

# SCHOOL

THE

*Totally*

*Fooded.*

AND

FORTIFIED

IRRITATING

SPIRT™



F

BATTLE  
UNIT



# JALECO



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01 : WINTER 2013

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# 悶えろ！！企画部

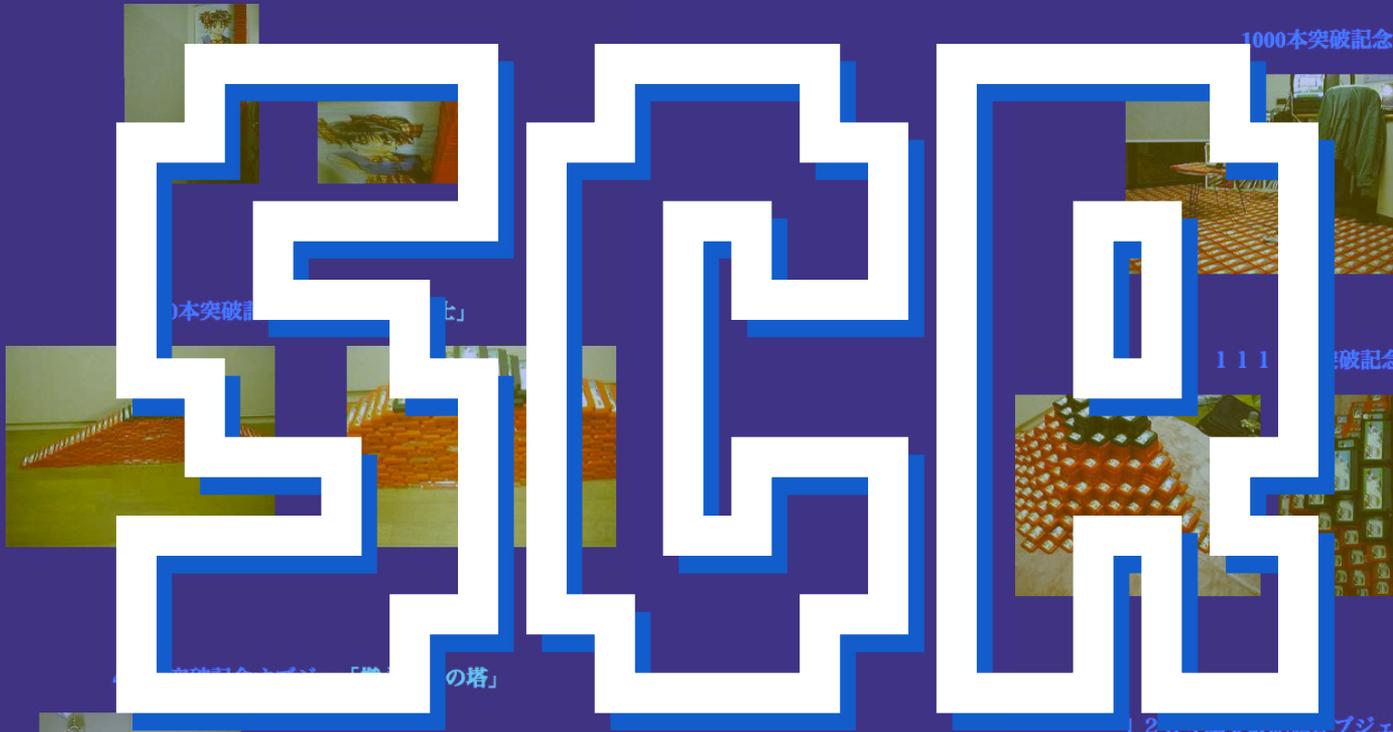
亡くてなかなか外には出られないです。

重たくってごめんなさい！



いくぜ！！35万画素パワー

100本突破記念オブジェ：「唯よりも高く！」



500本突破記念オブジェ「一つ積んでは、親のため」



1500本突破記念



700本突破記念オブジェ



1000本突破記念



1111本突破記念



1200本突破記念オブジェ

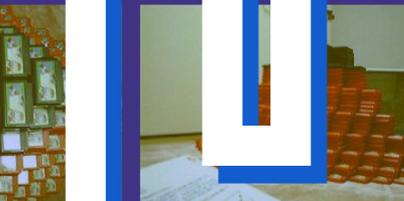
オブジェ「ウメッシュ状態」



オブジェ「千畳敷」



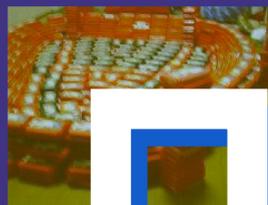
オブジェ「富士」



「もしも、私が死んだら...」



オブジェ「五重の塔」



宝島」異... オブジェ「閑取物語」

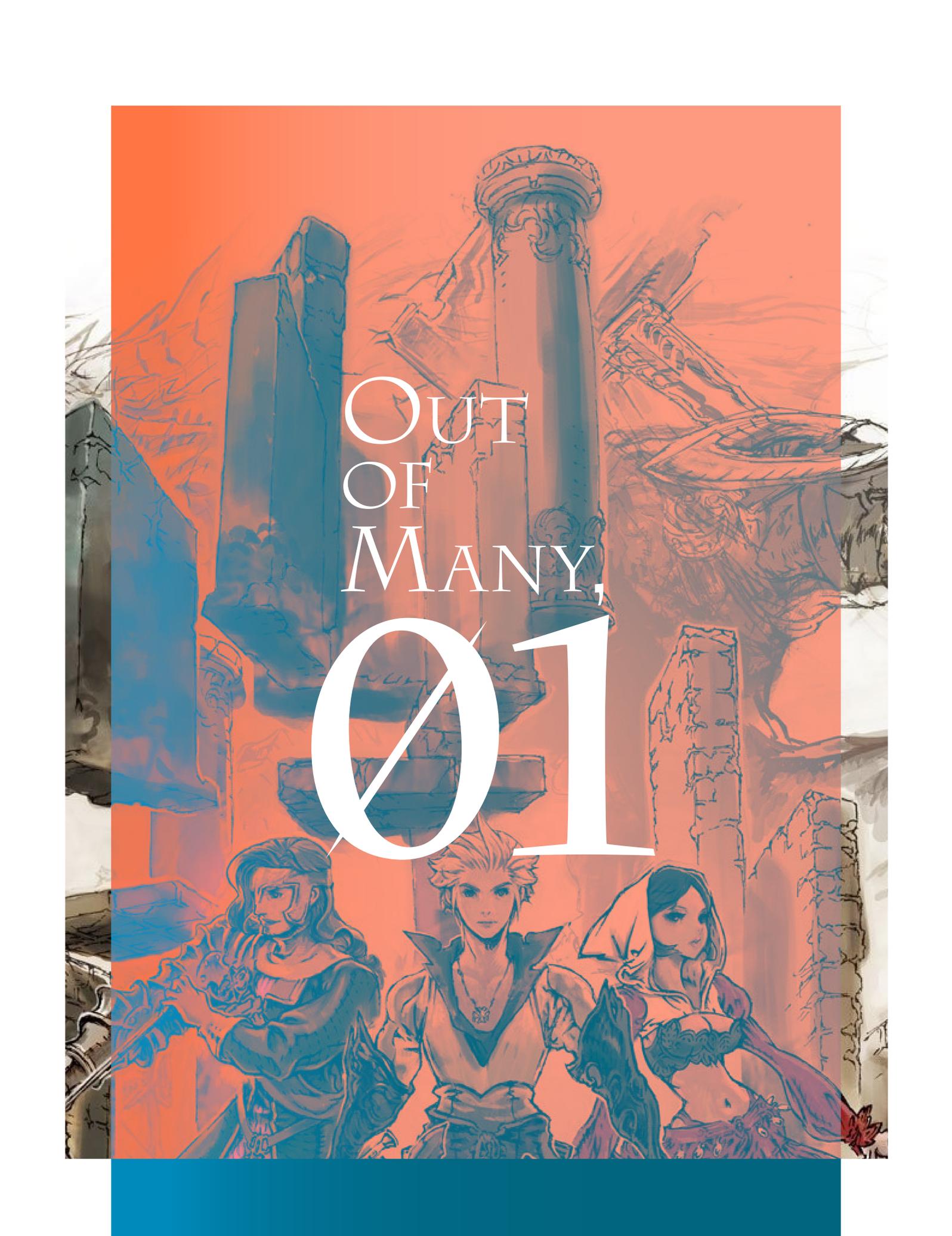


交歓記念オブジェ「閑えフ



いつもはこんなふうに保存しています。  
奥の棚だけで700本以上（奥に3列）、右上は箱付きです。

[戻る](#)



OUT  
OF  
MANY,

01

LEVEL 5'S  
DESIGNER  
OMNIBUS  
IS A  
FLAWED  
BUT  
INGENIOUS  
REMINDER  
OF HOW  
JAPAN USED  
TO BE



Once upon a time, Japan had the wildest games in the world. Not necessarily the best, nor the most prominent, but the most that would cause you to react with a laugh, or an "oh," or a "what the?" It wasn't even that far back—about eight or nine years ago is when the highest concentration of wild Japanese games was appearing. Most people use *Katamari Damacy* as the tentpole, but much more was being released that flipped the script in a number of ways.

That happens a lot less often these days, and Japanese games are viewed with a more critical lens than a wholly appreciative one. Fair enough, but the best minds are still pushing on, and it seems that Level 5 wants to show us that in their *Guild* series.

A self-professed omnibus, the *Guild* series takes ideas from different well-known creators and turns them into games. The ideas may not have started out fully-formed, but that results in small-scale games that work well on the Nintendo 3DS, where they might not have been able to succeed as richer, longer games anywhere else. Level 5 released *Guild 01* in Japan last May, though in Europe and America, it's no longer an omnibus by definition—the games were pulled away from one another and sold separately on the 3DS eShop. This happened in Japan some weeks later, but there it's not as big a deal when you can still buy the boxed, single-cartridge version at will.

Each creator in *Guild 01* came from unique points of time and from different mindsets. Yoot Saito had always played with simulation conventions, from the surprising challenge of managing high-rises in *SimTower* to trying to get the pouty Seaman to like you. Goichi Suda worked on wrestling games before starting his own studio that made games for more adult tastes, with story and setting ideas that could come from no one else. And Yasumi Matsuno headed up some of the most involving fantasy RPG and strategy games of their times.

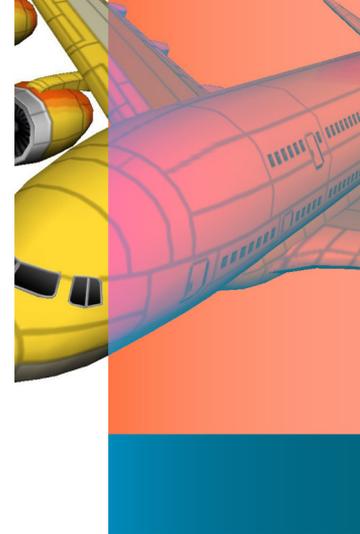
But *Guild 01* isn't quite an amazing all-star collection. Because these games are positioned as ideas first and games second, they come off as shards of greater experiences, and can feel pretty flawed. One may be better than the others, but it hasn't helped the general perception of the collection. Still, that may change when *Guild 02* is released, which features new games from Keiji Inafune, Kaz Ayabe, and the masterminds behind Chun Soft's classic visual novels. These may not be the most "indie" guys to be rounded up for these collections, but as the spotlight slowly dims on Japanese gaming creativity, the gathering of the *Guild* can still show a ton of potential.



Based on a story concept by Goichi Suda, *Liberation Maiden* is the far-flung future tale of Shoko Oozora, teenage "president" of New Japan, who hops in a powerful flying mech to destroy an immense invading force hellbent on destroying the natural beauty of the island nation. A free-roaming shoot-em-up with plenty of locking-on and missile dodging, *Liberation Maiden* is about five stages long and isn't incredibly challenging, which doesn't help the appeal of completing it on higher difficulties, which is then compounding by the whole game feeling a bit like work after stage two. Those expecting Suda-esque wackiness will be disappointed as well, as Grasshopper didn't actually develop it and left art and cut-scene direction to anime studio Bones.



Miniaturize the scope of *SimTower* to an airport baggage handling system and you have the basic pitch for *Aero Porter*. In truth, it's more of an action-puzzle game than a sim, as you send color-coded luggage to airplanes by shuttling them up and down their designated platforms, scoring as high as you can before your "shift" is over. Perhaps the most realistic element is just how overwhelming it can all get, and you increasingly run the risk of sending planes off without all of its bags or the wrong ones. To spice things up, you'll sometimes get super-important bags from VIP visitors, volatile cargo, or possible explosive devices. Compared to *Liberation Maiden*, Saito characteristics are stamped all over *Aero Porter*, including the light, jazzy soundtrack and feedback from your anonymous boss that can be downright biting if you mess up even slightly.



Matsuno has worked on the strategic *Ogre Battle* series and was the original director of *Final Fantasy XII*, but *Crimson Shroud* is rooted quite firmly in the oldest-school RPG experience of dice and miniatures. Essentially playing out like a typical menu-based video RPG, *Crimson Shroud* depicts battles as figures on boards, and rolling dice determines every little success or failure of your actions. While certainly different, *Crimson Shroud* has been dinged for its slow pace, and general opinion suggests that its problems aren't simply a case of it being an acquired taste. Regardless, its pen-and-paper stylings aren't as alienating as something like *Unlimited Saga*, and it's great to still see Matsuno putting ideas out there.

# MODEL CITIZENS

When 3D polygonal games reached arcades 20 years ago, the difference in console and arcade technology could be called the Great Disconnect. 2D games got workable conversions, but 3D games were a towering hurdle, as even the likes of the PlayStation and Sega Saturn could only barely come close to replicating the look of the biggest and best arcade games of the time. In the Saturn's case, you can "thank" Yu Suzuki for that. The recent introduction of Sega's Model 2 system had pumped up the polygon counts and added oodles of textures for a string of impressive games that made even slightly older Model 1 titles like *Virtua Racing* look outdated. Last year Sega brought an arcade-perfect version of *Daytona USA* to consoles for the first time, though it technically wasn't sourced from the original Model 2 version. This year, Sega is blowing things out with their "Model 2 Collection," a digital five-game lineup of more Model 2 games—some classic, some just plain fun, and, well, maybe one or two that aren't quite as good. On the other hand, they're handled by the same team behind the *Daytona* port, and therefore true to the source.

The highlight of the collection is *Virtua Fighter 2*. Like *Daytona*, *VF2* had been needing an accurate home version for some time. It was a big deal when it reached the Saturn, but still visibly hampered compared to the splendor of the arcade version (the missing bridge in Shun Di's stage being the big example). A PlayStation 2 port in 2004 was purported to be arcade-perfect but still had a host of inaccuracies (but it had the bridge), and then there was the bizarre Genesis version that Sega trotted out more than the others over the years.

The other games include the original *Virtual On* (perhaps made redundant by the sequel already on Xbox Live Arcade); *Fighting Vipers*, *Virtua Fighter's* weird cousin; *Virtua Striker*, which is a good if forgotten soccer game, and while it's nice to have *Sonic the Fighters* just for the sake of it, it is the lowlight of the Model 2 family; a floppy and not very technical fighting game designed for mash-happy little kids. But to Sega's credit, the port does feature Honey, a character hidden in the game's code for years and now made properly playable. Couple these with other great Sega ports like the aforementioned *Daytona* and *After Burner Climax* among others, and you have a pretty good representation of the best of the company's arcade legacy that's finally reproduced as best (and cheap) as possible.





COVER



# THE TOTALLY LOADED AND FORTIFIED IRRITATING SPIRIT OF BATTLEUNIT JALECO

Most of their games were disliked; they coasted through two hardware generations, and after a series of debilitating business moves, they ended up as but a shell of what they used to be. The story of Jaleco is not the happiest ever, but among the brotherhood of Japanese game makers that chased the trends of the arcade and NES markets, their history is one of the more interesting ones. Jaleco released tons of games of all kinds in order to gain profits along with some degree of notoriety, and with a better consistency than some. Furthermore, they represented different things depending on what part of the world you lived in, and that belies what you'll read about here: the Jaleco that sucked, the one that was all right, the one that was great, and the one Jaleco held aloft by the rest of them.

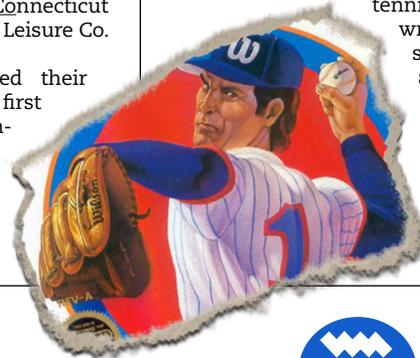
# THE JALECO PRIMER

Like many other recognizable video game companies, Jaleco started out as an amusements manufacturer. In the fall of 1973, Japan Leisure Co. was founded by Yoshiaki Kanazawa to produce the various mechanical novelties that existed in bars and bowling alleys before video games. In 1982, smack-dab in the video game renaissance, Japan Leisure followed their competition and expanded their business into arcade video games. Their first ones were *Pop Flamer* and *Naughty Boy*, both of which cleverly built on simple concepts that had been introduced by other companies earlier. Doubtlessly seeing the potential of the video market, they changed identity by shortening their name and making it a little more chic—much like how Connecticut Leather Co. became Coleco, Japan Leisure Co. became Jaleco.

In 1983, Nintendo released their Famicom console, and the first computers under the MSX standard were finding ways into homes, as well. Within the next year, Japan's great arcade game makers were flocking to both platforms, and Jaleco was no exception. Their first home games

Famicom baseball game that wasn't dramatically different from anything before it, though it was immediately attractive due to its presentation: the pitching and batting was displayed like a real-life TV broadcast, with the "camera" behind the pitcher instead of behind the batter like most other baseball games. A year later, Jaleco brought the game to America as *Bases Loaded*, where it gained possibly even more popularity, being one of just a few consistent baseball game brands throughout the 8- and 16-bit years. In Japan, it had to compete with Namco's *Family Stadium* series and a slew of other competitors, but Jaleco managed to get millions of *Moero!!* cartridges into homes and keep the sequels coming. Eventually, Jaleco expanded their sports line and released more *Moero!!* games that featured tennis, soccer, basketball and even sumo wrestling—hardly any with the same sorts of "revolutionary" presentation as the baseball game, but historically speaking, it was a great early example of sub-branding sports games before EA even thought of it.

Among burgeoning franchises and a steady stream of arcade games to draw from, Jaleco had another source of product coming



Jaleco logo, 1982-1988



# JALECO

Jaleco logo, 1988-2000

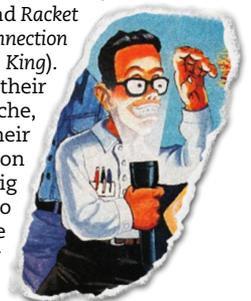
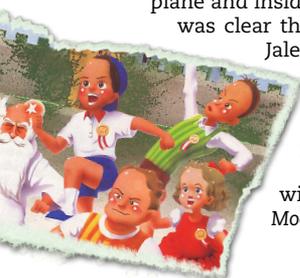
were conversions of their existing arcade games like *Exerion* and *Formation Z*, the former gaining some notoriety for its faux 3D perspective effect, dressing up what would otherwise be a normal shooting game. But for the first couple of years in the home space, Jaleco was more or less going through the motions. In a rapidly expanding market, that would sustain itself, but not for much longer.

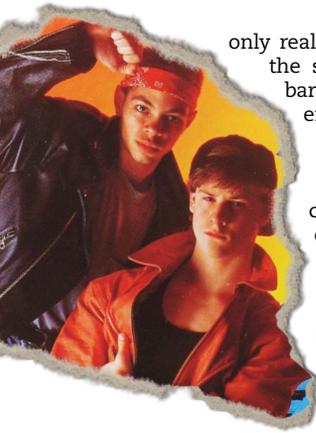
Later in 1985, Jaleco started putting up tentpoles. Longtime arcade game maker Universal (of *Mr. Do!* fame) had a recently-formed subsidiary called UPL, which had released an intriguing game called *Ninja-kun*. *Ninja-kun* featured a beanbag-shaped red ninja climbing a number of towering mountains evading and killing bad guys. Jaleco's Famicom version of the game was virtually identical thanks to a simplistic art style, and at a time when any new Famicom game was bound to break even, things went well. Similar to how Hudson took the *Wonder Boy* concept and spun off the rest of the *Adventure Island* series, Jaleco essentially borrowed the character, gave him a new identity—Jajamaru-kun—and put him in a new Famicom-only game that was fundamentally similar to the original (lots of jumping between platforms and attacking), but on a horizontal plane and inside castles rather than climbing cliffs. However, it was clear that Jajamaru was the closest thing to a mascot Jaleco had, so the character was soon being plopped into all sorts of platformers and role-playing games throughout the rest of the Famicom's life, and well into the 16- and 32-bit generations as well.

Jaleco's other big brand would be the one with the most competition. In 1987 they released *Moero!! Pro Yakyuu* ("Burning Pro Baseball"), a

in during those salad days: foreign games. Competitors like Hudson and Irem had made early success by licensing and making conversions of well-known computer games from America, mostly thanks to publisher Broderbund, who was actively lending out their best properties across the Pacific. Jaleco's first Western-borne games for Famicom included *Choplipter* (another Broderbund hit, and by then already ported to everything else) and the Activision adventure game *Murder on the Mississippi*, which would end up contributing to the rise of murder-mystery adventure games on the Famicom. Adapting Western games had worked out, and Jaleco kept it up for years after their rivals had focused more on domestic development. They ported more games, and as the NES market grew they localized American releases for Japan. In a couple of cases, they even supported development, such as *Metal Mech* and the NES version of *Maniac Mansion*.

Jaleco's American branch set up shop around 1988, debuting with two sports games (*Bases Loaded* and *Racket Attack*) and a couple of earlier winners (*City Connection* and *RoboWarrior*, originally Hudson's *Bomber King*). Compared to the by-the-books operation of their Japanese marketing, Jaleco USA had some panache, employing top-notch graphic design for all their games' packaging, plus a decent reputation cultivated from the *Bases Loaded* series and big titles like *Maniac Mansion* (the only Jaleco game to make the cover of *Nintendo Power*). Starting late in America also afforded them a slightly bigger library to curate, as they kept the lower-quality early stuff out of the States and focused on more recent titles among the sports games. The





only real void was in the shape of Jajamaru—despite the series' notoriety in Japan, Jaleco in the U.S. barely got any *Jajamaru* games out the door, and ended up with just the Game Boy game out of an increasing number of NES games to choose from.

As the '90s pushed on, Jaleco stayed the course when consoles moved into the 16-bit era (in this case, the Super NES, as Jaleco never touched a Sega system until the Saturn), which may not have been the best way to go. Like with the Famicom, their first 16-bit games were arcade ports and sports games, and their only real new series on SNES was *Rival Turf* (*Rushing Beat* in Japan), a pretty standard beat-em-up that spawned two just-as-standard sequels. At the same time, Jaleco's arcade division was producing games

less palatable for the console market, such as the bombastic arcade arm-wrestling game *Arm Champs* or the cartoon strip-mahjong game *Suchie Pai* (which did reach the Super Famicom, but naturally wouldn't fly anywhere else). One exception was *Rod-Land*, a cutesy arcade platformer that became a sleeper hit in Europe thanks to ports on Commodore 64 and Amiga in addition to NES and Game Boy. Perhaps not coincidentally, Jaleco published a few European-made games for SNES such as *Utopia* and *King Arthur's World*. All told, however, Jaleco's 16-bit output was protracted; not counting localizations, they barely crested 30 titles worldwide.

Things didn't get much better when the Sega Saturn and Sony PlayStation heralded the transition to the 32-bit generation. On paper, it was just

heading for serious trouble.

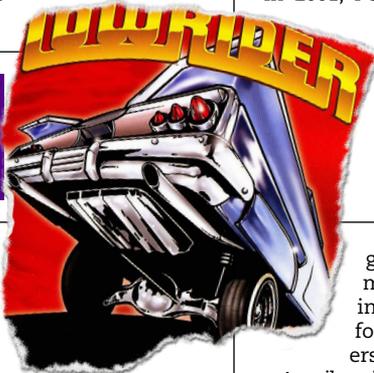
But then, right as the next decade began, a lifeline. In August 2000, Jaleco was purchased by a growing Hong Kong telecommunications company called Pacific Century CyberWorks (PCCW). PCCW bought 81 percent of Jaleco's outstanding shares for a total of 27 billion yen, at the time noted to be around \$250 million. Jaleco would then be submergled in favor of a new subsidiary, PCCW Japan, though they would continue operating in the home video game industry (the arcade division was dissolved). Yoshiaki Kanazawa left the company he founded with a hefty retirement bonus of almost 60 million yen, and would go on to start Amusement Interface Associates (AIA), which would eventually publish games that even Jaleco wouldn't touch.

The PCCW years were not the best. If surviving the 32-bit generation was tough for Jaleco, surviving what came in the 21st century would be positively excruciating. It was odd enough that a Hong Kong telecom would want to buy an increasingly irrelevant game maker, yet it was odder that they expected them to improve. Jaleco's biggest releases in 2000 were two editions of *Dream Audition*, a karaoke game for PlayStation 2 in Japan, and the North American release of *Vampire Hunter D*, which was swiftly panned, and only raised more questions as to what PCCW really wanted to do with them and why.

The following year, Jaleco had re-emerged in the U.S. as Jaleco Entertainment, though it wasn't a brand-new operation: in 2001, PCCW purchased VR-1 Entertainment, an American game company responsible for the Xbox launch



Jaleco Entertainment logo, 2002-2005



Jaleco Ltd. logo, 2006-2009

what the game industry needed: the low costs of pressing CDs meant more room for the little guys, yet more opportunity for the big guys to saturate the market without the risk of taking a dive on cartridge manufacturing costs. Jaleco was squarely in the middle of the two, and though they weren't the only "classic" game publisher that struggled to compete during a new generation with a slightly new way of doing business, they nonetheless bore the brunt of the pain. Without a massive brand in the 16-bit years, Jaleco naturally didn't have one for 32-bit. As a result, their catalogue was even more sparse than last generation, mostly taken up by *Suchie Pai* sequels. *Bases Loaded* got another edition before finally fading away, and even Jajamaru, the company's flagship character, could only stand to be in one dinky action game for his 32-bit revival. Back in the west, Jaleco was a shadow of its former self, mostly publishing games that their parent didn't even make, like *Punky Skunk* and *Irritating Stick*. Their one clear success was *Tetris Plus*, which quickly became a PlayStation Greatest Hits title and stayed on store shelves for years, but it was clear that at the end of the 1990s, all of Jaleco was

game *Azurik*, which was... not that great. VR-1 was merged with the remnants of Jaleco USA, transformed into Jaleco Entertainment, and was now responsible for publishing games from PCCW, more local developers, or themselves (they would go on to produce the

*Azurik* spiritual cousins *Nightcaster* and *Nightcaster II*, which, again, weren't that great.)

To no surprise, PCCW Japan wasn't really gaining ground in Japan, mostly focusing on game content for a broad-band entertainment network PCCW was trying to grow there. But on the other side of the globe, Jaleco Entertainment was building their own reputation—sort of. Virtually all of the games they published were terrible, often with even more terrible box art. The company was so awful that they earned an ironic appreciation, whether it was for publishing the humorously empty *Lowrider*, or for a string of Photoshop disasters that passed for their games' covers, including the Game Boy Advance racer *Karnaaj Rally*—arguably their best game regardless. Worse yet, the company mostly stuck to publishing on the Xbox and GameCube, both underdogs to the juggernaut that was the PlayStation 2, the system PCCW Japan was putting in most of their resources, yet not producing anything that the Western side could sink their teeth into (except *Lowrider*). The high-flying, *Bases Loaded*-fueled good ol' days were long, long, long behind us.

In 2004, PCCW began to use the Jaleco name in Japan again, but by then it was barely worth it, and only a handful of retail titles carried the brand, among a slew of low-rent cell phone games (some featuring real-world gravure models). The only



notable original release was a new *Jajamaru* game for Game Boy Advance that also included emulated versions of the 8-bit games. After publishing almost nothing unique in 2005, and with Jaleco in America and Europe sticking to their diet of utter mediocrity, it seemed that new owners and a new identity weren't exactly a catalyst for change, and it wouldn't be long before the game industry saw some more big shifts.

It was July 22, 2005 when the spirit of Jaleco would begin one crazy roller coaster ride. That was when PCCW off-loaded its subsidiary Hyperlink Investments to an entity called Sandringham Fund SPC. Originally, Hyperlink had nothing to do with PCCW Japan/Jaleco, but in the sale, PCCW Japan's ownership of the old Jaleco Ltd. was transferred to Hyperlink, and Hyperlink was then sold to Sandringham. Clearly, PCCW was done with video games, and the new owners weren't keen on them, either, continuing to focus on being an investment firm. By then, Jaleco Entertainment was pretty much done, and Jaleco in Japan pushed out two more games for the rest of 2005 before bowing out of the industry for a little while.

After purchasing a real estate company, a health care consultant, and a securities firm, Hyperlink announced in early July 2006 that they would be dividing up the company and transformed the whole of it into a holding company called Jaleco Holding; a strange move considering that the Jaleco name was all but wiped in the previous few years. In addition, "dividing" had a double meaning, because while most every other subsidiary stayed under the same umbrella, they spun off the video game business into an entirely new entity with the old name of Jaleco Ltd. In other words, the Jaleco that was founded in 1973 to make amusement machines and eventually video games now had essentially nothing to do with them. Regardless, Jaleco Ltd. was ready to get back to

Yarou soon after, and because Game Yarou didn't implement any protection measures for the shares to keep them from being illegally traded, they were left with an unexpectedly lighter load. An investigation by Jaleco Holding and a pending lawsuit by Game Yarou didn't turn around the bad luck, but Game Yarou nonetheless returned a year later to assume control of Jaleco Ltd.—perhaps because no one else would.

After the Game Yarou sale, in April 2009 Jaleco Holding changed its name to Emcom Holdings, snipping the last string that tied them to the Jaleco legacy and any potential association with video games. Today, Emcom and its subsidiaries continue to deal in real estate, health care, finances, and even running the K-1 martial arts competition. It looked as though Jaleco had finally breathed its last breath.

Not quite. Within a month of the buyout, Game Yarou announced their intent to keep Jaleco going, refreshing the company with a new logo, office, and plans to keep the legacy alive, as well as release the games that were thought to be in limbo. In 2008, they had at least one more game to finish: the Wii action-RPG *Ougun no Kizuna*, which garnered plenty of interest based on its great graphics. In May 2009, the "new" Jaleco finally released *Kizuna*, but it was the latest and perhaps biggest blunder for the company to date, earning a total review score of 17 out of 40 from Famitsu, and becoming Japanese gamers' laughing stock of the year.

Today, at the end of 2012, Jaleco Ltd. remains. The name is still there, as is the heritage, though it's obviously not the same. Jaleco's output has dried up since the release

Jaleco Ltd. logo, 2009-Present

# JALECO



video games, and in 2007 published a few lackluster DS puzzle and quiz games, and of course, a new *Suchie Pai*. 2008 was largely uneventful as Jaleco Holding increased their capital and continued buying up subsidiaries, while Jaleco Ltd. published a whopping three games the whole year; a sign that things may not have been going well.

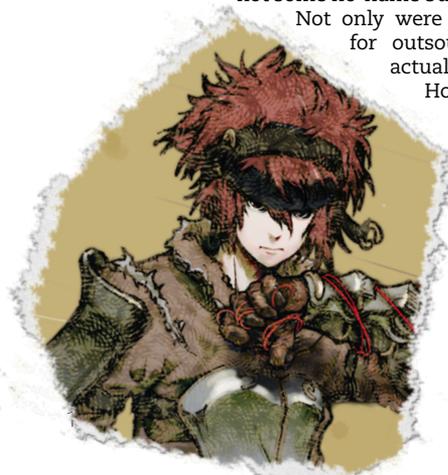
That was basically confirmed on January 15, 2009. On that day, Jaleco Holding decided to sell Jaleco Ltd. to an online game company called Game Yarou, for all of one dollar. Granted, Game Yarou would also assume all of Jaleco Ltd.'s loan debt—roughly \$7 million of Jaleco Holding's total debt—so it wasn't exactly a steal. Jaleco Holding explained the sale as the result of "intensifying competition" in the video game business and generally sluggish sales. And at the time, Game Yarou was not very vocal about what they would do with its new treasure chest of game properties, so after the news, the natural assumption was that Jaleco was pulling out for good.

The wrinkle in this part of the story is that Game Yarou was not some no-name buyer that came from the shadows.

Not only were they previously used by Jaleco for outsourcing online operations, they actually held the majority of Jaleco Holding's shares—nearly 42 million of them. That is until spring 2008, when they gave those shares to a company called Nihon Direct Messenger as collateral to a loan that was owed. Unfortunately, Nihon Direct was apparently a fly-by-night operation and stopped communicating with Game

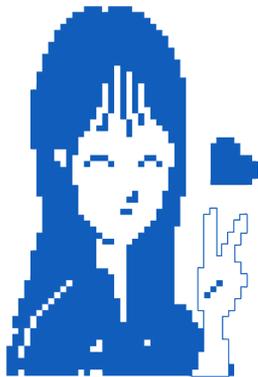
of the DS RPG *WizMan's World* in 2010, and they haven't updated their web site since August 2011. Currently, the company acts as a vessel for re-releases of their classic games on Nintendo's Virtual Console service, or licensing out their games for use in soundtrack collections, or any other venue where the Jaleco of old might still be of some worth. It's the same sort of story for several other companies who made their names in the Famicom era, but Jaleco and its publicly rocky life has certainly stood out in the past 12 years.

Not that any of it should come as a surprise. The underlying theme of Jaleco's early history—from entering the Famicom market, to porting arcade games, to filling out their sports library, to licensing overseas titles—was one of following the pack, and rarely did they step out of their comfort zone. Many of their games (in the console market, at least) capitalized on trends and made few statements, and that kind of thing is what ultimately doomed them to mediocrity and a less than favorable view in retrospect. In the '80s, they could hang their hat on *Bases Loaded's* TV-like camera view, but that wasn't enough to sustain its popularity against the more able competition from Namco and Konami. That approach ended up affecting Jaleco's later history, because though their games from the late '90s and early 2000s were certainly weird despite their often cheap feeling, they had nothing else to lean on. Without a "sticky" franchise fondly remembered worldwide on which to rely and reintroduce every few years, Jaleco floundered, and was bought and sold like the rest of the casualties of the Nintendo boom. Indeed, this sounds a little counter-productive to devoting a whole magazine that's meant to be appreciative of Jaleco and its games, but keep in mind this isn't all about them. Jaleco put out good games, bad games, and odd games, and they all have a story behind them, just as those of us who played and remembered them do, too.



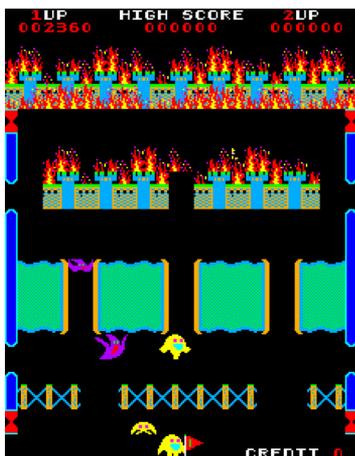
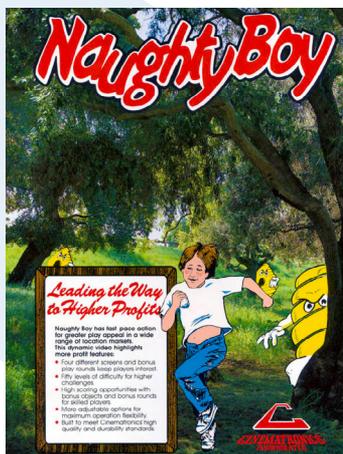
# THE EARLY YEARS

The first two decades of video games often seem to have harbored the most varied concepts—you had shooting space aliens on one side, sure, but then zookeeping and building giant hamburgers on the other. When Jaleco entered the business in 1982, their games were more on the side of the goofy ones, with some bordering on the morbid (who else was making games about flamethrower-toting mice torching delinquent monsters?). Within a couple of years, their mid-'80s arcade games—which would soon become their first Famicom games—were typical of most industry outliers in that they took existing ideas and dressed them up with clever graphical tricks or tacking on a couple of other ideas seen in movies or TV. The perspective effects of *Exerion* or the intense close-call-filled action of *City Connection* were worth checking out, though again, it was the Famicom that would take some of them to new heights. Jaleco was showing promise in an increasingly crowded space, and these games demonstrate that.



# NAUGHTY BOY

ARCADE • 1982



The former Japan Leisure broke onto the video arcade scene with the game known as *Naughty Boy*, a name second perhaps only to *Donkey Kong* on the list of great broken-English names of the golden age. But what goes on in the game is far from the mischievous youth the name may suggest—our “Naughty Boy” is really more of a crazed bloodthirsty soldier, or at best a hallucinating terrorist.

With simplistic graphics set against sparse black screens, *Naughty Boy* is hampered by the inherent abstraction in games of the time, but its objective is easy to grasp: our naughty hero trots up and down the vertically-scrolling playfield avoiding enemies or just getting rid of them with the grenades(?) he can toss at will. The goal of each stage is to safely make it to the top of the screen and toss explosives at all the enemy flags that dot their castle walls. When all the flags are gone, this signifies the enemy losing their defenses, and so the place erupts in flames. And so *Naughty Boy* succeeds in his mission as a one-man army, until the next stage.

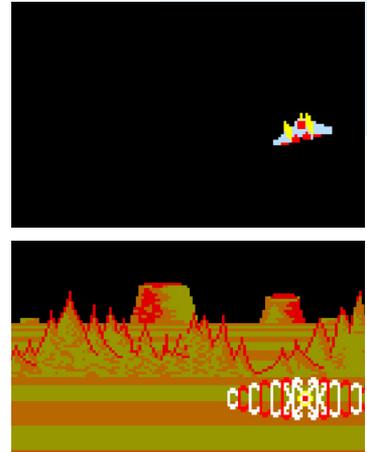
Sounds simple enough, but the enemies roaming the screen—which run the gamut from ghouls and ogres to the Loch Ness monster and apparent astromech droids—are incredibly persistent. A good number of the cast will not stay dead even after being tagged with a bomb, so *Naughty Boy*'s best line of defense is to keep moving forward and ensure enemies are stunned as early and often as possible before moving up and getting rid of a few flags before inevitably avoiding a returning enemy (or three). And he does have *some* skill: by holding the attack button, the grenade will travel further across the screen or explode once you let go, so if you have a clear long shot to an enemy or castle flag, you can hit it without necessarily reaching the top.

Like in *Pac-Man*, *Naughty Boy* can duck into screen-wrapping passageways on the sides of the screen to subvert enemies, but in an interesting reverse of *Pac-Man*, *Naughty Boy* can protect himself by running to a shed near the start of each stage, which will let him stay there for around 30 seconds at a time. Better yet, he can still lob bombs while inside, making it perfect for crowd control and clearing a path up to the enemy gates.

To its credit, the maps of the game's stages are different with each passing one, and in a medium where repetition was a necessary evil, the variety Jaleco managed to plug into the game is interesting and appreciable. Though, again, the black voids wher *Naughty Boy* takes place ran the risk of dating the game by the time it was released—some arcade games of 1982 were already evolving past simple backgrounds and featuring more detailed worlds. Some companies like Nintendo and Sega stuck with what they knew, but they would move on sooner or later. However, Jaleco certainly did not stand still, and started to realize the value in graphical tricks and other unique selling points to try and gain a foothold in the market. *Naughty*, you might say.

# EXERION

ARCADE • 1983



You couldn't ask for a better, more reliable kind of video game than the good old shoot-em-up, especially during the golden age. But as time rolled on, you couldn't just rip off *Space Invaders* and call it a day; you needed a hook, and it had to be a *good* hook, or else you would cry over a pathetic balance sheet.

Namco's *Pole Position* debuted in 1982 and rocked players with its faux 3D perspective effects that were improved beyond anything else, and would set the foundation for racing games for years to come. As for shooters, Namco had *Xevious* the same year, which featured beautiful scrolling backgrounds, but was hardly 3D. Still, it seemed natural that the tech behind *Pole Position* could be used for shooting games, especially when they were mostly all about flying through space. Vector graphics were one possible avenue, but Atari and Sega would be the only arcade game makers to use the technology more than a few times.

Jaleco, unsurprisingly, went down the middle. *Exerion* is technically 2D, but employs a perspective effect to give the illusion that your fighter ship is hurtling along alien planets. The striped landscape rolls in, and spiky hills appear and disappear behind you. While new for the time, the effect is kind of unconvincing, as the sprites don't scale along with the "moving" topography, and the vertical orientation of the screen leaves a lot of space at the top, making the whole game seem like you're just flying a ship around an animation of a landscape—there's a reason *Pole Position* received more attention than this one.

*Exerion* had a secondary gimmick, however, and it was the one that shaped how challenging it was: your ship moved with semi-realistic inertia. Push in a direction and your craft slowly moves there before eventually hitting top speed. All the *Space Invaders*-like games had your ship moving across the screen at the same predetermined speed, but in *Exerion*, you have to be quite mindful of where you're headed in relation to the enemies, or else you'll crash right into them after doing a few graceful figure-eights. In that sense, *Exerion* is like a vector game; *Asteroids*' thrust mechanic worked in the same way, though it's arguably less dangerous than the more acrobatic, less predictable formations of the enemies in *Exerion*.

Also in the mix are two firing types; a normal gun like in similar shooters, as well as a machine gun with a finite amount of ammo. Therefore, you have to conserve the rapid fire for when you absolutely need to clear out enemies—by now a pretty basic strategy, but few other contemporary shooters had anything like a machine gun. Couple that with the perspective effect and manufactured ship inertia, *Exerion* made itself worth a few plays when it arrived in arcades, and went on to be a Famicom highlight shortly after its release there as well.

# CITY CONNECTION

ARCADE • 1985



City Connection might be Jaleco's most endearing—and enduring—game. It is, in fact, emblematic of the peak of what a "video game" was in the early-to-mid '80s: a simple concept with nuances that take a little while to get used to, and then ramps up into painful twitch mayhem.

According to the NES version's manual, *City Connection* has you playing a thief on the run from the cops. Your crime? Stealing from an "exclusive paint store in New York City," with your squat buggy-like car apparently carrying an infinite number of 10-gallon paint cans. Your objective is to run over every mile of road in the city stage, and several more before escaping to England. As you "paint" the roads (most of which are suspended in midair), police cars appear and chase you down, though you can pick up oil cans to fire at them, then hopefully debilitate and knock them off the road. In practice, *City Connection* is yet another variation of the "maze chase" or "clear the board" type games that flooded in after the success of *Pac-Man*, but it's also a car game that has nothing to do with racing, and even a small tweak of convention like that can boost the appeal of a game such as this. It's ostensibly better than being some clown collecting fruit underground for whatever reason.

As mentioned, the difficulty in *City Connection* gradually increases until you can't take it anymore, and that's only partly because of the cops, because you can always get rid of them if you have enough oil. No, the true threat in *City Connection* is the cat. Cats appear on the road semi-randomly, and can only be jumped over. Most of the time you can see them at the edge of the screen and prepare accordingly, but other times you may be facing a squad of police cars without enough oil cans and there's a platform right above you and oh god I can't jump high enough I'm going to go over the cat and land right on the car I couldn't hi— crud. But it's all part of the fun.

The NES and other home versions of *City Connection* are still enjoyable since they don't lose anything from the core gameplay, but naturally do lose a bit of the arcade game's style—the "painting" of the roads is replaced with simply running over sections and filling them, causing the game to look a bit more like *Pac-Man*. Jaleco USA picked *City Connection* as one of its first four NES games; the only Jaleco original sandwiched between two sports games. But that helped it become an early favorite, and however you played it, chances are that you, too, hated all of those damn cats.

# FORMATION Z

ARCADE • 1984



Often paired with *Exerion* as examples of Jaleco's early shooters, *Formation Z* doesn't feature fancy 3D effects, but still has a gimmick: it lets the player's speedy walking robot transform into a jet at will, and the game rarely lets up on the shooting action. Just make sure to switch to the jet before you run off a cliff and crash. It's hard out there for a mech pilot.

# FIELD COMBAT

ARCADE/FC • 1985



The box art: a group of soldiers standing on a battlefield with a big silver tank. The game: shuttling said tank—which looks like a cross between a *War of the Worlds* UFO and a piece of meteorological equipment—along sparse battlefields. You can either kill enemies with missiles or pull them in your tank with a *Galaga*-like tractor beam. Modern warfare, indeed.

# ARGUS

ARCADE • 1986



*Argus* was Jaleco's first real attempt to overtake the other popular scrolling shooters of the time. Breakable blocks are reminiscent of *Star Force*, and the bombs of *Xevious* are replaced with a long air-to-surface laser. It also features an enemy that's just a dude's floating head with sunglasses on it. *Argus* isn't actually that bad of a game, but it's not one of Jaleco's better shows of originality.

# VALTRIC

ARCADE • 1986



*Valtric* is yet another shooter, but a little more unique than *Argus*. If you take Namco's *Grobda* and release it from its single-screen confines, you have *Valtric*, which scrolls vertically, but you control a tank-like pod that can move all around the screen and shoot down oncoming enemies. Considering the leisurely pace, it's more like a sci-fi version of Capcom's *Commando*, with maybe a dash of—oh, OK, so Jaleco wasn't super innovative, but like *Argus*, *Valtric* is still a pretty decent game.

# MOMOKO 120%

ARCADE • 1986



Jaleco's idea of a video game for girls was about as well-informed as most of them: a regular arcade platformer done over with a cutesy dollhouse-like veneer. Momoko must run-n-jump her way up a burning building and make it to the roof before the fire engulfs her from below. Enemies and traps try to slow her down, but luckily she's equipped with a gun that can take down any creature in her way. Momoko also ages every stage, so you play as her from four years old up to 20, when she marries her beau. What a... sweet fairy tale.

# URUSEI YATSURA: LUM NO WEDDING BELL

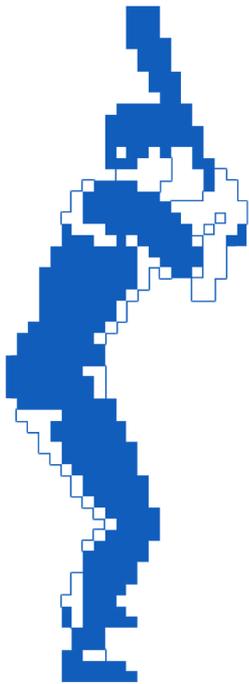
FC • 1986



Momoko had an opportunity to move to the Famicom, but Jaleco put a wig and little horns on her and said she's Lum, the sexy foil of Rumiko Takahashi's *Urusei Yatsura*. Besides that, the game is virtually unchanged, possessing almost no other distinctive elements from the manga/anime, aside from the title screen, where you can see it actually is Lum. One of the more shameless cash grabs of the Jaleco legacy.

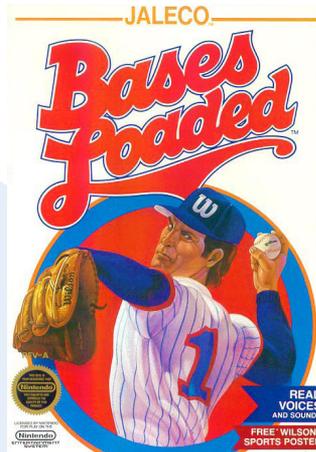
# THE SPORTS PAGE

Jaleco found itself a niche by the end of the '80s—probably the best one they *could* find. Sports games were (and are) a dime a dozen in the game industry, but after the release of *Bases Loaded*, Jaleco started to be known more for their sports titles. *Bases Loaded* charged ahead in popularity in America, and additional games like *Hoops* and *Goal!* padded out the company's catalog, while in Japan, the *Moero!!* series encompassed those as well as more traditional Japanese sports. Unfortunately, competition is constant in the sports genre, so Jaleco found themselves towards the bottom of the heap before the end of the 16-bit generation. Here, we look at the highlights of the *Bases Loaded* series, as well as a few more notable Jaleco sports experiences.



# BASES LOADED

NES • 1988



*Bases Loaded* was one of the four games Jaleco USA debuted with, and it couldn't have come at a better time. Nintendo fever was well underway in 1988, and sports games were a prime category for attracting American families to the system, just as they had in the golden age (Sears had *Pong* in its sports department, after all). With Nintendo's own *Baseball* practically obsolete by the time it came out, there was a great opportunity to seize the genre right out of the gate. In Japan, the game of baseball games was getting heated: Namco released *Family Stadium* in 1986, the first Famicom baseball game that was clearly better than Nintendo's. And, hey, if they could beat Nintendo, surely someone else could beat Namco. Jaleco followed with *Moero!! Pro Yakyuu* in 1987, which would become their biggest success, selling nearly 1.6 million copies altogether, though it ultimately fell behind the *Family Stadium* (2 million), and that good ol' dinky Nintendo *Baseball* outsold all of them—call it home field advantage. In America, history was ready to repeat itself, though cultural nuances would change the outcome slightly. In 1988, Jaleco had *Moero!!* Americanized for the NES market and gave it the name *Bases Loaded*. Coincidentally, Tengen was also ready with R.B.I. *Baseball*, the English version of *Family Stadium*, and LJN had an official Major League Baseball game called exactly that. All three scored a marketing coup when they appeared in a baseball feature in the first issue of *Nintendo Power*, though *Bases Loaded* clearly looked different—better—than its competition.

Those early Japanese baseball games set the precedent, cosmetically, for the next couple of generations: the box art was vibrant, the music was jaunty as all get-out, and players on the teams were depicted as cartoony, marshmallowy figures who had no distinguishing features other than their uniform colors. This chibi-fication of the sport persisted thanks to Namco, and was taken to extremes in the even-cartoonier *Nantetatte Baseball* series from Sunsoft and Konami's *Power Pro Yakyuu* games. Among the outliers was Jaleco, who banked on the fact that the players in *Moero!!* were realistically proportioned. Half the time, anyway; when the view shifts to the pitcher's mound, the perspective is distinctly that of a television broadcast: pitcher in the foreground, slightly off to the side, while the batter's box is in the background. It even had ambience; the fanfare of drums and whistles from the stands echoing throughout the ballpark (the drumming was a little out of place for American

baseball, but the sentiment came through).

Realism in video games is treasured in America perhaps more than anywhere else, and there's little doubt that that's what propelled *Bases Loaded*. It could be forgiven that the wide field view had the same thumbnail-sized player sprites as all the other baseball games (which would be improved in the sequels anyway), because that main pitching view was more than enough to catch attention. Though R.B.I. and SNK's *Baseball Stars* gained clout among players who were more concerned with how their baseball games feel, *Bases Loaded* played good enough and looked great, and hindsight be damned, that's what helped it lead the pack.

Nevertheless, when thinking about it in video game terms, a view behind or above the batter makes more sense, because distance and timing are better judged from the batter's perspective, while the pitcher mostly needs to worry about power and position. And superficially speaking, it's always more fun as the batter. This thinking can and has been applied to other sports games, yet they've all tried to replicate the broadcast presentation for years and years, just in different areas. (Soccer and basketball games have typically been the only ones to mimic their broadcasts' side-on views, and yet, ironically, Jaleco's soccer and basketball games both rotated that camera view.) Perhaps because of those considerations, very few baseball games aped Jaleco's approach, and before long, the reverse angle of *Bases Loaded* was regarded as a gimmick; its unique selling point eschewed in favor of the look all the other games were going for.

*Bases Loaded* was improved over the original *Moero!!* in a couple of distinctive ways. The colors of the grass and dirt is better contrasted, voice clips were added, and the game does seem to feel a little more difficult, with computer-controlled fielders tending to be more active in catching balls, whereas the ones in the Japanese version act a little more dead on the grass. Once the sequels starting being made, though, the versions were pretty much at parity, with only the requisite changes in names and incidental graphics being made.

Though *Bases Loaded* didn't last very long past the 16-bit days, it nonetheless enjoyed a heyday along with other treasured sports series of the day like *Tecmo Bowl*, and even its rival R.B.I. *Baseball*. For a while, Jaleco had something special, but even the longest winning streaks had to peter out sometime.

## SUPER BASES LOADED

SNES • 1991



*Bases Loaded* debuted on the Super NES almost in time with the system's launch, which is probably because *Super Bases Loaded* is largely a rehash of *Bases Loaded 3*, as its graphics are quite clearly based on it (just more detailed, of course), and it retains BL 3's contentious single-player "campaign" that requires you to score a perfect season to be considered a true winner. Still, its mere status as a 16-bit *Bases Loaded* earned it plenty of attention.

## SUPER BASES LOADED 3

SNES • 1994



Subtitled *License to Steal*, this was the last 16-bit *Bases Loaded* game, and interestingly the only one to actually carry the *Moero!! Pro Yakyuu* name in Japan. The trusty pitcher view is back in action, and the game is generally honed as best as it could be, but the veneer was fading on the franchise as the 16-bit market started gearing down, not to mention the appearance of Sega's spotlight-stealing *World Series Baseball*.

## BASES LOADED 4

NES • 1993



*Bases Loaded 4* was a last-wave NES game that quickly dipped into obscurity (and rarity), and is also basically a rehash of BL 3. Arguably it's even worse, considering that modes were removed, the same "perfect game" hook was left in, and the graphics were barely improved. A depressing end to the season.

## SUPER BASES LOADED 2

SNES • 1992



This wasn't even an actual *Bases Loaded* game, because in Japan it was called *Super 3D Baseball*, and because the main camera view is behind the batter! Sacrilege! In fairness, that was to better illustrate the "3D" part of the game: the field is a scaling Mode 7 layer that allows a more dynamic camera to pan up and follow the ball as it sails over the grass. Though considering that you see the effect for barely two seconds at a time, the whole thing is a bigger gimmick than the "standard" *Bases Loaded* camera view. Go figure.

## GOAL!

NES • 1989



A rickety, sputtering excuse for a soccer game, *Goal!* had only its cute name going for it. The diagonal playfield made it nearly impossible to properly control players and therefore the ball, so this one went face-first into the pitch. Infamous ghost developer Tose was responsible for *Goal!* along with virtually all of Jaleco's sports games; noted here because they just couldn't let a bad thing go and retained the diagonal view for Nintendo's *Play Action Football* games.

## GOAL! TWO

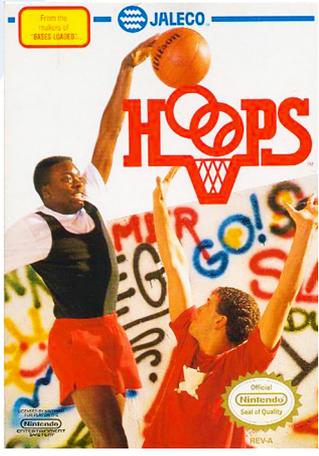
NES • 1992



To the credit of all involved, *Goal! Two* is much improved over the original. For one thing, you can choose how the control pad handles diagonals in the options screen, and the graphics are more detailed, as well they should be; this was released in 1992, after all. The diagonal view is slightly more skewed so as to let you see what's up ahead on the field a little better, too. The biggest downside was, in fact, its late release, which came with the rise of the Super NES and superior soccer games to come.

# HOOPS

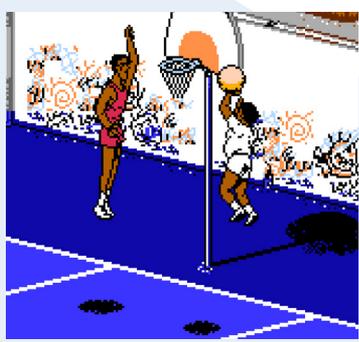
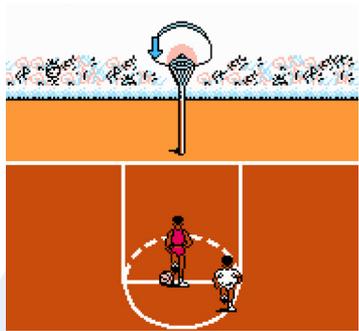
NES • 1989





**WIZ**

REAL SMART AND FAST.  
NOT A SHOOTER.  
GOOD PLAYMAKER.  
BEST PASSER.



Within Jaleco's long line of sports games, *Hoops* is the odd one out, but in a good way. Rather than go with a traditional basketball game, they went in the other direction and published a one-on-one street ball competition. Just replace the regulation court with one from a park, put up some graffiti-tagged walls, and insert a diverse group of characters in everyday athletic wear. Believe it or not, Jaleco actually broke ground by making this kind of game for NES. Granted, Electronic Arts' *One-on-One* pit Larry Bird and Dr. J against each other in a very similar game, but it wasn't more than two guys and a court—*Hoops* was a basketball game with genuine overall personality.

The cast of *Hoops* is as different as the game, a group of eight people with funny nicknames and who might even pass for pick-up players at the local park. There's Mr. Doc, the all-around pro; Jammer, the husky rebounder; Wiz, the geeky but speedy defender, and not one but two women, who are both respectable players and hardly sexualized. Sure, one is named "Barbie," but it doesn't *have* to be the doll's name. And "Legs" could easily indicate her athletic prowess! Regardless, it's almost too easy to see this group in some sort of Saturday morning cartoon where they solve local mysteries in between games of Horse.

But is the game any good? Well, with one-on-one b-ball, you're not getting quite as much excitement from a regulation game, and even then the number of different ways to play with two people is kind of limited. The two main modes involve shooting for possession or playing Around the World, and you can choose to play one-on-one or two-on-two, with co-op or versus variations when playing with another human. The actual game isn't so bad: you trot up and down the court trying to avoid your opponent, then, if you're in possession, make it to the net and shoot before it's too late. When the shoot button is pressed, an arrow bobs around the rim of the net in a somewhat arbitrary pattern, and if you press the button again, the ball will go where the arrow is. Trial and error will get you to "learn" the arrow, and the big annoyance will be a computer-controlled opponent who seems a little too good at staying close to you and stealing. If any player goes for a slam dunk, the game cuts away to a shot of them either nailing it or missing it; no doubt taking after a similar feature in Konami's *Double Dribble*. Nevertheless, the shots are *Hoops*' version of *Bases Loaded*'s TV view: a zoomed-in, angled view of the action that acts as the game's showpiece.

Development credit for *Hoops* goes to Aicom, a company behind other Jaleco games such as *Astyanax* and *Totally Rad*. But they had other clients, too: some months after *Hoops*' release in 1989, Vic Tokai published Aicom's *All-Star Basketball*, a traditional b-ball game that used the same "engine" as *Hoops*, featuring similar sprite design, vertical play view, sound effects, and of course, the slam dunk cutaways. Though for once, Jaleco got the better end of the deal.

## RACKET ATTACK

NES • 1988



Racket Attack was one of the games in Jaleco USA's debut lineup, and therefore a close sibling to *Bases Loaded*. In more ways than one, actually: the art style is quite similar, and goes from a pre-serve low angle view of the court to a high one once the ball crosses the net. One feature-slash-unexpected problem is that players keep momentum slightly when you let off the control pad. If you're used to crusty old tennis games, it'll take a little time to adjust.

## MEZASE! TOP PRO

FC • 1993



Jaleco's one and only golf game, and from the twilight days of the Famicom—presumably their only one because there were just as many golf titles as baseball ones. By then, NES golf game design had been mastered, so while *Top Pro* looks slick, it does nothing but travel straight ahead without hooking one way or the other. Although it was possibly preferred if one couldn't stand the Mario stylings of *NES Open*.

## PRO SPORT HOCKEY

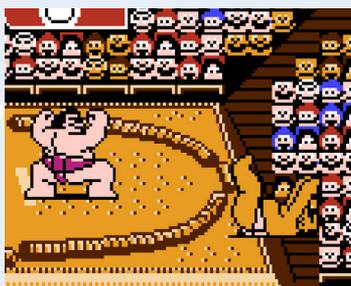
NES • 1993



Again, another late entry to a sport from Jaleco. Perhaps that was their plan: get in when everybody's gone, then deliver a moderately solid game that scratches your itch for the sport and nothing more. In fact, the only notable things you can pluck from this one are an NHLPA license and the fact that it's the only NES hockey game with a vertically-oriented view of the rink. Top shelf stuff, Jaleco, really.

## TERAO NO DOSUKOI OOZUMOU

FC • 1988



Sumo wrestling games enjoyed a brief period of competition on Famicom, much like baseball, and so of course Jaleco had to have a piece of the pie. *Dosukoi* has all the sumo game trappings, with tournaments and mash-happy gameplay, but ultimately, Tecmo's *Tsuppari Oozumo* won most of the mindshare.

## MOERO!! JUDO WARRIORS

FC • 1990



The sequel to *Big Challenge! Judo Senshuken*, *Judo Warriors* offers more realistically-proportioned characters as opposed to the original's near-bobbleheaded figures, and a better-constructed story mode where you can freely choose which international tournament to enter. All that and inspirational-sounding music that may well have been inspired by the judo manga/anime series *Yawara!*, only unattached to teen girl issues.

## BASES LOADED '96

SATURN/PS1 • 1995



Canonically the final *Bases Loaded* game (Japan got a *Moero!!* game on WonderSwan a few years later), *BL '96: Double Header* is a weird pre-rendered installment that switches between both kinds of camera views. Maybe that's the "double header." Sadly, by being on both 32-bit systems, Jaleco went into two lion's dens, going up against Sega's *World Series Baseball* and EA's *Triple Play*, not to mention Sony's *Pennant Race* and a wealth of others. Game called.

# WEST MEETS EAST

Not long after Jaleco started producing Famicom games, they followed their competitors' practice of licensing properties from across the ocean. British and American computer games from publishers like Activision and Broderbund made for a nice second source of product, and Jaleco snapped up what they could. This led to extra opportunities when they opened their US office later in the '80s, and set publishing deals for the NES version of *Maniac Mansion* and the original title *Metal Mech*, and then went the other way and localized a few American NES games for the Famicom. And though it isn't entirely "Western," Jaleco also had the *Tetris* license in the mid-'90s for *Tetris Plus*, and introduced concepts to the franchise that other developers would adapt years later. Unlike *Lode Runner* or *Spelunker*, however, Jaleco's biggest grabs in those early days didn't exactly rise to "cult hit" status, though some of what they published in Japan ended up as treasured NES games in America.



# MURDER ON THE MISSISSIPPI

FC • 1986



てはたててくねまはんか



いやー  
これは おいてきな たひたなな フトリン  
ええ のんりりして いいですね  
きょうは てんきも いいし、  
ミッシーに ててて さんぽ。 が てらに  
ほかの おまやくるんに ご あいさつ で も  
してこようか

Murder mystery adventure games became an unlikely niche genre during the Famicom years, providing a sort of circle of digital pulp novels with stories both orthodox and unexpected (for example, a baseball-based mystery from Capcom). Enix's *Portopia Serial Murders* led the charge, and believe it or not, Jaleco was one of the first to follow with *Murder on the Mississippi*. It's part of three games of non-Japanese origin Jaleco adapted in 1986; this one taken from Activision's computer title of the same name.

The protagonists on the front of the box sure look like Sherlock Holmes and Watson, but the game takes place on a Mississippi riverboat, so it's not them, but equally accomplished detective Sir Charles Foxworth and his servant Regis (ironically renamed "Watson" in the Japanese version). While on a voyage to New Orleans on the good ship *Delta Princess*, Foxworth happens upon a room with a dead man inside. Knowing the killer is somewhere on the ship, Foxworth jumps into action to try and solve the murder within three days, which is when the ship docks and the culprit can escape.

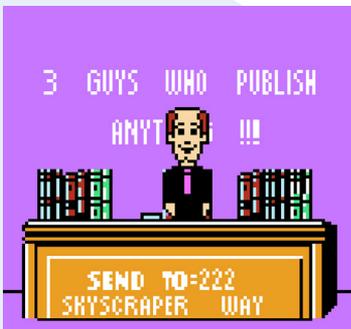
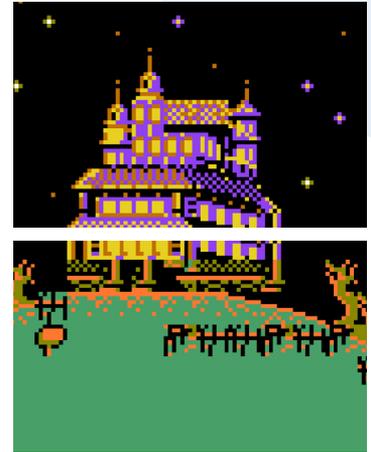
What follows is an exploration of every deck and quarters on the *Princess*, as Foxworth questions passengers and crew in the hunt for clues. It's an adventure game with a fun story, but *Murder on the Mississippi* is hampered by more than a few flaws. Perhaps most egregious is its classic case of pixel hunting: clues and other spots needed for progressing can only be found if Foxworth is in the exact right place to see it.

But *Murder on the Mississippi* is also an adventure game where you can lose, and as a result, other gameplay annoyances are more obvious: Right at the start of the game, Foxworth can enter room 1—he resides in room 3, and the dead body is in room 4—to find it booby-trapped with pitfalls that, for some reason, completely debilitate Foxworth even though he only falls in hip-deep. Other avenues for Game Overs exist, including other booby-trapped quarters, and getting a bad ending by accusing the suspected murderer without all of the sufficient evidence.

*Murder on the Mississippi* isn't on the short list of classic adventure games people usually bring up, but it ended up better remembered in Japan. At a time when Famicom games were getting more confusing and more vicious, the wrong turns in *Murder on the Mississippi* mocked players for years, and many consider it a *kusoge*, with all the good-natured ribbing that comes with that. Ironically, the Famicom version was the best port of the game, at least graphically, so Jaleco could have had one bullet point to lean on. But they'd never touch this genre of adventure games again, letting the competition get their feet wet while they looked for another stream to paddle down.

# MANIAC MANSION

NES • 1990



The NES version of *Maniac Mansion* was arguably Jaleco's biggest licensing coup: a deal with Lucasfilm Games (LucasArts) to bring its original acclaimed adventure game to the biggest game system in America. For LucasArts, it was an opportunity to break onto the NES market without going the distance of being a publisher. In addition, Jaleco had already converted *Maniac Mansion* for the Japanese audience (see page 29), but that version was barely recognizable from the original computer editions—this one would have an American team trying their best to replicate the original.

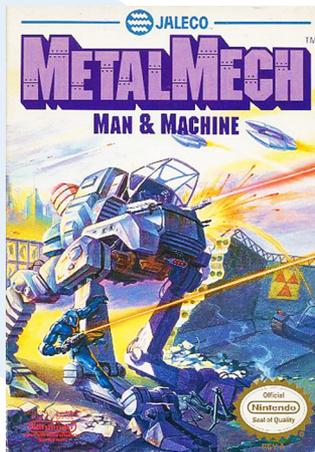
And by now, many of us know what happened. As described in an online retrospective by former LucasArts manager Douglas Crockford, a constant back-and-forth communication with Nintendo's evaluation department brought on multiple revisions of the *Maniac Mansion* NES port. At first, the Lucas team voluntarily censored some parts of the dialogue with knowledge of the kid-dominated NES market as well as what to expect from Nintendo's evaluators, but it was otherwise pretty faithful to the computer version in many respects.

However, much of the dialogue still included innuendo—both sexual and violent. At one point Crockford drafted a list of all potential content red flags in the game, then, as he explained, "gave the list to our friends at Jaleco, and they told me not to worry about it." A month later, Nintendo came back with their itemized list of changes that needed to be made before the game would see manufacturing, some of which blindsided Crockford, including objecting to a "nude" statue in the game, which the Lucas team tried to argue as based on a real sculpture, but ended up getting axed from the port anyway.

*Maniac Mansion* for NES eventually made it out the door, and though it was arguably a shadow of its former self, it really wasn't that bad, all things considered. The redrawn graphics fit the platform and look a bit better than the computer versions, just without the same color variety. And even after going through the Nintendo "process," *Maniac Mansion* was still a big deal for Jaleco and LucasArts. Nintendo saw fit to give it a cover feature in an issue of *Nintendo Power*, effectively introducing the game to a few million gamers who might not have heard of it before. From there, it no doubt exposed many kids to its quirky (if neutered) humor, which would then lead them to discover and appreciate the sequel, *Day of the Tentacle*, when it came out, and so on and so forth until a small legion of graphic adventure nerds was formed.

# METAL MECH

NES • 1991



*Metal Mech* holds a unique position in the pre-PCCW days of Jaleco: an original game produced exclusively for the company by a Western studio. Most of what Jaleco sourced from outside Japan was merely part of a licensing deal, but this time they reached a little further and got something they could call their own. Unfortunately, it was more worthy of being disowned.

*Metal Mech* was developed by Sculptured Software, a company out of Utah that spent about 12 years porting anything they could get a contract for, as well as making a slew of sub-standard licensed games for Acclaim that kept them going until the mid-'90s. In the middle of all that was this little game for Jaleco; a regular action game without much of a hook besides being faintly inspired by Japanese robot anime, and perhaps even Sunsoft's *Blaster Master*. A lone soldier by the name of Tony is the last line of defense against an invading alien horde, and pilots his three-legged walking robot in a journey to defeat the alien queen.

The mech lumbers along slowly, but it can fire in four directions, and also make short forward hops which can crush enemies from above. At any point you can have Tony hop out and have him explore nearby buildings, climb ladders, go underground, or anywhere else he can fit it where the mech can't. All the while, a menagerie of alien enemies are scuttling, flying, or dive-bombing along, and basically making you feel like you're walking through a fireworks display. However, the mech is tough, and can take a lot before blowing up, but it's always important to fire back, or just stomp on 'em.

The question is what good is Tony on his own, and it's here where *Metal Mech* really falters: it features no explanatory screen text, so without a manual, walkthrough or patience, you will never have any idea of what to do. Once you start the game, you might think that you simply have to move forward blasting every enemy in sight, but they never stop coming, and pretty soon you'll reach an apparent dead end. And you certainly didn't miss anything obvious. What you're actually supposed to do in the game is keep enemies at bay and then take Tony out of the mech to explore the immediate area, break everything you can break by shooting it down, and eventually find the stage's "key" that will open up the exit and take you to the next stage. The key could be anywhere, though typically up in some of the loftier buildings you'll come across. However, you still have to blow up every block to even the reveal the thing, then make it back to the mech without dying. (Tony and the mech have individual health meters, but Tony is naturally a lot weaker by himself.) And these are not short stages; simply taking the mech from one end to the other can take a couple of minutes, making for a lot of ground to cover to find the keys.

*Metal Mech* seemed like a marquee title for Jaleco, but it didn't live up to anyone's expectations. Even when you know what to do, the game feels awfully slow, mostly because the mech moves a little too realistically. Jaleco's great experiment in Western development took a long rest after this.

## KNIGHT LORE

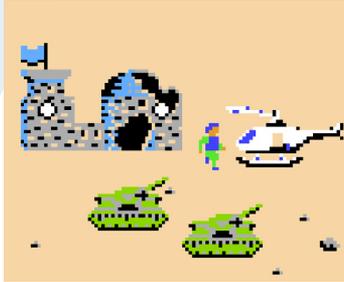
FC • 1986



It's widely known that Rare debuted on the Famicom/NES with *Slalom*, and they did, but Jaleco's self-produced port of *Knight Lore* was technically the first Rare game on the platform. They stayed pretty faithful to the original isometric adventure, but you'd think bringing an old microcomputer game to Famicom would result in better graphics than this oddly-colored remake.

## CHOPLIFTER

FC • 1986



As mentioned in the Jaleco Primer, *Choplifter* had been on every system under the sun, so really, all Jaleco was doing here was filling a gap. This version of the classic shoot-n-rescue-em-up definitely gets the job done, but only relative to the original, because it's ultimately a rather hollow Famicom production.

## MANIAC MANSION

FC • 1988



The Japanese version of *Maniac Mansion* was released two years before the American one, and is a 100% Jaleco production, with all the characters transformed from their original cartoon looks into some form of Playmobil-like figures. Much of the humor was neutered in the translation, presumably because it simply didn't pass through the Japanese language/culture filter. We got the better deal, for sure.

## ELROND

FC • 1988



Jaleco's partnership with Rare continued (and concluded) with this Japanese version of the first *Wizards & Warriors*. Practically none of it is different from the game we all know and love—except of course that odd title—but as one of the earlier Western-made NES games to reach the Famicom, it was certainly one of the better signals of the oncoming wave of weird *yoge*-ness, partly brought to you by Jaleco.

## FUSHIGI NA BLOBBY

FC • 1990



Another American export, *Fushigi na Blobby* is Jaleco's localized version of Absolute's *A Boy and His Blob*. Again, the game was mostly unchanged, except when it came to the eponymous Boy, who was redrawn as a cutesy cartoon Japanese schoolboy, complete with short shorts. As a result, he sticks out like the sorest thumb of all time among the rest of the game's semi-realistic backgrounds.

## RAMPART

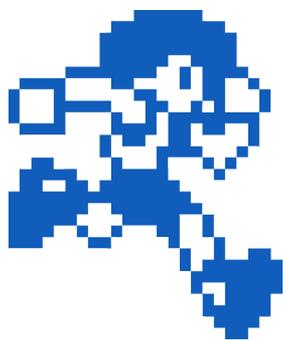
NES • 1992



An interesting score for Jaleco, this one. An NES port of an Atari arcade game would've seemed like a foregone conclusion for a publisher like Tengen or Mindscape—it is indeed a Tengen production—but instead it landed in Jaleco's lap. Perhaps this was Tengen's way of undermining Nintendo at the time, but it's hard to say that anyone suffered, because this is a great port of the original arcade *Rampart*, and nonetheless set the foundation (pun intended) for the wealth of tower defense games to come 20 years later.

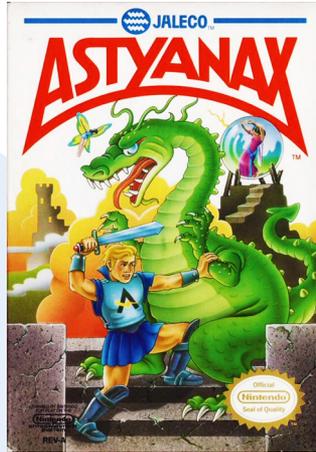
# MULTI- PLES OF 8

Jaleco had hitched their wagon to Nintendo's star for quite some time. For many years their arcade games went to the Kyoto giant's consoles and no others, and naturally, they created several original games and franchises on them. Many notable Jaleco games have been covered thus far, but these ones don't easily fit into any one category—they exist in their own little worlds, existing on different Nintendo systems at different times, and memorable for different reasons. In a way, they best represent the least offensive, yet least mindblowing "middle-of-the-road" Jaleco.



# ASTYANAX

ARCADE • 1989 / NES • 1990



Most of Jaleco's action games leaned toward the "weird" side, but considering everything about *Astyanax*, it's surprisingly normal. Loosely based on Greek mythology (about as much as *The Tower of Druaga* is based on Sumerian mythology), *Astyanax* is about a strong warrior swinging an axe at a bevy of monsters, but just who that warrior is varies between the arcade and NES versions. In the arcade version, it's Roche, who sets out to defeat the demon overlord and... that's about it. In general, the game is pretty swift, with cool explosions whenever you kill an enemy, and makes for a fine clone of Taito's *Rastan*.

The NES version, coming just a few months from the alleged arcade release, changes things considerably. In a story practically made for the pages of a *Worlds of Power* novel, *Astyanax* is the name of a regular teenage boy who is brought from the modern world to the fantasy land of Remlia, and given the powerful axe "Bash" as his weapon against the nefarious wizard Blackhorn (who resembles a relative of *Skeletor*). Cut-scenes are plentiful, too, with a *Ninja Gaiden*-style focus on both the good and bad guys, though the bone-dry dialogue is much more uninteresting than Ryu Hayabusa's adventures. Then again, the arcade version's "cut-scenes" amount to a two-frame animation of Roche pulling out the axe from a stone and becoming an armored hero.

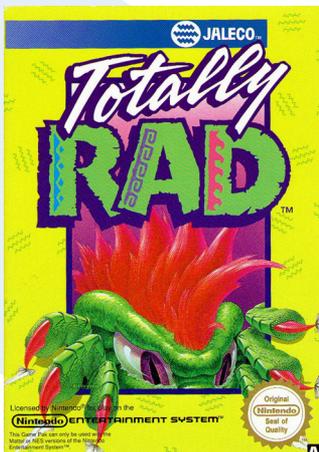
Compared to the vibrant graphics of the arcade version, the NES *Astyanax* naturally suffers a little bit, but is still nice-looking for what it is, with big character sprites and barely any flicker or slowdown. Stages in the NES version also differ quite a bit from the arcade, which is reasonable considering the releases of the two versions, suggesting that they were worked on in tandem, a la Capcom's *Strider* games. The arcade version's stages hop from location to location, while the NES game starts in a creepy castle and lingers there for a sub-stage or two before moving on to somewhere else.

Among the typical jump-and-attack action, *Astyanax*'s key feature is its power meter. When not attacking, the meter fills up, and when you do attack, your strength is determined by how far the meter went. During the game you'll find power-ups that extend the meter and can kill most enemies in one hit once it's fully topped-up. Nevertheless, the axe can be quite powerful even in early levels, making the game seem kind of easy at first. But that's countered with trickier jumps and jerkier enemies (so many airborne SOB!) that appear as you move ahead.

*Astyanax* was another Jaleco title developed by Aicom (both versions), who also produced *The Legendary Axe* for the TurboGrafx-16, a game spiritually similar to the arcade *Astyanax* and preceded it by about a year. Among all those basketball games was apparently an affinity for axe-wielding dudes in flashy action games, too. No complaints here; Aicom may not have worked with Jaleco for very long, but did them some real favors when it came to making decently fun games. Maybe this should have been the Aicom issue...

# TOTALLY RAD

NES • 1991



Oh, what gifts *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure* had given us. It was only a part of a larger cultural meme, but the spirit of its characters still helped influence a generation of kids across North America in speaking like exaggerated Californian stereotypes, confusing adults to the point where they would say things like "radical" as a genuine attempt to relate. And then we have *Totally Rad*, which was Jaleco's own little attempt to relate by dressing up a Famicom release in Ted "Theodore" Logan's vest.

Because the vest seemed to be all they could afford. *Totally Rad's* original Japanese version, *Magic John*, isn't much different visually, but a simple change of the protagonist and a dude-ification of the dialogue works wonders. Our hero is Jake, a guy who really might as well be Ted, out on a date to a magic show with his girlfriend Allison. The magician, the great Zebediah, is a hero to Jake, and he wants to learn the ways of magic. Jake then begins rigorous magical training that somehow includes physical exercise, but then one day, weird creatures swoop in and kidnap Allison.

Jake's magic is advanced enough that he can transform into several different creatures each with their own different powers and attacks, like an amphibious man-fish, a winged warrior that can fly freely around the screen, as well as a few screen-clearing elemental spells. What's great is that it's all available from the start of the game without having to unlock any particular powers, but on the other hand, that's why it's a little strange. Using the flying power, you can soar over many stages without having to attack that often, and it's only the spells that significantly deplete your magic meter when used.

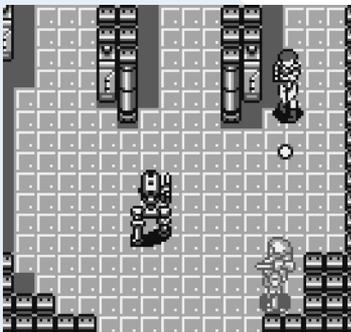
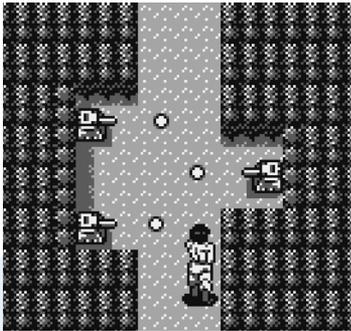
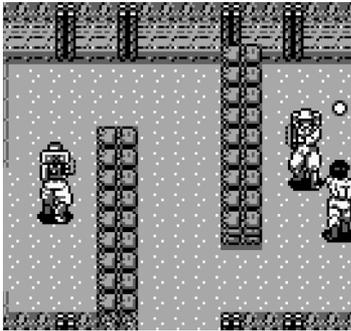
Surprisingly, Allison is saved after fighting through just one stage (pretty progressive trend-bucking for 1991!), but then her father, a hotshot professor, is captured by the enemies. It turns out the enemies are from an underground race that are trying to learn about the surface-dwellers, and seek the professor's knowledge. Jake rescues the prof, fights the emperor of the underground, saves the world, and in the words of our hero, "all's excellent that ends excellent."

Again, *Totally Rad* has a lot of fun with its affected dialogue. Aside from a couple of extended tangents, the text is a punched-up variation of the original Japanese—a mundane line like "Who were those guys?" becomes "Who were those dweebs?" Or the best one in the game, "Jake, they're like stealing me or something." Jake and Allison bust out the "excellents" and "gnarlys" almost every time they open their mouth, and even Zebediah sneaks in some of the lingo now and then, as if you needed confirmation he was the Rufus analogue here.

Beyond that, *Totally Rad* is (*here it comes!*) totally average. It's colorful, detailed, has neat power-ups and big bosses, but that only puts it in a category; it doesn't send it to the top. All of its bullet points could be found in virtually any NES action game from the same year, so the dude-talk was pretty much all it had going for it. Thankfully, it being an Aicom production keeps it from being too awful, but otherwise, it's not the most tubular thing around. Copacetic?

# FORTIFIED ZONE

GAME BOY • 1991



At the beginning, Jaleco's Game Boy titles were of their usual predictable nature: a new *Bases Loaded*, a psuedo-port of *Hoops*, a pinball game, and a shooter. *Fortified Zone* presented something different they hadn't done before: a top-down run-n-gun (rather, walk-n-gun) that at least made sense on the Game Boy, but still underwhelmed.

You play as two soldiers, Masato and Mizuki, as they infiltrate an enemy fortress that's crawling with enemy soldiers, robots and more than a few traps. The mazelike fortress stages get increasingly complex (though not to total brain-wracking status) and are guarded by the big guns, literally and figuratively.

You're able to switch between both soldiers at any time, because they each have their strengths and weaknesses: Mizuki takes more damage per hit (oh, because she's a *weak woman*? Is that it?!), but she's also the only one who can jump. Conversely, Masato can't jump, but can use the larger guns that the pair come across, and so on and so forth.

*Fortified Zone* is only four stages long, which is in line with most other short-form Game Boy games of the time, but with our heroes' slow walking speed, the brain-dead enemies, and several points of backtracking in the later half of the game, it quickly devolves into mindless routine. The first stage is a breeze, but soon you begin to realize that yep, the rest of the game really is just walking into rooms where the doors immediately close, then you kill all the enemies so the doors open, make your way past some traps in the next room, then find the key to open the permanently-locked doors, kill a few minibosses, et cetera. And the big problem with switching between different heroes is that if one of them dies, they're gone for good, and more often than not they'll be the one that had the grenades you really needed, or could've been used as a damage sponge for a boss up ahead.

While *Fortified Zone* was a pretty limp attempt at an action game even by Jaleco's standards, it got a sequel exclusively in Japan that was largely the same except for some more detailed art. But Jaleco USA did release the third installment, *Operation Logic Bomb*, for Super NES. Both sequels are visibly improved over the first game, though *Logic Bomb* is more obviously evolved because of better graphics and generally faster action (yet dumping multiplayer). Rough start aside, this may simultaneously be one of Jaleco's most consistent yet least remembered series, which is a bit of a shame considering how good it got later on.

# RIVAL TURF!

SNES • 1992



The great belt-scroll beat-em-up trilogies: *Final Fight*. *Streets of Rage*. *Sengoku*. *Rushing Beat*. All right, maybe not that last one. Jaleco took to the Super NES like most other tried and true publishers of the time, and apparently saw beat-em-ups as the genre to propel them forward.

Certainly, Capcom's port of *Final Fight* looked good and proved that the system could handle detailed arcade action games to *some* degree, and Jaleco could have easily decided to port their arcade brawler *64th Street: A Detective Story*. Instead, they spun that off into the spiritual sequel *Rushing Beat*, which would become *Rival Turf!* in the west, and get two more sequels (see opposite page). But this is about *Rival Turf!*, which makes one wonder how they managed two sequels anyway.

*Final Fight* has Cody, Guy, and Haggar; three guys and two tough names. *Rival Turf!* features the dynamic duo of Jack Flak and Oozie Nelson, which might as well be the names of characters in a comedy sketch. Together, they set out on a cross-country trip to eradicate a nefarious gang led by martial arts master Big Al, and throngs of lanky weirdos will give them a hard time, but our badly-dressed heroes are up for the challenge. (Seriously, why does Nelson look like a skinny M. Bison?)

Unfortunately, while the developers aped *Final Fight*, they didn't seem to learn much from it. *Rival Turf!* may look like an arcade game, but playing it feels as basic as a previous-generation console game. You have your punches and kicks, throws and super moves, but as the same class of enemy come toward you screen after screen, it barely feels like you're making a difference in this crime-ridden world. The action itself just feels inconsequential, as characters have barely three frames of animation for every action, and hits that should feel like they hit hard, but instead seem to just react to sprites like wind blowing a sheet of paper. Even for a straightforward beat-em-up, it's just bad.

And that itself is bad, because *Rival Turf!* did have one or two interesting ideas in stage design, notably the inside of a moving bus in stage 1, and busting through a sports stadium a couple of scenes later. Most of the background art is pretty competent, too, as back alleys feature light peeking through shadows, and frequent outdoor scenes show day turning to evening and night. But that's only half the equation, and if your beat-em-up is going to be so similar to everybody else's, it better have some real flash to it—*Rival Turf!*'s staid stages and limp action just don't cut it. One wonders why Jaleco didn't just go with a port of *64th Street*, with its faster action and better spectacle.

The *Final Fight* guys stuck to the dingy streets, but Flak and Nelson left no stone unturned in their pursuit of the criminal element. And Jaleco would not leave the beat-em-up genre alone after this, for better or worse.

## BRAWL BROTHERS

SNES • 1993



What should be "Rival Turf! 2" is... not. Apparently Jaleco wanted a fresh start over for the English version, and so Flak and Nelson are now Hack and Slash. That's not a problem, though, because *Brawl Brothers* is a much improved game, both in graphics and gameplay (comic-style sound effect starbursts are a nice touch). The stages are less creative, but do use more SNES scaling techniques.

## THE PEACE KEEPERS

SNES • 1994



*The Peace Keepers* features an all-new cast of *Rushing Beat*-ers, so Jaleco USA could ostensibly do whatever they wanted with the canon this time. Interestingly, *Final Fight* inadvertently knocked-off this game, because *The Peace Keepers* features branching paths in stages, which *Final Fight 3* would do a year later. This is easily the peak of the series, but weird localization choices extend into the audio of all things: much of the soundtrack is cut out and left quiet by default.

## TUFF E NUFF

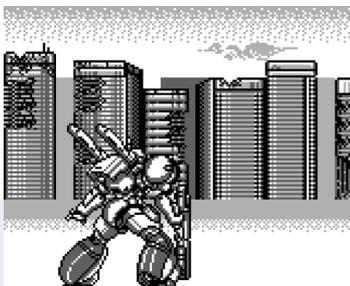
SNES • 1993



Slipped in between the *Rushing Beat* games was *Tuff E Nuff*, which is pretty much the only *Street Fighter*-esque fighting game Jaleco made (unless you want to count the wrestling and similar sports games)—and in a decade when everybody ripped off *Street Fighter*, that's pretty astounding. Of course, it wasn't any good, and Jaleco went right back to *Rushing Beat*.

## BATTLE UNIT ZEOTH

GAME BOY • 1991



Part shooter, part platformer, *Battle Unit Zeoth* is the name of the towering mech that you use to blast away the enemy armies. Zeoth's jet boost helps it float through some of the mazelike stages, while the full-flight shooting sequences are kind of impressive for a game originally released in the Game Boy's first calendar year. However, it is another woefully short Game Boy game from Jaleco, but for its time, it could have been much worse.

## WHOMP 'EM

NES • 1991



Originally *Saiyuki World 2* in Japan, Jaleco USA instead gave us our favorite outmoded Native American stereotypes on Nintendo! Just kidding; this isn't quite *Pocahontas* bad, because it's just a redressed *Saiyuki* game, and as such, *Whomp 'Em* stands only as another bog-standard action-adventure title. (The hero's spear attacks are pretty fun to use, though.) If this should be dinged for anything, it should be the awful pun of a title; a Jaleco USA hallmark.

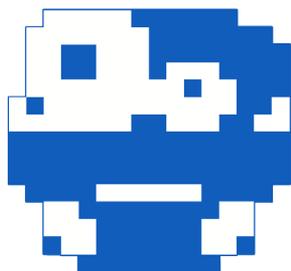
## BIG RUN

ARCADE • 1990 / SFC • 1991



Jaleco went from *City Connection* to this: a pseudo-3D racing game based on the Paris-Dakar rally. In all fairness, it's pretty fun, with plenty of variation in the terrain and stage backgrounds. *Big Run* was also Jaleco's first Super Famicom release, though the port is missing a lot of animations and other graphical flourishes of the original.

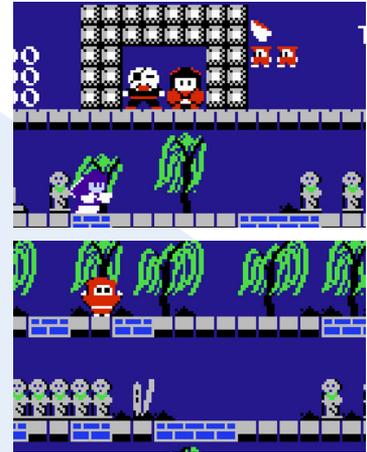
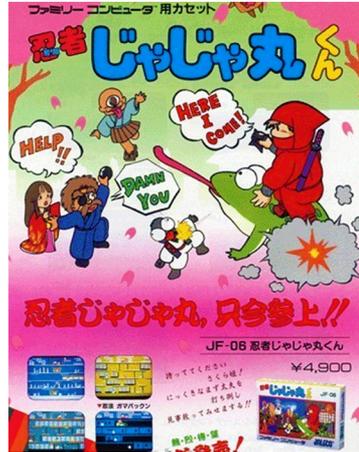
# MARU'S MISSIONS



Jajamaru started as UPL's "Ninja-kun" in a simple arcade game, but quickly became Jaleco's adopted son and eventual mascot (though according to the "lore," Jajamaru is actually the younger brother of Ninja-kun). And like other game mascots, Jajamaru went on several different kinds of adventures, including role-playing games and larger-scale platformers. As has been said several times already, Jaleco certainly knew a thing or two about sticking with (if not relying on) proven formulas—sometimes to their own disadvantage—but in the case of Jajamaru, it worked out better than usual. By iterating and smoothing out successive games, they didn't dip too low in quality. Though ironically, being some of Jaleco's better games, the *Jajamaru-kun* series barely made it to America, which seems foolish considering kids' love for all things ninja. Regardless, that meant Jaleco USA had to find other potential hits while the little red ninja (comparatively) thrived.

# NINJA JAJAMARU- KUN

FC • 1985



Ninja-kun traveled vertically; Jajamaru-kun traveled horizontally. That's about the simplest way to explain the differences between UPL's original game and Jaleco's reinterpretation. Though both ninjas eventually went their separate ways, Jaleco tried to stick close to UPL's work with the original *Ninja Jajamaru-kun*, perhaps not to alienate any fans. Or perhaps because that was the easy thing to do. Consider who we're talking about here.

Princess Sakura has been kidnapped by Catfish Tayuu, leader of the demon army. As he stands atop his palace clutching the princess, it's up to Jajamaru to beat back the enemy forces, which include various monsters and demons from Japanese mythology, like shrine maiden ghosts, bird-faced warriors, and cyclops boys. As long as he kills every minion in the immediate area, he moves on to another palace and gets ever closer to rescuing the princess (on paper, anyway; the game goes on for 99 stages and then loops). The enemies arbitrarily float and jump along the four-tiered screens, and in a Mario-like touch, Jajamaru can only get up to the other levels by busting the brick sections of the platforms, then hopping up through the gap. Don't expect Mario physics, though; like *Ninja-kun*, Jajamaru moves in a stilted manner, and players can intend to jump in one way, then immediately change directions before the jump begins and possibly fly headfirst into an enemy. It looks and feels pretty primitive, but all it takes is a little getting used to.

The thing is, none of the little variations in the object of the game really make *Jajamaru* all that different, because like the *Ninja-kun* games, the play still revolves around pursuing and killing all the enemies to clear the stage ad infinitum. So why would Jaleco go to all the trouble of renaming the hero and giving him a villain and a goal when the biggest thing they did to the game was simply change the direction in which the screen scrolls?

Unoriginal though it may be, the answer could have more to do with the basic nature of video games at the time. Gamers of all ages may have been initially attracted to characters and settings, but the really devoted types were more interested in dominating games by practicing and exploring. Give them a new game with new secrets to find (or at least new ways to boost score via bonuses) and perpetually increasing challenge, and nobody will really complain, because it was still about getting the highest scores. This isn't news to anyone who knows even a bit about retro games, but it helps place *Jajamaru* relative to *Ninja-kun*, and why Jaleco likely didn't want to go too crazy with the new game.

And on the bright side, Jaleco didn't sit still with the character, putting him in new types of games for many years and outliving his "brother." Nor did UPL immediately give all the power to Jaleco—they would continue to make new *Ninja-kun* games, even port them to Famicom, while Jaleco eventually took *Jajamaru* on new adventures.

# JAJAMARU NO DAIBOUKEN

FC • 1986



As mentioned, Jaleco took Jajamaru into the realm of richer games, and *Daibouken* is certainly not like the original. It's a "normal" platformer with bosses and way different stages and smoother physics and everything!

# JAJAMARU NINPO CHO

FC • 1989



Walking far away from UPL's source material, Jaleco redesigned Jajamaru and made him the hero of his very own RPG—as was the style at the time. Princess Sakura joined up for the adventure, too. Jaleco USA had the game localized as *Taro's Quest* before prematurely pulling the plug.

# MARU'S MISSION

GAME BOY • 1991



The only *Jajamaru* game to make it to America (but not the only one of its family; Sammy released the Game Boy *Ninja-kun* game as *Ninja Taro*). This shrunken platformer takes after *Daibouken*, though each stage is a pastiche of different countries such as Egypt and Brazil—and Japan too, but not until the end.

# NINJA JAJAMARU: GINGA DAISAKUSEN

FC • 1991



Faithfulness went right out the door once Jaleco started making this one. *Ginga Daisakusen* is a brazen attempt to capture some of the thunder of *Super Mario Bros. 3*, as did many other games of the time. From abilities to stage designs to even the status bar, this is the Mario-est of all the Jajamaru games, and while it's not a bad game, its shamelessness just turns it into a big, average lump.

# SUPER NINJA-KUN

SFC • 1994



UPL went out of business in 1992, leaving Jaleco with the keys to both Ninja kingdoms, and so they produced *Super Ninja-kun* in 1994. It basically expands upon the original's cliff-climbing stages by turning them into longer action-adventure stages. *Ninja-kun* gets many different weapons and abilities this time, too, and of course faces off against big bosses. It looks decent, it doesn't rock the boat, and it's generally a good enough game to be considered the peak of the whole franchise.

# NINJA JAJAMARU-KUN: ONIGIRI NINPO CHO

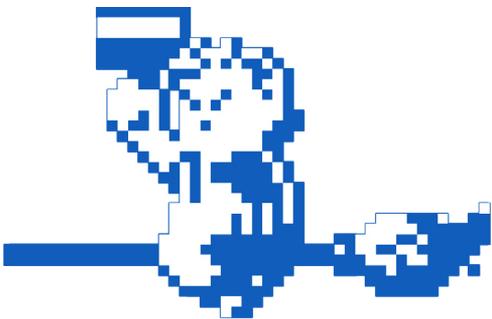
PS1/SAT • 1997



Jajamaru's grand debut in the 32-bit generation is second only to Bubsy's grand debut, but only because Jajamaru didn't start out underwhelming. Our hero now looks like some kind of ninja Bomberman, running and tossing shurikens through waves of enemies. All told, it's a mishmash of square-shaped stages, bad CG videos, and on top of that, it's a breeze to complete. A flameout for the ages.

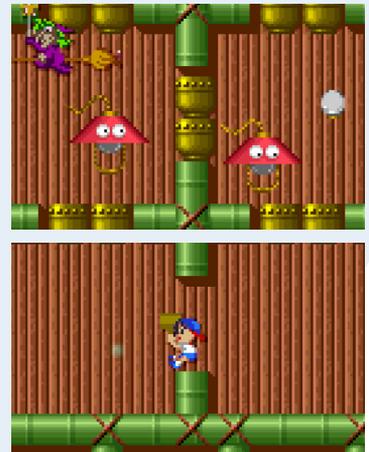
# THE WILD ONES

Jaleco made plenty of bad games, yet some straddled the line between "terrible" and "brilliant." Early productions like *Naughty Boy* tried to work against limitations and set themselves apart from the competition, but perhaps only because there was no better way to go, seeing as money still had to be made. As Jaleco matured, the company's contract developers snuck in more unique ideas that happened to make it to market. What follows is the best of Jaleco from a conceptual point of view.



# PSYCHIC 5

ARCADE • 1987



The nature of special powers in video games has usually been framed the same way: you have your one hero who happens upon a shiny icon that suddenly lets them shoot fireballs or swim better or break really big blocks. Then you have *Psychic 5*, which gives you five funny-looking magic-using kids (including one old wizard) who all have different ways of attacking, and who all move a little differently throughout the game world. It's characters as powers, which only a relative handful of games have done, much less pulled off.

*Psychic 5* was actually made by NMK, a fellow arcade game maker whose video division, along with Tose and Aicom, was one of Jaleco's main contractors, and responsible for most of the shoot-em-ups Jaleco released. This game, however, is certainly not a shooter, and is instead an ambitious (in arcade terms) platformer. The five espers you play as are on a mission to destroy Satan, who holes up in the middle of a giant mansion or castle and sends an army of anthropomorphic household items to flummox our heroes.

Every stage in *Psychic 5* is a multi-screen, usually vertically-oriented affair, with Satan sitting in a large room towards the center. Along with the threat of enemies, the stages are designed so you can't get all the way through with one character. Early on, you'll need to bust down doors, and only the heavy kid Bunta can do that, but he also runs much slower than the others. *Psychic 5* is characterized by the fact that every character can jump extremely high, but some jump higher than others.

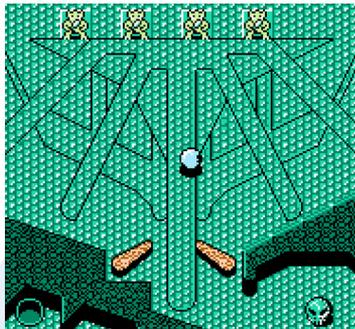
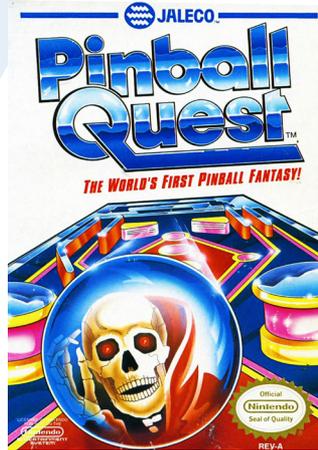
Furthermore, you can't just freely switch between characters at the start of a stage; you have to go rescue them by breaking pots, which will naturally give you access to parts of the stage that only they can reach. For the most part, you'll just have to rely on switching to a character that can get you over a certain "hump" in a stage, then continue using your strongest or most reliable character to mow down enemies, rescue other characters, and eventually engage Satan. He puts up a fight, though, and will immediately send more enemies once he spots you. The trick is to get in close and fast, and keep whacking him with your hammer attacks until he explodes and escapes elsewhere.

If *Psychic 5* sounds a little long for an '80s arcade game, well, it kind of is—eight stages of careful maneuvering between five characters can eat up time, but if you die or start over, you already know what to do and can blow through the stages much faster. Regardless, the action is nonstop, and the constantly respawning enemies lends a *Bomb Jack*-like feeling of panic, especially when you get yourself cornered (it's probably no coincidence that years later NMK made a *Bomb Jack* sequel for arcades).

*Psychic 5* is one of the better indicators that, partly thanks to NMK, Jaleco's arcade wing was putting out games that were way more creative than their consumer side. Eventually they overlapped, but for a while, it was interesting to see more unique stuff being put into cabinets as opposed to the more "disposable" games on Famicom.

# PINBALL QUEST

NES • 1990



*Pinball Quest* is probably the most ingenious game Jaleco ever released. But like so many of them, it's not polished enough to feel like it was fully realized. On the surface, it's a normal pinball game just like the others you can find on NES, with a few different tables to play and try to beat the high scores. But what you'll also find on the main menu is something called "RPG mode," a separate set of tables wrapped up in fantasy RPG tropes: the cute little beady-eyed pinball is the hero who must rescue a kidnapped princess from the clutches of a demon king. A six-stage adventure unfurls, as the ball travels from the kingdom, up the river and through the fortress of evil. Since this involves more than simply getting high scores, the stage designs are laid out as to make it more challenging to reach the exits at the top, and some even have a puzzling gimmick or two—on the river, the ball needs to land in a bucket to be carried further up.

One big RPG feature is also a part of this game: shops. In between stages, you're sent to an underground merchant from whom you can buy various stopper items to prevent falling down the bottom of a table and having to restart from the last one (crazily enough, you can even attempt to steal from the merchant).

For most of RPG mode, you'll have an easygoing time bouncing up through the mazelike tables and bonking bosses, but if you mess up a little too often and lose all of your HP, you're completely disabled and can only watch as the ball falls back down to the shop and the previous table. This is a humongous pain in the ass during the penultimate boss battle, where the demon princess will fly around the screen, then once you hit her, she hones in on the flippers and immediately incapacitates them, making for a somewhat unfair loss, especially if you just happened to send the ball flying right before that.

Far too many rough edges keep *Pinball Quest* from entering anyone's hall of fame, and it eventually all falls apart. For starters, the art is awful, filled with two-color backgrounds and many messy-looking character sprites. And for what it's supposed to be, *Pinball Quest* doesn't quite have anything approaching pinball physics—the ball bounces off obstacles at weird angles, gets caught on edges, and can frustrate anyone trying to aim it up a lane like they would on a real pinball table. Add that to the maddening final boss fights, and you'll wonder if that princess would really have it so bad as the bride of evil, anyway.

Somewhat mercifully, RPG mode doesn't last very long, even if you do factor in the infuriating final boss battles. This is one Jaleco letdown that kind of hurts, because *Pinball Quest* is still a neat idea—it's just one that desperately needs fixing up before someone tries it again. In the meantime, play *Wizorb*.

# ROD-LAND

ARCADE • 1990



Tam and Rit are two fairy children whose mother is captured and taken to an ominous tower far away. Luckily, they were just recently given magical rods to use, and so they do, getting rid of the adorable-yet-deadly monsters that roam the tower, and climb and climb hoping to rescue their mom. That's *Rod-Land*, and if that description has you thinking of cutesy colorful graphics, you get it in spades here.

Tam and Rit's rods fire beams that can ensnare enemies, and then they can slam them on the ground to and fro until they're gone (and somewhat brutally, compared to just how adorable this game looks). Defeated enemies will then leave behind extra weapons like missiles and bombs to further help the pair clear the single-screen stages.

It's all pretty clever, but *Rod-Land's* cleverness is not entirely its own. It's a form of gameplay mechanics borrowed from Taito's *Bubble Bobble* series, then tweaked: you have characters whose abilities only incapacitate enemies at first, then require a secondary action to kill them. Even the extra ability to create ladders at any space is a subtle reference to the rainbow-climbing ways of *Rainbow Islands*. Clearly, Taito had some secret admirers.

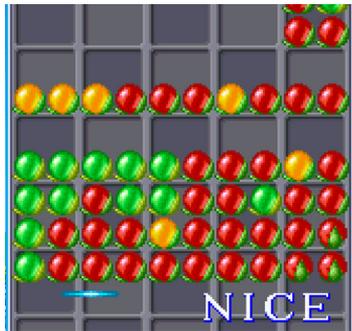
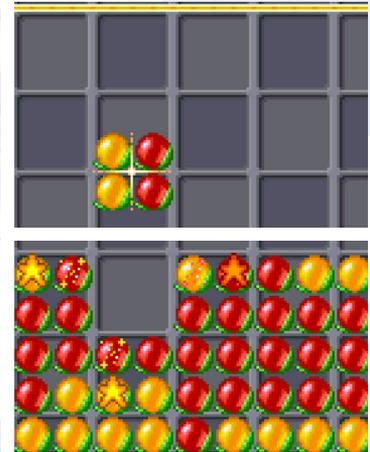
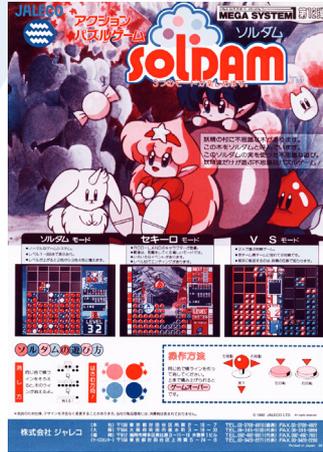
Remarkably, *Rod-Land* includes a second quest, playable after completing the "rescue Mom" story. The new quest takes Tam and Rit into a pyramid setting, where a completely new suite of levels and new mechanical enemies await them. These days, that kind of extra content is saved for late console ports or DLC, but in *Rod-Land*, it's in the standard arcade version from the beginning. The game's slow pace may keep many from hanging in there through both quests, however.

Despite *Rod-Land's* resemblance to *Bubble Bobble*, and *Bubble Bobble's* endearing worldwide popularity, Jaleco never saw fit to release the game in America in any form. However, it was released in Europe via licensed publisher The Sales Curve, and earned quite a bit of cachet from gamers thanks to a nearly perfect port for Amiga. Other versions showed up as well, namely for the ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, as well as an NES version that Jaleco had no hand whatsoever in making, though they did publish it in Japan.

Take the Jaleco name off of *Rod-Land*, and most people would think it was made by Taito. But that isn't a damning statement this time—Jaleco actually aped a game and made sure it was playable and looked good. It's near the top of the heap of the company's arcade gameography, and that's pretty special for something that came less than 10 years after they entered the market.

# SOLDAM

ARCADE • 1992



Jaleco's puzzle game canon is surprisingly sparse, but knowing them, they likely went where they knew they could make a buck. Arcade puzzle games rose in popularity in the '90s, but weren't always surefire hits in the same way a flashy new shooter or beat-em-up would be. So Jaleco didn't explore the genre that often, but with *Soldam*, they made something genuinely different for the time, even though it only looks like every other puzzle game you've played.

The rules of *Soldam* take a few more moments to grasp than most other puzzle games (and there's no guarantee this article will help), but for those wanting a little more complexity than just matching three pieces, it delivers: The main goal, like most puzzle games, is to clear whole lines across the screen, and the pieces are colored orbs that arrive in four-by-four blocks. When dropped on a pile of other orbs, the colors can "spread" out to the others. It's therefore very important to stay mindful of how the stack is organizing, and hope that your killer line-clear isn't bungled by misjudging how a color would spread to the pile. One of the basic, yet key techniques in clearing lines is by using "edge" pieces to enclose a row between two like-colored orbs, which then turns the enclosed orbs that same color. Other quirks exist, like the fact that the game is engineered to never give you enough blocks in a row to clear a line without doing anything. Additionally, the blocks only move in whole spaces; in other words, it's not like *Lumines* where you can easily drop off half a square. If this reads like the wall of text it looks like, then don't be scared off; playing the game a while and slowly working its rules into your brain is the best way to go.

As you might guess from the artwork, *Soldam* is technically a spin-off of *Rod-Land*, with a "story" mode that borrows many characters and other graphics from that game (changing the orbs into Puyo-like creatures), though Tam and Rit don't show up much except in the Versus mode. In Versus, the playfield is limited to just three columns, and you're tasked with gathering up as many red or blue candies as you can, which means that only your designated color can be cleared from the board. Best to teach a friend how to play before you go competing with each other.

*Soldam* only got one consumer port, for Game Boy. That makes perfect sense, but it's still odd that Jaleco didn't decide to take the game to any other consoles and provide more competition for *Puyo Puyo*, *Columns*, and anything else that came along before the great puzzle game deluge of the mid-'90s. Instead, Jaleco continued the *Tetris Plus* series, which was still pretty good, but not as refreshing as the complicated quadrants of *Soldam*.

# ESPER BOUKENTAI

FC • 1987



This Famicom reinterpretation of *Psychic 5* took after other arcade transplants of the time in that it tried to “adventure-ize” the original. In other words, it’s spread out over many huge areas when it didn’t really have to be, and any of the brilliance of *Psychic 5* is watered down by a generally low-rent game with simple graphics and barely any guidance for the player.

# AVENGING SPIRIT

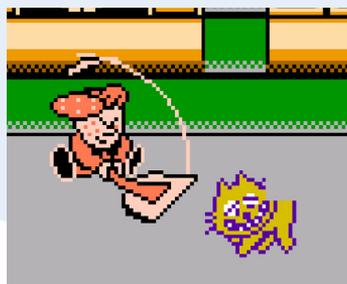
ARCADE • 1991



Imagine *Ghost Trick* as a platformer and you have *Avenging Spirit*: playing as a little ghost, you can inhabit the body of any enemy that comes along and use their unique weapons to make it through the game and rescue your kidnapped girlfriend. Simple, but a bit hampered by huge, open stages that tend to feel like slogs, and annoying music that loops a little too often. The Game Boy version, its only home port, is better-remembered, and even looks a little cuter.

# PIZZA POP!

FC • 1992



Another standard 8-bit platformer helped greatly by its wonderful absurdity. As pizza delivery boy Kid-kun, it’s your job to take a fresh hot pie through the dangerous streets of the city, beat the bosses and make your quota, then wait for the next call to come in. Cartoonish animations and peppy, insistent music are the icing on the ca—um, rather, the pepperoni on the pie. Why not this instead of *Totally Rad*?

# ARM CHAMPS II

ARCADE • 1992



Jaleco’s first *Arm Champs* (1988) smartly improved on the old-time mechanical arm wrestling games, but *Arm Champs II* went over the top with better graphics, a more futuristic cabinet design, and a larger cast of (vaguely racist) cartoon weirdos to go up against. Can you defeat Turk the, uh, Turk? Shibayama the sumo? Specks the cyborg? Assuming you’ll ever find the machine again, that is.

# SHATTERHAND

NES • 1991



NYPD’s Steve Hermann loses his arms after a fight with some robotic military insurgents, only to be fitted with metal appendages that make him *Shatterhand*, the lean, mean punching machine. That’s right—no guns, no ninja magic; just the power of the fist. All the credit for this one really goes to developer Natsume, who made other super-satisfying NES action games like the *Power Blade* series for Taito. And it’s up to their usual high standard on the system, which means it was way above Jaleco’s.

# IRRITATING STICK

PS1 • 1998



Forever a lightning rod for penis references (like that one), *Irritating Stick* deserves respect. Though not an actual Jaleco game (it was a previous Japanese release brought over by Jaleco USA) and a sequel to the obscure NeoGeo game *The Irritating Maze*, this simple action game is still one of the better things to have the Jaleco name stamped on it. Take out your rod and guide it through an electrified maze without touching the sides, and try not to have fun. It’s the kind of game that would’ve made perfect sense on Wii, and not just because of that penis reference.

# THE LATER YEARS

Take the weird *and* the bad and you have this rogue's gallery that comes not coincidentally from Jaleco's darkest days post-Nintendo. The company's bad publishing decisions were exacerbated from the mid-'90s to the early 2000s, giving us bizarre, middling crap that nonetheless earned some degree of notoriety because of them. Oh wait, that's called "infamy." These games are the three tallest pillars of Jaleco incompetence—and if you don't agree, well, keep in mind that in this case, it's not so lonely at the top.

## PUNKY SKUNK


 PS1 • 1998


After years of suppressing 2D games on the PlayStation, Sony relaxed just enough to let in *Punky Skunk*, an obscure Japanese release (*Cooly Skunk*) localized by Jaleco USA. God forbid we got good games like *Adventures of Little Ralph*; instead, we were treated to the anthropomorphic animal platformer pablum of *Punky*, already well out of date by its 1998 release. Jaleco even tried an outdated "attitude" approach with its marketing, despite the fact that Punky's spiky hair is about as edgy as the game gets. Slow, formulaic and easy (besides some baffling minigames), *Punky Skunk* is at least good for joking about how his stink attacks look a lot like fart clouds.

## STEPPING SELECTION


 PS2 • 2000


Unsurprisingly, Jaleco attempted to muscle in on the arcade rhythm game genre in the late '90s, and initially had a series of games called *Rock'n Megastage*. Their follow-up was *Stepping Selection*, a *Dance Dance Revolution*-like and Japanese PS2 launch game that used impossibly cheesy karaoke videos as backgrounds. You can not, will not, and probably should not believe the bevy of rent-a-dancers grooving alongside bizarre motion graphics to serviceable covers of "You Can't Hurry Love" or the *Ghostbusters* theme.

## LOWRIDER


 PS2 • 2003


Arguably the absolute nadir for Jaleco as a company, *Lowrider*'s hits just kept on coming. With branding by *Lowrider* magazine (on the American box, anyway), *Lowrider* the game challenges you to get your tricked-out hydraulics-supercharged car to bounce higher than the other guy's simply by hitting the button patterns when the wheels touch the ground—all while awful, plinky, stereotypically Japanese music runs in the background. Not to mention a smattering of unaddressed typos ("countinue;" "vibration"). It's definitely a unique idea—why not explore lowrider culture in a video game?—but it's even more a monument to the failure of PCCW and by extension Jaleco Entertainment. And depending on your view, it's either the worst or the greatest harbinger of death ever fashioned.



# The of Misfit Hardware



ARTIFACT #SMSS988

## Micomsoft Sensor Kid

### The science guy

In 1988, Sony's approach in marketing their line of MSX computers was equal parts technology and discovery. They wanted you to believe they had the best and most stylish MSX systems (and for a few years they did), but Sony also wanted enterprising kids deep in the world of computers to believe that they had the best units for creating. Want to make games? Our new MSX 2 models with floppy drives are perfect. Or maybe your geekiness is a little different; maybe you enjoy programming, but also electronics and science in general? Pair that Sony computer with a Sensor Kid and you've got just what you're looking for.

Actually produced by Micomsoft—at the time a prolific developer/publisher now known for the XRGB series of upscaler boxes—and co-opted by Sony for promoting their computers, the Sensor Kid was a special software suite and science kit contained in one bulky ROM cartridge for the MSX 2. The cartridge had three jacks on the side of it for three included cords, each one a different kind of electronic sensor: one cord had a phototransistor, which detected the presence of light; another was a tiny condenser microphone for picking up sound, and the third was a thermistor; a bulbous tip that measured temperature. The included software featured test programs and other guidance offered by your cartoon navigator Doctor D, and you could either play around with the included measurement applications, or go by the magazine advertisement and make things like an alarm clock that went off when the phototransistor caught the morning sunlight, or use the thermistor to monitor the bathwater until it was warm enough (provided your MSX could reach the bathroom). Ideally, you could use the Sensor Kid as an extension of the system and fashion a game that used the sensors in one way or another.

The Sensor Kid package was about as much as a brand-new game, and for the MSX user with a hobbyist spirit, it probably made for an easy Christmas gift. Who knows if anyone bothered to make a Sensor Kid-compatible game, but chances are it stayed in their home, what with the kit not becoming a smash hit or anything. Compare that to Nintendo's *Family Basic* set release years prior, which also introduced kids to programming, and even let them use the second controller's microphone as a way to affect programs. The Sensor Kid had that and more, but with the MSX already seen as an underdog to the Famicom, it's possible that few



With the power of cheap electronic sensors (apparently cheap even for the late '80s), the Sensor Kid could open up a world of experimentation in software, though its interesting uses of light, sound and temperature couldn't make a splash in a rapidly growing sector of PCs cultivating hackers and hobbyists of all ages, even with an ad-based endorsement by Sony.

kids had enough interest to give it a chance.

What's most tragic is that the Sensor Kid was a clever little product for a burgeoning electronic age, yet video games and natural science have always had trouble getting along. Back in 1998, Seta released *Tetris 64*, which supported a "bio sensor" that clipped to your earlobe and measured your heart rate to intensify a special "Bio Tetris" mode. It didn't exactly live up to the fantasy, and the game was a flop regardless. Some years later, the light sensor in Konami's *Boktai* series needed genuine sunlight to help beat bosses, but the games were only barely sleeper hits. And when Nintendo mentioned in an E3 press conference that they were making a Wii "Vitality Sensor" that you stuck your finger into, the public thought they were nuts, and nothing came of it.

Instead, the only sensors used by games involve touch and motion detection. Not to say that the Wii U GamePad should've had thermistors hanging off of it (though imagine how great *that* WarioWare game would be), but things like the Sensor Kid show us, even 25 years later, that so many more avenues exist in game development, yet have gone virtually untouched because of the absence of little bits of technology that could make big impacts. Well, we'll see about that after I release the MSX-exclusive masterpiece *Extreme Ice Cube Melting*.

# CRAZY TAXI

ACCLAIM • PS2 • 2001

There's not a lot that's historically significant about *Crazy Taxi* by itself, but the PlayStation 2 version was released in May 2001, making it the first Sega game on a rival console following their discontinuation of the Dreamcast and transition into a "platform agnostic" developer-publisher.

However, Sega had little to do with it; it was a licensed title made by Acclaim, and known to be in the works for some time before the Dreamcast downfall. If you didn't want to believe that Sega was going third-party, it at least made some sense that they would hand off *Crazy Taxi* to another publisher to sidestep competing with themselves (which is basically what happened with the few Sega games that were ported to the Famicom/NES about 15 years earlier), but in reality, it was a taste of what was to come from Sega proper.

It nonetheless worked out for Acclaim. In

a rare display of making a game that wasn't awful in some way, their port of *Crazy Taxi* is pretty much identical to the Dreamcast version—no doubt by virtue of *Crazy Taxi* not being that complicated: you stop to pick up passengers and get them to where they want by any means necessary, and to hell with anyone that stands in your way. (Not actual hell; this isn't *Carmageddon*.) It is by all means a classic, from a time when Sega looked to be firing on all cylinders, creatively, for the first time in a while.

The problem is that the port arrived the same month as *Crazy Taxi 2* on Dreamcast, and was followed by *Crazy Taxi 3* on Xbox a little over a year later. The sequels featured new cities and added new tricks and bonus minigames, which made the original seem all that more paltry, and garnered a few unimpressed reviews from critics who may have wanted a little more from a game they

were already burned out on.

Not that a few unrealistic expectations made a difference anyway. *Crazy Taxi* was a fast success on Dreamcast, and the PS2 version would make even more "crazy money," going Greatest Hits in less than a year and giving birth to games like *Smashing Drive* (or at least the idea to port it to GameCube) and *The Simpsons Road Rage*, the equally ubiquitous clone. A GameCube version of *Crazy Taxi* followed, officially putting it on the top of Acclaim's pile of licensed Sega games, which included the barebones *Eighteen Wheeler* and an ill-advised PS2 port of *Ferrari F355 Challenge*. No doubt they picked up a good amount of money for the deal, but by the end of 2001, Sega had fully realized their agnosticism, so Acclaim could only hope that *Crazy Taxi*'s sales numbers stayed high... for a few more months.



## Round three

This issue marks the close of *SCROLL*'s second year, and though many people have enjoyed it the whole way, the journey here has still been a bit cloudy. Issue 01 was pretty rough around the edges, but it seemed most didn't care, and it still stands as the best-selling issue. Fair enough; I never expected this to be a self-sustaining smash hit no matter how hard I could promote it.

Despite appearances, *SCROLL* didn't have much in the way of a goal, theme, or purpose; it was mostly a smattering of ideas of things I wanted to write about. It was the "journal of video game appreciation," I guess; it was that "retro/Japanese" magazine. The most I did know was that it wasn't going to be a "real" magazine, much to the chagrin of people who wanted to write for it.

On the web site I described my belief that knowing and appreciating games from many time periods and many sources was crucial in understanding them, especially for those who write about how important they are, yet may not fully grasp how important they have been. That belief hadn't changed, but it was taking a while to convert it into a new magazine every few months. By this time last year, with the fourth issue, it was clear what I wanted to—and was—doing with it.

I don't know about you, but "The Unknown Xbox" is so far my favorite issue of *SCROLL* because it was exciting to finally get my hands dirty in a subject and library I had long been curious about. In going over the history and finally playing all those games I kept only as names in my head for ten years, I was satisfying my own curiosity, naturally educating myself, and hoping to pass that on to whoever read it. I love feeling like the one to enter the cellar and uncork something left alone for so long. Admittedly, I didn't keep doing that sort of thing for every successive issue, including this one, but now I think the third time's the charm.

If all goes well, you'll see *SCROLL* solidify as an alternative video game history journal. You'll see more exploring of lesser-known (or plain unknown) games. More filling in of knowledge gaps. More highlighting of the unique and worthy. And maybe of those next four issues, you and I will have a new favorite.

rdb

## EDITOR

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## ONLINE

The *SCROLL* web site is [scroll.vg](http://scroll.vg). Find out about old (or new!) issues there, and check out whatever things I find on the Internet that are germane to the whole *SCROLL*... thing.

You can also follow the *SCROLL* Twitter account, [@scroll\\_vg](https://twitter.com/scroll_vg). It's good for an instantaneous alert as to when something new is published, and the occasional link to something else game-related and cool.



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