

SCROLL



LET'S
KICK
SHELL!

Yippee-I-Ay!



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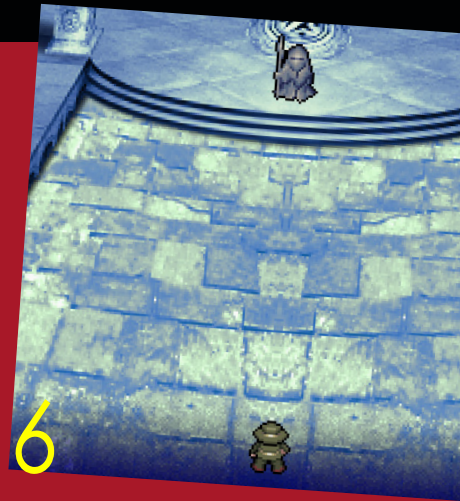
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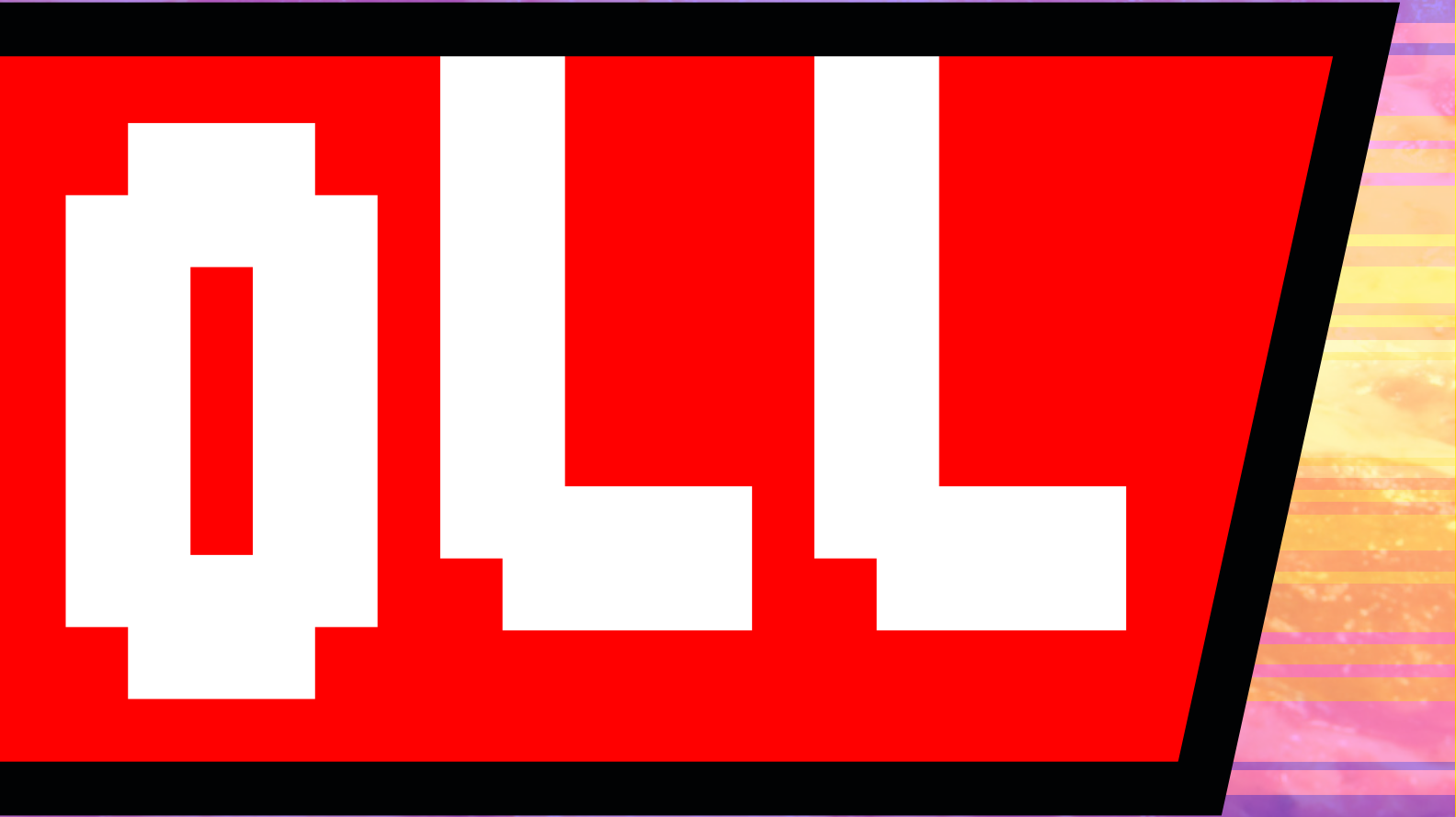
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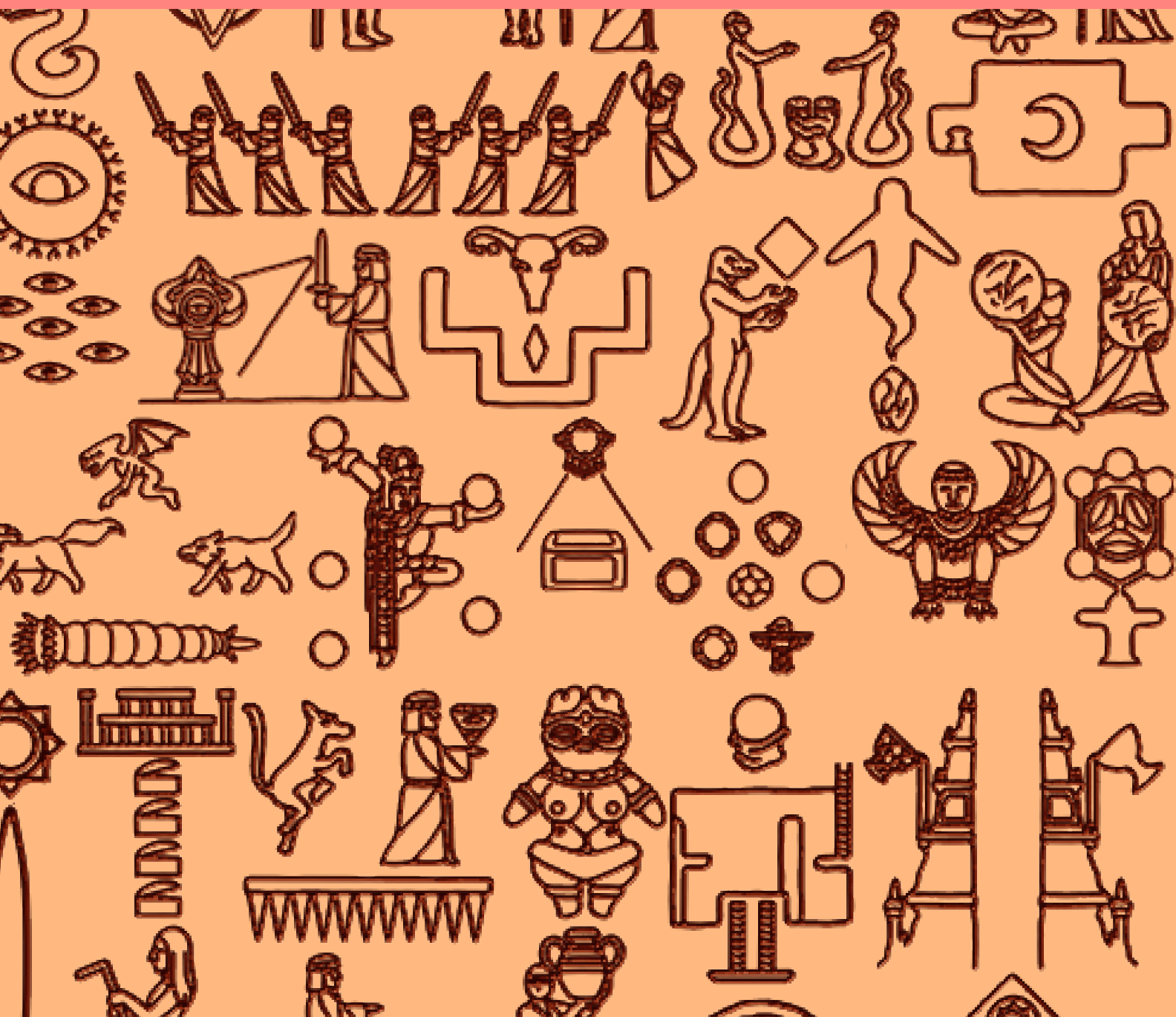


STOP





Raiders of the Lost Platform



How MSX fandom begat sublime retro-style action in the new and improved **La-Mulana**



IF ADVENTURE HAS A NAME, IT MUST BE LEMEZA KOSUGI.

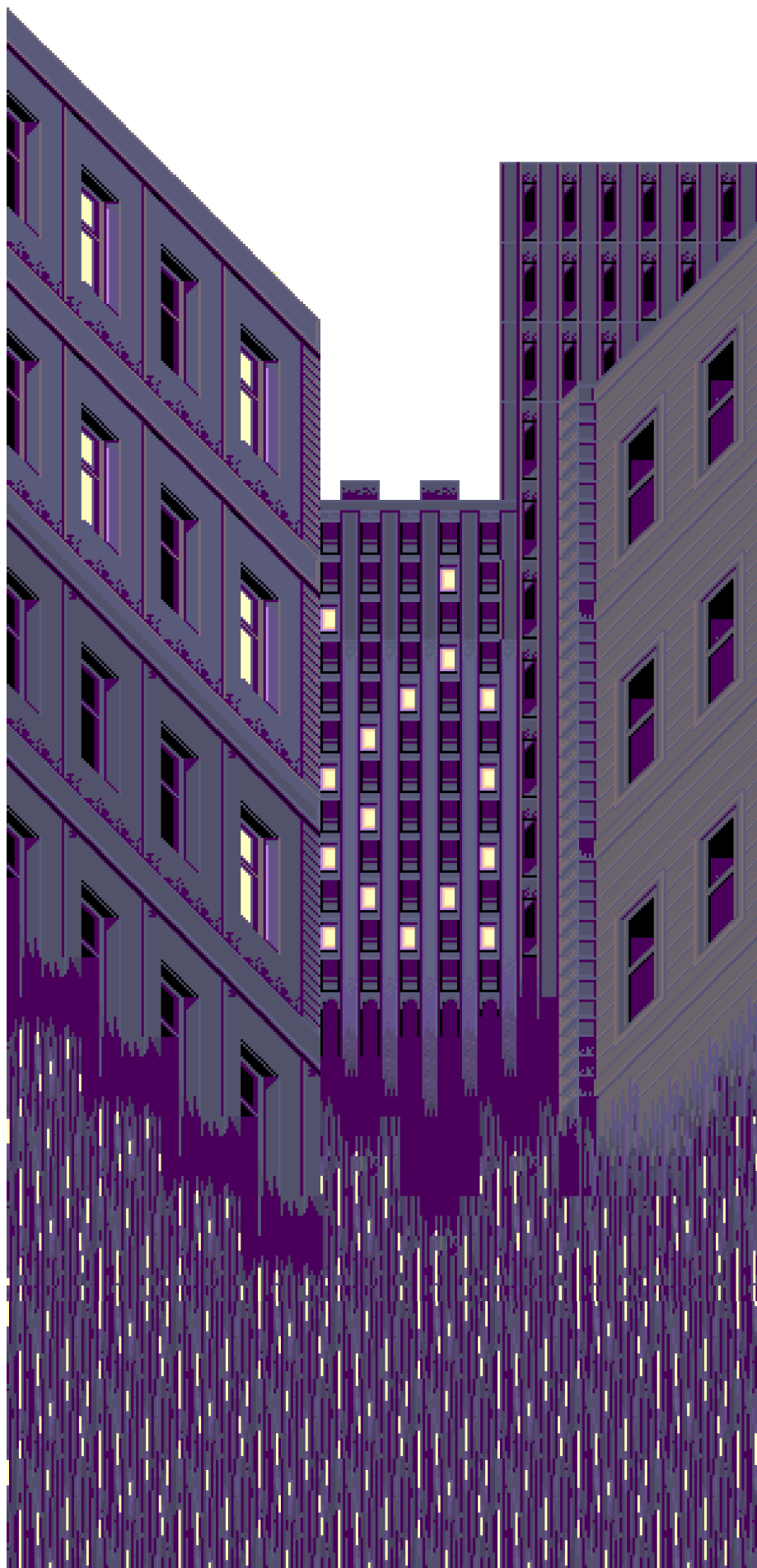
The rough-and-tumble archaeologist has his work cut out for him hunting down treasures in the ruins of the La-Mulana region, and with your help—that is, a couple dozen hours of determination—he can make it out alive. So goes *La-Mulana*, a side-scrolling action-adventure with a high level of difficulty that can confound the most battle-hardened retro gamers. However, most of the trouble doesn't come from twitch action so much as a need to solve various puzzles to slowly progress through rooms and find new items. Then you fight bosses, and, well, then some action skills will be needed.

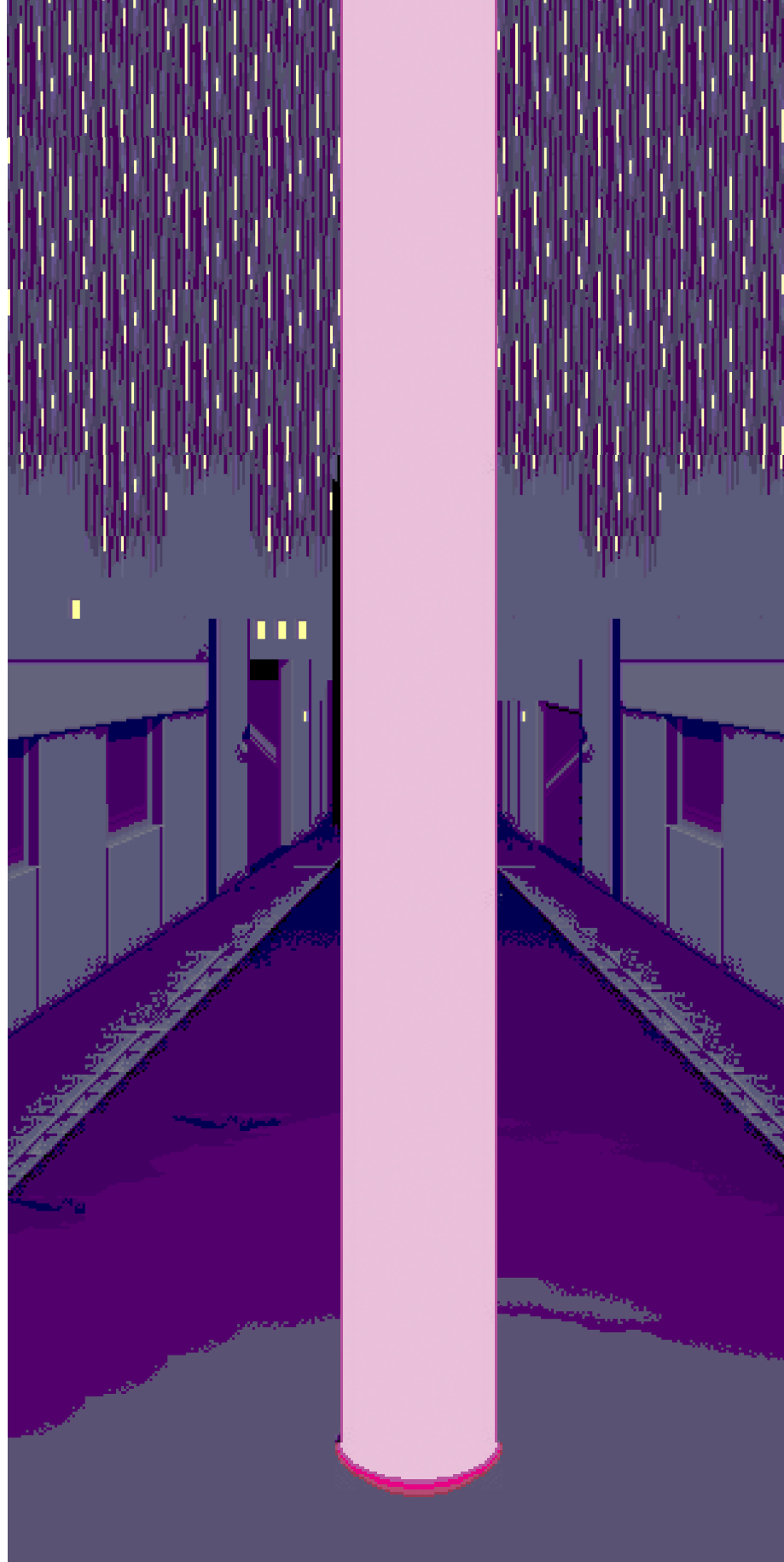
Much has already been said about *La-Mulana*, and many people have already enjoyed it, but some of the most interesting stuff about it has to do with its origins. The original PC version was an out-and-out love letter to the MSX computer platform and its unique games that cemented its status as an underdog in the halcyon days of games in 1980s Japan. Developers Nigoro started out as a group of friends running an MSX fan site and later started making Flash games, but their touchstone project was *La-Mulana*, a full-featured action-adventure that harnessed the spirit of the MSX and its best games, most of which were by Konami. Its graphics were purposefully undetailed and its music was pure chip goodness. Even its hero Kosugi was described as an MSX nut, and the game's status-affecting "software" items were MSX game cartridges named after virtually every title in Konami's gameography.

What Nigoro set out to do with *La-Mulana* was not simply make something that looked like an MSX game, but one that was designed to *feel* like a specific kind of MSX game, as well. For most of the MSX's life, games had to contend with the fact that the computer, like almost every other PC platform, couldn't handle smooth screen scrolling like the dedicated home consoles. Therefore, many games for the system were easily adaptable to slower, single-screen play, like adventures, RPGs, and all manner of puzzle games. Konami was in the pantheon of great MSX publishers, and produced a few games just like that. The one most influential to Nigoro was *Nightmare II: The Maze of Galious*, which, like *La-Mulana*, puts you in the shoes of a pudgy-looking hero running and jumping through a treacherous underworld. *La-Mulana* even paid tribute to it in a secret stage. *Galious* had a sister game, *King's Valley II: The Seal of El Giza*, another single-screen, ruins-exploring adventure game, though with a more obvious focus on puzzles in the vein of *Solomon's Key*.

The recent *La-Mulana* remake on Wii and Windows definitely doesn't look like an MSX game anymore, but you can still drum up a reference the good old days—specifically Falcom's Sega Saturn remakes of their best games such as *Xanadu* and *Ys*. They, too, were monumental hits that started as dinky-looking computer games, later enhanced with the 2D graphics capabilities that the 32-bit generation provided. By Nigoro's own admission, the new *La-Mulana* is the "32-bit" version, though it's missing the MSX references (well, other than a certain dangerous one), but it's still largely the same, and it's still great. (playism-games.com)







LET'S KICK SHELL!

THE RADICAL RETRO TALES OF THE **TMNT**

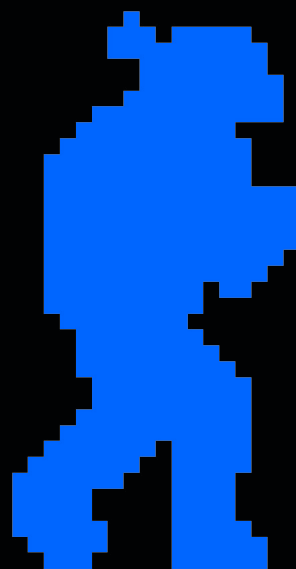


In the history of ultra-commercial, mind-rotting, parent-annoying media franchises, few can compete with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Just as Star Wars before it or Pokémon after it, TMNT captured the imaginations of Gen Y kids with a multimedia onslaught that peaked in the early 1990s. And for kids also into video games, a notable force was Konami, who produced an unforgettable lineup of games in the 8- and 16-bit days, and held the key to the Turtles' video game kingdom. And nearly all of their games made a mark on fans that was as big as the franchise altogether. As the TMNT get rebooted for a new generation (again!) this fall, SCROLL looks back at Konami's Turtles gameography, from a time when both were at the top of their game.



SCENE 1

OOZY ORIGIN



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

NES • 1989



For a game based on a franchise with an indelible identity, the first *TMNT* game barely had its own. The funny thing is that there's no logical reason why. It had to have been made at least a year after the debut of both the TV show and the toy line, yet Konami's platformer had an oddly serious tone that skirts the line between those and the comics (regardless of the box art being lifted from issue #4 of the *Mirage* comic). Was it rushed? It certainly feels like it. Maybe it was made in a bubble of ignorance, wherein shaky confidence in *TMNT*'s success may have put it in the hands of an inexperienced or uncaring team. Whatever the reasons, *TMNT* on NES is certainly different, with a melange of clever ideas that are almost all executed poorly. The cause may be vague, but the effect was that the first *TMNT* game turned out to be the weirdest (and without a doubt the most-played) game in the entire series. Not bad, all things considered.

The best thing this *TMNT* game had was the ability to let you switch between any of the Turtles on the fly via the pause menu, a no-brainer of a mechanic that was used a total of three more times in Konami's games—the majority focused on multiplayer. Still, the team usually traveled together, so even in a single-player game, it seemed natural to establish a sense that they were all there at the same time.

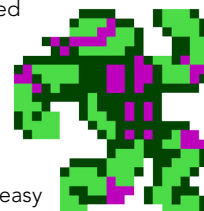
But while it used the hot-swap idea, the game didn't completely harness it. Because of their different weapons, the Turtles all played a little bit differently from each other, but it became immediately apparent that Donatello was the best one to use because of the ridiculous (if realistic) reach of his bo staff, making it easy to hit enemies from above and below without harm, and making the other three Turtles disposable. Need to get through a particularly nasty spot? Switch to Raphael or Michelangelo and use them as a damage sponge, then go back to Don (or Leonardo; he's second-best) and continue pummeling. And remember to switch to the right Turtle when you find a pizza.



If any of the four "die" (i.e., shrivel up into their shells... out of shame, maybe?), they're captured by the Foot clan and can only be rescued in certain rooms from the third stage onward, so despite Don being your go-to guy, it's duly important to keep everybody alive, because *TMNT* is kind of challenging. That is to say it's unbalanced, slipshod, and hard for only stupid reasons.

Oh, it starts out just fine: head down into the sewers, make mincemeat of a few waves of bad guys, follow Bebop and Rocksteady to the end of the line, and save April O'Neil—nothing too frustrating for an experienced gamer. But you go from that to the dam stage, which is not even the strongest curse word you'll use as you try to complete it. The dam's reputation precedes it, because it's such an abrupt shift after the first stage, and is such a conflagration of stupid stuff that it's the most infamous stage in *TMNT* whether or not you've played it. You have less than three minutes to find and disarm eight bombs located under the dam, though they're all guarded by electric beams or other obstacles. The Turtles' swimming is not very accurate, either—with a *Super Mario* game, it's relatively easy to put Mario where you want in an underwater stage, but here the Turtles' sprites are at an angle, and so even when going straight up, they're pointed diagonally. Therefore, squeezing past obstacles is always a case of hoping you're hooked in the right direction so that the hitbox doesn't touch whatever thing it shouldn't be touching. Though it often will anyway.

The rest of the game is basically room after room of enemy mobs, and they always respawn if you scroll the screen too far away from where you met them, which is the biggest freaking annoyance of any below-average 2D game. Granted, a lot of the enemies are dumb; dumb enough that you can easily slip past them, at



TUBULAR TURTLE TIMELINE

MAY 1984



Eastman & Laird ship *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* #1. It does all right.

SEP 1985



TMNT & Other Strangeness is the first licensed Turtles product, and it was a game; a tabletop RPG, to be exact.

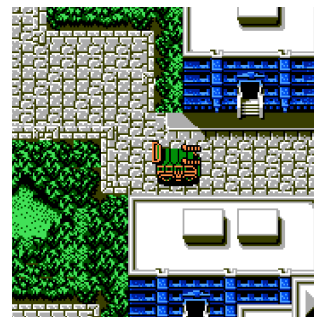
MAY 1987



Companion comic series *Tales of the TMNT* debuts.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES • NES



least in the more wide-open screens—less so when everybody is crammed into a narrow corridor, which crops up so frequently in the game that it was apparently the M.O. of the developers. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*? They should've called it *Too Many Narrow Hallways*. This brute force method of challenge peaks at a few points in the game where it's just about impossible to make it through without getting hit. Specifically, a treacherous path of electrocuting seaweed in the dam level, and the final gauntlet

before facing Shredder—no amount of powerful wave-shooting scrolls or well-timed bo strikes will get you through unscathed, so either you have Raph or Mike at full health, or you likely don't finish the game.

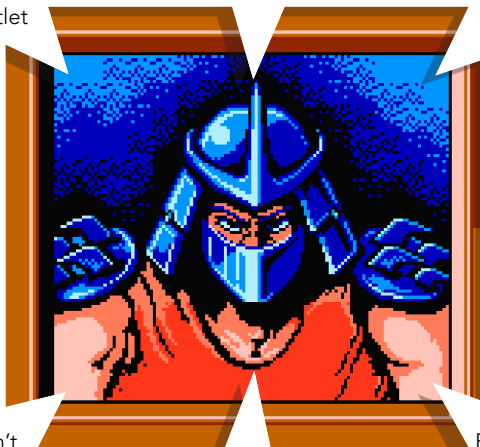
As mentioned, along with the hot-swapping, *TMNT* does have a couple of interesting ideas in it, though not so obviously so. For one thing, unlike the later beat-em-ups, fighting doesn't begin and end with the Turtles' weapons. Secondary items like the shurikens and scrolls can be quite helpful after you get them, and the rope, necessary to complete stage 3, is used to create makeshift bridges to travel along rooftops. The rope in particular isn't worth much in practice, but it's clear there was an attempt to show some of the ninja ingenuity the Turtles sometimes demonstrated in the cartoon and comics, rather than focus on pummeling the Foot and collecting pizzas.

The story of the first *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* establishes the two-point structure of every other *TMNT* game plot: rescue friend(s), beat Shredder. At

the start, April is captured by Bebop and Rocksteady, so the Turtles head into town to free her. That's only one stage, though, so the Turtles continue to pursue their enemies. After taking care of the bombs in the Hudson River dam, the foursome returns to their makeshift apartment to find the place trashed and their master Splinter missing. They hop in the Party Wagon and again head into town, mowing down the Foot and their creepy brethren and heading to the top of their main base in that part of the city. When the Turtles track down Splinter, he's held hostage by a mute Turtle clone, who soon transforms into the golden flying Mechaturtle. Oddly enough, Mechaturtle's existence is concurrent

with the "official" robot Turtle, Metalhead, and his clone form is a trope that shows up later in the *Tournament Fighters* games, so, hey, talk about foresight. With Splinter saved and Shredder feeling the heat, the Turtles proceed to the airport in order to recover the Turtle Blimp, and navigate a series of underground passages that invariably lead them to a fight with a giant-sized Mouser. After trashing that hunk of metal, it's into the skies we go in the Blimp and onward to the site of the Foot's secret base. The mission takes the Turtles below ground,

again weaving through a rocky maze until they finally find the Technodrome. In every other *TMNT* game, we just see the team leap inside and go after Krang and Shredder, but here, the Turtles fight the Technodrome itself in what represents the zenith of this game's absurdity. The fight makes no sense, it's hard to stay alive (of course), and the Technodrome is laughably shrunken so it can fit on the whole screen—you're basically



The *TMNT* RPG gets its first supplement: *Guide to the Universe*.



The five-part premiere of the kid-friendly *TMNT* animated series airs in syndication.



Playmates' *TMNT* action figures launch as a tie-in with the TV show. In a few years they'll out-weird anything else in the Turtleverse.

NINJA ANCESTRY

TMNT doesn't feel like a "normal" Konami NES game, but it may be more of one than we think. It bears some similarities to *Getsu Fuuma Den*, an earlier Famicom action-adventure based in ancient Japanese folklore: it has an overhead map that precludes action stages; massive floaty jumps, and a familiar sword-swinging animation. If that weren't enough, the TMNT game was called *Gekikame Ninja Den* in Japan with a somewhat similar logo as *Getsu's*, suggesting that Konami may have indirectly passed it off as a spiritual successor.

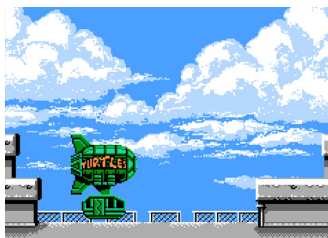


fighting Technodrome Junior, and then you're supposed to believe there's a labyrinthine enemy lair in it?

The Technodrome is as bad as all the other stages, if not worse: few of its rooms are spacious enough to survive, and you can stumble upon a couple of dead ends, at least one of which with a bed of spikes that's not easy to jump across. In fighting an unending swarm of enemies (again, how can the Technodrome fit all of them?), the Turtles push through one last corridor before entering a room containing Shredder and the game's final showdown. It's easy to keep Shred-head at a distance, with a hit-and-run strategy that will eventually bring him to his knees and end this adventure. Then, all's well that ends well: Splinter thanks you, changes back into his human form (the original goal of the cartoon's story), April says the world is saved, and

despite itself was the music, especially the main theme and the peppy first overworld tune. Surprisingly, none of the music has anything to do with the cartoon's theme song (unlike the hints of it all over the soundtracks in the beat-em-ups), but does have the same sort of boppy feel. That, along with the distinctive non-cartoon look of the game and its characters leads one to think the biggest source material for the developers were the Playmates action figures and accessories. The Party Wagon features prominently in one stage (and you can drive around in it; another thing only this game did), as well as the Turtle Blimp, which makes an appearance in a between-stage cut-scene. Even the not-to-scale Technodrome resembles a digitized version of the playset.

Pardon the dwelling on what "could have been," but



that's... it. An abrupt and tidy resolution befitting an episode of the TV show... or bad NES games.

With many different stages that aren't very brief, Konami didn't have many official TMNT enemies to stuff them with. Other than Shredder, Bebop, Rocksteady, Mousers and the weird purple mannequin things that are supposed to be Foot soldiers, the majority of the game's enemies are batty original creations, like the chainsaw men, the giant flylike insects, winged balloons that drop bombs (uh, right), and bipedal porcupines, to name a few. I guess if you have mutant turtles, you might as well be fighting other mutant animals. To be fair, this is still a greater variety than the enemies in the beat-em-ups, which deal largely in differently-colored Foot soldiers and Mousers, but there's a lot to be said about familiarity.

Probably the only part of TMNT that aged well

it's too bad that some unknown factor or factors kept Konami from putting more effort into a TMNT game that had real potential buried under an amateurish avalanche. A well-made, fairly lengthy platformer would have been exactly what the NES was known for, and perhaps would have brought sequels more like it instead of the arcade games and their beat-em-up stylings. Those won out mostly because they brought us closer to the source material (the cartoon, in this case), and were linear enough to take level design out of the spotlight, as opposed to the nightmarish gauntlets of this game. However, that was enough of a silver lining, and for Konami, the licensed games they made on NES since then all adhered to a higher standard of quality, as anybody who's played *Tiny Toon Adventures* or *Bucky O'Hare* will tell you. This was just a slight bump in the shell.



Archie begins regularly publishing *TMNT Adventures*, a less heady comic book series for kids. It still gets pretty wild, though.



Konami ships the *TMNT* arcade game around the world.



Konami/Ultra releases the first *TMNT* game for NES.



TMNT cereal is one of the franchise's first food tie-ins. 'You kept the bowl, right?'



SCENE 2

ARCADE AMPHIBIANS



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

ARCADE • 1989



T

he first *Turtles* game for NES was definitely a big blob of weird, but it succeeded despite itself: it was a *Turtles* game on NES, for crying out loud. But in the arcade division of Konami, it was a vastly different turn of events. *Teenage*

Mutant Ninja Turtles the arcade game was also released in 1989, and it was firing on all cylinders. With a license to make something based on the cartoon series, the developers made sure that it was as faithful as possible to the source material, and crafted a beat-em-up that went above and beyond the call of duty. Some may have fond memories of the NES game, but the original *Ninja Turtles* arcade game was the true catalyst; the one that set the course for the rest of the *TMNT* games and our expectations of them—immediately afterwards, and generations later.

The NES game was a troubled mess that had only tenuous links to the other *TMNT* media entities. The arcade game, however, laser-focused itself on the TV show, with the closest look and feel of playing through an episode of the series. It sounds like a no-brainer, considering the greater technology afforded by a high-level 16-bit arcade board, but ensuring a *TMNT* game was accurate to the source material was likely much more important in the arcade market in the first place. Arcade video games and pinball machines based on movies and shows are out in public all day, and are positioned to represent the property as best as possible to attract players (and a good reason why you still see them in movie theaters). A chintzy NES game based on the latest summer blockbuster doesn't necessarily have to bare its flesh out on the street: kids could read about it in a magazine, decide they want it, and then go out and purchase it, and its job is done. And again, arcade games of the time were much more technically advanced than contemporary consoles, with lots of money put into

their development and especially manufacturing and distribution—big honking cabinets and motherboards aren't as easy to shove out the door compared to a few piles of cartridges.

To get to the point, the *TMNT* arcade game had to be extremely faithful. Fortunately, it arrived at a prime point for Konami's then-current generation of arcade boards, and was hot on the heels of their original beat-em-up *Crime Fighters*, so there was nothing but potential ahead. Staying accurate no doubt boosted Konami's image as much as *TMNT*'s, as a game that looked and sounded that good suggested that Konami knew exactly what they were doing, and that they could be trusted with the license from here on out. Mostly.

Like many arcade games, *TMNT* wastes little time getting going: we open with the Turtles and Splinter looking out at a burning apartment building; April's, to be exact. The Foot clan has set the place ablaze, so our heroes leap from the neighboring room and rush into the burning building—a move that, honestly, would be kind of extreme for an episode of the fairly clean TV show, where certain death is hinted at, but not made plausible. After fighting

through the longest hallway ever made, destroying Foot soldiers, Mousers, Roadkill Rodney robots, and dodging giant black balls rolling down stairs, the Turtles reach April, only to be interrupted by Rocksteady. Once he's toast, the Shredder rushes in, takes April, and escapes.

From there, the Turtles take it to the streets, literally, and here's where the game goes from "not wasting time" to stretching it out as much as possible. At the end of the section they face and beat Bebop, head down into the sewers to defeat a pre-mutated Baxter Stockman (in a flying pod that gets surprising mobility in the cramped, dank sewer), and then back up to a



The *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie hits theaters, raking in \$25 million on day one.



Konami releases *TMNT: Fall of the Foot Clan* for Game Boy.



The TV show moves from syndication to a primo spot on the CBS Saturday morning lineup.



The Turtles have a concert on the roof of Radio City Music Hall to promote the *Coming Out of Their Shells* tour. Sure, why not?



parking facility to take on Rocksteady and Bebop simultaneously before finally rescuing April and leaving a heap of Foot soldiers in their wake. And that's just stage 2. The important thing is that April is now safe, and per *TMNT* game protocol, it's time to go after Shredder for revenge, so our heroes get on a freeway to head to a secret factory, because apparently there is a secret factory—run by the Foot, I guess. The road is littered with tire stacks, spiked barriers, and of course, a hell of a lot of Foot, some in slick hot rods trying to run the Turtles over. In the stage's second sequence, the Turtles hop on jet-powered skateboards for some extra speed, but wouldn't you know it, the Foot soldiers have their own jet-powered skateboards! And if that weren't annoying enough, they're also equipped with machine guns and a fleet of compact attack choppers. The Turtles make it through safely (well, assuming the player doesn't quit out of frustration at getting knocked around so often in the hail of bullets and punches), and the Party Wagon rolls up beside them. They hop in and exit the freeway by busting through the barrier and falling back down into the city.

The Wagon is trashed, but the Turtles land just in time to see Splinter being carted off by Mousers into the aforementioned secret factory. Yes, now Splinter needs to be rescued. The factory is the most treacherous stage so far, with lots of Roadkill Rodneys jetting around, and the threat of quickly-moving and near-fatal laser turrets. That said, the factory is relatively short, and waiting at the end is Granitor,

one of Dimension X's stone warriors employed by Shredder. He's also got Splinter tied up and hanging from the ceiling, which may or may not be a coincidental mini-trope with *TMNT I* on NES. He wields a flamethrower that

can burn the Turtles to a crisp, but in a comical way, of course.

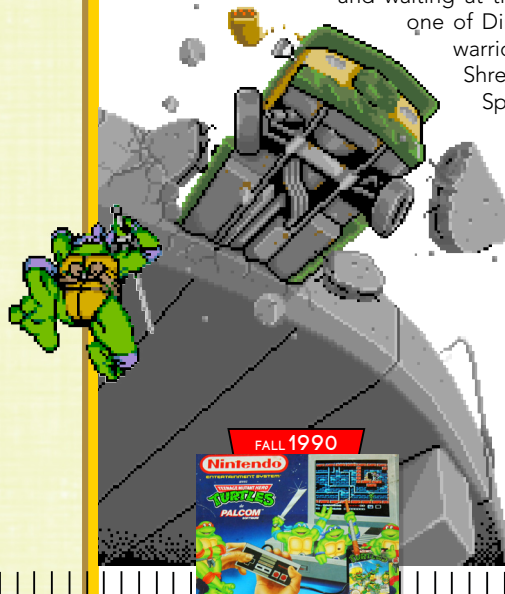
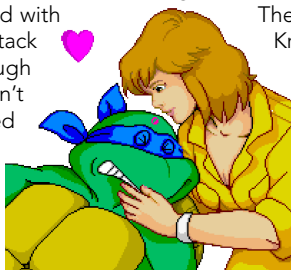
But once he's turned to rubble, Splinter is safe, and it's finally—*finally*—time to get Shredder on his home turf in stage 5, called "We Gotta Find the Technodrome" despite the sequence that *just* played showing the Turtles jumping into the Technodrome. Though it's a change of scenery, the Technodrome stage is basically a retread of the factory, with the same threat of Rodneys, lasers, but at least one new addition: pop-up liquid nitrogen sprayers that encase the Turtles in ice. And then it crescendos with another stone warrior fight, specifically General Tragg. He has a bigger gun, but goes down as easily as Granitor.

The game's penultimate boss fight is against

Krang in his android body, and is an imposing figure—until you start hitting him with back-and-forth jump kicks, and he falls pretty quickly. That leads to the final battle with Shredder himself! Fortunately for him, he's a little more threatening than Krang was, as he's able to zap the Turtles with a magic beam that temporarily transforms them back into tiny regular turtles, which not only makes for another

humorous moment in the game, yet also shatters the story behind the cartoon, because Shredder wanted nothing more than to turn the Turtles back into babies, yet apparently had the power to do so this whole time. But, again, story wasn't the leading factor in the game's faithfulness. That said, Shredder's biggest dick move is his ability to split himself off into a clone that also walks around attacking, but it's difficult to know which is the real one until you knock the helmet off of the clone, at which point you focus attacking the real, helmeted Shredder—killing the clone beforehand will simply summon a new one and repeat the cycle. But if the Turtles keep up the offensive, the Shredder collapses, and the Technodrome is set to self-destruct, so the four make a break for it, and the day is saved.

The story and stage design is not entirely what makes the *TMNT* arcade game so much like the TV show. The Turtles are brightly colored, have big eyes, and move as fluidly, or even moreso, as they would in an average cartoon episode. The representations of all the other characters are also on-model with the



The UK gets an NES bundle with the first Ninj—er, *Hero Turtles* game, which actually saves the system from certain doom there.



The TV show airs its 100th episode, "Splinter Vanishes."

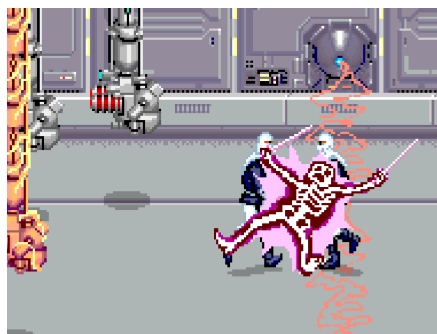


Creator's Syndicate begins the daily *TMNT* newspaper comic strip.



TMNT II: The Arcade Game comes out in North America.





They ain't getting any prettier!

show, though the cartoon only had one variety of Foot soldier. Still, you couldn't knock it for taking liberties here and there, because for a bunch of Japanese guys who were probably given a box of videotapes to work from, it wasn't a bad job. The accuracy extends into the audio, too, because with the advent of voice clips, the Turtles retain their jokiness from the cartoon, spitting out a variety of wisecracks at certain points in the game. Well, it's really just one Turtle voice that vaguely sounds like Rob Paulsen's Raphael, but the voice clips were nonetheless another surprisingly cool thing about the game. Occasionally you even got bona fide exchanges, such as the encounter with Bebop at the end of stage two: Quoth the Turtle(s): "They ain't getting any prettier!" "Watch your mouth, slime ball!" replies Bebop. Mind you, this is in the middle of walloping each other, so it's not exactly realistic.

varying degrees, but here, the most exciting stage in this game is the skateboard chase, and mostly because it moves fast. On the other hand, harping on the game for not being all-around amazing isn't really getting the point. It was made in and for a certain time, and there was nothing wrong with that: a two-button game based on a mega-popular cartoon that any kid could get some fun out of, doubly so with a friend or three. *TMNT* the arcade game is mediocre today, but from 1989 to around 1992, it was simply a treat. Your eyes would light up when you saw it in the middle of an arcade, and playing it with others would inevitably strengthen or create new friendships. It looked good and played well enough that of course it was going to be memorable. This quickly became the hallmark of



In all honesty, the talk about audiovisual accuracy belies what is probably *TMNT*'s true greatness: co-op. As one of the few arcade games since *Gauntlet* to feature more than two joysticks on its cabinet, the four-player setup of *TMNT* was like a siren's call to any kids within a 30-foot radius of it. It was a chance to get together and jointly experience the extended cartoon that was this game. And with a full four-Turtle team, the pure mayhem that bubbled up from whacking everything that moves, accidentally falling into manholes, and generally blowing through the game faster than you would alone was simply unmatched for a young diehard *TMNT* fan.

Kind words aside, you can't escape the fact that though this may have been a great Turtles game, it wasn't the best game ever. As a belt-scroll beat-em-up from the end of the '80s, *TMNT* is unadventurous with its gameplay design. It's just so mindlessly partitioned that with any less than three players, the enjoyment peters out fairly quickly. Sequels addressed this to

Konami's licensed games, as the same director worked on the *X-Men* arcade game, and their *Simpsons* and *Asterix* games were similarly on-model with their respective TV shows or comics. And, really, co-op can do a hell of a lot for any game.

In case it hasn't been made clear yet, the *TMNT* arcade game was something special. By harnessing state-of-the-art arcade tech, Konami was able to make an awesome Turtles game just before the franchise's popularity went supernova, and by getting in on the ground floor (relatively), they scored big and imprinted the game on the minds of every kid who played it. However, that came at a price, namely the fact that it was difficult to bring to home platforms without a lot of time and compromise. But for a few years, the best *TMNT* game was only at the arcade, the pizza place, the theme park, or the mini-golf course, and if you played it, you wondered how it could get any better. Not to mention that if you were lucky enough to have three friends join up, you got a radical bank of memories.



TMNT II: The Secret of the Ooze hits theaters. It's much cheesier than its predecessor, and not solely because of Vanilla Ice.



TMNT II: Turtles in Time heads to arcades. Its mission: to blow minds.



TMNT: Manhattan Missions is released for the IBM PC; the only original PC Turtles game (unless you count the coloring book suite *World Tour*).



TMNT II THE ARCADE GAME

NES 1990



T

he Ninja Turtles were children of the '80s, but it was the turn of the decade when the *TMNT* empire began to really gain ground. 1990 was utterly pivotal for all things *TMNT*: the movie was released in March and earned zillions; the TV show was moving from syndication to CBS in the fall, making a reliable and lucrative spot for the series until its cancellation, and the toys were becoming a new Christmas tradition. As all of that went on, the proliferation of the arcade game continued, and it kept being a fixture of pizza parlor birthday parties. And the NES game, about a year old just like the arcade game, could already be considered evergreen, saleswise. It wasn't the only *TMNT* video game at the time—arcade or home—but with the NES penetrating several million homes itself, *TMNT I* was the only option for a lot of kids. And who knows how many of them bothered to get past the dam. A new *Turtles* game for NES would have been great; maybe one that improved on the original and brought things closer to the cartoon, just as the arcade game did. On the face of it, the arcade game would have been great for the NES, but the system couldn't exactly handle it. Still, it was the one to play, and it's safe to say a lot of kids just wanted it in their house at any cost. So Konami killed two birds with one stone by going ahead and porting the arcade game to NES and calling it *TMNT II: The Arcade Game*—simple, effective, and a touch bold. Not to mention it arrived just in time for Christmas 1990; the cherry on top of a banner year. Though other ports of the game had cropped up, *TMNT II* was the only way to get the game for many, or at least the best way to play it without taking a ride into town just to go to the arcade. Now we could take our time.

But there was that nagging concern that it couldn't have been easy trying to shrink a flashy 16-bit arcade game and figuratively shove it into the NES. That

described pretty much every arcade game at the time, too—even the Super NES would have trouble with arcade ports it could theoretically handle, though in that case it was almost always a memory problem compared to memory and graphics problems on NES. On the other hand, though not many arcade games of *TMNT*'s caliber were being re-created on the NES, Konami had already done plenty of it, including *Contra* and *Super C*, which may not have looked as great as their arcade originals, but were arguably more fun and well-known. If anybody could give *TMNT II* a competent treatment, it was them.

Competent, yes, but not perfect. On the short list of *TMNT II*'s failings is that it only supported two players instead of the four of the arcade game. It was two players simultaneously, which was a big enough deal for NES games at that time, but it was still unfortunate, since *TMNT II* arrived in the middle of Nintendo's campaign to push four-player games and accessories, and though *Play Action Football* and *Gauntlet II* were nice, imagine how many NES Four Scores would be sold if *TMNT II* retained complete four-player grandeur. Then again, if you were in Japan, that didn't even matter, since the arcade game was two-player to begin with; a modification made in order to accommodate standard modular cabinets.

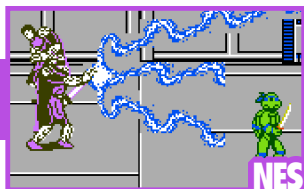
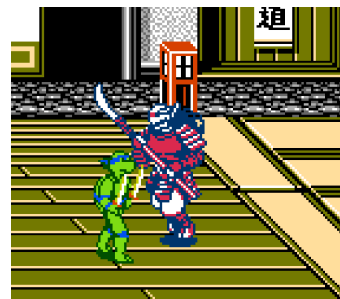
However, for what was taken away, *TMNT II* made up for it by adding brand-new content; specifically two entire stages that were distinct from the others: a snowy park (actually a sub-section of stage 3), and a Foot soldier-infested dojo, both guarded by new Konami-created boss characters Tora, a leather jacketed wolf-type creature ("tora" is Japanese for "tiger," but he doesn't really look like one), and Shogun, a robotic-looking samurai. As Konami described in the game's manual, both bosses were bounty hunters from



TMNT II: Back From the Sewers hits Game Boy.



The surprisingly solid *TMNT III: The Manhattan Project* comes out for NES.



Dimension X that Shredder hired to stop the Turtles, but they're really just two more punching bags for our heroes. The stages themselves are welcome changes in scenery, but almost too large of changes in terms of the game's story. Indeed, the arcade game's poor excuse for narrative leaves it flexible, but the snow stage is an abrupt shift in between two bright and sunny street stages, and the dojo is placed in between saving Splinter and going to the Technodrome, making it feel like a unnecessary stop on the way to walloping Krang and Shredder. But they were new, and helped *TMNT II* feel more substantial than the arcade game. One principal change included replacing the Bebop and Rocksteady fight in stage 2 with the mutant Baxter Stockman. There's no obvious reason why, but perhaps having Bebop, Rocksteady and up to two Turtles moving around was too taxing on the NES, or perhaps having Stockman's second form added a bit of flavor to the game. And though it doesn't necessarily add or take away from the game, *TMNT II* was injected with Pizza Hut product placement, as several signs in the game—mostly in stages 1 and 2—are stamped with the restaurant chain's logo. A natural fit for *TMNT* considering the Turtles' favorite food, but more tied to the coupon for a free Personal Pan Pizza included with the game. "You scratch my back, I'll immortalize your brand in a video game."

For all the praise the arcade game gets, *TMNT II* doesn't deserve the same. Sure, it had new stuff, and it may have technically been the best port of the original you could accomplish on NES, but the overall quality still falls short. That's mostly due to the art and graphics: the game has a pallor that makes *TMNT I* look like a Technicolor masterpiece in comparison. This is a multi-pronged issue, because while the NES had a limited palette to begin with, the arcade game used a generally gray/earthy/otherwise drab set of colors, while it's the characters that bring out the vibrant cartoon look. That works in a 16-bit game, but when

the NES has only so many colors to go around, nothing really "pops." Furthermore, the sprites themselves are slightly messy, especially the Foot soldiers, who in some frames look like their heads are melting. Then there's the Turtles themselves. In the arcade game, they all have distinct poses and attack animations. In *TMNT II*, they all have the same basic pose, and only the weapons in their hands change—about a notch up in quality from *TMNT I*, where you didn't even see their weapons until you attacked. They've also been given different colors not unlike the action figures, which is helpful in two-player games, but clearly the artists ran out of greens, because Raphael is positively turquoise.

These things culminate in a port that just doesn't feel the same as the original.

It looks a bit off, and it just doesn't feel as fast or flashy. That being said, you can't deny that Konami did a good job of copying every stage, every boss fight, and every little between-stage cut-scene for *TMNT II*, and adding two new stages on top of that. There was a mountain of problems in the challenge to move the *TMNT* arcade game to the NES, but a good number of them were surmounted, and a not-so-perfect *Ninja Turtles* beat-em-up was still preferable to a rickety, occasionally unfair platformer.

As said at the beginning, *TMNT II* was on practically obsolete hardware compared to the original, but it was more or less the only way to get the arcade game at home—if you were in America, anyway. The arcade game had seen more ports than just this one, mostly for computers, and most of those for the British micros. Despite those platforms being even more obsolete than the NES at the time, their versions of *TMNT* mimicked the original as close as possible, meaning that their artists were drawing the sprites in similar poses and capturing the barest essentials of the levels, as opposed to the NES version, which veered in a slightly different visual direction. *TMNT II* still pleased kids, and established the arcade game as the *TMNT* game to play on home systems as well. A truly amazing *TMNT* arcade game port would have to come later, but there was still some good work to be done on NES.



TMNT IV: Turtles in Time is released for Super NES.



TMNT: The Hyperstone Heist for Sega Genesis joins the party.



TMNT III THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

NES-1992



Arcade games and beat-em-ups quickly proved that was the best way to go when it came to doing the *TMNT* franchise justice. Improved technology made them look great, they were focused on action, made relatively easy transitions to consoles, and generally just made more sense in regards to what the Turtles were all about, that being heading out to the streets and kicking Foot soldier ass. With that and the incredible ubiquity of *TMNT II* in the year after its release, it's no surprise that Konami soon followed it up with a third NES game that gave us more belt-scroll fun. And if *TMNT II* was an upswing from *TMNT I*, then *TMNT III: The Manhattan Project* was positively a home run.

TMNT III tends to get neglected in remembrances of Turtles games, probably because it was so close to Turtles in *Time*/*TMNT IV* and the splash that it made, and that many kids already had (or would

be upgrading to) a Super NES. In that sense, it truly is an underdog, and a pretty special one at that: a wholly original *TMNT* beat-em-up that didn't start as an arcade game (*Hyperstone Heist* skirts the line, but we'll cover that later), and

a sequel that smooths over almost every issue with *TMNT II*.

In some ways, you could call it a reboot: The pre-title opening is basically the same as the arcade game's (missing from *TMNT II*), and more than half of the stages are very similar in setting, just arranged differently. The story is a change, but then it's pretty much another version of *Turtles in Time*'s: we open with the Turtles enjoying a vacation on the shores of Key West, because if there's anything four ninja warriors honorably and secretly protecting New York City need, it's a faraway beach vacation. Naturally, this leaves Shredder free to wreak havoc back home, and that's exactly what he does: as the Turtles are chilling out watching TV, Shredder appears and somehow sends Manhattan up into the air, stranding the people on it and basically using it as another vague threat that we're not really clued in to. He kidnaps April as well, a routine so set that it's the equivalent of flicking the power switch on

the coffee maker first thing in the morning.

Though the *TMNT* beat-em-ups are mindless in practice, the way the stages are laid out actually helps the story. In this case, the Turtles need to get back to New York, but instead of starting the game there, stage 1 is on the pier in Florida, and then shifts to the ocean and submarine stage before they finally get home in stage 3. The previous game had this, but to a smaller and less obvious degree. *TMNT III*'s progression, along with its opening cut-scene and a couple of other small transitions, just help flesh it out.

Indeed, the Turtles start on the beach, and fight their way through groups of Foot soldiers before meeting and beating Rocksteady at the end of the pier. From there they hop jet boards and head clear across the ocean to make it back to Manhattan. Here the Foot soldiers get positively acrobatic as they start popping out of the water in set formations to try and throw off our heroes. Did Shredder program them for

synchronized swimming in between *TMNT II*

and *III*? The surfing is cut short when a large submarine comes into the view, so the Turtles hop on the deck and find more Foot hanging around. The sub is commanded by Groundchuck, the armored mutant bull who makes his one and only

appearance in a *TMNT* game. When 'Chuck is gone, the Turtles make it to New York, and head across a bridge where they can be picked up by the Turtle Blimp and head to the floating Manhattan. On the island, the Turtles fight through the streets and parks, and the Foot soldiers are up to their old tricks: leaping out of automobiles and sending barrels rolling. Going underground, they fight miner mole Dirtbag in the subway station, and then head into the sewers, where Leatherhead awaits. But when he's sent into the drink, the mission continues to the Technodrome, and the Turtles make their way through to face Shredder, who still has April captive. When he's defeated and April's safe, Shred-head manages to escape to a base just above the Earth's atmosphere. The Turtles climb to the top of



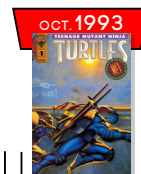
The third *TMNT* movie releases. A change of hands in production results in a cheaper, lamer sequel.



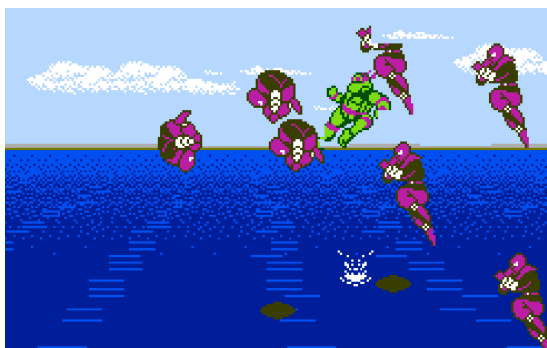
After nine years, Mirage publishes the last issue of *TMNT* Vol. 1.



Konami launches the first of the *TMNT Tournament Fighters* games.



TMNT Vol. 2 begins, and the comic is now in color as an attempt to stay current.



the highest skyscraper, get beamed up into the base, and face Krang, who can now detach his android's torso and run around creating twice the pain. But as usual, he's just the prelude to the final battle against Shredder. And this time, Shredder breaks open an ooze canister and turns himself into Super Shredder. One more grueling fight ensues, but soon the villain is knocked out for the last time, the spaceship self-destructs, and whatever power it had over Manhattan is gone, and so the island falls back down to safety. Cowabunga, awesome, and so on. Typical of the games, we never find out Shredder's motive for stealing Manhattan. You'd think a clever title like "*Manhattan Project*" would suggest something a little sinister, but nope, it's just the bad guys being jerks for the sake of it.

Back in the real world, *TMNT III* arrived in early 1992, about a year after the second



Turtles movie, *The Secret of the Ooze*. As such, it's the first *TMNT* console game to feature movie characters, specifically Tokka and Rahzar, the mutated snapping turtle and wolf, as well as the presence of Super Shredder. In *Secret of the Ooze*, Tokka and Rahzar were both pitted against the Turtles at once, but in this game they're separate bosses, much like how

the arcade game's dual Rocksteady and Bebop fight was replaced in *TMNT II*. And seeing as how they were essentially the movie counterparts to those two, it's nice to see all four of them in one place. Oh, but we mustn't forget the boss fight against Slash, the other mutant snapping turtle who mostly showed up in Archie's *TMNT Adventures* and also had a popular Playmates figure. Slash isn't as dumb (or large) as Tokka, which makes him a relatively more interesting character, but he's shamefully placed in the middle of stage 2 without the sort of impact as the endgame fights against Tokka and Rahzar.

As a matter of fact, *Manhattan Project* is packed full of bosses—a total of 13, including midbosses. Granted, that's the same number as in *TMNT IV*, but cramming that many in an NES game shows that no expense was spared in keeping the Turtles busy. It also makes for a

stupidly smart tie-in with both the movie and especially the toys, considering the number of newcomers that were best known from the figure line.

But what really makes *TMNT III* stand out is the simple fact that it has much better art. Gone are the narrow sprites and the need to adapt an arcade game's graphics onto the NES. With a new development team, *TMNT III* had a fresh coat of paint that makes it look like an actual NES game. The color palettes are more varied, backgrounds are more detailed, and the character sprites are drawn a little thicker and look more like they're supposed to—bosses adhere to a big-headed style that makes them appear more toylike, which may have been the point, but it doesn't hurt. *TMNT II* may have been the template, but *TMNT III* really fills in the details, and finally brought the NES series up to par with the arcade and subsequent 16-bit games. And it gives off a feeling that the developers just plain cared about getting it all right—who knows how true that really is, but it still has the spirit of the arcade games.

As far as the raw gameplay is concerned, obviously there's not a ton to say. The Turtles calmly shuffle forward and jump unrealistically high just as they did in *TMNT I* and *II*, but special moves (used by pressing the A and B buttons together) are now unique to each Turtle, like Raphael's drill attack or Mike's "kangaroo kick." Before *Manhattan Project*, almost no *TMNT* games featured signature special moves, though it soon became a foregone conclusion. Lastly, two different modes for two-player games are available, one that allows friendly hits and one that doesn't. Or put another way, one that accelerates sibling conflict and one that doesn't.

Though it didn't end up as the world's favorite *TMNT* beat-em-up, *Manhattan Project* had enough to put it in the running. It may be a new coat of paint for *TMNT II* from a distance, but its refinements, improvements and needed cuts are apparent up close, all of which easily make it the all-around best *Ninja Turtles* game on NES. As for what was the world's favorite, we'll have to take a small step back in time...



TMNT III: Radical Rescue is released for Game Boy; the last handheld *Turtles* game of this generation.



Tournament Fighters on NES marks one of the system's last releases, as well as the last *TMNT* game for a while.



Playmates releases the *Star Trek* crossover *Turtles* figures, and the toy line officially jumps the shark.



TMNT TURTLES IN TIME ARCADE 1991



It's easy to assume that the *Ninja Turtles* home games were pulling in the most money for Konami, but, as has already been suggested multiple times, the arcade game was the guiding light. Important though it was, *TMNT* in the arcade was beginning to fade a bit after a couple of years, due to the onslaught of new toys, TV episodes, movies, the few other video games, and the simple rapid evolution of arcade games in general. If Konami wanted the arcades to continue being the place to find the best *TMNT* experience, they had to do the obvious, which was to put out a sequel. To the pleasant surprise of the legion of *TMNT*-loving kids who stepped into an arcade from late 1991 to early '92, Konami had something new for them: *TMNT: Turtles in Time*, a full-blown arcade sequel that managed to go the extra mile, with improved art and animation, a bunch of stages all unique from one another, and perhaps most importantly, a plot.

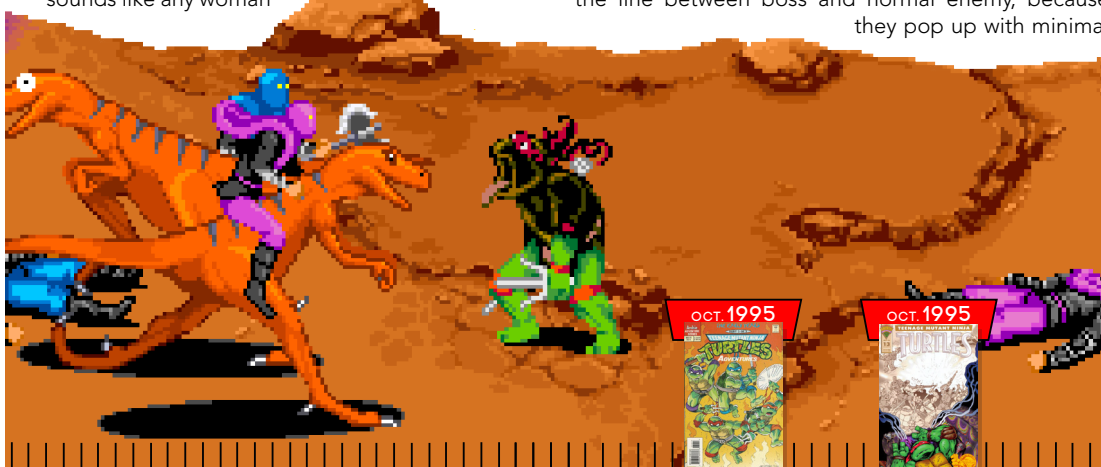
Or a slightly better one, anyway. In the first arcade game, the Turtles rescued April from Shredder, and then kept going after him, though he had no clear motive. This time, we get an actual setup: as the Turtles sit at home watching April do a regular news report on TV (apparently a favorite plot device for Konami, considering every *TMNT* game after *III* opens the same way), a giant-sized Krang swoops in on Liberty Island and steals the Statue of Liberty right off its pedestal, taking it to, presumably, the Technodrome, where it will... sit there? All right, so motive wasn't exactly a priority of this game, either, because we're left wondering why Krang and Shredder thought they'd pull off an absurd Carmen Sandiego-style caper just for the hell of it... again! Like the original game, the intro sequence is voiced, and it's even more hilariously inaccurate. Even though the dialogue is less than 10 seconds and half of it is roaring or laughing, we get to hear April, who sounds like any woman

off the street, and we get to hear Leonardo exclaim "HEY KRANG, BRING THAT STATUE BACK, YOU BLOATED BEANBAG!" in a nasally voice that hardly passes for any of the Turtles, let alone Leo. (You can call it a blessing or a curse that most of the game's voices had to be removed for the Super NES version.)

Regardless, the Turtles have to go save the day, so the adventure begins on a bridge in the city; the well-known "Big Apple, 3 AM" stage, which begs another question: why did they wait until early morning to get going? Krang is still around, using his giant self to zap the Turtles as they run along the bridge fighting Foot.

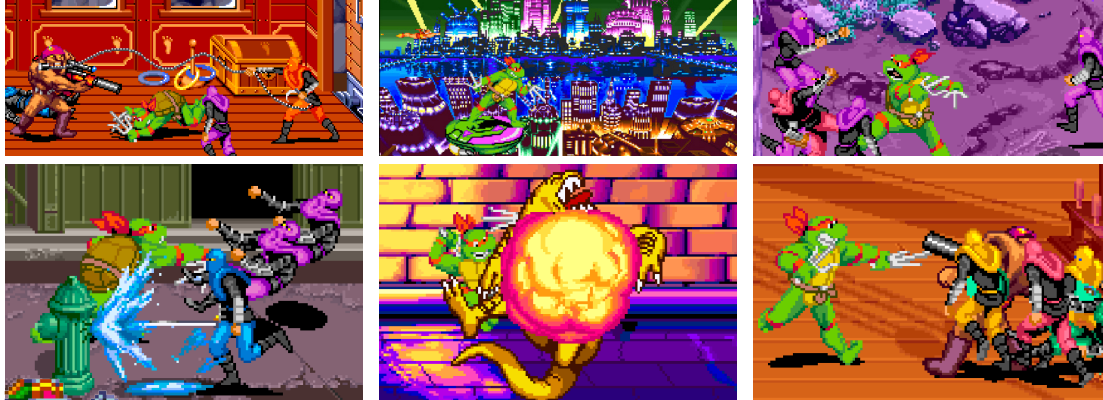
The overall level of spectacle in *Turtles in Time* is higher than the arcade game, but we don't get much in this first stage; there's no wall of fire at the bottom of the screen or any giant balls rolling down stairs; we get a brief sequence trying to dodge giant Krang's eye lasers (who yells "PREPARE TO DIE" in, again, a completely ill-fitting voice) and the balls are now attached to chains and just slam downward. It picks up later, but to not see the first stage of the new *TMNT* arcade game go all-out is a slight letdown.

When they make it to the end of stage 1, they face Baxter Stockman, who buzzes around in the air while firing at our heroes with a gun that shoots bullets as well as some sort of plasma beam that can manifest itself as a giant fist. I suppose it's not out of the realm of Stockman's usual insanity, but he still falls quickly. As dawn comes, the Turtles continue to the streets, mowing down more Foot soldiers and then going up against Metalhead, who zips around by way of his jetpack-enabled shell, but is also quickly turned to toast. From there the Turtles go "Sewer Surfin'" and avoid murderous Foot soldiers jetting up beside them, and later a group (gaggle?) of the pizza monsters from the cartoon episode a few years earlier. They straddle the line between boss and normal enemy, because they pop up with minimal



Archie ends *TMNT Adventures* after 72 issues.

That same month, Mirage ends *TMNT Vol. 2* after just 13 issues. It seems the writing is on the wall.



warning, and don't take many hits to get rid of. But once they're all gone, the face of Shredder appears as a large hologram. His "patience wearing thin" with the Turtles, Shredder decides to send the four heroes into a time warp that puts them back in the prehistoric era, and thus, *Turtles in Time* officially begins.

It still doesn't explain the Statue of Liberty heist, but it's still neat to have the game lead into the time travel stuff and not just explain everything in an intro and suddenly it's dinosaur time. Although it is a bit odd to have Shredder magically appear in the sewer, of all places, and cut the Turtles' mission short—Super NES port fleshes this out slightly, which is covered on the next page.

The stages nicely line up with what is probably the short list of places kids think of when they imagine time travel: the dinosaurs; pirates; post-colonial America, and the far-flung future. In the stone age landscape, the Turtles face the Cement Man at the end (who actually did show up in an episode of the show beforehand, contrary to some thinking Konami just made him up). From there the Turtles warp forwards to the year 1530, landing on a pirate ship covered in Foot soldiers—it's a given—and fight Tokka and Rahzar, the aforementioned supermutants from *TMNT 2: Secret of the Ooze*. The next time warp takes them to a locomotive in 1800s America, where stone warriors await them amongst the Foot, along with Leatherhead at the end of the line (honestly, he fits nowhere better thanks to his Cajun characterization). Following that, the Turtles are thrust into the far future, where the surfboards of the sewer stage are replaced with circular hoverboards taking the Turtles across a future metropolis highway. Android Krang returns, now in normal form, but no less annoying. From there the adventure reaches its climax as the Turtles enter a "starbase" to fight Krang one more time, though this time he's divorced of his android and piloting some sort of space pod—indoors, mind you. Then the final battle, back home in the present day, inside the Technodrome where Shredder awaits. He and the Turtles fight in front of the captured Statue of Liberty. However, Shredder goes down as easily as before, and the Turtles save the day by returning the

Statue to its rightful home.

Turtles in Time is still a clear notch above the original in quality, and again, being an arcade game, it benefits from the inherent advantages in resolution and memory. And with that came the developers' ability to stuff the game to the brim with colorful art and smooth animations. Most obviously, the Turtles are drawn a little larger, looking more like the bulkier action figures than the slender cartoon models of the original game. They're also more expressive and "rubbery;" they run, turn, kick, get knocked down and spring back up with surprising fluidity. It's not quite Disney-level stuff, though, because this is still a fast action game and nothing is "over-animated" in regards to moving and attacking. Perhaps the developers were conscious of that, and instead put most of the animation into moments when the Turtles are harmed. They can be flattened like a pizza when hit by the giant balls in stage 1; can be kicked in the midsection with visible pain; they can step on a loose plank and get whacked right in the face, and of course, they can hit a spiky obstacle, grab their feet, and yell "My toes! My toes!" Considering all the ways you can pummel our heroes, the visual faithfulness to the cartoon takes a turn for the cruel in *Turtles in Time*. But it is funny, and a lot of those animations tie into the extra actions each Turtle can perform. The regular attacks and jumps are there, but the Turtles can go from a walk to a dash by holding a direction, have new special moves, and can throw enemies into the screen; a favorite among fans.

There was just so much going on at any one time that it made even the impressive original game look stiff in comparison. Plenty more little details give *Turtles in Time* a vibrance all its own, and even though the time travel trope was done in both the cartoon and the comic books, it finally gave Konami's *TMNT* titles a fresh dose of variety in a game context, and at a time when the Ninja Turtles were now synonymous with beat-em-ups.

GOVA BUNGA!



Japan gets their own *TMNT* cartoon: the OVA series *Choujin Densetsu Hen*, wherein the teens transform into bulked-up superhero versions of themselves.



Image picks up the *TMNT* comics with a 23-issue third volume. It's so awful, Peter Laird retcons it right after it ends.

TMNT IV TURTLES IN TIME

SUPER NES • 1992



W

ith the arrival of the Super NES, the 16-bit generation was in full swing, and the systems' first games were captivating minds left and right. And in terms of the Turtles, that meant Konami was finally able to do the arcade games justice in a home setting. *Turtles in Time* became *TMNT IV* for Super NES, just as *TMNT II* on NES before it, and was an evolution of *II* in more ways

than one: yes, it's an arcade port that does its best to represent the source while dealing with its limitations, yet it also adds new content that fills some gaps, and in general, it pleased kids who were expecting the best from Konami, and this time they pretty much got it.

One key difference with *TMNT IV* is that it arrived at the beginning of the console's life rather than at the zenith as *TMNT II* had. This helped it stand out in the second year of SNES games, which was preceded by great launch games followed by a bunch of lackluster titles. With *Turtles in Time* (along with *Street Fighter II*) coming in 1992, it could pretty much stand on its own and potentially dominate Christmas more than *TMNT II*. This would also help the game seem more amazing from the get-go, especially when other SNES arcade ports before it always seemed to have one or two big things missing. Lastly, it bookended the other half of 1992, as *TMNT III* was released

towards the start of the year, ensuring another solid year of video game Turtlemania.

But even when not factoring in good timing, *TMNT IV* is still astoundingly close to the arcade version, mainly due to the huge color palette of the SNES that could easily replicate the detail of the art. On the flip side, lots of animations had to be cut down in frames to be able to fit the cartridge; the Turtles are still expressive, but not quite as energetic as they felt in the arcade version, and bosses, too, are largely lifeless. Likewise, virtually

all of the voice acting was removed—the intro, boss taunts, and Turtle quips were turned into text. On the flip side of *that*, it also left out the clip of “Pizza Power,” the dreadful song from *Coming Out of Their Shells* played in the attract mode. And in terms of gameplay, once again, an anticipated Turtles arcade port arrives just shy of the advent of four-player play for its console, as the first SNES multitaps arrived months later. Given all the big, lovely graphics in the game, it's a fair bet *TMNT IV* wouldn't have supported four players even if it could. Then again, if *NBA Jam* could do it...

The bigger thing in *TMNT IV* is not what's missing, but what was added. Though it didn't include two brand-new stages like *TMNT II* did, it did fill out the stage progression with a familiar one. As the story went, the Turtles rush to go after Shredder and Krang, only to be warped through time in the middle of their mission. This happens in the sewer stage, which seemed like a weird place for a holographic Shredder to show up, so instead, in *TMNT IV*, the sewer stage ends normally, then proceeds to a new Technodrome stage. While the bad guys' motives seem pointless, this stage structure presents a unique twist: in a few short stages the Turtles head to the Technodrome, which would be the final or next-to-final stage in other *TMNT* games, but instead it's a midpoint that transitions to the time traveling—the boss fight in the Technodrome is against Shredder, but when he's taken down, he reappears in the old hologram form and zaps the Turtles through time here rather than in the sewer. In the cartoon, something like this wouldn't be such a big deal, because the Turtles know Shredder and Krang hide out in the Technodrome, and it's usually the first place the team will go when there's trouble. But in terms of the games, it was an interesting way to set things up, and in the end makes *TMNT IV* a more narratively cohesive (pardon the nausea) version of *Turtles in Time*.



After 10 seasons and close to 200 episodes, the *TMNT* TV series ends its run.

WHOSE HUE

An interesting toggle in the *TMNT IV* option screen lets you play with the Turtles' default ("Anime") skin colors, or their individual colors as used in the action figures (erroneously called "Comic"). That means Leo is basic green, Raph is a little brighter, Don is brown, and Mike is a touch more turquoise. And for extra accuracy, their pupils are gone from their eyes. The toys' colors were always a weird contrast to the homogenous hue of the TV Turtles, so it was neat to see them acknowledged outside of the Target toy section.



Though the Technodrome is the only new stage, the developers used the opportunity afforded by *TMNT IV* to redo other bits, specifically the bosses. The sewer stage features a new midboss, the Rat King piloting his Footski, a vehicle lifted directly from the toy line. Tokka and Rahzar were moved from the pirate ship to the new Technodrome stage, and replacing them in the 1500s are Bebop and Rocksteady in pirate costumes. Not only does that make them the most appropriately-dressed bosses, they even have an extra animation where Rocksteady's whip can get caught on Bebop's lance and incapacitate them for a few seconds. And, hey, what's a *TMNT* game without those two nimrods, anyway? In the prehistoric stage, the rather drab Cement Man is replaced with Slash, last seen in *TMNT III* and looking surprisingly well-drawn; almost too much, because like the Rat King's Footski, he looks like the action figure come to life. And to bump up the movie tie-in quotient (along with putting the game at parity with *TMNT III*), Shredder turns himself into Super Shredder for the final battle, though the fight itself isn't more intimidating than the "vanilla" Shredder from the arcade version.

Other big shifts in stages involve the sewer, which has a similar layout as in the arcade, but it's treated as a "bonus stage" that simply asks you to destroy as many of the pizza monsters as you can while they leap out of the water. The future stage, "Neon Night Riders," is also repurposed that way, asking you to destroy as many Foot soldiers as you can, although most of the stage has been redone as a behind-the-back *F-Zero*-style affair, with the Turtles' hoverboards ducking and weaving around corners in the freeway before meeting and fighting Krang as usual. By shortening those stages, the addition of the Technodrome doesn't extend the length of the game that much, and again, it only helps the game's overall layout. Elsewhere, *TMNT IV* also includes an odd sort of one-on-one fighting mode set in the Turtles' sewer lair, and could pass as a proof-of-concept for *TMNT Tournament Fighters*. But it's no deeper than the main game, as the characters are just pasted into the mode, only they can hit each other.

Like *TMNT II*, *Turtles in Time* became a staple game for the system it was on; you had to have it if you were a *Turtles* fan and an SNES owner. Chances are it made a bigger impact at home than in the arcade because

of that, and became one of the most beloved *TMNT* games twice over. You might say time has been good to it.

SO WHICH IS BETTER?



When Ubisoft's *Turtles in Time Re-Shelled* was released a couple of years ago, fans were initially pleased to see it happen, but soon felt disappointed that the remake was based on the original arcade version rather than *TMNT IV* and its various additions. Many consider the Super NES version to be the best, partly (or even solely) because of the tweaked stages. As you read, the Technodrome stage does a better service to the game's story, but it's not exactly *needed*, nor does turning "Neon Night-Riders" into a Mode 7 showcase make it automatically more fun. The arcade version has voice, better animation and speed, and when you combine those with four players, it really turns it into an event. To be sure, it is odd that Ubisoft went with the arcade version when *Re-Shelled* was a console game anyway, but the differences in *TMNT IV* just aren't impactful enough to make it the easy choice over the arcade version that everyone claims it is.



Ninja Turtles: The Next Mutation airs on Fox Kids. To this day, timeline writers insist on acknowledging it.



Some of the last Playmates figures include Camo-Bandana Turtleflage Leonardo and Blacktop Boardin' Venus. "Next Mutation," indeed.



TMNT THE HYPERSTONE HEIST

GENESIS • 1992



T

hink back to your *TMNT* toy collection; the figures, accessories; the whole shebang. Now think of your friends' collections. What did you have that they didn't, and vice versa? How were they treating and playing with theirs? Did they have the same accessories or playsets? Maybe you played by the rules of the established story while your friend made it so that the Turtles now own the Technodrome and Shredder fights back on the Turtle Blimp. However it was, it's that kind of experience that's emblematic of *The Hyperstone Heist*—it's the video game version of that friend with the same figures, but they're just not playing with them the same. And that's about enough to make it the second-weirdest *TMNT* title in the lineup.

By 1992, Konami was finally producing games for the Sega Genesis, putting almost all of their key franchises of the time on the platform. This meant that Sega kids would be getting their first *TMNT* game. And it was right around the debut of *Turtles in Time*, so surely they'd also be getting a version of the best *Turtles* game thus far, right? No, but they'd be getting a special game made just for them!

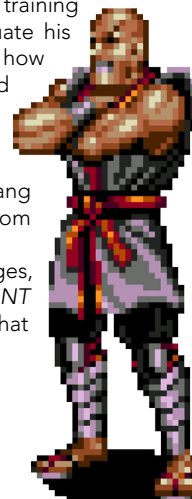
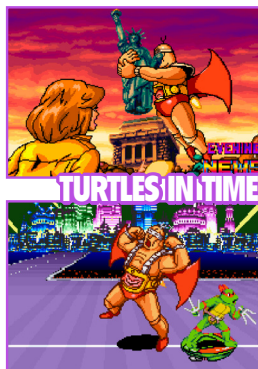
To be exact, *Hyperstone Heist* is a shuffled-around version of *Turtles in Time*: it looks and feels the same, but there's plenty to differentiate it. This is obvious once the game starts: the intro shows *Turtles in Time*'s familiar shot of April reporting from the Statue of Liberty, except that instead of Krang swooping in and stealing it, the statue vanishes, and it turns out Shredder has shrunk all of Manhattan using the Hyperstone, an extra-dimensional item of power. Again he taunts the Turtles, and again they vow to kick his butt and restore Manhattan. The ensuing adventure takes the Turtles through oddly familiar backdrops such as city streets and old pirate ships, as well as re-encountering old foes like Rocksteady and Leatherhead (to say nothing

of the red-tinted non-pizza monsters that show up, as well). It even ends in the same old way, with the Turtles leaping into the Technodrome and ultimately facing Shredder in the chamber that once held the Statue of Liberty, only now it has some nondescript doomsday device in it. With all the re-used sprites, backgrounds, and new stages that are somewhat drab, *Hyperstone Heist* may as well have been called "*Turtles in Time: The First Draft*."

On the other hand, *Hyperstone* also takes a few cues from the NES games, to the point where you'd think the development team was peering over the NES teams' shoulders. Like in *TMNT III*, the second stage opens with a high-speed chase over the ocean on a jet board while Foot soldiers approach in waves (though not with the acrobatic showmanship they possessed in *III*). Then there's "Shredder's Hideout," a dojo that is conceptually similar to the dojo stage from *TMNT II*, though the first half begins outside in a courtyard before progressing inside and eventually to the boss fight with Tatsu, the Foot clan commander from the movies. On one hand, it's better than fighting Tokka and Rahzar again; on the

other, Tatsu's presence makes no sense in the cartoon-based game world, because the Foot soldiers here are robots, so what do they need training for? Shredder really should re-evaluate his workforce. Moreover, considering how the stage apes *TMNT II*'s, this could have been a perfect opportunity to use Shogun again. On top of that, the Technodrome stage features giant bouncing metal balls, and a Krang midboss fight practically lifted right from *TMNT II*, backdrop and all.

Hyperstone Heist has only five stages, which sounds paltry compared to *TMNT IV*. However, it really depends on what



Next *Mutation* is canceled after not even a year. A nation mourns.



While the Image comic book continues apace through 1999, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles lay dormant everywhere else. An era of *TMNT* ends.



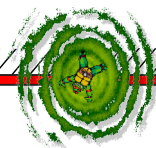
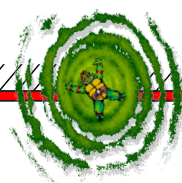
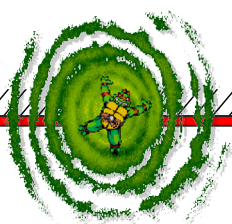


constitutes a stage. Certainly the game says there's five, but like *TMNT II*, there's several sections within them, and some are disparate and long enough on their own to feel like they should be split up. For example, stage 2 goes from the ocean to the ghost ship to a cave, which makes thematic sense, but in practice they feel like abrupt changes. Interestingly, midbosses are absent from the first half of the game, until you begin the "Gauntlet" stage and have to fight the previous bosses again, then face pre-mutant Baxter Stockman at the end of it (another very odd character choice).

Though it resembles *Turtles in Time* visually, *Hyperstone* has a darker style to it. The stages and the color palettes used within are earthier, in line with Konami's other Genesis games, and even the incidental art is drawn more "extreme:" the Turtles in the opening and select screen are muscular and pupil-less, not unlike the action figures or the Mirage comics. And Shredder looks more like the Super Shredder considering how bulked up and crazy-looking he is (for all intents and purposes, he's more like Cyber Shredder, but the game never calls him that).

It's things that like those which really reinforce the cherry-picking, devil-may-care nature of *Hyperstone Heist*. If these games had a canon, this one would fall way outside of it. Borrowed aesthetics aside, it's hardly as adventurous a game as *TMNT III* and *IV*, so why *didn't* Konami simply make a Genesis version of *Turtles in Time* in the same year it was coming out on Super NES? One possible answer may be as simple as the methodology behind the company's other Genesis titles: producing original games and side-sequels that had shades of the games that made them famous on NES and Super NES, but with enough new elements to make the Genesis versions stand out. However, that's countered by the later arcade-faithful Sega versions of *Sunset Riders* and *Lethal Enforcers*, so the fact that they didn't bank on the sure thing that was *TMNT IV* remains baffling, and probably left some *TMNT*-slash-Sega fans a bit gyped.

As nice as the *TMNT* arcade game and its progeny were in the context of Turtles games, the arrival of *TMNT IV* and *Hyperstone Heist* came at a time when beat-em-ups were reaching a new level, especially on consoles. These games would soon be met by Sega's *Streets of Rage 2* and Super NES games like the *Final Fight* sequels and *Sonic Blast Man*, all of which improved on the use of audiovisual glory from their predecessors, yet strove for tighter gameplay mechanics, too. After four games with the same four heroes (and the same four villains), the whole *TMNT* game franchise was in danger of getting long in the tooth. But fighting is what the Turtles do, and as it happened, there was another popular genre they could be a part of.



SCENE 3

HANDSHELL'D



TMNT FALL OF THE FOOT CLAN

GAME BOY • 1990



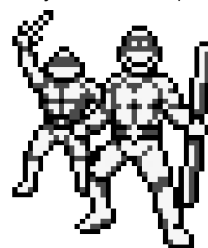
nsurprisingly, the Ninja Turtles' dominance in the world of Nintendo spread to the Game Boy. What's surprising is how quickly it happened—not even a year since the system's release, and at the time when the Turtles franchise wasn't believed to be a bunch of *Double Dragon*-style beat-em-ups. Regardless, *TMNT: Fall of the Foot Clan* has all the base elements you'd expect from a *Turtles* title, and isn't as overly ambitious as the original NES game. On the other hand, it may be under-ambitious compared to everything else.

Like *TMNT I*, *Fall of the Foot Clan* is a standard platformer, and also lets you switch between Turtles (only between stages, though). Also like the NES game, our heroes don't "die," but are shown to be captured by the Foot and needing rescue. You won't feel the hurt if you're lacking Donatello, though, because hardly anything differentiates the Turtles in this game besides the weapons they're holding. It's one thing to have four characters representing different colors on a monochromatic system, but their sprites are exactly the same, with the same permanent grin on their faces, and their attacks use the same swipe motion with almost exactly the same reach. The Turtles are homogenous in this game, and that's just not kosher.



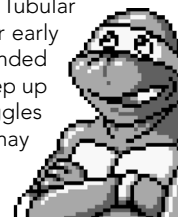
tune remixed from *TMNT I*, and the boss fight with Krang is basically the arcade game version set on a single plane: Krang runs away to the force field after you defeat him, plus the ending text is verbatim from the arcade game.

Let's say you get low on health in *Fall of the Foot Clan*, or you do manage to get a Turtle captured. Let's also say the latter actually matters and you want to remedy that. What to do? Well, that's when you do your best to find the myriad hidden warps in the game that lead you to something no other *TMNT* game of its era featured: minigames. Three kinds of minigames are hidden throughout the game: in the first one, Splinter gives you 10 chances to guess what number between one and 999 he's thinking of. That's it. Krang appears in the second challenge, where you play a game of elimination against him: select as many shurikens on the screen as you want (or should), give Krang his turn, and repeat until the board is clear. If you're smart enough,



you can end up removing the last shurikens and win the match. The third game is pure twitch; a rudimentary clay pigeon-style game that challenges you to shoot down as many dots that fly across the screen as possible so you "qualify" and win.

Fall of the Foot Clan's biggest fault, and one that places it on the opposite side of *TMNT I*, is that it's remarkably easy. A player is able to finish it in around half an hour, and that's including the few times they'll get hit. Konami even exacerbated this by letting you set the number of lives on the start menu, as well as selecting any of the five stages. Forget half an hour; skip to the Technodrome and you can finish the game in four minutes. The whole game is a slow progression where you stop to attack enemies, sometimes from the right and sometimes from the left, and though some stages have their own special enemies, you're mostly whacking on Foot soldiers and Tubular Transports. *Foot Clan* and the other early Game Boy games from Konami tended to treat the system as if it were a step up from an old LCD game: set your toggles and go! Make your own fun! That may



2000



Rumors of a fourth, CG-animated *TMNT* movie produced by John Woo begin to arise. Ultimately it perishes in development hell.

JUN. 2000



Kevin Eastman is effectively done with the Turtles, so Peter Laird and Mirage buy out his ownership in the company and franchise.

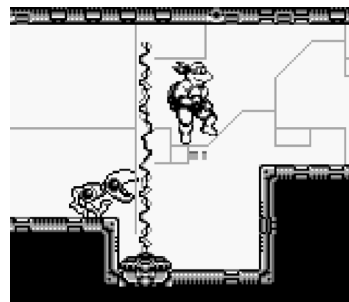
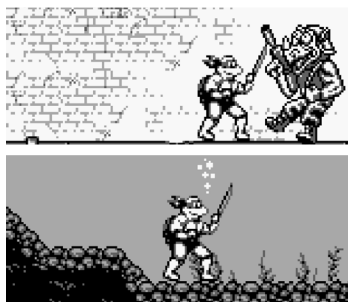
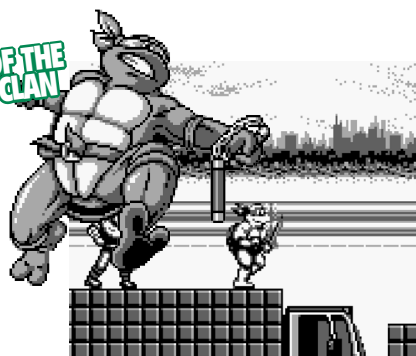
DEC. 2001



Laird revives the black-and-white comics with a fourth volume. The Turtles are no longer Teenage, but their adventures are no less wild.



FALL OF THE FOOT CLAN



do just fine if you're trying to better your scores in Nemesis, but *TMNT* games relied on having somewhat meaty stages that give you a beginning and end to the action. For the kids who liked to bring their Game Boys everywhere and play new games in the car as soon as they got them, they could be done with *Foot Clan* in the time it took to get back home. Needless to say, it would be a couple of years before Konami and other game companies would create Game Boy games with more substance.

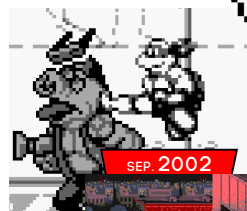
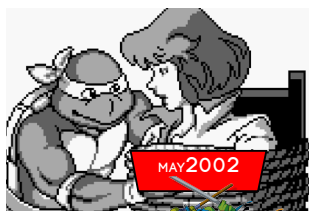
Including the references to the arcade game, *Fall of the Foot Clan* has a couple of other tiny, funny details, mostly of the aural variety. It's one of about two *TMNT* games to use the cartoon's whole theme song as actual background music, and not just something that precedes the title screen. One would think pumping the theme song wherever possible would be priority one, but other games had only a bar or two peppered among their tunes. In general, the Game Boy games have the most musically interesting soundtracks of almost all the other *TMNT* games, and part of *Foot Clan*'s sound design is credited to now-famous Konami composer Michiru Yamane.

You can call Konami's *TMNT* games "cash-ins," but most of them are good enough to rise above that. *Fall of the Foot Clan*, on the other hand, screams it. But there's a chance that may have been a strategic move. As the story goes, the core of Konami's MSX division was shifted to work on the Game Boy, which makes sense considering Konami's non-Kojima MSX games were fairly simple, and a low-res monochrome handheld with a similar processor was a pretty horizontal move. Nevertheless, the team was pretty much making a handful of games at once: *Nemesis*, *Castlevania*, *Contra*, and *Ninja Turtles*, all being set up for release at least 18 months out from the Game Boy launch. With *Fall of the Foot Clan* being the only licensed game in that bunch, one can understand why the developers might not have put 110 percent into finishing it. Like on NES, the first *TMNT* Game Boy game was a weird, disposable specimen, but once the system had settled in to worldwide success, Konami could take their time for the sequels.

GEAR JEER



Although Konami eventually stepped out of the Nintendo circle and made games for the Sega Genesis, they didn't touch any other system, least of all the Game Gear. Sega's handheld was the best competition for the Game Boy (if not by default), but didn't get so much as a *Gradius* game from the Big K. Would a *Turtles* game even perform well on Game Gear? Certainly the market share was smaller, but the kids that wanted and got the system were just as big *TMNT* freaks as the Game Boy owners. Considering Konami's approach to pushing out the Game Boy *Turtles* games, it seems odd that they didn't try to slap some color and a Sega logo on *Fall of the Foot Clan* and see how it performed.



Rapidly-growing 4Kids announces a new *TMNT* franchise for early 2003, with Mirage/Laird overseeing development of the TV show.

Konami is re-signed as the official worldwide producer of *TMNT* video games. The first ones will show up the following year.



TMNT II BACK FROM THE SEWERS

GAME BOY • 1991



Not a year since *Fall of the Foot Clan*, Konami was ready with the next Game Boy TMNT game, *TMNT II: Back From the Sewers* (also what a water treatment engineer says after a long day's work). Without a doubt, it was easy money—they probably could have made TMNT games for Game Boy every week if they wanted to—but Konami got a new team on the sequel that brought a host of improvements compared to *Foot Clan*, yet couldn't quite eliminate every flaw along the way.

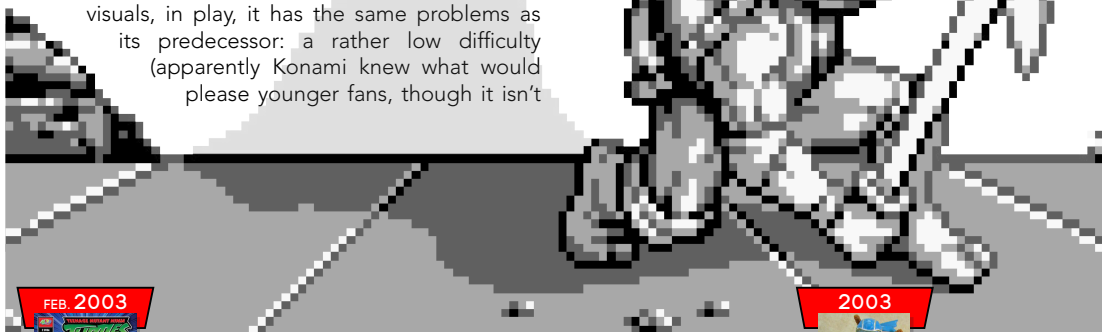


Back From the Sewers is another simple platformer, but this time the arcade games were a more obvious influence: For one thing, the intro sequence is another take on the arcade game's, and if your Turtle falls in a manhole he goes "Who put the lights out?" Though this time around, there isn't so much as an attempt to tell a story. Even the game's manual dryly explains that Shredder has kidnapped April, and it dares to call this the Turtles' "most dangerous" mission yet. Who knows why, because it's all so familiar. The stages are even more similar to the arcade game's: you get jet boarding down the freeway, pizza monster midbosses, a factory, and of course, the Technodrome—all with the same boss characters you've come to know and love. To the designers' credit, the stages aren't mere carbon copies, because some work was put into the background art, perhaps to compensate for the cramped screen space on the Game Boy. Take, for example, the sewer section of the underground stage, which depicts the sewer tunnels extending out into the background. You'll feel reminded of the other games, but at least this one has a unique look.

While *Back From the Sewers* is a marked improvement over the original in terms of visuals, in play, it has the same problems as its predecessor: a rather low difficulty (apparently Konami knew what would please younger fans, though it isn't

quite as much of a cakewalk), practically identical Turtles and weapons, and a methodical pace. Our heroes walk as if they're on an afternoon stroll as they casually hold their weapons at their sides, making the six stages feel as if they're taking forever to get through (and in the stage with the midair platform-hopping, it does). This is almost entirely due to how the sprites were drawn: every character is "built" vertically, so the artist(s) had to cram as much detail as possible into a stack of sprites. But when you have a character whose weapon is a long staff, your ingenious plan to save memory for graphics doesn't execute so well. At least the super-tall android Krang does look pretty imposing. Even the Turtles' jumping is slow, with a floaty forward flip animation that evokes bad memories of the first NES game.

The bonus game concept returns, though the ones here are not nearly as creative as *Fall of the Foot Clan*'s. But that's a good thing, as they were just kind of annoying. Here, you have a simple challenge to slide under or jump over obstacles to collect randomly-appearing pizzas. Get all of them and you win a health boost. Similarly, the Turtles can once again be "captured" if they run out of health, and a makeshift "rescue game" involves your replacement Turtle going up against a towering security bot who fights back hard. Beating him will free the captured brother and keep your



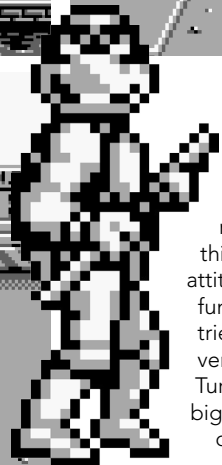
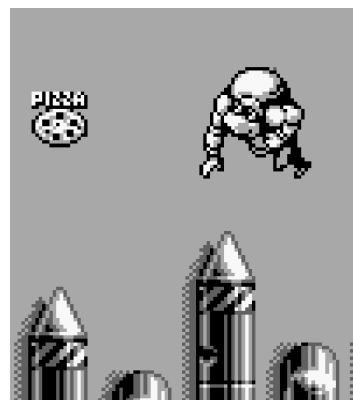
The new *TMNT* TV show debuts with the episode "Things Change." The series more closely follows elements of the original comic books. Thank goodness.



Playmates still can't help themselves and produce figures like Scootin' Leo.

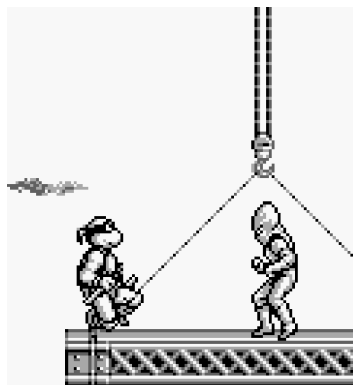
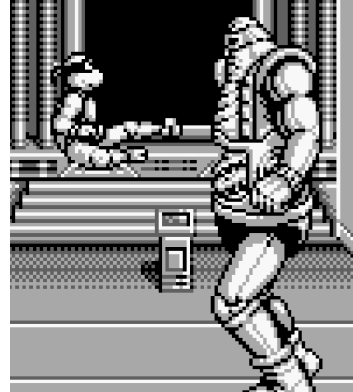


BACK FROM THE SEWERS



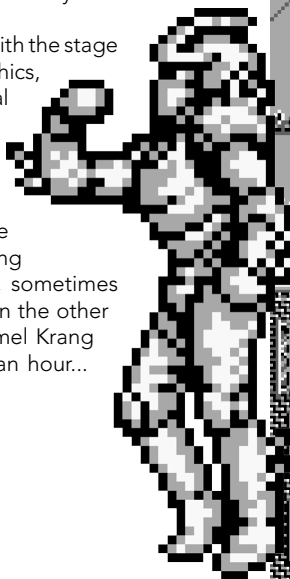
roster strong, but again, their attacks are indistinguishable, so your choice of Turtle is dependent on which one is your favorite.

Putting aside the negative stuff for a moment, *Back From the Sewers* does one thing better than *Fall of the Foot Clan*: its attitude. Playing the game may not be the funnest thing, but it's clear the designers tried to give it some personality. The vertically-oriented sprites are odd, but the Turtles and other characters are nonetheless big and more cartoonlike, and when they're captured, they show up behind bars on the character select screen. And whenever



you pause the game, it exclaims "Pizza time!" and a picture of a Turtle munching on a pie (copied from the cartoon's title cards) is shown while a jaunty tune plays. Even the options screen has character, depicting a high-rise with Turtles popping in and out of the windows. None of that is on the level of expressiveness seen in the arcade games, but it's as close as a Game Boy *Turtles* game would get.

And that closeness, coupled with the stage designs and improved graphics, would be enough to appeal to any fan who would have wished for a version of the arcade game on Game Boy. The downside is that they'd be treated to a game that once again mostly consists of walking to the right whacking enemies, sometimes turning to the left to hit ones on the other side, and then save April, pummel Krang and shame Shredder in under an hour... and for under 30 bucks.



Dreamwave launches a comic series based on the 4Kids show, which lasts seven issues, then the company goes bankrupt. Radical, dudes!



Konami releases their new flagship *TMNT* game. Like the old ones, it's pretty mindless, but longtime fans aren't as forgiving anymore. And it's not four-player?



The second season of the 4Kids cartoon begins about a week after the first one ends.



TMNT III RADICAL RESCUE

GAME BOY • 1993



When Konami took *Castlevania* and adopted some design principles from *Metroid*, gamers stood up and took notice. When a *TMNT* game did it four years earlier, no one cared. That's a not-so-serious way of looking at it, but it's not entirely false, either. *TMNT III: Radical Rescue* came at a time when the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in general were in their denouement, and Konami was moving past the beat-em-ups to freshen up the franchise with fighting games. Meanwhile, after two fairly lame Game Boy games, it was clear to fans that the handheld wasn't the system to go for hot new *Turtles* action (not to say those games weren't successful). Nevertheless, Konami released a third game, and even though its predecessors weren't great, this one is worth talking about. And that's because it's pretty much the most interesting *Ninja Turtles* game of its time. It had that *Metroid*-style interconnected map, yet had more in common with *TMNT I* on NES than any of the others—and pulled it off much better.

You might say the most unorthodox thing about *Radical Rescue* is that it has—are you sitting down?—an honest-to-god story. One day, a year since the Shredder was last defeated, Michelangelo is sent out to get pizza, and the brothers back home are catching April on TV doing a report from the scene of a prison break. Suddenly she screams, presumably kidnapped. The three rush to the scene without Mike, who returns wondering where everybody went. An evil voice then comes on the TV and tells him that if he wants to see his brothers and friends again, he'll have to head to an abandoned mine out in the country. This is all in the intro, of course, so even before the proper game starts, we're getting new stuff in the franchise. First, it puts the spotlight on Mike, known to be the general favorite among fans because he's the "party dude," and second, it flips the "rescuing Turtles" mechanic so that they're all captured to begin with and most of the game revolves around seeking them out.



Mike heads to the mine and starts exploring the labyrinthine cavern, which is also part underground base, reminiscent of the Technodrome. He mows down Foot soldiers and other enemies in an attempt to find his bros, discovering that they're trapped inside cells behind metal doors, but naturally, the doors need keys. That means your primary objective at any point is to find boss chambers, beat the bosses and get the keys from them, then go back to the doors and free the captured Turtles.

Continuing through the mine and finding more brothers is only possible by using each Turtle's special ability: Mike can use his nunchuks as a makeshift helicopter to let him float over large gaps; Leo can drill downwards through breakable blocks; Don can climb any vertical wall, and Raph can shrink into his shell and slide through tight spaces.



In true *Metroidvania* fashion, you'll frequently encounter rooms or parts of rooms you can't get to until you free the next Turtle, and then a wave of relief rushes over you when you can finally get past it with their special move. And by the time all four Turtles are reunited, you'll be switching between them often as more varied obstacles appear and you get closer to rescuing Splinter and April and Shredder (rather, Cyber Shredder) is defeated. Oh yeah, it was Shredder this whole time. What a... surprise.

Speaking of bosses, *Radical Rescue* further breaks tradition by having bosses that have never (or almost never) been in a *Turtles* game before. Dirtbag makes another appearance—making him the only one to show up in two "*TMNT II*s"—as does a Triceraton, plus the all-new additions of Scratch and Scale Tail: the former a transplant from the Archie comic, and the latter being a humanoid snake who, like the extra bosses in *TMNT II: The Arcade Game*, makes his first and only appearance here. Add Cyber Shredder (who really doesn't do anything special to earn the name) and you have a truly unique boss roster for a truly unique *Turtles* game. The



Tales of the *TMNT* gets an all-new second volume from Mirage. It becomes the second-longest *TMNT* comic, ending after 70 issues.

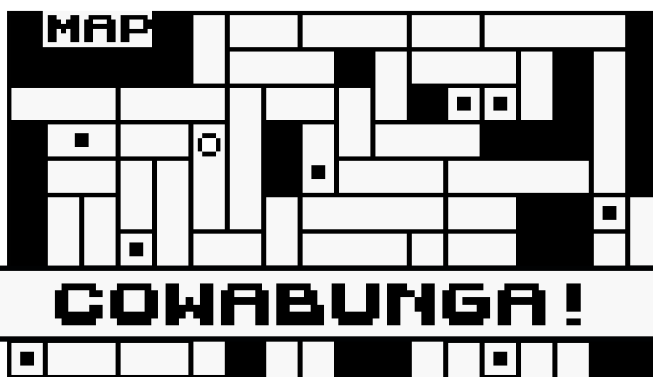


The original 1987 cartoon gets its first DVD re-release from Lionsgate.



Konami's *TMNT 2: Battle Nexus* includes the original arcade game, but with changed music and dumb graphical bugs. Thanks anyway.

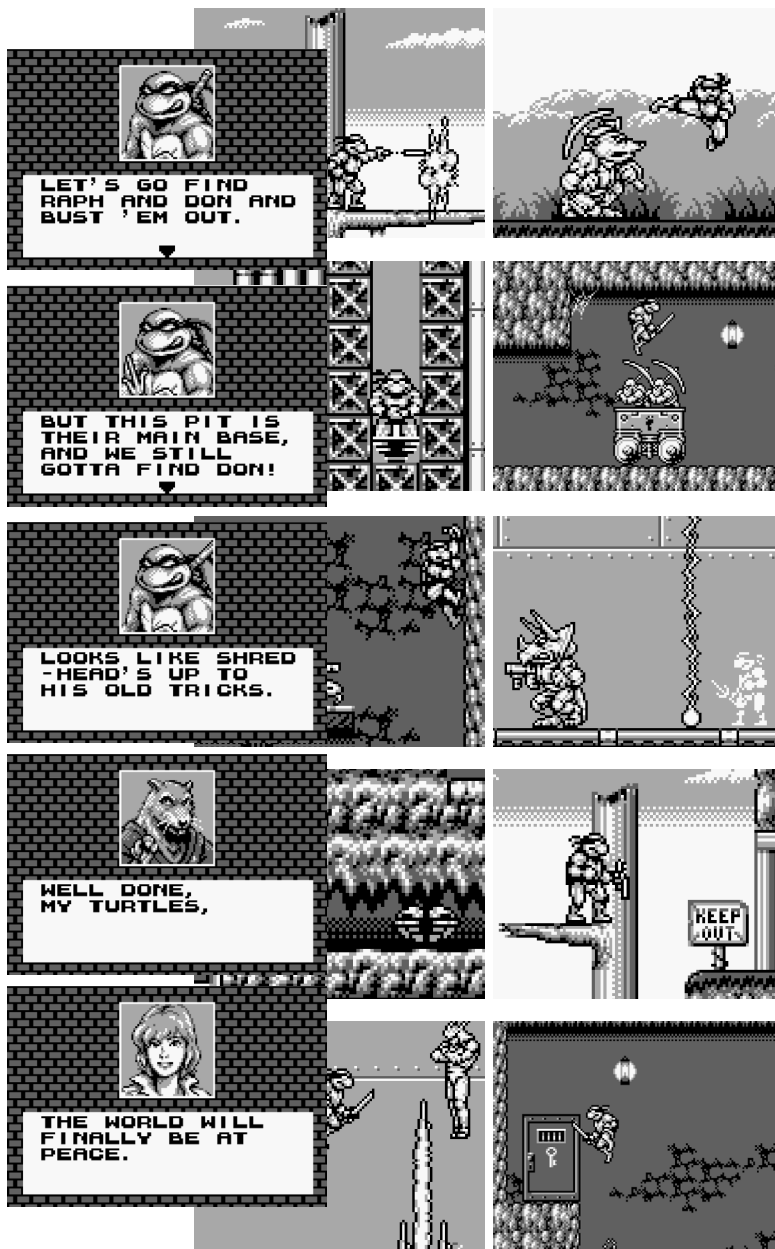




only drawback is a boss gauntlet just before the final battle, though the game throws you a bone by replenishing your energy after each fight—take the good with the bad, I suppose.

As neat as it is, *Radical Rescue* isn't exactly perfect. The in-game map isn't very helpful, as the whole thing is revealed to you at the start, and the world is smooshed together in a big blob, so it's tough to tell if a room actually connects to an adjacent one, or if you need to take the long way around to get to it. Hiding undiscovered rooms or simply shading the quadrants would have helped. Later on, you'll come across some *really* long gaps that will require some guesswork at first, because who knows when that bed of spikes will end unless you either fall onto them or manage to land on the pillar just ahead. And enemies tend to respawn right when you least want them to; not at the exact moment they're off the screen, but after you've gone away for a while and dare to come back—then you'll have to kill the same two robots or carefully dodge the annoying bats again. At least pizza items respawn, too.

The other *Turtles* games could be called "adventures" in comparison to the half-hour escapades of the TV show, but *Radical Rescue* was the game that actually felt like one, instead of being just a long string of left-to-right stages. In terms of the Game Boy series, we went from finishing a *TMNT* game in well under an hour to finishing one in a handful of hours for once. It's just a shame that *Radical Rescue* wasn't made until after the other Game Boy games, and that it was one of the last *TMNT* games of the '90s to begin with—it was just after the apex, and the *Tournament Fighters* games were the focus of the Turtleverse in 1993. On the other hand, at a time when Game Boy games in general were maturing, and Konami was through making *TMNT* beat-em-ups, you couldn't ask for anything better. A *Turtles* game that was weird and good. Who knew?



Konami releases *TMNT: Tournament Fighters*, a Power Stone-like arena fighting game. The world misses *Tournament Fighters*.



TMNT 3: Mutant Nightmare is the third and final boring action game, and includes a flawed version of *Turtles in Time* as well!

SCENE 4

FEARSOME FIGHTING TEAM



TMNT TOURNAMENT FIGHTERS

GENESIS 1993



T

he Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles do a lot of fighting, that much is true. They're ninjas, after all, and combating the forces of evil is part of their code. It was serendipity, then, that the height of TMNT fever in the early '90s coincided with the rise of fighting games. When *Street Fighter II* appeared in 1991, it simultaneously blew up in popularity while setting off a chain reaction of other companies making fighting games for the arcade. In the console market, it was mostly a matter of waiting for ports of those games, but it was also a market more welcoming of games based on licenses, so it seemed natural that fight-heavy kids' shows would also get to throw their hats into the proverbial ring. In Japan, it was *Dragon Ball Z*, and later in the West it was *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*, but in between them was *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. In 1993, Konami launched the *TMNT Tournament Fighters* series—one-on-one fighting games starring our shelled heroes, their best friends and worst foes.



With *Street Fighter* becoming a killer app for the Super NES, Konami could've just stuck with that system and made one game, but they went the extra mile by making a version for each of the systems where Turtle power was still strong: the NES, SNES, and Sega Genesis. Strategically, it was a great idea, but the execution left something to be desired. The three TF games were made by completely different teams operating only by the concepts of "*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*" and "fighting game." Beyond that it was anything-goes, and the games didn't fall on the same spot on the quality scale. In fact, the Genesis version

settled at the low end.

The Turtles fighting each other without cause wouldn't make much sense, so *Tournament Fighters* gives us a reason: while Splinter is away meditating, four sneering clone Turtles approach and kidnap him, unbeknownst to the real ones. They're in the sewer lair watching TV, when all of a sudden Krang appears onscreen, tells them their master is gone, being held hostage in Dimension X, and that they'll have to come after him. (Is picking up the telephone just not theatrical enough for these guys?) The foursome enlists the help of April, Casey, Ray Fillet and mutant beetle Sisyphus to go after Krang and the clones, and so the Turtles (somehow) get a spaceship and jet to Dimension X.

The clone Turtles are just like the disguised Mechaturtle from *TMNT I*; purple-ish versions that know all the same moves as the real guys and, honestly, just as big of pushovers. After they're gone, it's time to face a Triceraton, and then face android Krang in the Technodrome, who is now just as big as the Turtles.

But once Krang is down, it turns out he's not the mastermind. It's not even Shredder! Instead, it's Karai, the woman who is the true head of the Foot clan. Karai had only appeared in the *Mirage* comics at this point in time, so her inclusion in a game where Krang—a villain created for the cartoon—also exists is pretty baffling. Was Shredder killed a long time ago like in the comic? How were the clone Turtles made? And why did April decide to put on a skimpy outfit and fight, anyway? These are questions without answers, and for better or worse, are easily excused just by saying "it's a fighting game!"

To its credit, this is the only *TMNT* game of its generation that actually took place in Dimension X—



JAN. 2006



JUL. 2006



With Konami out of the picture, 4Kids and Mirage sign Ubisoft as the new maker of *TMNT* games. Theirs will be based on the upcoming animated movie.



The first looks at the new *TMNT* movie and Ubisoft's games are shown at the San Diego Comic-Con.





aside from time travel, the Turtles never had to leave home to bust some heads. What this lends to the art style is a bioorganic look to most of the stages, mostly because we never saw much of Dimension X to begin with—barely ever in the cartoon, and the renditions in the Archie comics were a bit too wacky for this game. Each stage is a different planet, with descriptive names such as “Mirage Planet” or “Bio Planet,” and feature the likes of giant grayish xenomorphs, giant spiders, giant lava beasts, giant dinosaurs—a lot of giant things. Giant things that barely move, too, because the backgrounds don’t (or couldn’t) have much animation; there’s some glimmering here and some blinking there, but nothing like the groups of bystanders in a *Street Fighter* stage. It just feels like the Turtles are wreaking havoc on a perfectly innocent bunch of planets. What did that apatosaurus do to deserve this?

TF has the fundamentals of what makes a good fighting game, but doesn’t really apply them well. Everybody has plenty of special moves, of course, though a lot of those moves can be countered or stopped pretty easily. That said, the moves themselves tend to fit the characters (assuming we know enough about them), and in the case of the Turtles, are sometimes taken from the other games, such as Leonardo’s drill move, which was really Raph’s in *TMNT III*, but let’s not go too deep, here. Android Krang can fire missiles from his arms, and Karai has lots of quick and painful ninja attacks. But it’s not the intricacies of the fighting system that hampers this version of *TF* as it is a general feeling of shoddiness. The characters have so few frames of animation that everything feels loose and rickety, as though the developers took a crash course in the genre just so they could pass the exam, so to speak. Even the

sound has problems—the music isn’t bad, but almost every sound effect uses the annoying

synth “wub” of the Genesis. It’s meant to convey motion, but makes everybody sound like robots.

Though the game arrived around the time of Sega’s official six-button Genesis controller, it doesn’t support it. The A and B buttons are punch and kick respectively, and the C button is for taunts, which is more or less the only forward-thinking element of the game. As in other fighters, taunting stops your character as they perform the taunt animation, and in *Tournament Fighters*, characters yell out some sort of catchphrase that you can barely make out because of the not-so-advanced voice capability of the Genesis sound system.

The Genesis *TF* has a special feature that allows you to tweak “power” and “speed” ratings for a character once you select them. Turning the speed up to 9 will move your character a little faster, likewise with power and how much damage is dealt. That said, they seem to be at odds with each other, because cranking them both up doesn’t seem to make a difference; it’s not like you can cheat your way through the game that way. Hell, even if you did cheat, it still might take a while. The AI opponents are horrible jerks, even on the easiest difficulties—they go for the jugular constantly and always know when to use special moves. Plus, in the story mode you’re given a finite number of continues, something that would make more sense in one of the beat-em-ups.

With this edition of *Tournament Fighters*, Sega-based *TMNT* fans got shafted for the second and last time, because much like the plot of this *TF*, both Genesis *Turtles* games were like evil clones of the others. Granted, the franchise wasn’t hurt by it, and in 1993 Sega got both *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II*, so who needed the Turtles anyway? Still, it would’ve been nice to have a game on the same level of quality as the one on the other side of the fence.



The long-awaited *TMNT* CGI animated movie is released, but the medium is wasted on an unexciting plot. Still, it makes a profit.



Ubisoft’s *TMNT* games are released at the same time, but they’re about as thrilling as the movie.



On the flip side, Ubisoft finagles a deal with Konami to re-release the original *TMNT* arcade game on Xbox Live Arcade. Fittingly, it’s the first *TMNT* game to have online co-op.



The seventh season of the 4Kids show (*Fast Forward*) ends. A truncated eighth season won’t be on for another year.

TMNT TOURNAMENT FIGHTERS

SUPER NES • 1993



Second time's a charm. The second *Tournament Fighters* was the one the others should've taken after. With a good chunk of people on the development team who worked on *TMNT IV*, some of whom took on multiple duties, the SNES version of *TF* naturally demonstrated an advanced understanding of not just the Turtles, but fighting games in general. It's not cartoony, it's not monotonous or unfair, and it possesses an audiovisual quality that puts it near the top of the pile of SNES fighting games. With all of that, you might say it's the last great *TMNT* game.

But it can't defy every expectation, because the story is still lame. Krang was featured in the Genesis version, while Shredder is in this one (maybe they drew straws), but Karai is once again the main villain, and is more properly introduced. As usual, the Turtles are watching TV in their lair when a threatening letter arrives on an arrow. She and her "Shredder Elite" have captured April and Splinter—what else is new?—and so our heroes hop in the Turtle Blimp to rescue them. April gets in touch with them somehow, telling the Turtles where the bad guys have taken her and Splinter. As it turns out, they're in places all over America, apparently, so the Turtles follow the signal, leap down to the locations, and fight any one of a number of bad guys in order to get closer to Karai. Their opponents are a variety of warriors mostly taken from the Archie comics, including War, a spiky purple being who's supposed to be one of the Four Horsemen; Armaggon, a mutant shark; Chrome Dome, a mechanoid built by Shredder; Wingnut, the doofy mutant bat, and Aska, a headstrong ninja girl. Along the way are familiar foes such as (Cyber) Shredder and Rat King, who both look fairly intimidating and nonetheless are good choices for a *TMNT* fighting game. A clone Turtle shows up as well,

colloquially known as "Fake Brother" and sporting the same purplish hue as the clones in the other games. He's also the one holding Splinter captive, which is a pretty direct reference to the Mechaturtle fight from *TMNT I*.

The game's stages abide by the unwritten rule of fighting games: they're all places that have nothing to do with one another. But because the story is framed with a cross-country trip, most of them are relatively believable city-type locations: a rock

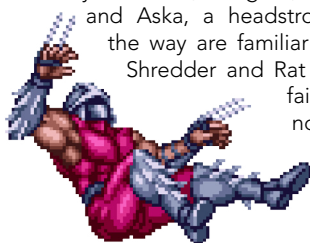
concert, museum, café, high-rise rooftops, and so on. It's the ones like the ancient ruins and the Japanese shrine with a giant, presumably living toad that are more in line with fighting game wackiness, and thank goodness.

In fact, the entire game has an over-the-top visual style that lends an arcade-style faithfulness. Besides the stages, the characters are big and detailed, have voices, move fast and have plenty of animations.

The non-story modes of the game are presented as a flashy, big money competition show on Channel 6 with April as host, with winners of matches standing beside a pile of cash. Even the menus are glitzy with stars and stripes. It's seriously on the level of games of the NeoGeo renaissance, and it wasn't even an arcade game.

What's also notable about the look is how "mature" it is. As mentioned, this isn't a cartoony game inasmuch as it's not based on the *TMNT* TV show, but it's not quite the rougher approach of the Mirage comics, either. The style of *TF*'s director and character designer Takemasa Miyoshi sits closer to the work of favored *TMNT* artist Michael Dooney, whose pupil-less, realistically-proportioned Turtles are the best-realized, and if Miyoshi sourced him for *TF*, it was the right choice.

The most important thing in the long



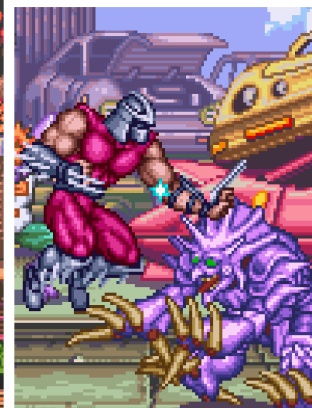
The 4Kids cartoon ends with the 13th episode of season 8 (*Back to the Sewer*).



The Turtles celebrate their 25th anniversary. A reprint of issue #1 is made available on Free Comic Book Day.

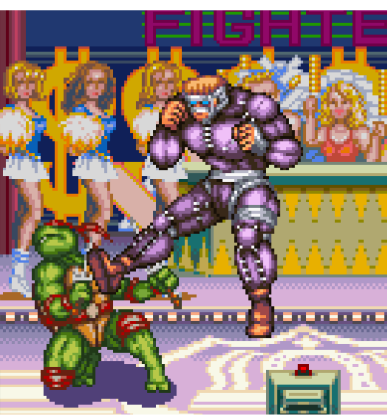
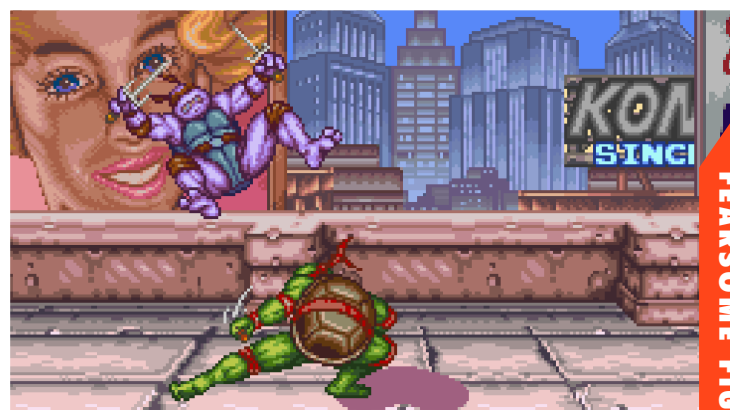
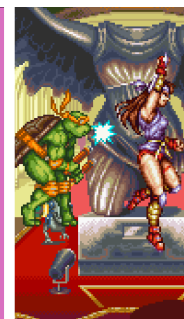
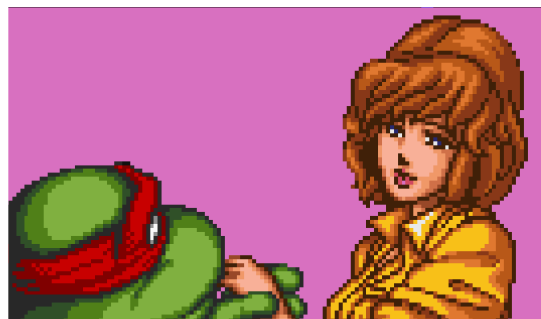


Plans are announced to build a *TMNT* theme park ride called *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 4-D Dark Ride* in Incheon, South Korea. Peter Laird will troll them five months later.



run is that *Tournament Fighters* on SNES really was good enough to be a legit fighting game. It's not the world's best or anything, because you can still do some pretty cheap, exploitative stuff in a match (especially if you're playing Wingnut), but compared to the other versions, you can tell the designers were keeping a close eye on the genre. You can do all sorts of cross-ups and combo strings, and everybody has a healthy lineup of special moves, including Michelangelo's wholly unrealistic "Dragon Breath" move where he spits a fireball from his mouth. And for 1993, it's remarkably up-to-date, with the ability to select identical characters (still a bit of a big deal back then), turbo settings, and even a super meter, which lends extra credence to the game's apparent NeoGeo inspiration (and only usable in non-story modes).

Luckily, the *Tournament Fighters* series wasn't a total lost cause. The Super NES got only two TMNT games, but it lucked out by getting the two best ones. Even the long line of *Dragon Ball* fighting games took years to properly ape the best original games in the genre, but it took Konami just three tries, and in the same year. Basically, *Tournament Fighters* on SNES is easily the best-crafted TMNT game since *Turtles in Time*, and it's the one you ought to play; accept no substitutes.



Turtles in Time Re-Shelled is released by Ubisoft and is widely panned, then it disappears in under two years.



Ubisoft gets *Smash Bros. Brawl* developer Game Arts to make TMNT *Smash-Up*. It is indeed like *Smash Bros.*, but with an anemic roster.



Peter Laird sells the entirety of the *Ninja Turtles* property to Viacom. Old-school TMNT fans shift in their seats.

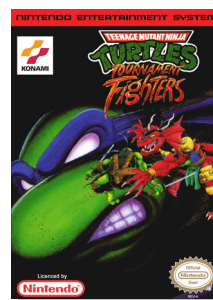


4Kids' swan song is *Turtles Forever*, an insane animated crossover movie featuring both generations of cartoon Turtles, plus the (tongue-in-cheek) comic book ones.



TMNT TOURNAMENT FIGHTERS

NES • 1994



K

onami's *TMNT* games may have hit some milestones, though mostly in a financial sense. On the other hand, *Tournament Fighters* on NES has a few real claims to fame: it's one of few Japanese-made games on the system to not come out

in Japan; it's one of the last official NES games ever, and it's one of very few fighting games for it. (Konami had one of the first, too, with the Famicom version of *Yie-Ar Kung Fu*.) Of course, none of those have anything to do with the game itself, which is a respectable but still kind of so-so product, not helped by it existing in the shadows of its 16-bit siblings.

The respectable part is that it has more than you'd think a *Ninja Turtles* fighting game for NES would have. For starters, it has a story that's somewhat reasonable compared to the batty plot of the Genesis version: the Turtles receive a letter from Shredder inviting them to a challenge "on the streets of Manhattan and see which of us is the most powerful." That is, no joke, the entirety of Shredder's scheme, if you could call it that; no twists, no Krang, no stealing New York. Because when you've had years of failed battles with the Turtles using an army of robots, mutant bounty hunters from another dimension, and just plain fucking magic, you want to see if you can take them on in a bare-handed street fight. Indeed, we never so much as see the Turtles' signature weapons in this game. The whole setup makes no sense in the greater *TMNT* universe, yet it's such a breath of fresh air in the realm of the games.

You also get good and bad endings based on the difficulty level, a tournament mode, and even a bonus stage where you try to bust through several wooden walls in under 30 seconds. All this in an end-of-life NES game? It's true!

The road to Shredder involves the Turtles having a fighting tournament with one another, plus Casey Jones and Hothead (a.k.a. Warrior Dragon, a mutant dragon-man first seen in the Archie comics). It's a tiny roster, plus four whole stages to fight in, and that's where the NES limitations aren't so surprising. Sure, there were plenty of cheap bootleg renditions of *Street Fighter* and other games on the system, but to make a good one with good graphics probably had a lot of roadblocks surrounding it. The best example of this is that you can't play a Hothead Vs. Hothead match because his sprite is so much larger than the others. An infamous cheat will let you shoehorn in two of them, but the graphics and logic overload makes the game a bit screwy.

In terms of the game mechanics, the NES version of *TF* sits in between the other two, perhaps leaning closer to the Genesis version. With two buttons, there's obviously no way it could compete with the hottest fighting games, but just by punching and kicking, you can get a lot done. Everybody has simple special moves, like Michelangelo's kangaroo kick or Casey's suplex, and they're mostly charge moves or double-taps followed by a button. (Double-tapping also lets characters run towards opponents.) To spice things up during matches, a floating pod comes by and



Michael Bay's production company acquires rights for a new *TMNT* movie sometime in the future. Fans shift in their seats again.



Nickelodeon formally unveils a preview of where they're taking *TMNT* in the next year. Guess what, it's a TV show and toy line.



IDW announces that they've licensed *TMNT* from Nick and will begin a new comic book series led by co-creator Kevin Eastman.



"SHREDDER, THIS BETTER NOT BE ONE OF YOUR LOUSY TRICKS!"

drops a red orb that when picked up will let the character throw a fireball with the traditional Hadouken motion, but then the orb flies out and gives the opponent a chance to grab it. Before *Smash Bros.* and some select arena fighters, few games in the genre featured items because they were either *Street Fighter* or trying to be *Street Fighter*, so it's interesting to see it in a largely ignored *Turtles* game. Still, the game doesn't have all the checks and balances a "real" fighting game would. For example, there's an inherent inability to block air attacks—not air blocking, but crouching and blocking and still getting opponent jumps hit when the character makes the blocking pose right before. It seems too crazy not to be intentional, crazy.



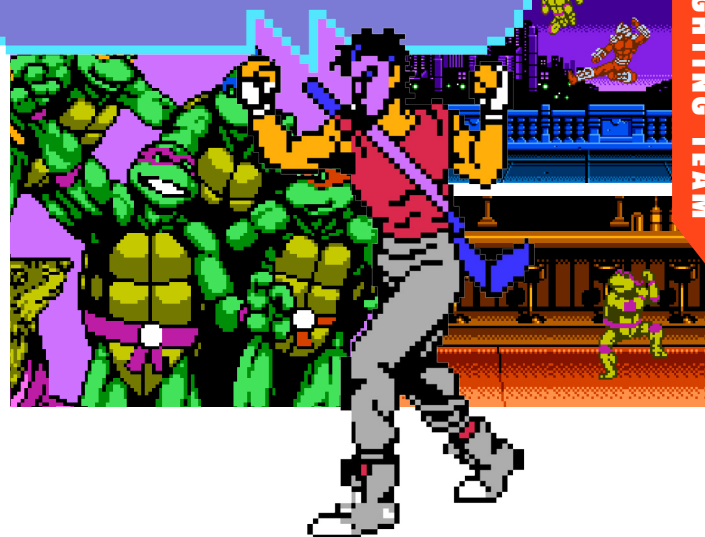
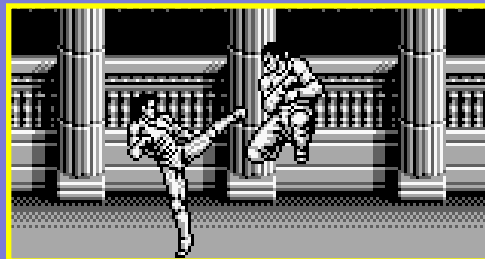
Then there's the little details. The stages are familiar backdrops in the beat-em-ups, like the sewer and the grimy alley, except the bar, which features a skull-and-crossbones flag in the middle. It's either a reference to *Turtles in Time*, or the whole stage was inspired by Mac's Bar in *Art of Fighting*. As for the Turtles, their renditions are again off-model, and their colors are mostly the same as in *TMNT II*, though Raphael is bluer than ever; he might as well be one of the clone Turtles from the other versions. But the graphics are generally well-done despite the game being essentially letterboxed, with a persistent *TMNT* logo at the bottom of the screen in every match. That Hothead sprite must've really done a number on the rest of the game.

Though it lacks some details that other fighting games had, even back then, *TF* on NES is the second-best of the "trilogy," but it's just too simple to be taken seriously, for reasons that should now be obvious. Still, this is where the *Ninja Turtles* franchise ended for the '90s, and though it wasn't a beat-em-up or even a decent sequel to *TMNT I*, the fact that the last Turtles game was also part of the last wave of NES games speaks to the series' popularity on the system, which sustained for several years, and gave us games that stayed in our minds for many more.



WHITHER GAME BOY?

The existence of *Tournament Fighters* on NES seems weirder when you consider that it wasn't also on Game Boy. *TMNT* games were just as frequent on the handheld and, ironically, the GB would quickly surpass the NES in its selection of fighting games. In fact, Konami made one of the first ones: *Raging Fighter*, a generic "world warrior" game that came out in 1993, the same year that the *TF* games debuted. Maybe it was a *Turtles* game at some point—at least it wouldn't have left Michelangelo out of the cold when it came to the box art.



FEARSOME FIGHTING TEAM



IDW publishes the first issue of their new *TMNT* series. It's the only new *Turtles* media for another year or so.



After auctioning off remaining merchandise, Mirage Studios shuts down.



SCENE 5

MUTANT MACHINATIONS



TMNT MANHATTAN MISSIONS

PC • 1991



In 1990, Konami set up computer software divisions in the West. They were not to the scale of their arcade or console businesses, as they mostly focused on products based on their other sure hits, like *TMNT*. Their games were more ports than original titles, but one of the first *Turtles* games was an original: *Manhattan Missions*, an action game for DOS developed by Canada's Distinctive Software, who became Konami's go-to development house for their PC games.

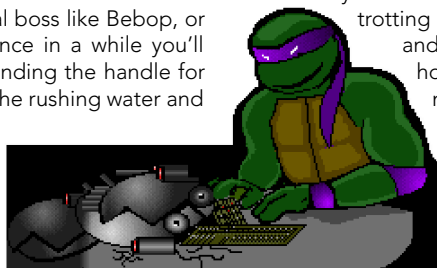
The story of the game opens with the Turtles' brief origin story, but one slightly different from the TV show and more in line with the *Mirage* comics. In fact, most of the game's cut-scenes are displayed as comic panels, with the intro in particular "narrated" by Splinter and later Leonardo, just like in issue number one. There remain several parts from the cartoon, but first, the story proper: as usual, the Turtles are sitting at home watching TV (in casual clothes, oddly enough) when a news report discusses a recent crime wave that's struck Manhattan, which must be pretty bad for it to get on the news. Shredder and the Foot clan claim responsibility for the crime wave, and the Turtles know what they must do: track the crime scenes, hunt down the bad guys and get rid of them.

When the game begins, you're presented with the eponymous Manhattan missions: a map screen with selectable areas where the bad guys are. Fortunately for the Turtles, Shredder's criminal masterminding isn't as theatrical as it usually is, because the crimes run a gamut of clichés like bank robberies or intercepting valuable shipments. The difference is in the criminals: one of the first missions has you going up against Triceratons, or mutant cat-men in another. Each stage has a "boss," who can either be another one of the regular thugs, an actual boss like Bebop, or a no-name gang leader. Every once in a while you'll also have to solve a puzzle, like finding the handle for a sewer valve so you can shut off the rushing water and push ahead. But really, it's all about staying alive, because enemies will make a beeline for you once you're spotted, and even the punkiest of punks can kill you in a few quick hits if

you're not careful.

PC games used to be almost exclusively known for their sophistication, with a regular stream of complex RPGs and simulations for hardcore adult gamers, and arcade-style action games were best left to the kids and their TV consoles. By the time *Manhattan Missions* was out, *TMNT* games were already established as fun and fast action games, but here the mark is pretty well missed. For starters, the game has a persistent timer; Shredder claims he'll take over New York in 48 hours, so you have exactly that amount of time to clear every mission and finish the game. Easy enough on the surface, because it ticks down in real-time, but you'll have to make sure the Turtles rest so they don't do too much fighting and deplete their energy meters, and that can take a handful of hours—not in real-time—to get everyone topped up again. Should they be drained, they're picked up by Casey Jones and incapacitated for a little while. Basically, the game is one big balancing act, for no other reason than to point and laugh at the player if they take but one minute longer to beat the game than they should.

But what's crazier about *Manhattan Missions* are the controls. For whatever reason, the game is not a simple jump-and-attack affair. You have two main keys to use, but they're more like toggles than instant action commands. Let's set the scene: when starting a mission, your chosen Turtle is in "walk" mode, just trotting along checking the place out. If and when it's time to attack (which, honestly, is usually the second the mission begins), you'll have to push both keys to switch to "fight" mode so you can actually use your weapons. Since fight mode is for pure self-defense, you can't do things you can in walk mode, such as climb ladders



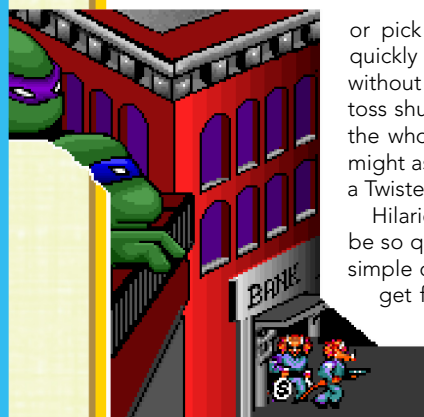
Nick lifts the veil on their new *TMNT*. The Turtles look more childish than ever, with stocky builds and jovial faces. At least we'll all have 2003.



Michael Bay lets slip that his upcoming *TMNT* movie will present the Turtles as an alien race. Everybody in the world loves this idea.



A new *TMNT* ride, *Shell Shock*, opens as part of Nickelodeon Universe at the Mall of America.

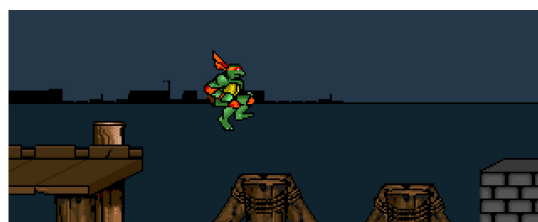


or pick up items. Likewise, you can't quickly use a weapon in walk mode without switching, though you can toss shurikens in a pinch. Nevertheless, the whole setup is deranged, and you might as well be playing the game with a Twister mat.

Hilariously, you don't actually have to be so quick on your fingers thanks to a simple cheat code: just press Ctrl+S to get five shurikens, the only weapon you can use in walk mode (if you have less than five), then toss them to your heart's content, and refill when needed. Most enemies

including bosses don't take that many hits before they're dead, so you can theoretically plow through every mission without ever going into fight mode (assuming you don't accidentally leap to your death), and so, with a simple keystroke we often use to save files, you can barely play *Manhattan Missions*.

Once again, it's odd that *Manhattan Missions* straddles the line between the cartoon and the comics. It's not a game filled with wisecracks, nor is it one with much violence or trips through time and space. It's simply a subdued Turtles game, "helped" by a severe lack of music, theme song or no. That seemed to be what Distinctive was going for, though, so chalk up one thing they managed to pull off. The weird stuff with the gameplay wasn't a problem unique to *Manhattan Missions*, either—PC action games had a knack for being slower and more complicated compared to the run-and-jump romps on consoles and in arcades. Who can say why, except perhaps because PC game developers were so set on creating cautious, methodical games no matter how exciting they tried to make them. On the bright side, at least *Manhattan Missions* could be finished, unlike Konami's previous PC TMNT game.



IDW begins publishing *TMNT* comics digitally on iOS. This includes re-releases of classic Mirage and Archie books, as well.

TMNT
PC PORTS

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

1990



et's step back a year to where this whole mess began. Part of Konami's PC initiative was merely porting their most recognizable NES games over to DOS. Again, Distinctive was behind most of that, and brought utterly dismal versions

of *Metal Gear* and *Castlevania* to the platform. And then it came time for *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*; a rebuilt version of the NES game. In a better world, this would present a great opportunity to take a problematic game and spruce it up into something more palatable. Instead, the PC version of *TMNT I* actually made the whole thing worse.

Like the other Konami ports, this is simply meant to be a one-to-one conversion of the original NES game, with every stage, room, enemy, and line of dialogue found in it. And it even has redrawn graphics, which ostensibly is a good thing, because it's nice to see NES graphics redone in the 256-color splendor of VGA. But the graphics are redone *completely*, to the point where this looks like an extra-cartoony version of *TMNT I*. Granted, that works for some sprites, like the weird two-legged hoppers and the fleet of flying enemies, but the Turtles are shrunk down by about a third, making them look more like the Preteen Mutant Ninja Turtles. Other parts are virtually untouched, such as the overworld maps, while other bits of art go way off the rails, like the nightmare-fuel renditions of Splinter and April, who looks more like Ronald McDonald than the attractive young woman the Turtles usually hang out with.

Because everything had to be squashed down and stretched out to fit the 320x200 VGA resolution (including fitting the status bar at the bottom),

you'd think the programmers would have made the necessary concessions to the game design, because you can't quite pull off the same game as it existed on the squarish NES screen. Well, they didn't. Instead, the port retains the basic physics of the NES version; in other words, the super-high floaty jumps. With smaller

Turtles running around in levels that only appear height-adjusted with the same kind of physics, you get gameplay that's even more maddening than the original. An infamous example pointed out on the Internet is a particular part of the sewers where you have to make a long jump across a gap, but there's a low ceiling. In the NES version, you could clear it fairly easily by taking the correct angle, but in the PC version, with the stage graphics stretched, the gap is made wider while the wonky re-created physics stay the same. Therefore, the gap simply cannot be cleared normally and will always end with your Turtle falling into the water. This isn't an isolated incident—the whole game is filled with stuff like that; nearly impossible without cheating (by mashing the left side of the home row on the keyboard, you can walk on or through most surfaces).

Considering Distinctive's "pedigree" with Konami's NES ports, the level of quality in this version of *TMNT I* doesn't really surprise. Hardware limitations are one thing, but rushing to rebuild a probably already-rushed product

can only end in disappointment and anger. If you go back and recall the weirdness of the original NES game, this PC version is basically all of that filtered through an even weirder screen that resulted in an even worse game. "Nowhere to go but up," one might say. But they'd be wrong—Konami and Distinctive had even more for us.



JUL 2012



Nickelodeon sets September 29 as the premiere of the new *TMNT* TV show. Will it recapture past glory, or end up as turtle soup?



TMNT THE ARCADE GAME 1992



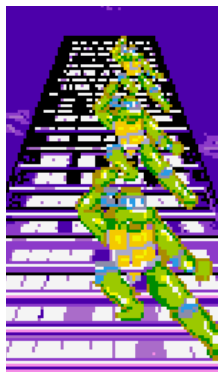
Earlier in this issue were some criticisms of *TMNT II* on NES and how parts of it felt rushed despite being as accurate to the original arcade game as possible. That all still stands, but when Konami released a port of *TMNT The Arcade Game* on PC, it was the third and final piece of evidence that the state of *Ninja Turtles* PC games got exponentially worse with each new title. And in this case, it could have been so much better.

Thankfully, this version of the game doesn't take after the NES port, but rather is based on the honest-to-god arcade game. And at a glance, it seemed to do a much better job of remaking it—it's not perfect, but it looks pretty darn close. However, seeing a pretty picture is no doubt what Konami wanted when it came out and you passed by the game shelf at the computer store. In motion, it's an entirely different story.

Let's start right at the beginning, after you choose your character. The intro sequence with the Turtles leaping into the burning building is mostly intact (minus voice), except when the scene cuts to the shot of the Turtles falling from the other rooftop, they're all Leonardo. Likewise, all the Turtles leap down and run in at the same time, as opposed to Mike crash-landing on his butt and having to catch up. It's an inconsequential couple of details, but no less funny to see.

And it gets funnier. Once things get into action, it's obvious that the animation quality just isn't there. Honestly, the whole game moves in a stuttery fashion. This isn't totally surprising considering that screen scrolling in DOS games was essentially a hack, and tons of other action games on the platform move the same way. The point is, you really do have to see it in motion to realize that this is *TMNT: The Arcade Game* in name only. Foot soldiers move in clumps, no other sprites are bigger than the Turtles (try not to laugh when you notice that Rocksteady is now shorter than April), and some parts are a little too faithful, like the "Electric" store in stage 2.

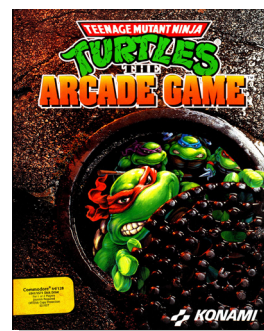
And whereas the port of *TMNT I* had some



semblance of the NES game's music playing throughout it, this version of *The Arcade Game* had literally no attempt to reproduce the original's sound. The entirety of the game's soundtrack is a bouncy, almost rag-like tune that plays during the character select and over the intro sequence, and never again. What's left is a series of basic bloopy sound effects and no music. And no, of course it doesn't support sound cards.

Konami also released an Amiga version of the game. Amiga computers shared a Motorola 68000 processor with the original game's arcade board, and could produce graphics just as colorful. One would think it would be a better version, but no, it's a duplicate of the DOS version, but with added flaws such as a terrible color-flipping effect on the Turtles' sprites: Don may have a purple headband, but the bands on his arms and legs are clearly Leonardo's. The Amiga could also accomplish synthesized sound, but once again, this is basically a silent game. Several other ports of the arcade and NES game made it to other computers, with even dodgier versions for the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC, but the makers of those knew that those systems could never produce anything that looked like the original, and they at least attempted to capture the general look of the game, just like with the NES version. But with the Amiga, you had a system that could have pulled it off, yet no one tried. We've all heard of wasted potential, but here you can see it happen right in front of you.

Given that Konami relied on the same developer for most of their games on the platform and that they were all putrid, there's little reason not to believe the existence of the whole PC division was a cash grab. There isn't one redeemable game in all of the company's early PC lineup, and it's too bad that the *TMNT* brand got the worst of it. But the Turtles survived, of course, and fortunately the continent's millions of households with computers also had an NES, so most of us were spared the flagrantly awful experiences of *TMNT* on PC. Raise a slice of pizza to that.



The *TMNT-tacular SCROLL 07* is finished. It does all right.



BOSSES BY THE NUMBERS

HOW OFTEN DO THE TURTLES' FOES SHOW UP, ANYWAY?



SHREDDER (ALL FORMS) 14

Shocking. Still, the *Tournament Fighters* games stunt this number: Shredder's technically not a boss in the SNES version, and he's not even in the Genesis version; in fact, that's the only TMNT game here without him.



KRANG (ALL FORMS) 9



ROCKSTEADY 7



BEBOP 6

Bebop would've been equal with Rocksteady if he'd shown up in *Hyperstone Heist*. Slacker!



BAXTER STOCKMAN (ALL FORMS) 6

With his fly form added to *TMNT II*, Stockman is about as prominent as Bebop and Rocksteady.



LEATHERHEAD 3



PIZZA MONSTERS 3



TOHKA, RAHZAR, SLASH, GRANITOR, TRAGG, DIRTBAG, TRICERATON, TATSU, KARAI 2

Too many two-timers! Chalk it up to a lot of overlap between *TMNT III*, *IV* and the Game Boy games.

CRITERIA

Totals are based on appearances in all of the *TMNT* games featured in this issue, excluding ports, unless a character was added for it. Midbosses are considered, as well as unplayable characters in *Tournament Fighters* and ones who end the story modes. Repeat appearances in the same game with the same form are also excluded (e.g. boss gauntlets; Rocksteady and Bebop together).

...AND WHERE DOES EVERYBODY* COME FROM?

*Including all non-Turtle characters from *Tournament Fighters*!



TV SHOW 14

Several villains were adapted from the original Mirage comics, but their game appearances are clearly from their cartoon versions, hence the beefy number.

ORIGINAL 10

Mechaturtle from *TMNT I*, the new bosses from *TMNT II*, Scale Tail from *Radical Rescue*, and Sisyphus and Aska from *TF* were all made for their respective games. (Clone Turtles from *TF* included)

COMICS 7

The *TF* games really fill this one out, as Karai is from the Mirage series, and almost all of the supporting mutants come from the Archie run.

MOVIES 3

Aska from *TF SNES* would've been here since she was originally meant to be Mitsu from the third movie, but... she ain't!

"PIZZA TIME"



The of Misfit Hardware



ARTIFACT #NSK008

Nintendo M Series Demo Units

Demonstrably cool

Those who have even a passing curiosity in funky retro game hardware are probably familiar with the Famicom Box, a big metal unit that housed several different Famicom games, meant for use in Japanese hotels. This isn't about that, but the concept is one Nintendo used multiple times, and not just in Japan, because what may be more familiar to people on this side of the globe are two of its NES cousins, the M8 and M82 store demo units.

The "M" series consists of several retail display fixtures Nintendo shipped to stores, though most of them were unplayable models behind Plexiglas. But the M8 and M82 are two of the playable NES units that you've probably seen in a store if you were alive during its heyday: a flat gray unit that you set a TV on with two NES controllers (and a Zapper!) sticking out, and a bank of available games inside. The M8 was the first: a bulky plastic thing that featured Nintendo's early "black box" titles; up to 16 of them all built into the unit, and able to be cycled through with a tiny nipple-like button that got worn out early and often. Though they offered the opportunity of playing games for free, owners could set a time limit for each game before it flipped back to the attract mode, or just go wild and set it to unlimited play. Not that setting even the shortest time limit would stop kids from hogging the unit all day—a free game is a free game.

A couple of years later, Nintendo discontinued the M8 and replaced it with the M82, which had the same basic design, but shaved the number of games down to 12. However, this time it used actual, interchangeable cartridges, so an owner could insert any NES game they wanted, which was probably why Nintendo made the new unit in the first place, what with the monthly influx of new games once the system really took off. A window on the front lets you see all the games that are loaded in, for maximum impulse-buy effect. As such, the M82 got lots of mileage in stores well into the peak years of the NES, and likely kept stores from getting updated units, much to Nintendo's chagrin, I'm sure.

On paper, these demo units aren't much different from having a regular NES—aside from maybe a special attract mode screen saver—and they definitely weren't a new idea considering almost a decade of home video games that came before. But whether they're from Nintendo, Atari, or Sega, they nonetheless carry a certain allure for old-school fans. Looking at all those games lined up in the box and pushing



The M8 (top) and M82 (above) demo units were the best ways to sample NES games, aside from renting them. When the Game Boy and Super NES were brought in, Nintendo changed their retail fixtures into sleeker single-game kiosks and "Nintendo Power Previews" video stations.

that selector button no doubt makes up more than a few memories of weekend afternoons, and for the truly obsessed fans and collectors of today, the thought of loading up the unit with all your favorites is just too nice to resist.

When games moved into the 16-bit generation and onwards, store kiosks were less about multi-game changers and more about keeping it simple by having a regular system under glass, changing games one at a time as usual. That way, there isn't as much special hardware to replace if things go bad, and kids who want the system get a nice clear view of it at all times. The double-edged sword with that was they didn't have automatic timers, so kids could be even bigger jerks when they hogged the games.

While the methods changed, that did nothing but solidify the old NES units as hot collectibles years later. After all, with the non-removable first-wave games in the M8, it's like an interactive time capsule. But like most ornate video game retail displays, be prepared to part with a few thousand dollars if you truly want to play with power.

AUTO MODELLISTA

CAPCOM • PS2/XBOX/GC • 2003

What happened to all the cool racing games? OK, the likes of *Gran Turismo* and *Forza* are pretty cool for a number of good reasons, but there used to be a time when racing games strove for an attitude without caring so much about accurate re-creations of cars and courses, and gamers accepted that. And at a time when everybody thought they could make a racing game, Capcom stepped up with *Auto Modellista*, which was, and still is, one of the coolest racing games ever made.

Inspired by racing-based manga and anime series like *Initial D* and *Wangan Midnight*, *Auto Modellista* employed bright colors, deep outlines, and plenty of speed lines to make it look like a cartoon without being cartoony. Other games like *Tokyo Xtreme Racer* tried to adapt the allure of those comics with realistic graphics—and totally did, let's be sure—but *Modellista* tried

to re-create the feel of the actual comics. And with a minimalist UI design on top of that, it just oozed coolness.

Again, this was a time when several big game companies were, for some reason, trying to respond to *Gran Turismo* with their own realistic racing games. Almost all of them were too gimmicky to come close, but at least *Auto Modellista's* gimmick was immediately apparent, as opposed to some advanced physics or hamfisted story that you had to play the game to see. But those games are, in a way, what doomed *Auto Modellista*. The biggest criticism that met the game was that it seemed to suffer an identity crisis. Like the competition, its cars were based on the real things, and you had several different customization options at your disposal, but it also had those bright, cel-shaded colors and was dressed with all manner of manga-based visual effects.

Whether it was true or not, that suggested unrealistic arcade-like gameplay akin to *Ridge Racer*, not a sim-leaning tuning-fest like *Gran Turismo*. A reliance on drift-happy handling didn't help the game win many friends, either, especially for players unfamiliar with what inspired it, and crashing into walls more often than winning races.

Perhaps with a tighter focus on getting out there and racing instead of collecting, customizing, and mastering the finer points of drifting, *Auto Modellista* would have more quickly been recognized as an underdog among genre fans. Instead, it was a little too ahead of its time; a little too full of gumption to keep gaining the head of steam it should have. But it's still worth remembering for its developers, who dared to go with a visual design that no racing game would have before or after (unless it had "Kart" in the title). And who could say that isn't cool?



We're all assholes

Gamers who invest themselves in every bit of the industry love a new reason to attack game sites and their writers, especially when they find out a site is making a Web documentary about themselves, as they did in the past month. You could almost hear the dam burst as hate flowed in from all sides, decrying the practice in a variety of ways, and not just from the anonymous kids and kiddish adults on message boards, but from colleagues, as well. *That* part felt weird to me, because bagging on the other team was something I rarely saw outside of the offices where I worked and the email threads we started. For the first time, I took a mental step back and wondered if internal shit slinging goes on outside the video game world to the same degree that I've known it.

I know what you're thinking: *no freakin' duh*. Yes, I'm sure CNN and Fox News would like nothing more than to see the other burn to the ground, but I wonder how many of their people *actually* keep an eye on what the other is doing, when there's so much more important stuff going on in their own worlds every day. Since I'm still unemployed, I could only think about my own life: I like to read about technology, gadgets, and so on; it's a natural secondary interest for a game nerd, I'd think. I catch up on news and reviews from a few different tech sites, and as often as I do with video game sites. But as a writer in a similar field, I barely care about who their authors are. I listen to their podcasts, and maybe I'll be a little irked by an ignorant statement from someone who's supposed to be an expert, but I stop caring once the show is over. Contrast that with video game coverage, where I know who everybody is, my game podcast count is near zero, and I keep a mental shit list of anyone who irked me (and who I haven't met, of course).

The obvious reasoning is that I'm just not as passionate about gadgets as I am with games. And in general, electronics don't lend themselves as well to pontificating as games do; it's easier to have a clear-cut opinion about a cell phone than an emotional adventure game. But that can't apply to everybody. I'm sure tech journalists have other tech journalists that they hate and enjoy saying so to their coworkers, and I already know there's forums and other communities where readers criticize the tech sites they read for bias or inaccuracies or for being a bunch of hipsters, but I just don't pay attention to it. And there's a good chance you can apply this to any industry that has a healthy field of coverage: Cars. Celebrity news. Veterinary equipment.

So maybe the loudmouths on the message boards and the snarky bloggers who all have chips on their shoulders aren't speaking up out of concern over how we treat the medium. Maybe it's because we're all assholes, and always will be. But if we stay aware of who and what we like, maybe we won't be as concerned with what we don't.

rdb

A nighttime photograph of a city street, likely in New York City, featuring several tall flagpoles in the foreground with flags flying. In the background, there are illuminated skyscrapers, including one with a prominent red light on top. A large building with a curved facade and the word "MOSCOW" is visible on the right. The street is filled with cars, their headlights and taillights creating a sense of motion.

scroll

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SPECIAL THANKS

David Bastien

ONLINE

The SCROLL web site is 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.



next

FREAKED THE FOOTS ,MANGLED
THE MOUSERS AND TOTALLED
THE TECHNODROME .
THAT'S .. TURTLE POWER! !
BUT ,WHAT ABOUT THE SHREDDER
AND KRANG ...! ?
BURNED TO TOAST ?
VAPORIZED TO MILKSHAKE ??
OR ..ESCAPED TO DIMENSION X ?
UNTIL WE KNOW ,NONE OF US CAN
SLEEP SAFELY IN OUR BEDS ..
ER , SHELLS!

