

SCROLL

THE JOURNAL OF VIDEO GAME APPRECIATION



ENDURANCE



01

MARCH 2011

Blitter

Frame One	6
Japan Desu	10
Play These Already!	14

Cover Story

ENDURANCE: Super NES - 20 Years	16
The Most Enduring SNES Games	20
SNES RPGs You Should've Played	22
The Co-Op Machine	24
The Endurance Handbook	26

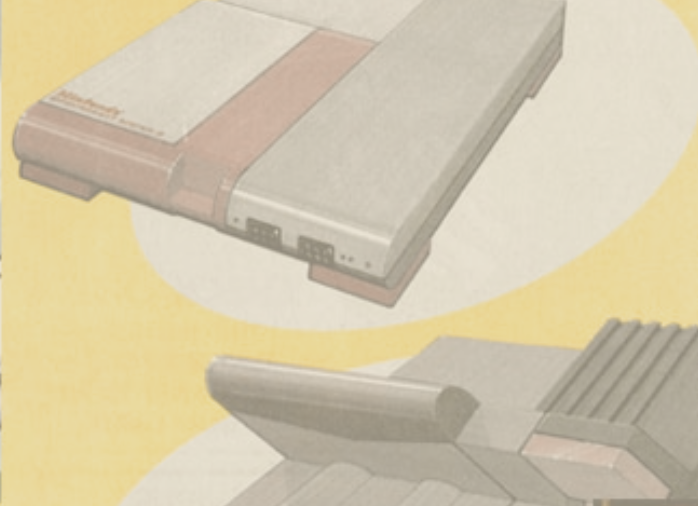
Scanline

The Island of Misfit Hardware	29
Fullscreen	30
Wait Wait, Don't TALK Me	32
In Defense Of...	34

Closing Text

36



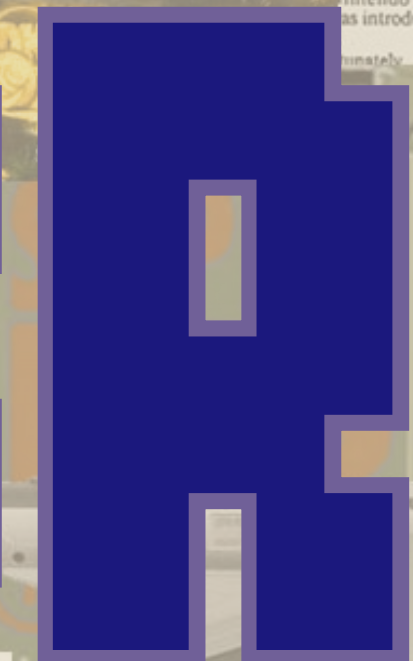
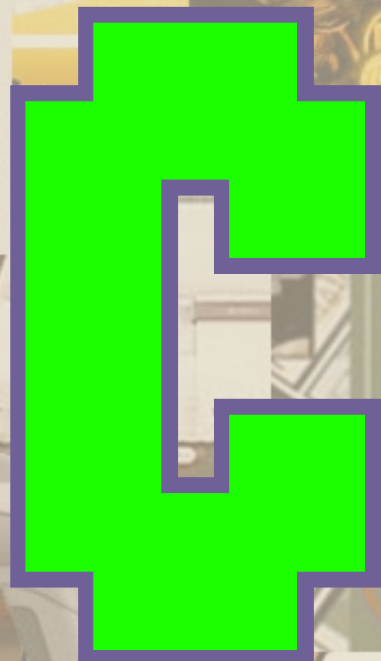
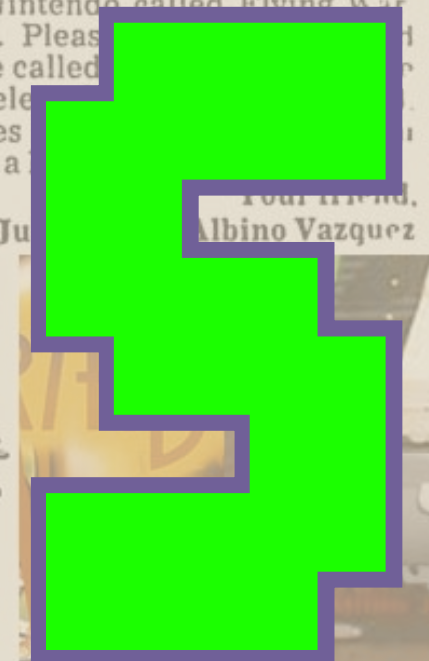


...T SYSTEM
...ment system with dig
...World Cartridge and
...SALE 184.99

Dear Santa,
I have been good. I have good
grades in school. Please bring me
a Super Nintendo with a game
named Baseball Simulator 1,000.
Could you please bring a game
for Nintendo called Flying War-
riors. Please bring a game called
game called ...
homele ...
homes ...
have a ...



New Super
TWICE A YEAR, the
tion's electronics mar-
turers, distributors and
other to show off new
products. It's called the
Electronics Show, an
event was held this
Chicago. Attendance
1,000.
our purposes, this
new games, particularly
at will be coming out
s. However, this show
special, as the long-av-
Nintendo Entertainment
has introduced forma-
tunately to most



er Nintendo has plenty of drawbacks

The new Super system does have stereo audio outputs. The soundtracks of the Japanese counterparts are truly phenomenal when listened through a stereo system. Also, the different ways to play of the game

There will be tons of new software to back up the new system. Virtually every Nintendo licensee has a game in the works. Hot titles include "Final Fight," "Gradius 3," "Darius Twin," "Super Castlevania," "Super Ghouls and Ghosts," "U.N. Squadron," "Hole in One Golf," "Super Adventure Island,"

World" game. Worse yet, be prepared to stand in line to buy the system. Though it will not hit the stores until September, production is not expected to keep up with demand. Shortages of systems are expected to occur around Thanksgiving. Kind of sounds like 1986 (the year the Nintendo Entertainment System came to Milwaukee) all over again!

These are the tabs

Sega's *Dreamcast Collection* isn't the revivalism you're looking for, but it could be worse

Up in front is Sega themselves, who have been trying to make a big deal of their Xbox 360 and PS3 ports of a select—very select—few Dreamcast games. *Sonic Adventure*, *Crazy Taxi*, *Sega Bass Fishing*, and *Space Channel 5 Part 2* have or will be showing up on Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Store, and soon they'll be collected on a single disc called, simply, the *Dreamcast Collection*. Reactions to the collection on the internet followed the usual pattern of what happens when you get your hopes up too high, and

It stands to reason that if this quartet of games remained separate and online, they'd be regarded as odd but passable choices in retrospect. Instead, the added decision of packaging them together elicits much more extreme reactions, as no insane Dreamcast fan thinks of sitting Sonic and Ulala alongside a *fish*, to say nothing of the lack of *Jet Grind Radio*, widely considered to be the divine seed of the Lord God Himself. Regardless, none of this is new coming from Sega, a

Does that mean the dream is dead? Not necessarily—Sega doesn't think so, even if their realization of that thought doesn't agree with many others', and indie publishers like redspotgames and NG:DEV.TEAM are keeping the DC alive in their own ways with interesting arcade-style games, in a case and everything. After all, if there were no people to remember how awesome the Dreamcast was, we might instead have a compilation with *Bass Fishing*, *Dynamite Cop*, *18 Wheeler*, and the PlanetWeb browser.

Puckman's New Post

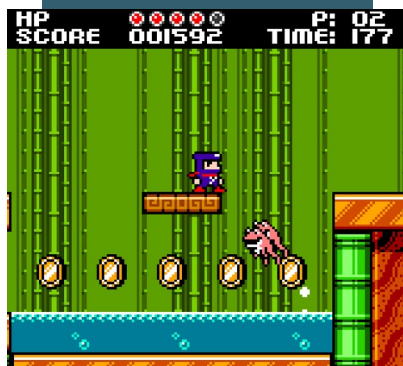
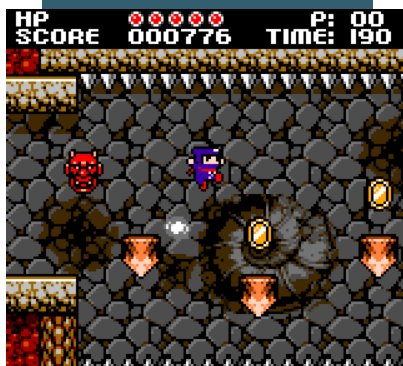
Namco kicks the tires on their arcade division with *Pac-Man Battle Royale*

Surviving in the arcade business seems like a bigger challenge than working PR for an oil company, but Namco is one of the old guard still walking tall, even if their biggest arcade products are *Tekken* and any combination of *Ms. Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Bosconian*, or *Rally-X* in a novelty cabinet. But for once, Namco can brag about a cool new arcade game that doesn't seem like it will come to a console any time soon. It's *Pac-Man Battle Royale*, a new four-player variation on *Pac-Man* that sounds like a riff on Nintendo's *Pac-Man Vs.* and looks a lot like *Pac-Man Championship Edition*.

In practice, it's just barely similar to both. What you have is a free-for-all battle to the death where the last Pac standing wins—like *Bomberman* without the bombs. Essentially, players can eat one another and score wins in a game round, but not without first collecting a power pellet to become “super,” and only if the other player(s) aren't powered-up as well—like trying to put two magnets together, same-sized Pac-Men will just ricochet off one another. In between this war of attrition is the ever-present threat of ghosts, too, so death can come from two sides.

The *Battle Royale* cabinet is what you might call a “tall cocktail” design, something suited for walking up to it and playing, almost as if it's a pool table at a tavern (which is certainly Namco's idea, cup holders notwithstanding). Units began shipping in mid-January, so if you can't find one locally, either wait patiently a little bit longer, buy one yourself, or get out and go to more bars, you pussy. (www.facebook.com/PacManBattleRoyale)





Super Shinobi

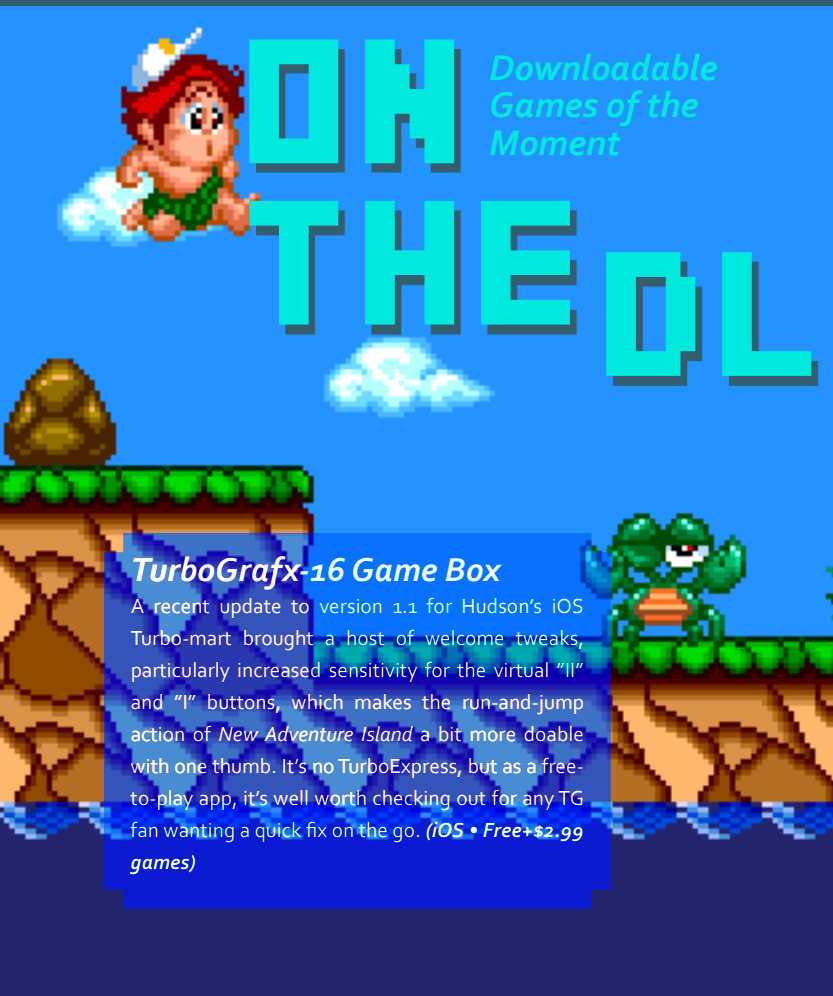
Ninja Senki harnesses true 8-bit spirit in free PC game

A huge number of today's indie games take after games of the pre-2000 heyday, but too often, they're referred to as "8-bit" when there isn't much in them that truly reflects the days of the NES and its contemporaries, other than pixel art. Jonathan Lavigne's Windows game *Ninja Senki* is more in line with what an 8-bit sensibility stands for, and though it's not entirely a nostalgia vector, it looks good, is decent fun, and costs nothing. (And supports game pads).

Lavigne is an accomplished pixel artist, working at Ubisoft and having contributed low-res art to similarly retro-inspired games such as *TMNT* on GBA and assisting on *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World*. In *Ninja Senki*, that same inspiration is shaped as a challenging platformer that's most obviously like *Mega Man*, but moves a bit

swifter, and with a dash of ultra-violence when enemies burst into gobs of blood—well, as "ultra" as a game this cute can get.

And from the not-too-detailed graphics, not-too-overdesigned levels, and appropriate NES-style sound, *Ninja Senki* hits many of the same nerves that *Haggle Man* did in *Retro Game Challenge*. Granted, it's presented in a narrow aspect ratio that's closer in spirit to the Game Boy Color than the NES, which makes playing seem extra cramped—especially when blown up on your giant computer monitor—but the game is clearly designed for it, and to be honest, when you've died for the billionth time, you'll appreciate not having 200 more pixels of enemies trying to kill you on your next life. (www.ninjasenki.com)



Downloadable
Games of the
Moment

TurboGrafx-16 Game Box

A recent update to version 1.1 for Hudson's iOS Turbo-mart brought a host of welcome tweaks, particularly increased sensitivity for the virtual "II" and "I" buttons, which makes the run-and-jump action of *New Adventure Island* a bit more doable with one thumb. It's no TurboExpress, but as a free-to-play app, it's well worth checking out for any TG fan wanting a quick fix on the go. (iOS • Free+\$2.99 games)

Mega Man 1 & 2

Transferred to the US PlayStation Store from Japan's comes the 1999 PS one "Complete Works" edition of the first two *Mega Man* games (the other four have yet to show up as of this writing). They're virtually the same as the NES original, but with bug fixes, fast weapon-switching, and a "navi" mode where you can summon tips at certain points in stages. You could find these versions of the games as part of the American *Mega Man Anniversary Collection*, but regardless of them not featuring English navi text, they're technically the native versions, and the best ones, to boot. (PSP/PS3 • \$5.99 ea.)



E.D.F.

Jaleco was never really known for their shooters, but they gave it a pretty decent go with *E.D.F. (Earth Defense Force)*, which is now on iOS thanks to DotEmu's *Jaleco Arcade Classics* series. You don't get power-ups in the traditional sense, but via an experience meter that fills as you keep shooting. It's horizontal, it's 16-bit, and come on, you've played enough *R-Type* for this century. (iOS • \$1.99)



PULSECODE NEW GAME MUSIC WORTH HEARING



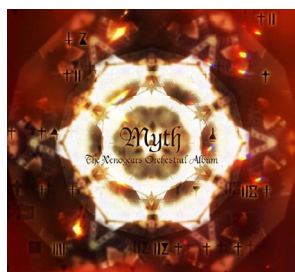
Opooona Original Soundtrack

Three years late, but never untimely, Basiscape's work on the ultimately mediocre sci-fi RPG is supremely comfortable, with Hitoshi Sakamoto and crew creating a few hours' worth of suitably spacey tracks that will make you wish the rest of the game was just as good. Best such example: "Blue Desert Hotel." (¥3,675)



echochrome ii: a soundtrack

Available in retail in Japan or on the PlayStation Store elsewhere, Hideki Sakimoto gives us an utterly beautiful 75-minute symphony of piano and strings that's also more than a bit bouncier than the somber songs of the original *echochrome*. Regardless of your interest in the PlayStation Move game, the music is still a must-listen. (\$4.99)



Myth: The Xenogears Orchestral Album

It is what it says it is, and many fans may only need a name. *Myth* hits 14 memorable songs in *Xenogears*, with original composer Yasunori Mitsuda teaming with the Bulgarian National Radio Orchestra for this one, which seems all too fitting, doesn't it? (¥3,000)



Rom Cassette Disc in Jaleco

For whatever reason, retro game omnibuses have been increasing in number this past year, and Jaleco finally throws in their hat with this over-100-track audio history. When you absolutely, positively need a sample of *Ninja JaJaMaru* music overnight, look no further. (¥2,310)

JAPAN です



Gaga for the Gals

A bombing of babyfaces opens another year of seemingly endless otakudom

For the nerdiest game nerds in Japan—those who own Xbox 360s—the biggest game of February is not *Bulletstorm*; it isn't even anything that includes guns, unless they're included as part of a downloadable costume. It's *The Idolmaster 2*, Namco's much-anticipated sequel to their talent-fostering sim.

The 360 had become the de facto home of the franchise after a port from the arcade version in 2007, and after one semi-sequel and a few portable versions later, it returns home, and only home; you won't find an arcade version soon, if ever. Odd as it may sound, it's no doubt due to Namco's consistent supply of *Idolmaster* DLC that worked wonders for the company, since getting new goodies for your girls is an instantaneous process as opposed to buying up cards and going along relatively slower in the arcade (and the sheer number of goods for download makes *Rock Band* look like a Fun Size bag of M&Ms).

In past *Idolmaster* games, the player—the faceless “Mr. Producer”—chose one new prospect at the 765 production company, and attempted to turn them into a nationwide sensation (ostensibly, anyway, as the game boiled this down to a series of branched conversations, minigames, and constant live performances). In *Idolmaster 2*, you're responsible for a trio, and must begin a genuine three-pronged assault on the zeitgeist. The sequel also introduces a three-member boy band, but they're the stars of the rival production company, not the player's, so it

seems female *Idolmaster* fans won't get to dress up and shape the lives of promising young men after all (obvious-looking ones, that is; not counting cross-dressing Ryo from the DS edition). But don't be surprised if some dude-ful *Idolmaster* clones begin to crop up within the next year.

As it turns out, the first quarter of 2011 is turning out to be quite a bounty for imaginary girl fetishists the world over. Preparing us for *Idolmaster 2* is fellow Xbox release *GalGun* (right), the “light gun” shooter where schoolgirls ambush you with affection after you, a mild-mannered schoolboy, is shot with one too many of Cupid's arrows by an angel-in-training. To neutralize the onslaught of waifs, you fire your “pheromone shots” (which is a much more innocent-looking practice that it sounds) at them as they rush forward—basically, it's the expression “beating them back with a stick” turned into a video game. If it sounds insane, it is, and though *GalGun* may not look too obviously like a parody of typical gal games, it definitely knows how nutty it is: A good old-fashioned “boss button” (though here it's the “Mom button”) pauses and hides the game under a fake retro RPG for however long you need it to. Even if it were serious, you have to respect

GalGun for trying something very different with a schoolgirl game besides a typical melodramatic adventure. Uh, right?

For similar levels of girl-osity in a genre we can all get behind, the 360 is also getting Konami's *Otomedius Excellent*, the horizontal shoot-em-up that, just like *Idolmaster*, is a console-only sequel to the original arcade game, with new levels and characters to supplement the original cast of cyborg maids-slash-fighter ships. Catch it on March 24 in Japan, but amazingly, Konami is planning to release it in America... one of these years.

Speaking of America, loners on this side of the world are already enjoying the PS3's *Hyperdimension Neptunia*, the latest Idea Factory-developed RPG from NIS where the very young, very girly heroine can transform into a cyber superhero in a fantasy world loosely based on today's game industry. Idea Factory's games are rarely top-shelf, but *Neptunia* seems better realized than their past work, and at least cameo from Alex Kidd. All told, it's an exciting time for questionable games that only a fraction of the world's gamers would ever be caught alive, much less dead with. Well, I hear *Bulletstorm* is pretty fun.





The Night Before 3DSmas

Nintendo's new handheld
begins a potentially long life

By the time you read this, the Nintendo 3DS will have launched in Japan, heralding another era of portable gaming for the company that became synonymous with it. But it seems things have changed: With Apple's constant posturing of iOS as the new best place for portable games, and the impending release of Sony's "Next Generation Portable," Nintendo may have to work a little harder to get the general public to make the 3DS their first consideration for playing a game on the go.

Of course, the 3D helps. The autostereoscopic screen for the system will mark the first affordable mass-market application of "goggleless" 3D, and while the effect isn't quite as absorbing as a big-screen movie, it's a big enough step in technology that pretty much telegraphs what Apple, Sony, or someone else might do in the years to come.

In terms of Nintendo's own history, the 3DS is also a pretty nifty upgrade. Beyond the striking leap in graphics quality, the system has a wealth of built-in applications, from AR games, a pseudo-face-scanning Mii maker, a step counter, and native "tag mode" features that further encourage you to take the system with you.

Nintendo's been relying on their recent marketing techniques to pitch the 3DS—specifi-

cally, getting practically every comedian under 35 to appear in promotional material, from print ads, to TV, to the company's own public expos (January's "Nintendo World 2011"), as they express their amazement and excitement at games we can't even properly see on video. As a matter of fact, you won't find one teen or tween in Nintendo's marketing. Considering the extra features of the system like the aforementioned step counter and tag mode (StreetPass), the 3DS is apparently being positioned as a lifestyle device for Generation Y. Then again, they also want you to believe the same young people play *Wii Party* on a regular basis.

Around 30 days after Japan gets it, Europe and America will get their shipments of the 3DS, with the American price at \$249 and a launch lineup that includes almost of all of the heavy hitters from Japan, such as *Super Street Fighter IV*, *Ridge Racer*, and some not-so-heavy, like *Combat of Giants: Dinosaurs*.

What remains to be seen is if, like the DS before it, the 3DS actually could become a lifestyle device. *Brain Age* was the catalyst for a new ecosystem of "nongames," but with 3D films and the mere sight of the most impressive 3DS games, 3D has become synonymous with entertainment. And, let's be honest, the asymmetrical size of the 3DS screens makes using it book-style a bit unappealing.

Would developers bother making educational stuff that wouldn't necessarily be 3D? Or could the original DS find new life as a slightly more serious product, like an electronic dictionary? After all, the DSi XL hasn't been out that long, and maybe an elderly Japanese mother still has more Korean phrases to learn from her Bae Yong Joon game. Let's see what the next 365 days bring.



I CAN'T BELIEVE
THIS SHIT IS
¥9,240





Striking Twice

Final Fantasy XIII-2 adds to the "Fabula Nova Crystallis" pile

Back in the heady days of 2003, Square Enix announcing *Final Fantasy X-2* was a shock of the most baffling proportions. The first direct sequel to an *FF* game? A story that went a little too far off the rails? Well, at least it was fun. And though Square has since produced all manner of *FF* sequels and spin-offs, that somehow didn't keep the recent announcement of *Final Fantasy XIII-2* from not feeling insane, either. Until rumors of it started ramping up in January, no one could have really saw it coming. And maybe that's because Square Enix had dedicated themselves to "Fabula Nova Crystallis," the overarching brand for *FFXIII* and its soon-to-come sister games, a similar tactic used in the "Compilation of Final Fantasy VII" campaign that gave us sequels and prequels to that game. The difference was that the "regular" *FFXIII* was the centerpoint in a family tree of games that all had "Final Fantasy XIII" in their name, but hardly anything else in common. They would go off into different worlds, but share key concepts from the main game (like the mythology of the l'Cie and Fal'Cie).

Unfortunately, it didn't all go according to plan. The next major game in the semi-series, *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*, has been wrapped up in development hell for nearly half a decade now, though a new extended trailer alongside the *XIII-2* announcement tried to bring back some faith that the game will come out before the PlayStation 5. And *Final Fantasy Agito XIII*, which was once a cell phone game before being quickly shuffled over to the PSP, has now been removed from under the *Crystallis* banner and renamed *Final Fantasy Type-0* (right), because, allegedly, it was veering too far from the *Crystallis* mythology.

With all this dysfunction, it becomes easier to consider why *FFXIII-2* is happening—something needs to fill the void, similar to how *X-2* kept people playing a "real" *Final Fantasy* game for a few years before the arrival of *FFXII*. But it remains to be seen if *XIII-2* can fill both of the voids

in the *Crystallis* lineup.

If anything seems sure about *XIII-2*—even a little bit—it's that, compared to *X-2*, it bears even less of a resemblance to its predecessor. The game's scant teaser trailer shows heroine Lightning in a suit of armor complete with sword and shield, fighting alongside(?) a tall-dark-and-handsome type in a similarly dark netherworld. Why, what ever could have led to this?! Speculation was helped along by *Final Fantasy XIII Episode 1*, a short story in a booklet included with the Japanese Xbox 360 version of *FFXIII*, which described events where the game left off. In particular, Lightning leaves the rest of her friends to explore the wilds of Gran Pulse, looking for a way to restore Fang and Vanille, her Pulsian friends who seemingly sacrificed themselves for the greater good. At some point, Lightning apparently enters another world, with a black sea (not *the* Black Sea) spread out before her in a world that is also without color or sound. Sounds like a *great* setting for a high-def RPG. The black sea could be spotted in *XIII-2*'s teaser, so the natural assumption is that it continues the novella.

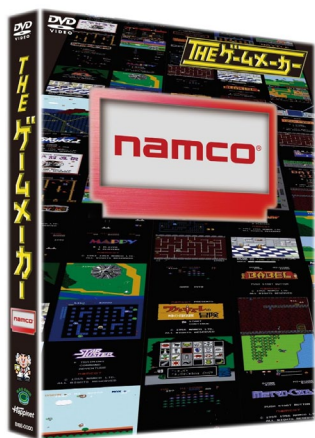
And with such a big change in scenery, fans are wondering what will the game will actually play like. *FFX-2* had replaced the predecessor's battle system with a honed, speedier version of *FF*'s typical Active Time Battle, but *FFXIII*'s battle system was also pretty swift, if not pretty comparable to *X-2*'s. Will Square bother fixing something that isn't, on the whole, broke? Will they at least make AI-controlled allies able to be directed manually? Could they introduce a stricter job system? Maybe the battles will be reformed entirely and replaced with a semi-strategy game like *Suikoden*'s castle battles?! And of course, the big I'm-joking-but-not-really question: Will there be towns? There are plenty of big questions still to answer, and plenty of letdowns to deliver to stubborn fans when *FFXIII-2* hits near the end of 2011. Maybe.

BELIEVE IT:



The rough equivalent of \$115 buys you a ticket to *Imouto Paradise*, the new PC sex adventure where you try to bed five different little sisters. Different on the outside, anyway—they all happen to share the player character's surname. Oh, brother.





'Co and 'Mo Get Their Own Sho

New volumes in *The Game Maker* DVD series chronicle Namco, Tecmo



The staff behind *Game Center CX* are back with another series of their spin-off DVD franchise *The Game Maker*, a selection of discs with reams of gameplay footage of Japan's most treasured Famicom developers (previous volumes covered Irem, Jaleco, Taito, and Sunsoft).

The new editions cover the 8-bit gameography of Namco and Tecmo, and just like the other discs, are made up primarily of long video clips of games in chronological order. If that sounds like a

bore (and it kind of is), the GCCX crew has plenty of extra segments to spice things up, from interviews with key game developers, spotlights on memorable magazine ads, play-through challenges with the ADs, and for this pair of discs, a new music segment—in the last volumes, an independent nerd orchestra performed medlies in a concert hall; now, a skilled pianist plays game tunes in a dim bar while GCCX host Shinya Arino sits and listens.

Both DVDs are just over \$30 if you import them from Amazon.co.jp or other such outlets. As mentioned, you shouldn't expect anything equally or more entertaining than your average episode of *Game Center CX*, but for those of you who like to learn a thing or two about old Japanese games such as *Captain Tsubasa 2* or *Warpman* on video, minus the white guys in embarrassing YouTube videos, *The Game Maker* is your best choice.



A Different Sort of Swan Song

Small-time publisher Qute returns with the shooter *Eschatos*, and brings their WonderSwan legacy along for the ride

The Xbox 360 shoot-em-up *Eschatos* may look like a student project, but in motion, it employs lots of creative camera motions that most 2D-style shooters just don't have. In that sense, it's definitely worth checking out, but as clever as *Eschatos* may be, its big draw for many shooter nerds is what comes with it: *Judgment Silversword*, a WonderSwan shooter that was the product of M-KAI, a garage developer who made the game with Bandai's "WonderWitch" commercial dev kit, and *Cardinal Sins*, a follow-up to *Silversword* which was only available by downloading it via the WonderWitch web site.

Silversword was an envelope-pushing shoot-em-up for the handheld, just as *Recca* was for the Famicom, but as is typical of such treasured shooters, it nosedived into obscurity while its price went in the opposite direction.

Eschatos will be released on March 24, and if you're interested in any part of it, you may want to set aside the cash. And for those who have their heads on their shoulders and decided against buying a Japanese 360, Qute has made it clear that *Eschatos* will be a region-free disc, something that will elicit sighs of relief from bullet-dodgers the world over.

PLAY THESE ALREADY!



DRAGON QUEST VI: REALMS OF REVELATION

This Valentine's Day marked a time of celebrating love, perhaps even curling up with your special someone and feeling grateful for what you have. So, if you haven't yet, go ahead and look at *Dragon Quest VI*, give it a warm smile, and spend a nice, quiet evening together. Make it several evenings. You'll be glad you did, and your relationship will feel stronger than ever.



YS I & II CHRONICLES

XSEED's reverse-chronology releases of the Ys PSP games ends at the beginning with *Ys I & II Chronicles*, and even though this may be the 96th re-release of the two classics, Falcom delivered an airtight port and the best English versions, courtesy in part by Falcom superfan Tom Lipschultz. If only we could all be as lucky; If only I could help localize a revival of *Toilet Kids*...

RAD NEW RELEASES THAT ARE WAY BETTER THAN GOING OUTSIDE!



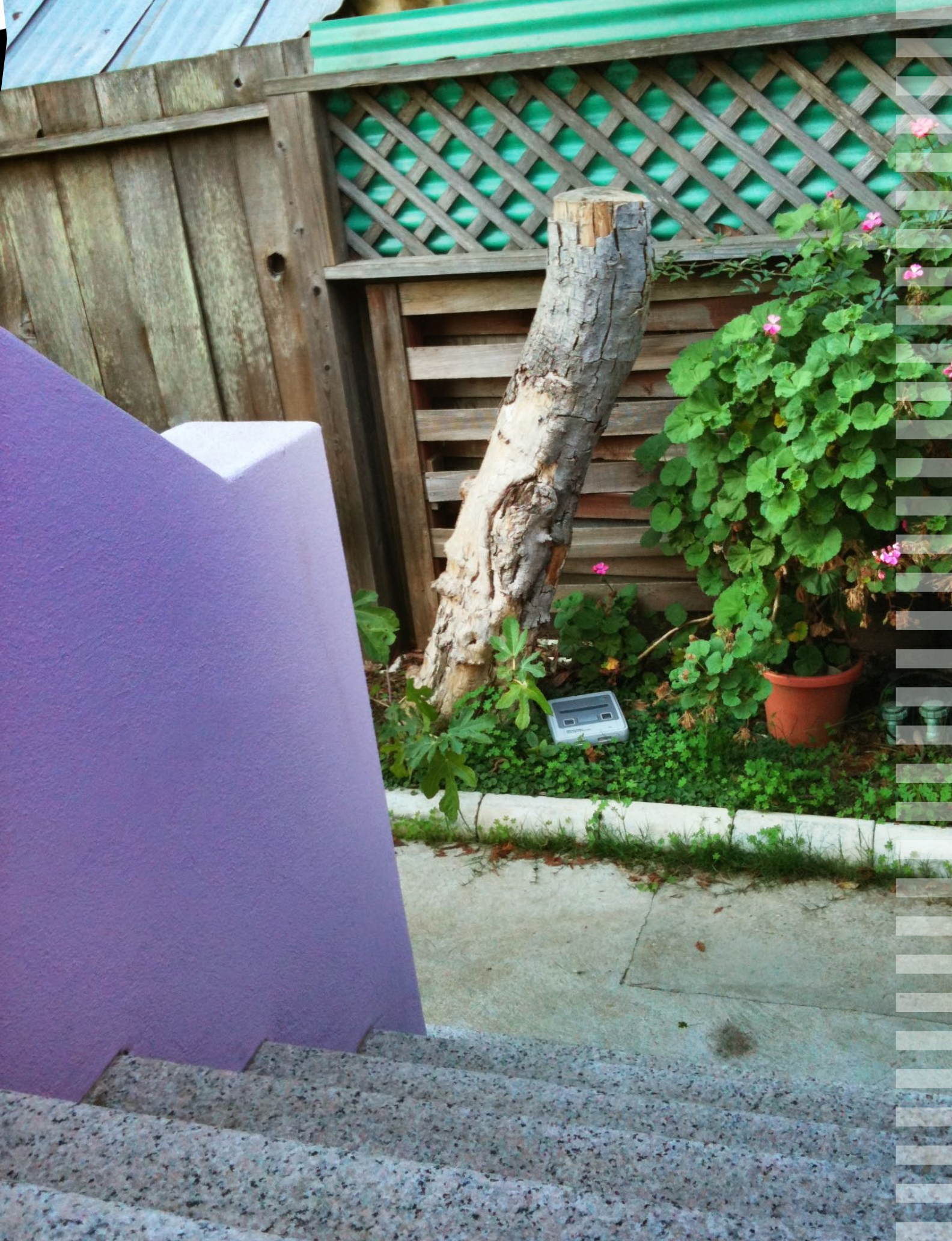
HARD CORPS UPRISING

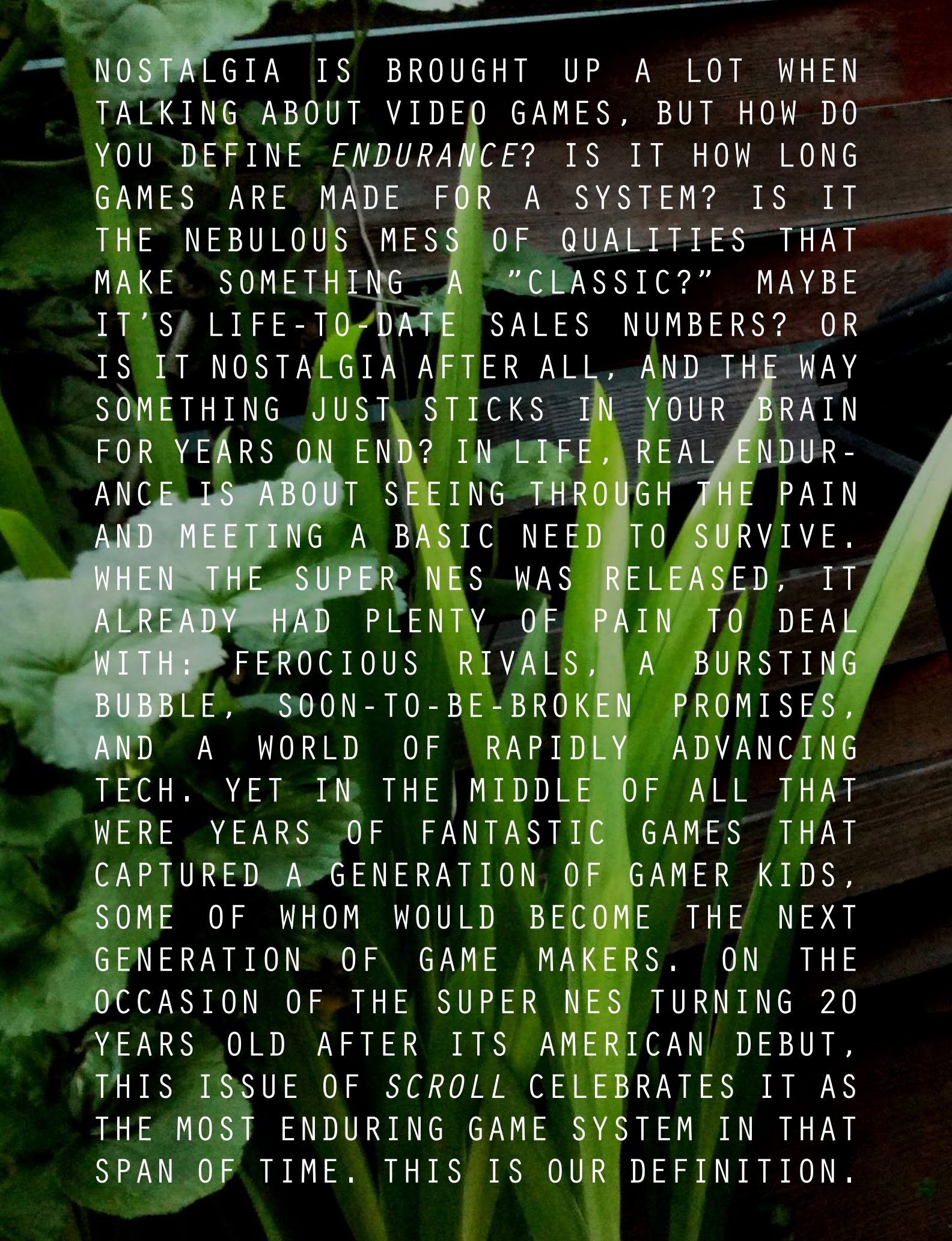
Wish fulfillment is hard to come by in the game industry, but you start to wonder if there really is a higher power when Konami and Arc System Works get together to make a 2D prequel to *Contra Hard Corps*. On the other hand, *Uprising* seems to move a little slower than its awesome Genesis namesake, and Arc's affinity for an anime art style may affect its reception, but for now, let's just appreciate the fact that it exists.



DODONPACHI DAIFUKKATSU BLACK LABEL

For those who like their shooters like they like their coffee, Cave has the new home version of last year's *Daifukkatsu Black Label*. Don't let the name scare you off: *Black Label* has plenty of interesting tweaks to the last iteration of the game, chiefly the ability to fire both regular shots and your super laser simultaneously, but a new "red mode" to go with it, where a red meter fills the longer you use both weapons, and when it tops up, the enemy difficulty jumps up. Maybe you can be a little scared.





NOSTALGIA IS BROUGHT UP A LOT WHEN TALKING ABOUT VIDEO GAMES, BUT HOW DO YOU DEFINE *ENDURANCE*? IS IT HOW LONG GAMES ARE MADE FOR A SYSTEM? IS IT THE NEBULOUS MESS OF QUALITIES THAT MAKE SOMETHING A "CLASSIC?" MAYBE IT'S LIFE-TO-DATE SALES NUMBERS? OR IS IT NOSTALGIA AFTER ALL, AND THE WAY SOMETHING JUST STICKS IN YOUR BRAIN FOR YEARS ON END? IN LIFE, REAL ENDURANCE IS ABOUT SEEING THROUGH THE PAIN AND MEETING A BASIC NEED TO SURVIVE. WHEN THE SUPER NES WAS RELEASED, IT ALREADY HAD PLENTY OF PAIN TO DEAL WITH: FEROCIOUS RIVALS, A BURSTING BUBBLE, SOON-TO-BE-BROKEN PROMISES, AND A WORLD OF RAPIDLY ADVANCING TECH. YET IN THE MIDDLE OF ALL THAT WERE YEARS OF FANTASTIC GAMES THAT CAPTURED A GENERATION OF GAMER KIDS, SOME OF WHOM WOULD BECOME THE NEXT GENERATION OF GAME MAKERS. ON THE OCCASION OF THE SUPER NES TURNING 20 YEARS OLD AFTER ITS AMERICAN DEBUT, THIS ISSUE OF *SCROLL* CELEBRATES IT AS THE MOST ENDURING GAME SYSTEM IN THAT SPAN OF TIME. THIS IS OUR DEFINITION.

A photograph of a black recycling bin with its lid open. Inside the bin, a white Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) console is visible, resting on a clear plastic bag. The bin has several labels: "GARBAGE ONLY" in small white letters, a "Rethink waste" logo with a recycling symbol, and a large white identification number "F1085031". The background shows a green wall and a wooden surface.

ENDURANCE

SUPER NES - 20 YEARS

F1085031

GARBAGE ONLY

**Rethink
waste**
Recycling is the
best way to
reduce waste.

ATMO
ONLY
EAS

PLANNING IS IMPOR- TANT TO SUCCESS,



baffling Famicom Adapter, was retooled in 1989, and further refined closer to 1990, finally ready to realize its potential.

But even even after the delays and up to release, The Super Famicom still impressed people. Chip-based graphics scaling made an option, rather than a necessity, out of redrawing sprites to simulate perspective. Manipulating whole screenfuls of graphics brought 3D worlds ever so slightly closer. Sony's sound chips made the other guys' FM synth sound like the screeching of the damned. Combine that with demos like the pre-*Pilotwings* "Dragonfly," and a sneak peek of the next *Mario*, and you'll turn more than a few heads.

But for those interested in the Super Famicom because they wanted to publish games for it, an engineer might not have shared your enthusiasm. The PC Engine and Mega Drive were lean and mean, but the Super Famicom, in spite of its good looks, was a tortoise in the technology race. A 3MHz processor made bringing speedy arcade action games to the system a bit of a challenge, and the standard screen resolution was the same as the Famicom's. The consumers didn't care, though, and trusted Nintendo's brand.

RUNNING START

Besides, any doubt that may have persisted about the thing faded pretty quickly after the first few months of its life, when everybody started making money. Reliably, Nintendo turned their second cartridge console into a second phenomenon. Virtually every publisher making Famicom games decided to make Super Famicom games, and by the time the Super NES was ready for America, a good year's worth of games had been made for Japan. Not all of them were great, nor suitable for other cultures, but Nintendo's constant patience had paid off. *Mario* and *F-Zero* were destined for the tops of the charts, but launch window showpieces like *ActRaiser*, *Castlevania IV*, *Gradius III*, *Final Fight*, and others proved that there was a hell of a lot of potential in the years that would follow.



and for Nintendo, it's all about thinking ahead. Announced in 1988—perhaps conceived earlier—the Super Famicom was not to be taken lightly. The 8-bit Famicom was already huge; huger than huge, and Nintendo had to make sure to avoid a sophomore slump. Not to mention that at the time, NEC's PC Engine was already out, and Sega's Mega Drive had a good amount of interest from gamers leading up to its release. The Famicom was still huge, though, so Nintendo could take their time. And yet, in what is now a pretty uncharacteristic move, they announced the Super Famicom two years before it would be released. Of course, that wasn't really planned—things change, and the original SFC design, with its chubbier look and

The problem was that the potential came with a price. In Japan, the country's economic bubble had reached its threshold in 1990, and games were priced in an equivalent 70-to-80-dollar range, which certainly met with some gripes, but not much worry.

After the bubble burst, the prices didn't get any lower. Manufacturers were still contending with the production costs of developing and boxing games for a high-level system, on top of Nintendo's stricter licensing agreements keeping both prices and print runs above the median. Eventually, games broke the 10,000-yen barrier, and some kept going.

Outside Japan, it was a similar story: \$49.99 for a new Super NES game was a blessing, but \$69 was a necessary evil if you wanted a new release at that very moment—of course, bonafide hits like *Street Fighter II* were worth saving up for, and naturally earned more than enough profits to make the Asian recession a little bit easier to deal with.

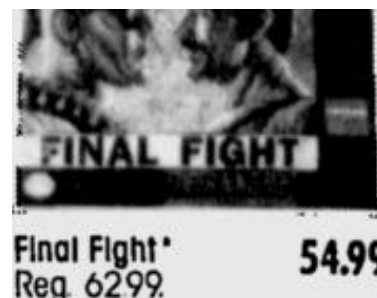
But again, beyond their price tags, it was nice that Super NES games just looked great. Today, no one worries about color limits, but with the SNES and its 32,000-color palette, it was a load off, and a step towards putting more realistic game scenes on the television. Unsurprisingly, a lot of early games used earthy tones, or were generally dark and moody, but the ones that went the extra mile in detail were the ones that still looked great to this day. Capcom was a standout developer, producing gorgeous examples like *Super Ghouls 'N' Ghosts* and *The Magical Quest* that seem extra impressive when you take a step back and realize they're from 1992 and weren't arcade ports. By the late '90s, as many developers became entranced by the use of digitized CGI graphics, the system still got beautiful RPGs like *Star Ocean* that could easily compete with the better 2D games on the PlayStation.

FEELING THE BURN

Though the SNES rode high since its launch, it couldn't sit pretty. Sega and the Genesis had two big scoops of mindshare from American and European gamers, and the company had already made clear that they loved a good fight, as their earlier "Nintendon't" ads illustrated. The 1991 SNES launch was mere months after the release of *Sonic the Hedgehog*, the best weapon Sega had (perhaps ever) to fend off Nintendo. From then on, Sega turned up the heat, doubling up on their "cool kid" image and bashing Nintendo with the blind confidence of a playground bully. Nintendo stuck to the high road and let their products speak for themselves. Sonic was cool, but how cool would he look after witnessing the spooky, rotation-heavy levels of *Castlevania IV*?

Sega stayed on course through 1992, when the release of *Sonic 2* and supplementary games like *Streets of Rage 2* and *Mortal Kombat* (plus its blood code) kept them positioned as the cool kids. Was any of it necessary? From the people who were there, Sega was more confident than threatened, so maybe it wasn't necessary, but it kept them in front for quite a while. But slowly, Nintendo climbed.

By many accounts, the battle came to a head in 1994, where both Sega and Nintendo saw their strongest lineups emerge in full force. *Donkey Kong Country*! *Sonic 3*! *Super Metroid*! *Contra Hard Corps*! At the same time, Nintendo stopped playing nice in America and transformed their marketing into the Gen X-empowering "Play It Loud" campaign,



TL: Early glimpses of the Super Famicom kept the hype train at full steam for nearly three full years. **TR:** Much to parents' chagrin, SNES games started at higher prices than the other systems'.

BL: The first year of SNES games was almost all showpieces. **BR:** Sonic was meticulously designed to undermine Mario mania. When the bugger worked, Sega kept the hits coming in barbed ads

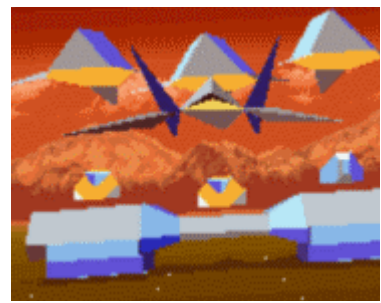




which, rather than calling out Sega by name, merely matched their message: *No, we have the best games, and have for a while.* *Donkey Kong Country* in particular reminded the entire world that by virtue of its planning, the system could produce the best visuals for a home console—even if they did come from Silicon Graphics render farms first.

Jurassic Park was redefining computer graphics in films.

Three years later, the new system, the Nintendo 64, was released, and though it was impressive, it wasn't that much better than the 32-bit consoles that came before it. With weird hardware-based anti-aliasing and a cartridge-based console that represented Nintendo's resistance towards CDs, the N64 was comparatively as hobbled as the SNES, perhaps moreso, but that's a story for another time.



AGAINST THE ELEMENTS

NEC and Sega had at least one perceptibly good advantage over Nintendo: the CD-ROM. Both the TurboGrafx-CD and Sega CD were presented as leaps forward, with games that supported redbook audio and full-motion video. Nintendo stayed relatively silent on the format, but rumors persisted that it was only natural they would make a CD drive for the SNES. It was just too advantageous not to ignore. Right?

Sony's sound chips for the console dovetailed into an extended partnership to develop not just a CD add-on, but a two-in-one system known as the Play Station. You know the story by now: In the thick of it all, Nintendo turns their back to Sony and instead allies with Philips and their CD-i format. The new partnership ended up having nothing to do with the SNES, and became a black mark on Nintendo's record as they lent Mario and Link to a bunch of nobodies.

And as the rest of the world was falling in love with CDs, Nintendo once again held firm, and went against the notion of add-ons by unveiling the Super FX chip, an in-cartridge graphics accelerator that brought real polygonal graphics to the system, once again bettering its rivals in the 3D effects department.

Star Fox proved what the Super FX chip could do, and though the game was still pretty slow, it was a competent shooter. Unfortunately, the chip just added to Nintendo's already vice-like manufacturing costs, so while there was a convenience for the consumer who didn't have to buy a new piece of hardware, the publishers were the ones eating their own lunch. The result was a pitiful number of Super FX games, and oddly ill-fitting ones, like *Stunt Race FX*, which was conceptually sound, but a inherently counterproductive to the overall speed of the SNES and SFX combo.

Some games even became bigger than the Super NES itself. The slow tech inside the system kept many shooters and other flashy arcade games away, but the door was left wide open for RPGs, a genre that didn't need running and jumping, and positively flourished on the system. In Japan, 8-bit RPGs had largely been various riffs on *Dragon Quest*, but in the SNES era, the loosened restrictions on graphics and memory brought quite a bit of new ideas to the genre, or at least expansions of old ones. Squaresoft painted outside the lines often with games like *Live A Live* and *Secret of Mana*, Nintendo created a whole new sect of rabid fandom with *EarthBound*, and there isn't a soul alive who hates *Chrono Trigger*. Meanwhile, traditional RPGs were a relative rarity on the Genesis, where action-RPGs and the more strategic *Shining Force* series picked up the slack in between *Phantasy Star* sequels.

The Super NES was barely two years old in North America when Nintendo announced their intentions for their next system, the "Project Reality" platform. By joining forces with Silicon Graphics, Nintendo was certain that whatever the next console was going to be, it was going to have the best graphics ever seen. That was 1993, when SGI's hand in

SECOND WIND

Against many odds, the SNES survived almost to the end of the '90s. A redesign of the console in 1997 re-positioned the console as a "beginner's system," much like the redesigned NES had been. The good news is that you could still find SNES games in stores; the challenge was finding the good ones. The better RPGs were all snapped up, and the new system had no pack-in at first—why didn't they keep the *Super Mario All-Stars* & *Mario World* cart? 1997 had its highlights, like *Kirby's Dream Land 3*, but that was practically ignored while regressive titles like *Frogger*, *Arkanoid*, and yearly EA Sports games made the final years of the SNES sound like the wheezes of an old dog. But even in 1997, the Super NES still stood for something. Nothing would keep it from being regarded as a big step forward, a platform that brought amazing color, graphics, and amazing games that have a lasting feel stronger than most other 16-bit ones. Not to mention the best controller ever.

Today, any gripes about the weaknesses of the Super NES are irrelevant, and well-worn arguments of the console wars. No matter what, it's the games that will always stand out. No matter which one jolts your nostalgia the most, it all comes back to where the true endurance is, and why the Super NES makes such a supreme "retro" system. You can pull it from your closet or buy it from a used game store, pick up any given game, whether it's *Chrono Trigger*, *Pocky & Rocky*, *Donkey Kong Country 2*, or *Tecmo Super Bowl*, and still get plenty of fun out of it—enough to not feel like you wasted your time.

That's not to say that the SNES will endure forever. Sure, it's as great as it was 20 years ago, but from now on, who knows? High-def graphics, especially of the hand-drawn variety, will become more commonplace as the decades go on, and even today's "retro" games are at least upscaled when brought back in a port. Things like Virtual Console can bring back some of the magic, but the Wii can't last forever, either.

However, it's what the SNES established and kept maintaining that makes it so powerful. Nintendo's own Game Boy Advance and DS kept the SNES around in spirit, with not just ports and remakes, but a whole stable of great 2D games that—if you'll pardon the hackneyed phrasing—kept the fun alive, and relevant, in spite of them not having the highest possible resolutions.

And in terms of game interfaces and design principles go, the 16-bit era solidified a foundation that successive generations didn't stray too far from, so it's possible that to the average (though also open-minded) kid, something like *Contra III* can still feel as instantly gratifying as something like *Call of Duty*. The Super NES hit a sweet spot: despite the fact that it landed in a hailstorm, its timing couldn't have been better. Graphics, games, and memories that have stood the test of time, showing us all that for the past 20 years, it could just simply, and greatly, endure.



TL: "Play It Loud" is nothing if not laughable pandering, but it nonetheless sent a message that Nintendo was changing its tune. **TR:** *Star Fox* prepared us for the future of game graphics, but its pricey tech limited publishers.

BL: RPGs like *Final Fantasy VI* thrived on SNES, though Squaresoft's classics were expensive, highly-sought by those in the know, and soon hard-to-find. **BR:** The SNES "Jr." was one last grasp at relevancy for the old warhorse



THE MOST ENDURING (AND ENDEARING) SUPER NES GAMES

They're not underdogs, but they might still knock off a sock or two



C



G



F



H



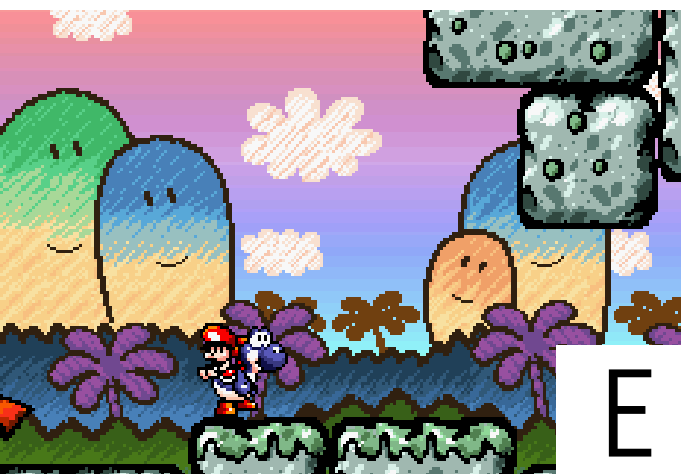
A



D



B



E

A] SUPER MARIO WORLD

It came with the system, it was the first thing anyone wanted for it, and c'mon, it's *Super Mario 4*—how could it not stand the test of time? Besides blowing away *Super Mario Bros. 3* with 96 levels, *Mario World* made a great, if subdued introduction to the Super NES world. The cartoon style was much more realized: the world burst with color and had a few humongous enemies to contend with, and they weren't even bosses. Perhaps some charm was lost from before—a lack of animal suits and airships in Dinosaur Land will do that—and it wasn't as gratuitous with the graphics effects, like scaling (Konami had plenty of that to go around). However, for a humble period of time where “3D graphics” referred to independently-scrolling background layers, you'd have been hard pressed to find a better introduction to 16-bit than *Super Mario World*.

B] CHRONO TRIGGER

Somehow, despite being over \$70 and quickly going out of print; despite resurfacing in an imperfect PlayStation port, *Chrono Trigger* turned into the 16-bit RPG worth caring about, even long after its sequel, *Chrono Cross*. Does anyone outright hate it? Will anyone resist the urge to play it over a holiday week? Likely not, but there isn't enough space here to try and figure out why *Chrono Trigger* became such a force. It is what it is, I suppose—an enjoyable time-travel saga with some of the greatest graphics and music on the system, and of course, more endings than you know what to do with.

C] THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

Its title not-so-subtly hints at the stepping back in the timeline of the *Zelda* mythology, but it also belies a return to the overhead view of the original NES adventure, and the stubby matroska-like Link. For those let down by *Zelda II, LTP* gave them everything they wanted and more, thanks to all that sweet Super NES power. It's the most well-rounded *Zelda*, the basis for all sequels after it, and the one that never leaves the short list of any fan of the series.

D] SUPER METROID

The novelty of the Game Boy made *Metroid II* a decent return for the series, but what would really solidify the adventures of Samus Aran as classic sci-fi action was *Super Metroid*. Much like *A Link to the Past*, the finer points of *Super Metroid* had also drawn a template for the series from then on, with *Metroid Prime* acting like a hard rock cover of it, and *Fusion* and *Zero Mission* picking up the 2D torch. Then there was *Other M*, while different enough, was repeatedly dinged for being a little too cinematic. As such, *Super Metroid* continues to come out on top.

E] SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

Super Mario World had telegraphed the next few years of SNES platformers for the system's life, and *Donkey Kong Country* unfortunately brought a wealth of ugly copycats for the rest of it. As if to show that good ol'-fashioned hand-drawn art was still alive, Nintendo released *Yoshi's Island*, with an unmistakable pastels-and-charcoal look. As much as CGI transplants and digitized actors were practically becoming standard, the fact that there were more colors to mix and match in the levels of *Yoshi's Island* did nothing but help the game feel as fresh as hell. While loved to death, some may be hesitant to place it at the top of the best quote-enquote *Mario* games, but there's no shame in calling it your favorite.

F] FINAL FANTASY VI

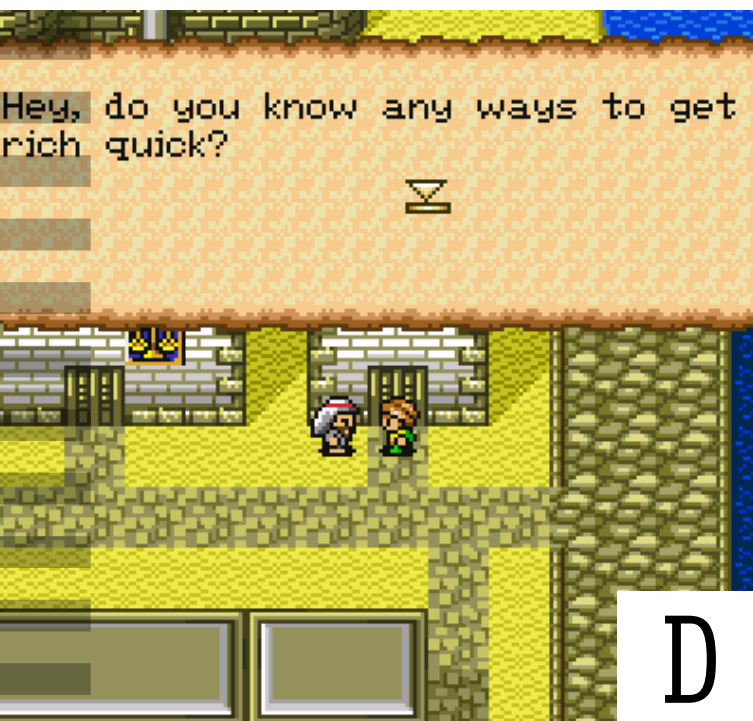
Chrono Trigger had made quite a splash, but would it even exist if not for *Final Fantasy VI*? After *FFIV* and *V*, Square upgraded the series' art style, ending up with the best-looking RPG of the year. On top of that, you got one of the better stories in the series' history (not that the writing itself was spectacular, but you gotta love a strong ensemble), a further-honed Active Time Battle system, some great music—even an opera—and a nice send-off to the 16-bit era for the *Final Fantasy* franchise. Up to 40 hours of traditional JRPG goodness that can stand the test of time.

G] CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

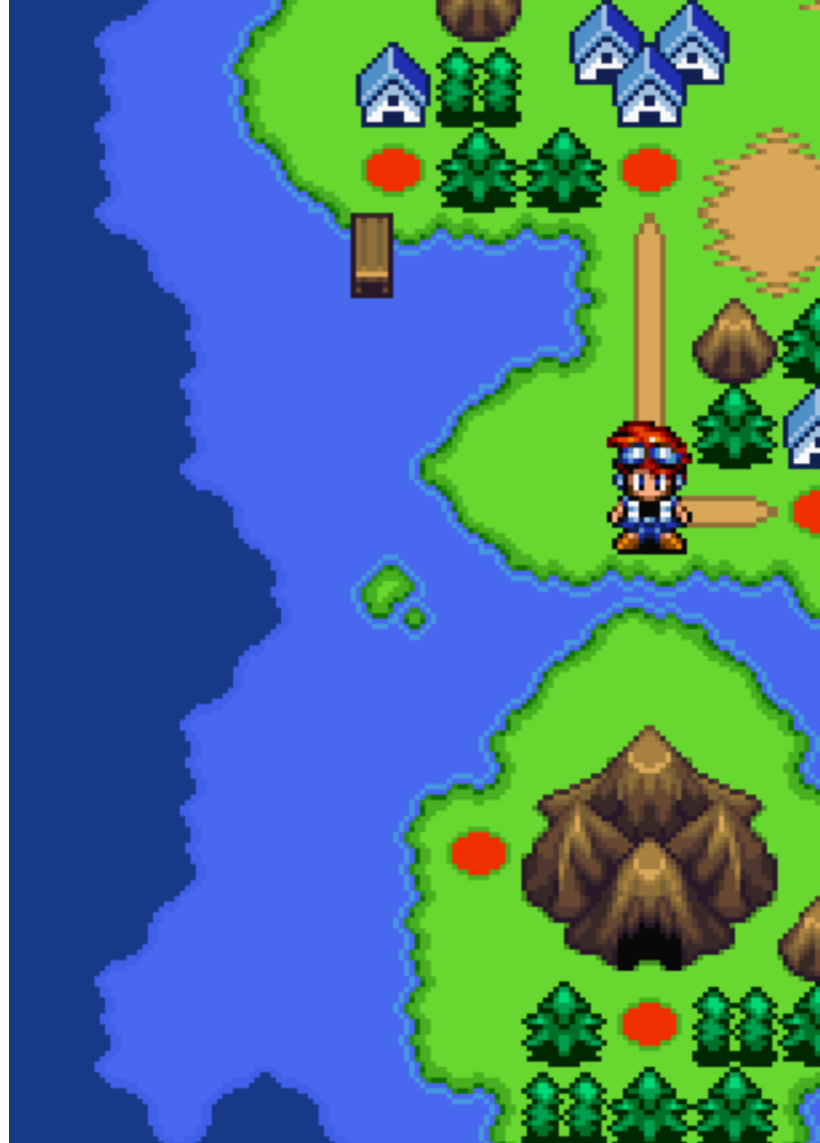
You go to *Super Mario* for all-around great platforming; You go to *Metroid* for platforming with exploration and shooting. In between them, forming the spire that goes above and beyond them, is *Contra III*, the game that defines “run-and-gun” and became an early ace in the hole for the SNES. What Konami did on NES by turning the underwhelming arcade *Contras* into console classics is elevated to a near artform in *Contra III*: a theater of bullets, explosions, fancy acrobatic shooting, and unabashed difficulty.

H] KIRBY SUPER STAR

What does a perfect *Kirby* game encapsulate? They almost all feature ability copying, good-feeling control, and sublimely cute looks. But the golden child might well be *Super Star*, the one with several flavors of platformer wrapped up in a hell of a package. It's a *Kirby* “sampler” that takes you to many different places and and puts you in many different situations, even though the engine is the same and the controls rarely change. It's kooky and wonderful, and if it's not perfect, it does just about the best damn job in convincing you.



D



B

SUPER NES RPGs YOU SHOULD HAVE PLAYED



A

A] ROBOTREK

The name "*Robotrek*" makes this game sound more serious than it is, and so does its ominous box art depicting nothing but a space station. Indeed, there are robots, and there is a trek, but the unabashedly cute graphics and lightweight plot prove that Enix did their best to cover up the truth up until you got past the title screen. As icing on the cake, consider that the game's original Japanese name is *Slapstick*. But is it good? Sure, and not simply because Quintet was behind most of it, but because it's "kiddie" without feeling like you're sitting through an entire Nick Jr. programming block. It's a real RPG, and it speaks to at least one boyhood fantasy: making killer robots that can then fight other robots. A few other neat touches in the game's technotopia are nice, too, like the use of "megs" for experience points, and the disruptive evil entity known as the Hackers. Everyone just compares it to *Pokémon*, but *Robotrek* deserves a little more respect than that.

B] SUPER NINJA BOY

The games in Culture Brain's *Ninja Boy* series have a certain kind of charm to them. They're not spectacular, being cut quite deliberately from the *Dragon Quest* cloth, but they offer a bounciness in all parts of their presentation that even *DQ* can't match. *Super Ninja Boy* is the zenith of that, with slightly more detailed graphics and battle scenes that don't move quite as jankily as the 8-bit installments (battles are basically beat-em-ups based on the mechanics of *Kung-Fu Heroes*), and is generally a lightweight, easygoing RPG that sits comfortably in the middle of the spectrum.

C] BRANDISH

Brandish is kind of nutty, but it's by Falcom, so it's actually more grounded than it looks. Its weird movement mechanic—your character always faces forward as the maps move around him—is certainly, er, one way to interpret 3D movement, but overshadows a more than competent dungeon game underneath. It takes a bit of time to adjust to it, yet it's definitely worth trying at least once, because if you get it, it's gotten you.

D] UNCHARTED WATERS: NEW HORIZONS

Kids of the 16-bit era probably glanced at ads for Koei's games in magazines and immediately flipped ahead, ignoring them as if the pages may as well have been blank. In some ways, that's understandable, because slow-paced strategy games weren't what defined console games, but us flippers missed out hardcore when *New Horizons* debuted. It's one part seafaring sim and one part RPG, with several characters with their own defined stories and a generally more approachable look and feel not unlike the *Final Fantasy* games. Koei themselves seemed to agree that *New Horizons* was special, as it's the second in their grand total of two titles on the Wii Virtual Console.



C



THE CO-OP MACHINE

(4 GREAT SNES MULTIPLAYER GAMES)



B

A] LEGEND OF THE MYSTICAL NINJA

One word: Piggyback. The American debut of Goemon of Ebisumaru—sorry, Kid Ying and Dr. Yang—could not have been stronger, nor, really, more of a fluke. It's Japanese on multiple levels, with a sense of humor most console games in America were bereft of. But it's the two-player play that makes an already rich game flush with wealth. Yes, you can hop on the other guy's back while he does the running and jumping, but you can also play the paint roller minigame, make competing bets at the racetrack, or see who's best at *Gradius*. Every SNES owner should have it.

B] POCKY & ROCKY 1 + 2

Coincidentally, there are other great co-op games on the Super NES that share *Mystical Ninja*'s cartoon depiction of old Japan. *Pocky & Rocky* revisited the sort-of-shoot-em-up-style fun of the original *Kiki Kaikai* series and made them supremely capable 16-bit action games, with enough projectile mayhem and kooky characters to keep things enjoyable. Frankly, there's much more instant gratification here than in *Mystical Ninja*, but these games are still just as essential.

C] SUPER BOMBERMAN 1 + 2

Naturally. While they're nowhere near the best *Bomberman* games (*SCROLL* pledges allegiance to *Saturn Bomberman*), if you have a multitap and four controllers, you can't fail with a few rounds in a *Super Bomberman* title. Purists will usually go with the kangaroo-less sequels anyway, and stick with the default gray-and-green battle stage—and most of the time, that's more than good enough. And as far as jeopardizing friendships, *Bomberman* is simply unmatched.

D] SUPER OFF-ROAD

No one forgets *Super Mario Kart*, but so few of us really bother with the racing part of it when playing with others. *Super Off-Road* is more straightforward with the going-around-in-a-circle stuff, but with an underlying engine-upgrade arms race that can either make the smart shopper undefeated or the evenly-matched thrust into a battle to the death. Well, that's one way of thinking about tiny trucks putting around a dirt track.



C

THE ENDURANCE HANDBOOK

NINTENDO'S SUPER NES PLAYER'S GUIDE



For most of the '90s, Nintendo supplemented *Nintendo Power* subscriptions with a series of "Player's Guides" for hot new releases, beginning with the well-known NES guides for *Super Mario Bros. 3*, *Final Fantasy*, and others that they wedged in the magazine's regular schedule.

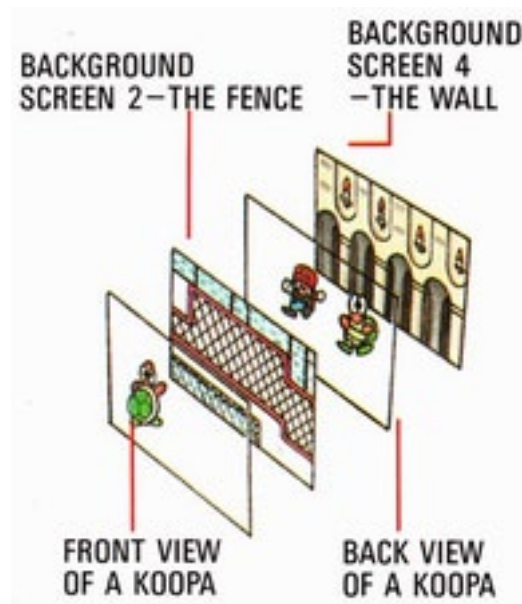
At the dawn of the Super NES era, the Player's Guides became more all-encompassing, with the strategy-packed *NES Game Atlas*, an everything-you-need-to-know book on the Game Boy, and the brilliant *Mario Mania*, which paired a *Super Mario World* strategy guide with several pages of Mario history up to that point. Though all the books followed the same basic concept—maps and strategy cushioned with fluffier content—they were all special in their own right, not the least of which being the *Super NES Player's Guide*.

Considering that the Player's Guide was published in 1992, the Super NES had already been out in America. The truly obsessed already knew the system's technical specs by heart (and those of the Genesis, too, to fan the flames), but even *Nintendo Power's* own articles weren't illustrating the power of the Super NES as well as the Player's Guide did. It started with about five pages of technical explanation, mostly using *Super Mario World* as an example of the system's graphics and sound capabilities. And from there, it goes right into the strategy, with page after page of profiles, tips, and maps where applicable, ending with a section previews for games like, er, *The Rocketeer* and "Super Contra IV."

But damn if it didn't look good. The best part of the book is the charming inclusion of real-world photos and facts that begin each chapter, using one of the featured games as a base to present any remotely-related factoid they could (*F-Zero*: Hey, did you know about the first race in America or the first speeding ticket issued?). Clever stuff all around, and hey, at least a video game company was *trying* to tell us about the outside world.

Principal design for the Player's Guide was done by the Japanese company Work House, which is no mystery if you look at the masthead, but their work on the book can be seen as kind of a predecessor to the work of Ape, the publishing company that, besides contributing their talents to *EarthBound*, produced a number of strategy guides for Nintendo's games in Japan, some of which also employed the use of real photographs to give the books a sense of life.

Content is king, after all, and the pages of the Super NES Player's Guide, with its facts, maps, overviews, and previews made it a well-worn item on a gamer's shelf, or floor, or often lap—much like the system itself, and with virtually the same lasting appeal.





JOE & MAC

Just Another Busy Day For Early Man!

It's mesozoic madness as our paleolithic pals battle dangerous dinosaurs, terrible pterodactyls, and nerdy neanderthal neighbors. Incredible graphics and nonstop action.

IT'S A JUNGLE

Before there was civilization there was Joe & Mac. With no cities, no pollution, no politics, and no taxes, life should be a picnic, right? Wrong! It's a jungle out there! You can set the game so that they help each other or compete for survival.



USING THEIR HEADS

Hundreds of huge statues, some up to 40 feet tall and weighing more than 50 tons, were created from compressed volcanic ash and raised onto burial platforms by a pre-Columbian culture long before they were compressed into a video game. They stood with their backs to the sea when the Polynesian island was discovered by Dutch admiral Jakob Roggeveen on Easter Sunday in 1722.

GRADIUS III 42

RPG SIMULATION



SHOOT THE MOON

How long would it take for a bit actually fly the mean distance to moon? We couldn't time a Chocobo the fastest flier among real birds is Peregrine Falcon, which has clocked dividing at 217 mph. If it's able to fly to the moon at that rate 238,857-mile trip would take about days, 20 hours and 41 minutes.

FINAL FANTASY II 9

THESE EGGS HAVE PRIZES INSIDE!

Be sure to whack all the dinosaur eggs. They can have 1-Ups or weapons inside. They might also hold



STONE AXE

The ultimate in high tech weapons systems, and probably the best all around. The axe can be thrown up as well as sideways, making it the best weapon against pterodactyls.

BOOMERANG

Another good weapon that can be thrown up as well as sideways. You have to wait for it to return before you can throw in a different direction, so it can slow you down.

some nasty surprise, but hey, you can't evolve if you don't take risks!

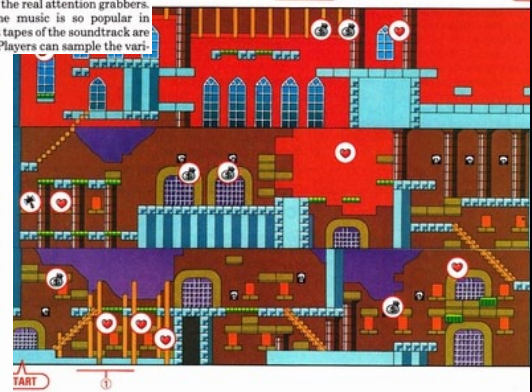


GO WANDERING WITH SUPER STEREO SOUND

Wanderers from Ys opens with slick, vivid, movie-like cinema scenes that tell the story of the world travelers. The rich graphics made possible by the Super NES are just part of the sensory experience of the game, though; the background music and sound effects are the real attention grabbers. In fact, the music is so popular in Japan that tapes of the soundtrack are available. Players can sample the vari-



imagined by the mind of man. Here might betray you and



ADVENTURE

IT'S A TOUGH LIFE

The people who settle the different areas in Actraiser have to contend with monsters, but the hardy folk who settled America and helped build communities here faced hardships no less daunting. Some apparently found their private paradises when they moved west, judging from the number of towns with names like Pleasant Valley, Friendly Corners, Sweet Home, Eden and Wisdom. Others, it seems, were less than thrilled with their destinations. Let's hope that they moved on after naming places such as Boring, Oregon; Muddy Gap, Montana; Skull Valley, Arizona; Stinkingwater Pass, Oregon, and the thought-provoking Why, Arizona.

ACTRAISER 70



DUBIOUS DIAMOND

Gemstones have long been valued for their beauty and mystique. One of the most famous is the Hope Diamond, the world's largest blue diamond at 44.50 carats. Taken from the forehead of a statue of the Indian god, Rama Sita in the mid 17th century, it was coveted for its rare beauty—but also rumored to carry a curse. Its several owners suffered bouts of bad luck after acquiring it, and when New York jeweler Harry Winston bought the diamond in 1947 after its previous owner died, he did not keep it. He donated it to the Smithsonian Institute, where it remains today.

ZELDA III 78



PILOTWINGS

Soar With The Flight Club

The Pilotwings Flight Club offers you high-flying fun in your home. Join up and take off for four fantastic variety of flying conditions.



INSIDE THE SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM



THE ISLAND OF MISFIT HARDWARE

Aiwa CSD-GM1

The Mega Drive Stereo



The good ol' Sega Genesis had itself cloned in many an interesting way. From all-in-one consoles like the X'Eye and LaserActive, the Mega Jet and its redneck cousin the Nomad, and two different two-in-one PCs in Japan and Europe, it seemed there was no place Sega wouldn't put that cartridge slot.

Perhaps the most coveted of such places is on the bottom of the Aiwa CSD-GM1 stereo, a rather typical cassette/CD/radio unit that just happened to play Mega Drive and Mega CD games. It was manufactured in very low quantities in 1994, and the mere existence of it cemented its place among the great treasures of video game collectordom. And why not? It's just goofy enough to be irresistible.

To be fair, the GM1 had a good enough concept from a marketing standpoint: For roughly \$450, you got a unit that does pretty much every possible thing one could want for home entertainment outside of watching video tapes—the only other requirements would be electricity and a television. With that, the GM1 could be easily pitched as a no-brainer appliance for the young person living in a stereotypical tiny Japanese apartment. And with a wealth of Mega Drive games already released at that point, most offering simple arcade-like action to help pass the time, why, you'd probably greenlight it, too.

The execution, however, left something to be desired. The design of the unit is odd, to say the least: the Mega Drive slot is part of a detachable platform on the bottom, similar to the GameCube Game Boy Player. It's the only such attachment, which begs the question: Why it wasn't just made into the whole unit? Was the stereo's design already finalized? Did Sega come into the picture too late? Furthermore, why does it need a separate serial cable to connect to the top so you can play CD games? (Hope you don't lose that!)

Proof that even the best horse can stumble out of the gate, the GM1 quickly disappeared into the night. And the oft-troubled Aiwa slipped into bankruptcy years later and was wholly absorbed by Sony. Oh, but hey, at least you can use the 32X on this thing!

STARTROPICS

NINTENDO • NES • 1990

Think about what 1990 meant for the NES. *Super Mario 3*, right? *Dr. Mario*, too, which came right after *Tetris*. *Final Fantasy* was already taking over “flagship RPG” duty from *Dragon Warrior*, and there were great third-party games like *Mega Man 3* and *Ninja Gaiden II*. In other words, in what was inarguably a peak year for the NES, it was all about best bets, safe but sure things.

By that line of thinking, *StarTropics* is kind of a fluke. Most of the year’s big games were action games; platformers. They were what worked best in America, after all—even *Zelda II* had its feet in that pool. At first glance, *StarTropics* was an action-RPG that was a little bit beyond the *Legend of Zelda*, but not quite *Final Fantasy*. It also had a setting and concept not often seen among the guns ‘n’ swords ‘n’ puzzles ‘n’ sports of the rest of the system’s games. (Maybe if the first *Earth Bound* had been released, *StarTropics* wouldn’t seem so unique, but I digress.)

Even if *StarTropics* was a fluke, it managed to come off well-timed. Consider this: There was huge excitement for *Zelda II*, but there’s a reason many gamers were disappointed with it (and still are): it sure as hell wasn’t *Zelda I*. It didn’t feel like much of a grand adventure with a big open world, although it sometimes tried. When *StarTropics* arrived, there was no guarantee of a third *Zelda*, at least not for a several more months when Super NES news would ramp up, and who knows, maybe it would be another side-scroller. Meanwhile, hey, here’s a new *Zelda*, more or less, with just a little bit of *Dragon Warrior*.

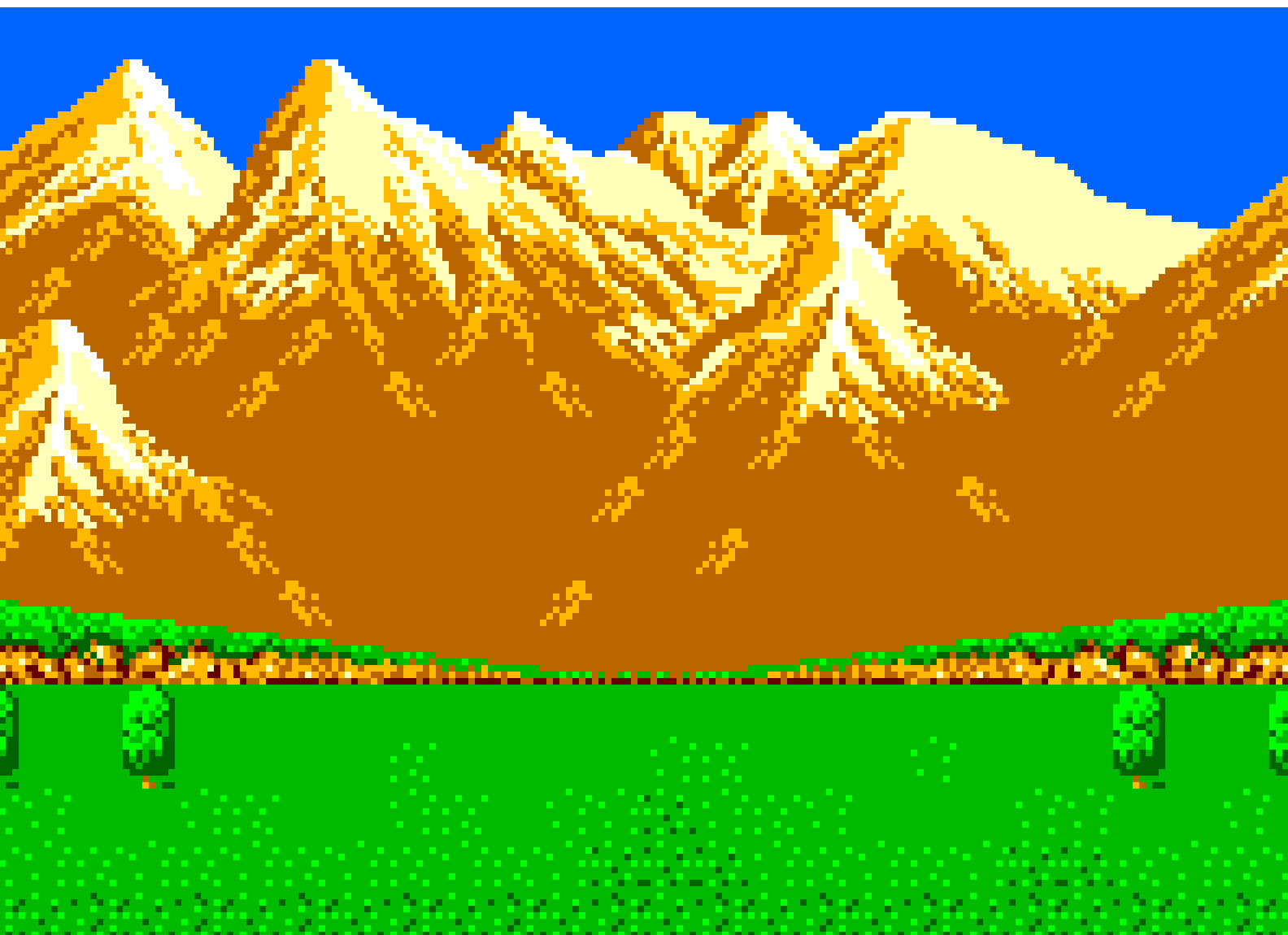
As a product, the most notable thing about *StarTropics* is that it was produced for North America; it never came out in Japan. It did reach Europe, but this game was clearly supposed to be Nintendo of America’s baby—for one thing, teenage hero Mike is an Archie pastiche who hails from Seattle. Not that there was anything

new about an America-only game (Nintendo’s own NES *Tetris* was made only for the West, too) but *StarTropics* was put on quite a tall pedestal in NOA’s 1990-91 lineup; This was a big game, and the closest thing to *Zelda I* we had gotten in several years. Not every NES owner was content with running and jumping.

StarTropics also showed that no matter what kinds of games publishers were sticking to, Nintendo would have the wherewithal to try something different. Think “action-RPG” and you likely did think of *Zelda*: little Link with his sword and his shield exploring forests and dungeons—not so much a kid in a T-shirt and jeans flinging a yo-yo and swinging baseball bats.

By now, most people would probably snicker among one another if Nintendo said they were making a new *StarTropics*, so maybe it was a fluke after all. Then again, it’s often the flukes we remember best.





WAIT WAIT, DON'T TALK ME

The incidental qualities of Phantasy Star.

BY ALEX FRAIOLI

The mountain backdrops of a *Phantasy Star* battle screen: soaring, snow-capped peaks skirted by thick forest, all beneath an endless blue sky. The battle ends and the game switches back to the bird's-eye view of planet Palma, where the mountains have been reduced to a perfect pattern of brown clumps. My eight year-old self pauses and wonders what lay atop those mountains, which only appear when the party is under attack. I had a lot of theories: Maybe that's where Lassic trains his guards! Or locks up dissidents! It could be a breeding ground for Gold Dragons, because how else could those things respawn every time Alis and company ascend the Sky Castle?

Enough has been written about *Phantasy Star's* myriad contributions to Japanese RPGs—the trendsetting female protagonist, first-person dungeons, three expansive planets, and large animated beasts. But an objective overview says only so much. Consider the unintentional elements from which *Phantasy Star* derives its romantic feel: the slipshod translation, rudimentary graphics, and ambiguous sound effects that make it much more alien than the developers intended.

At the fore of these is the game's English translation, which made the Algol solar system even more foreign and perplexing. At eight years old, I had no idea that "First Food" was a bastardization of "fast food" and assumed that there must be some ordinal relationship between it and the adjacent "Secondhand" shop. The wizard Noah's master is referred to as both "Tarzimal" and "Tajima," but to my young mind, this must have been because he's an inscrutable old codger whose true name can't be known for sure. One undead enemy named "Batalion" served as a sort of revelatory time bomb for nerds like me, one that would detonate after a dozen or so years in the thick of pop culture—*Battalion* was the Japanese title of *Return of the Living Dead*. But in 1988 America, it was just a baffling name for a red zombie in an ice dungeon.

Strange sound effects haunted the game's battles. A centaur swings his sword to the sound of what can only be a spring-loaded boxing glove. Vampire bats perform somersaults while making vacuum cleaner sounds. And I don't know what the hell is happening when a character is bound by rope or webbing, but it sounds like someone dropping a cat on a theremin.

In exercising a kid's imagination, *Phantasy Star's* scarcity of detail proved potent beyond any long-winded cutscene. The Antlion traps dotting the desert planet of Motavia were the first things to jump out at me as a kid: a hundred mouths arranged in dark ranks amid the dunes, opening and closing in unison, creating the feeling of a hostile alien world. Their origin and nature are unexplained; they simply are. They're also really fucking creepy and, as the player soon discovers, they initiate battle immediately upon contact. Like a child touching a hot stove, I steered clear of them even after my party was maxed out.

Phantasy Star's mythical metal, Laconia, is described as the hardest substance in the galaxy. That's all that's said, and all I need to know. Little Me has already started subconsciously fabricating the origin of the game's prized set of Laconian arms and armor. How were they forged, and by whom? What was their original purpose? How did the shield wind up on the bottom floor of a morgue on a frozen planet at the edge of the Algol solar system? That none of this is ever so much as hinted at makes every piece of equipment all the more alluring and mysterious. Why am I scouring the blood red corridors of an island fortress for a legendary sword? *Because it's there.*

A classic like *Phantasy Star* shows that less is more, whether intentional or not. A modern-day RPG would no doubt pack all of this information (and then some) into a speech bubble from a sassy guard who's plodding around town. Because that guy's a weapons expert, you see, and he can also show you a battle tutorial and explain how to equip Synerjism Crystals in the F.O.R.C.E. slots of your Wank Belt to boost the Buddy Rating of the entire party. But watch your Flush Gauge!

Alex Fraioli is a dynamic chucklefuck. His podcast, *I Don't Know If You Know This*, is somehow on iTunes.



N

DEFENSE

OF...



Call me crazy—c'mon, not out loud—but I think *Hydlide* gets a bad rap. I wouldn't say I'm downright insane, though; in all fairness, *Hydlide* could never be able to undo its own reputation. It was a victim of the NES rapid-aging curse, where games made in the early years of the Famicom were being brought over to America when the NES started getting big.

In this case, *Hydlide* reached the US in 1988, two years past its expiration date (four if you count the original computer release), and smack dab in a year when companies like Konami were blowing minds with their high-quality games, with Nintendo about to release anticipated *Mario* and *Zelda* sequels. You could say those were late, too, but they weren't like *Hydlide*: A PC transplant with all the flaws and tainted perception that carries. The game was definitely a victim of circumstance, and not really what you'd call "curated," but neither was anything else in publisher FCI's catalogue. (A

kid getting it for Christmas in lieu of *Zelda II* during that game's shortage probably didn't help its rep, either.)

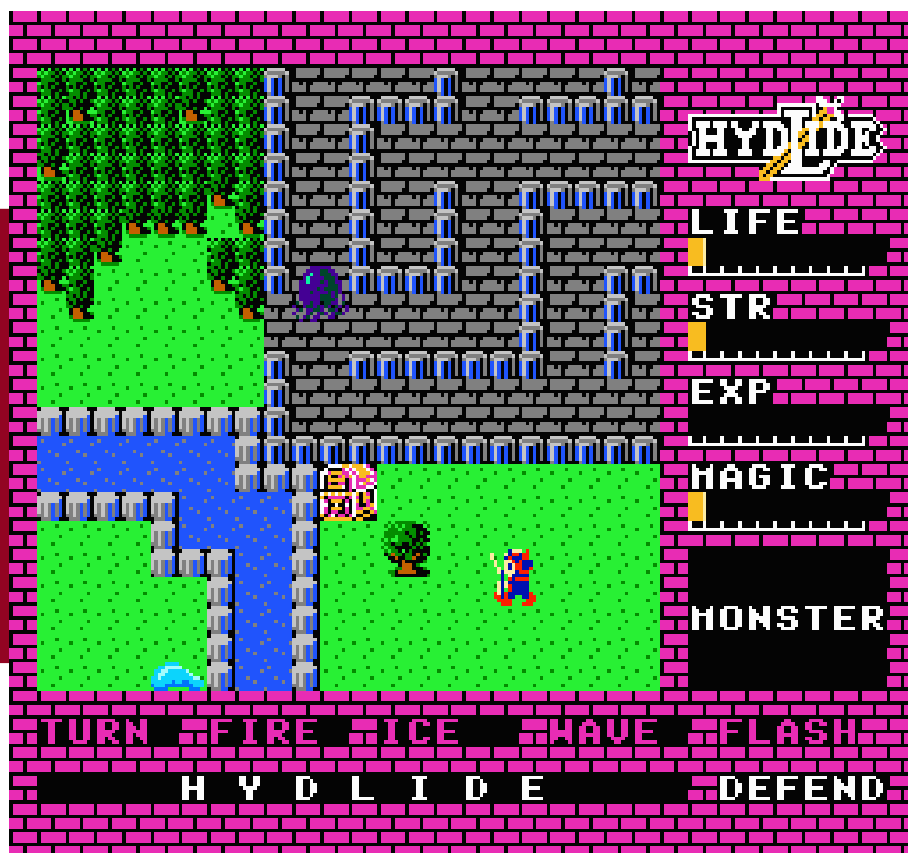
Yet none of that is the fault of the game itself. Yes, it sure does look, move and sound bad, but *Hydlide* doesn't fail at being all it ever wanted to be: an "RPG Lite" that can be a bit vague without proper guidance, but is more manageable—even beatable—than most people think.

Playing as the hero, stoic knight Jim, your goal is to rescue the princess Ann (amazingly, both are named that in the original Japanese), who instead of being captured or put to indefinite sleep, is simply turned into three separate fairies which need to be found and put back together into the princess, and from there, your mission is to seek and destroy Boralis, the evil bastard who did this.

As mentioned, *Hydlide* was an ill-timed release, and it takes all of five seconds after starting to realize that. The graphics are typical of most RPGs

at the time, which is fine, but the game is quickly knocked down a peg or two once you experience the "finer" points: the rough screen scrolling that really brings forth the ugliness of old PC-to-NES ports; upwards of a *few* pieces of music; the non-fighting of bumping into enemies by holding the "A" button to toggle "attack" mode, and letting up to "defend" so you don't get hurt quite as badly (a mechanic mimicked in the equally simple yet much more loved *Ys*). For more proof of how primitive *Hydlide* is, the entire game world is roughly the size of four *Final Fantasy* towns, which was probably the mark of an epic computer adventure in 1984, but comes off absurd in the face of any other NES RPG.

On the other hand, a tiny world means that *Hydlide* can be finished in a fraction of the time than it would to complete even *The Legend of Zelda*. I'd call that neither a pro nor a con, but regardless, *Hydlide* is still a competent action RPG.



It has defined goals. It has micro-quests where you fetch for items to help you access the next item to help you access the next area. It has challenging but not impossible mazes. And in between all that, you have to know when to “attack” and when to “defend.” Know your limits; know when to retreat. Keep dipping your toes in the water, and eventually you’ll have your whole foot in there. It’s obvious advice, but that’s because *Hydlide* is not the uncrackable riddle of RPG design that you may have been led to believe—it’s reasonable.

From my own experience, I used to hate *Hydlide* because I’d be running around the world aimlessly, bumping into the weakest slimes only to watch Jim end up dead in a split second, and there’s no doubt others went through the same process. You have a very easy way to combat this, though it’s not spelled out for you, and many people who played/hated *Hydlide* likely don’t have a manual or FAQ in front of them anyway. It’s simple, really:

the game’s save system is both password-based and state-based. You can pull up a password at any time, and that will always bring you up to speed between session, but you also get separate “Save” and “Load” options that let you reload from the exact spot you saved during the same session (you just have to make sure you get that password before taking a break). It’s the same as quicksaving, of course, and even in 1988, it’s a smart bit of design—it makes the deaths a little less annoying, since you can have a save point from a little farther back, and if you space them out well, you can get back on your feet in no time. Obviously, today’s emulators and save states have made any form of inbuilt saving obsolete, but again, when taken in context, *Hydlide*’s save system(s) make the game bearable, especially if you’re playing on a real NES.

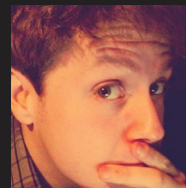
And really, even if you have something as simple as a save routine in your mind, *Hydlide* becomes... well, not *great*, but better than it would be going

in blind. If you keep it at it (and sure, go ahead and use a FAQ), it’s all over in less time than it took you to foster such vitriol for the thing in the first place.

If there’s any joy to be found in *Hydlide*’s legacy, it’s that its two sequels demonstrated clear improvements and a few clever design choices (like a rudimentary morality system), forming the series into a stricter, more hardcore alternative to *Dragon Quest* and its many lookalikes. For years, Japan’s roguelikes were unfairly ridiculed in the Western press, and much like those games, *Hydlide*’s special brand of RPG deserves a second look.

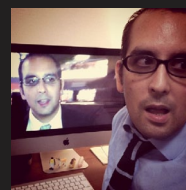
But I admit that’s a tall order no matter what I say. After all, someone thought it was a good idea to make and publish *Virtual Hydlide*, which set the whole franchise back another 10 years; right to zero, in fact, while developer T&E Soft mainly stuck to producing golf games. Ah, poor *Hydlide*—sometimes a curse is just genetics.

Ray Barnholt
ray@scroll.vg



WITH ADDITIONAL
WORDS BY

Alex Fraioli
pitohui.org



BLOG
scroll.vg

SCROLL is different. This is about games, and loving them, and communicating why they were and are so damn fun, or relevant, or just plain worth checking out. Y'know, like the old days. This is not about showing you the passive version of that—a chunk of soap shaped like an NES pad. Let's leave that to the blogs, the other magazines, and the myriad other ciphers that capitalize on it. It's not harmful, but it's not what matters.

Considering that this magazine is entirely my thing, my tastes are obviously thrown into the mix: Old games, Japanese games, and old Japanese games. But you saw that already. I suppose that labels me a purist, but let me add that I'm really no elitist.

Really-really. As someone who for a long time used to feel marginalized for loving games, even I can't help enjoying some bit of game-related merchandise or art for myself—my Genesis business card case might be a shining example of that. If anything, I'm just a harmless hypocrite. But I can live without the case, and I didn't buy it to impress anyone but myself. As for my real Genesis and Genesis games, well... those I kind of need. This is for the needy ones.

rdb



next

