

## HARDCORE GAMING 101 PRESENTS

# SEGA ARCADE CLASSICS

VOLUME 1

Hardcore Gaming 101 Presents: Sega Arcade Classics Vol. 1 (Color Edition)

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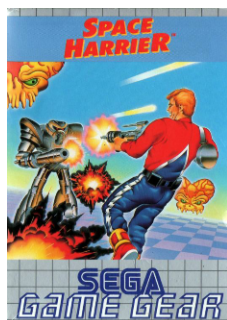
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## Space Harrier

Original Release: 1985

Platforms: ARC, SMS, TG16, FC, GG, IBM, AMI, AST, AT8, ZX, X68, PC88, PC60, MZ, X1, FM7, C64, 32X, SAT, GBA, DC, XB, PS2, MOB, 360, PS3, WII, WIN, 3DS



Released by Sega into the arcades in 1985, and designed by the legendary Yu Suzuki, *Space Harrier* is a shoot-em-up that ditched the horizontal or vertical views of most games at the time, and put the viewpoint right behind the player. Featuring a flight stick to emulate piloting a jet fighter, players take control of the "Harrier", a blond guy wearing a red shirt and blue jeans.

Through means left entirely unexplained, the Harrier can fly over the landscape at incredible speed. Armed only with a huge cannon, he rushes forward, destroying the bizarre, dangerous creatures of Dragon Land. It wasn't the first game to use this technology – *Space Harrier* is predated by Sega's own 1982 3D shooter *Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom* – but it's a huge technological improvement, and manages to look extremely impressive even today.

The action is remarkably simple: just fly, dodge, and shoot back. Even though there's no targeting crosshair, aiming is remarkably easy, as you only need to shoot in the general vicinity of a foe to hit them. Bad guys also shoot directly at the Harrier, so as long as you keep moving and don't backtrack over your previous position, you won't get hit. All the while, you'll be maneuvering the Harrier between stone columns, stationary poles, and various kinds

of plants. While you'll usually only trip over bushes and rocks, smacking into a tree spells certain death (the original arcade release also has a glitch where you'll shoot right through bushes, though most later ports fix this).

The trippy backgrounds are a trademark of *Space Harrier*. The ground consists of a flat checkerboard which changes color every stage. The sky switches between from bright blue to the yellow of dusk, to the pink atmosphere of some otherworldly planet. Across the horizons are alien buildings and landscapes which fall and rise after the completion of each stage. A few levels even feature a ceiling, giving a hallucinatory feeling of claustrophobia. There are 18 stages total.

## Creatures of the Land

The enemies in Dragon Land are extremely creative and distinctive. The Harrier fights one-eyed mammoths, bulbous yellow squids, stone heads, and orbs that resemble cybernetic peanuts. Amidst all of the bizarre enemies are more standard types, like jets and flying mecha (which are basically the Doms from *Mobile Suit Gundam*), although even these designs are still incredibly cool looking. But the most impressive foes are the dragons, usually taking the role of the level boss.





Each of these consists of a head and several segments which, in motion, gives the appearance of long, floating Chinese dragons. Their visage is reminiscent of Falkor the Luck Dragon from the movie *The Neverending Story*.

Keeping control over the Harrier, all while dodging and firing amidst the wild colors, is the kind of glorious chaos that is representative of the best in 1980s arcade gaming. The stages have strange names like Moot, Geeza, Minia, Parm and Absymbel, that help create a distinctive and thoroughly memorable game world. There are also a few bonus stages, where the Harrier hops on the back of a white dragon named Uriah. Although he's hard to control, Uriah is invincible, and the goal is simply to smash as much of the landscape as possible.

*Space Harrier's* theme song is incredible, composed by famed Sega musician Hiroshi Kawaguchi, and easily ranks as one of the most memorable in gaming. It only fades out during boss fights or special stages, but it's long enough that it never gets tiring. There's also the encouraging voice over, which yells "Welcome to the Fantasy Zone! Get Ready!" or proclaims "You're doing great!" after the end of each level. Even after dying, as your Harrier screams in agony and falls to the ground, a friendly message pops up that says "Many more battle scenes will soon be available!" as he picks himself off the ground and returns to battle.

Given its popularity, it's natural that *Space Harrier* would be ported to every possible platform. Unfortunately, given the advanced hardware of Sega's bespoke *Space Harrier* arcade board, there was no home system at the time that could pull off the scaling effects necessary to



replicate the sense of speed found in the original. Not only that, but the analog control needed to be ditched in favor of digital, which greatly alters the gameplay.

The first console port was to Sega's own Master System. The pace had to be stifled quite a bit for the 8-bit machine to keep up, and the scrolling is much choppy. Still, the huge enemies manage to impress. For the most part, the enemies and levels are comparable to the arcade version. Sega added an additional final boss named Haya-Oh (named after Hayao Nakayama, the then-president of Sega) and a real ending – which is much better than the arcade version, which simply showed up a huge "The End" sign. Also hidden in the game is the ability to play as a jet fighter and a secret message that urged players to write to Sega giving their opinions.

The Game Gear port is based on the Master System release. Due to the smaller screen size some of the proportions had to be changed, so the Harrier is much bigger. The enemy sprites have been altered to appear more organic, which at least makes this version unique. Some of the level names have been changed as well,

and there are only 12 levels in total. A password function also allows players to skip to later levels. Despite running on the same hardware as the Sega Master System, the music has been rearranged.

Takara ported *Space Harrier* to the Famicom. While the scrolling is smoother than the SMS port, the Harrier moves incredibly slowly, and there's a whole bunch of flicker. Not to mention the fact that all of the sprites are smaller. They couldn't even fit any of the voices in. The enemy arrangement is based on the Master System version, so it has the additional final boss.

NEC Avenue and Dempa brought *Space Harrier* to the TurboGrafx-16. It's smoother than the other 8-bit console ports, but it still doesn't feel quite right, and it both looks and sounds ugly. The checkerboard floor is also gone.

Dempa also took care of the computer ports in Japan. The versions on the PC-6001 and the PC-8801 are the worst looking iterations out there. While the Harrier is a low-color sprite (as are the enemies in the latter version), everything else, including the clouds, trees and bullets, are just featureless colored rectangles. And yet despite how awful it looks (or perhaps because of this), it keeps up the speed, and actually plays more smoothly than most of the European computer ports.

Top row: [ARC] The bonus stage with Uriah the dragon, and the beginning of stage 10  
Bottom row: Artwork for the Japanese Game Gear release





### OutRunners

Original Release: 1992

Platforms: ARC, GEN



After a whole slew of disappointing semi-sequels, AM2 got behind the wheel again and brought back the graphics, the music and their characteristic style. *OutRunners* was presented most often in its sitting cabinet form, usually linked to multiple machines for a maximum of eight players. There are eight cars you can choose from, each with different attributes and resembling real life cars like the red sprinter in the original *OutRun*. The drivers of the various cars are also different, making for additional unique ending variations.

While the previous games covered North America and Europe, *OutRunners* has stages that cover the entire world. The game route still has the same "pyramid" pattern it did back in the early days, but there are two completely different maps. There's now an east side and a west side map, and the very first fork in the road (right after you start the game) will let you choose which of these two layouts you want to play through. This technically means there are about 30 stages total, but a few levels are duplicated on each side.

The game plays pretty much the same as the original *OutRun*, as it loses the turbo button, weather effects and rivals of *Turbo OutRun*. The turning animation for the cars is more pronounced than before, but otherwise the game

controls about the same. However, the game greatly benefits from Sega's Multi 32 board, which allows for even faster driving action and smooth-as-hell sprite scaling. For the first time, the road is actually textured, instead of the cycling grey/black of the earlier games. The backgrounds are incredible and have a lot more detail than any other game, as well as huge hills, which makes the tracks feel less flat. It always keeps up the pace, because even if you hit an obstacle and the drivers fall out, there's some comical animation as they somehow fly or jump back into the car without it stopping. It's accompanied by a laugh track and is quite silly.

The stages become increasingly more gorgeous as you drive over bridges, near waterfalls, through dense forests, and even underwater. Compared to the lame levels of *Turbo OutRun*, each stage has a distinct background, and you'll drive past many famous landmarks. Some of the vehicles even change depending on the stage, as you zoom by covered wagons in the Grand Canyon, blaze past (or through) cyclists in China, or weave between double decker tour buses in Hong Kong.

There's now an in-game radio station select. You can choose from the remixes of the four classic tunes ("Last Wave" included!), as well as several new songs. These aren't quite as good



as the originals, but there's some decent stuff, like "Looking for the Rainbow". The voice effects are particularly notable as well, especially Jake Elwood (possibly a reference to *The Blues Brothers*?) as a radio announcer on the car select screen.

*OutRunners* is an absolutely brilliant game, and a fantastic update of a classic. But sadly, it never remotely reached the same level of popularity. Its only home port was on the Genesis, and it's rather badly done. The system couldn't handle the special effects of the original *OutRun*, let alone this powerful sequel. The arcade version featured a fairly impressive rendition of the Golden Gate bridge, but in the Genesis version it looks like any old bridge. Consequently, the game feels very scaled back, worse than the Genesis version of *OutRun*.

The game tries to include a multiplayer mode by dividing the

screen into two halves, but it looks so bad it's just silly. Worse still is that you always have to play split-screen, even in single-player mode, making the view extremely cramped.

This in itself introduces a number of illogical technical conundrums. If the CPU player advances to another level before the human player (or vice versa), the entire backdrop changes for both players, even if the other is in a totally different stage. This bizarre situation is presumably because the system couldn't handle two different sets of graphics on screen simultaneously.

In addition to the regular "Arcade Mode", there's also an "Original Mode", which lets you pick any of the levels and race against either another player or a computer controlled opponent.

Right: [GEN] The *Virtua Racing* car in the Japanese version  
Bottom: [ARC] The beautiful sights of Asia

The Japanese version included a cheat code where you could play as the *Virtua Formula*, the car from *Virtua Racing*, but this was strangely missing from the American release. Sega didn't even bother to publish the game outside of Japan themselves, leaving the duties to Data East.



## Screenshot Comparisons



Arcade



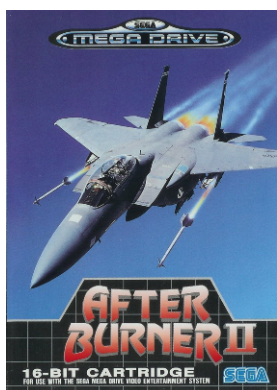
Genesis



## After Burner / After Burner II

Original Release: 1987

Platforms: ARC, SMS, NES, ZX, GEN, PCE, 32X, SAT, GBA, DC, XB, MSX, C64, IBM, AMI, MOB, X68



Sega's *After Burner*, an aerial combat game released in 1987, ditches complexity in favor of straightforward action. Prior to this, 3D airplane games were all mind numbing computer flight-sims and ran at a crappy framerate. Running on Sega's "super scaler" technology, *After Burner* uses incredibly smooth pseudo-3D effects to propel arcade gamers into the cockpit of a jet similar to the F-14 Tomcat. The sole goal is to blow up as many bad guys as possible while trying to stay in one piece, all set to gloriously cheesy synth rock music. It's undoubtedly inspired by *Top Gun*, just minus Tom Cruise and all of the homoerotic undertones (also far better than any of the actual *Top Gun* games, of which there are far, far too many).

*After Burner* and *After Burner II* are both powered by the Sega System X board, which is an improvement over the boards that ran previous "super scaler" games like *OutRun* and *Space Harrier*, all directed by Yu Suzuki. The controls in the first game are fairly limited: you can climb, descend, and rotate your plane. Turning back and forth rapidly will send your plane spinning dizzily, which looks cool but ultimately doesn't do much. It's impossible to crash into the ground, and for the most part, you don't need to worry about anything but dodging enemy fire. Your primary weapon is heat-

seeking missiles – just line up an incoming enemy fighter with your crosshairs, wait for the "lock-on" to appear (usually accompanied by a frantic voice yelling "Fire!") and hit the fire button. Unfortunately, missiles are in limited supply, so you'll need to rely on your Vulcan cannons for easier enemies. Trying to hit anything with bullets is nearly impossible unless your target's at close range, so conserving your missiles is extremely important. Thankfully, every few stages, a friendly plane comes by and replenishes your stock.

There's very little variety; there are a few stages set in a canyon, where you need to weave between the walls, but these are really just bonus stages. Other than the color of the sky and the changing landscapes, the core game never changes, but that's not really important, because *After Burner* excels at throwing all kinds of crazy stuff in your face. At its best moments, you need to keep enemy fighters in your targets, dodge incoming missiles, and attempt to keep track of your own airplane amidst the explosions and smoke trails, all while the scenery is rocketing by, rotating completely out of control. The sense of speed is still unrivaled by most video games even today.

There are also some damn nice explosions – get hit by enemy fire and your engines will smoke as



you careen downwards, creating a line of fire and destruction as you hit the ground. Later games in the series had even more impressive death sequences, with plenty of seizure-inducing screen flashing. The soundtrack, per usual protocol during the mid-1980s, is absolutely brilliant. The FM synth of Sega's arcade boards manages to produce some incredibly rocking tunes, and while there are only a handful of songs, all composed by Hiroshi Kawaguchi, they are all quite memorable.

## Too Crazy to Handle

Alas, *After Burner*'s greatest asset is also its biggest flaw – it's ridiculously crazy to play. Since your movement range is so limited, and the screen can get very crowded, it becomes incredibly difficult to make your way through later stages without crashing and burning every few seconds. Still, this was originally an arcade game, designed to provide some impressive thrills for a few coins, and nowhere was this more apparent than the cabinet design.

The first release had a replica of a flight stick, and the second game had a model throttle that let you control your speed. Many sit-down cabinets even tilted as you rotated your plane. In this respect, *After Burner* is really more of a ride than a legitimate game, which is maybe why it doesn't quite hold up compared to other Sega arcade games around the same time. But taken as what it is, it's nice, flashy fun.



Strangely enough, there are very few differences between *After Burner* and *After Burner II* – in fact, the latter isn't so much a sequel as it is a minor upgrade. *After Burner II* has a fancier intro (featuring a series of rotating spheres), some new enemies, and a handful of extra levels, increasing the total number from 18 to 21 missions.

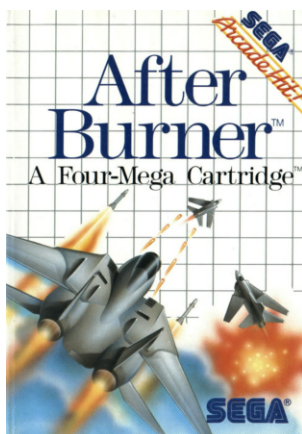
Sega also added little intermissions where your plane lands to rearm, which include cameos by the motorcycle from *Hang-On* and the Ferrari from *OutRun*. The biggest addition is the throttle control that lets you speed up or slow down. Enemy planes will occasionally pop up on your tail, and using the throttle can either help blow past them or have them overshoot you so you can deliver a killing shot.

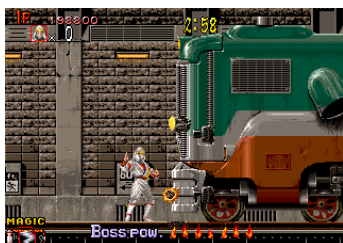
The only other noticeable difference is that you're granted more missiles, both when you

Top: [ARC] *After Burner* in action  
Bottom: An ad for the computer version, the [SMS] cover, and the deluxe arcade cabinet

start and when you refuel. This makes the game easier, and overall less frustrating.

There are also some minor differences in the instrumentation of the music, although the soundtracks are essentially identical. Furthermore, there are also "melody" versions of three of the songs – "Maximum Power", the title theme, plus "After Burner" and "Final Take Off". These versions feature an extra melody track during most of the song, and greatly enhance them, to the point that the original compositions feel rather empty. While these are not used in-game for the arcade version, they were featured on various soundtrack CDs, and were used as a basis for some of the console version soundtracks, including the SMS, PCE and FM Towns ports.





## Shadow Dancer

Original Release: 1989

Platforms: ARC, SMS, AMI, AST, C64, CPC, ZX



While there were many follow-ups that came out in quick succession on various platforms, *Shadow Dancer* is the only true sequel to the original arcade *Shinobi*, as the gameplay is pretty much the same. It runs on Sega's System 18 board; the major difference is a considerable graphical upgrade from its predecessor. This is especially noticeable for the main character, who has undergone a drastic overhaul and now wears a cool white costume similar to the one in *The Revenge of Shinobi*. This time you play as Hayate, Joe's son, as it's set several years down the line.

New for this game is Hayate's canine companion named Yamato, who follows him throughout the game and will periodically incapacitate foes, thus allowing for an easy takedown. Another visual treat is that casting ninja magic shows a cool cinematic close up of Hayate, with a background of colored burning flames behind him. Other than the dog friend, the changes are minor. The enemy organization this time is known as Asian Dawn, who has commandeered the Space Shuttle Olympia, and has planned to use it to launch an attack via satellites. In order to distract the hero, they have planted bombs everywhere, so these need to be defused in every stage before proceeding.

The levels include an airport, a junkyard, a cave, and final base

at the foot of the space shuttle. The bonus stages are similar to the previous game, although now you toss shurikens upward at ninjas that are slowly descending a building. The bosses are not quite as inspired, though it does include a slightly silly "man vs. train" fight – fundamentally it's not that much more ridiculous than the helicopter from the previous game. While *Shadow Dancer* is sometimes viewed as a step backwards compared to the advances made by the almost-simultaneously released Genesis title, *The Revenge of Shinobi*, it still recaptures the knife-flicking intensity of its arcade predecessor and is a fine sequel.

Since the Genesis game is entirely different from the arcade original, "true" ports of *Shadow Dancer* were mostly available in Europe. The Sega Master System version was only released in PAL territories and Brazil, and the hero has been renamed Takashi. While it admirably captures the huge character graphics, it's simply too much for the 8-bit system to handle, as it controls and plays horribly. The graphics are inconsistent, ranging from decent to awful (many of the bad guys have green skin) and it flickers with the intensity of hell. Your dog friend doesn't follow you anymore, but he can be summoned to bite enemies. It's missing several levels too. The soundtrack is all new,



since the system couldn't handle the percussion heavy sound arcade game, so the replacement songs are more "video game-y".

The home computer platforms received several ports, with roughly the same differences as *Shinobi*, only MSX and IBM versions were not made. The 8-bit computer versions lack music, but otherwise they're more complete than the Master System port.



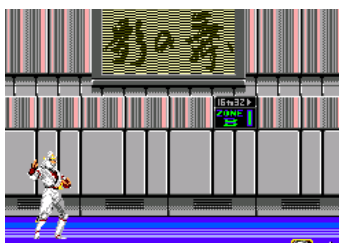
Top: [ARC] The cutscenes from when Hayate uses magic, and of Yamato in the intro  
Bottom: [ARC] More shots from the arcade version, including the bonus round



## Screenshot Comparisons



Arcade



Master System



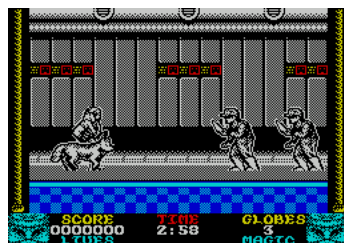
Amiga



Commodore 64



Amstrad CPC



ZX Spectrum



## Altered Beast

AKA: *Jyuuouki* (JP)

Original Release: 1988

Platforms: ARC, SMS, FC, GEN, PCE, DC, MSX, C64, AMI, C64, AST, CPC, ZX, PS2, PSP, 360, PS3, Wii, IOS



*Altered Beast* – or *Jyuuouki* (“Chronicles of the Beast King” in Japan) – is something of a Sega classic, owing mostly to being the original pack-in for the Genesis. Ironically the game is one of their weaker titles, though given the strength of its visuals, it’s easy to see why Sega picked it as a demonstration of the 16-bit console’s power. The game was directed by Makoto Uchida and developed by Team Shinobi, who worked on several other Sega brawler games, including *Golden Axe* and *Alien Storm*.

At the beginning of *Altered Beast* the Greek god Zeus resurrects a fallen warrior and commands him to travel through the underworld – it seems Zeus’ daughter Athena needs rescuing from the evil lord Neff (why they chose to make up their own Greek-like god rather than using Hades is unclear). It’s up to you, and potentially a friend in two-player simultaneous mode, to bash your way through hordes of demons, wolves and monsters.

The game is basically a beat-em-up, though unlike *Double Dragon* or the later *Golden Axe*, the action only takes place on a single plane. The screen slowly autoscrolls as enemies lumber forth, whom you can dismantle piece-by-piece by smashing them with your gigantic fists.

Throughout the game you’ll see white wolves, which drop

power orbs when killed. When you get one you’ll bulk up slightly, an omniscient voice will announce “POWER UP”, and your punches and kicks will be a bit more powerful. Grab another orb and your muscles will bulge even further, completely tearing your shirt. Get a third and you’re treated to a thoroughly impressive full screen transformation sequence of your human turning into their beast form.

## The Beast Within

Each of the five levels features a different monster. The Wolf can throw fireballs and execute a cool flaming jump kick. The Dragon can fly, shoot lightning bolts from its mouth, and surround itself with blasts of electricity. The Bear blows petrifying breath and does a crazy spinning jumping roll. The Tiger also has fireballs, as well as a vertical jump kick. In the final level, you turn into the Gold Wolf, which is exactly the same as the first transformation but a little bit more powerful.

One of the most annoying issues is that it’s far too easy to let one of the white wolves slip by, so you lose out on a power-up. The first few times you run into Neff, he’s polite enough to refuse combat if you’re not transformed, so you get to continue with the stage for another cycle. If you mess up too often though, he’ll



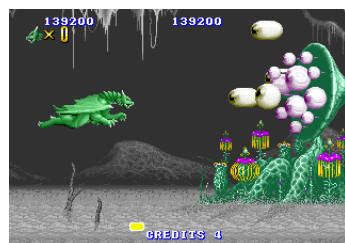
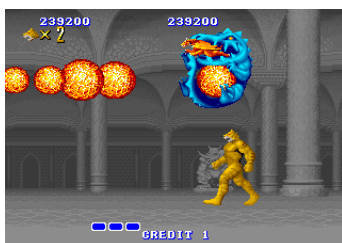
fight you anyway, which is a recipe for guaranteed death if you're still a human.

The difficulty is also incredibly high. Enemies approach in droves and attack quickly, and it's far too easy to get surrounded or bombarded by cheap hits. There's almost no invincibility time after taking a blow either, which just results in even more damage. Your character is so huge that it's extremely difficult to dodge attacks during boss battles without getting hit. Unfortunately *Altered Beast* was originally designed as something of a credit feeder, so when translated to the home consoles, where you're given limited continues, it just becomes obnoxious.

## Long in the Tooth

*Altered Beast* hasn't aged quite as well as other Sega properties – it really is all about the visuals. But from a certain mindset, it's still rather impressive, because the presentation is damn good. Various body parts fly out of the screen when you kill bad guys. Kill a gargoyle, and its body falls to the ground while its wings fly back off into the sky. Kill a Cyclops and its flesh literally falls off. It's almost humorously grotesque, especially considering there really isn't any blood or similar effects.

The voices – whether it be the opening cry to “Rise from your grave” or the nefarious “Welcome to your doom” spoken before each boss – are iconic. The monster designs are also pretty awesome, especially the early bosses, like



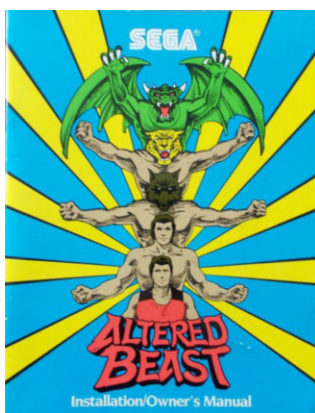
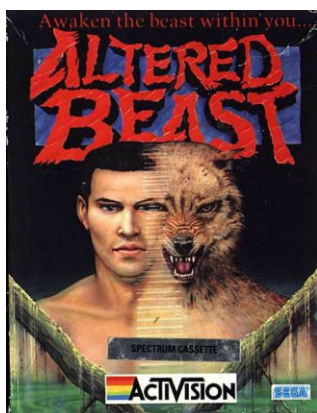
the huge demon who rips off his heads and showers his screaming visages down on the player, or the plant-thing which attacks with its innumerable eyes. The Chicken Leg monsters, also known as Chicken Stingers, show up in *Golden Axe* too. Even though *Altered Beast* is somewhat lacking as a game, it maintains the joyous excess of 1980s arcade titles which made them so appealing.

Sega also had a weird thing going on with the endings of some of their arcade releases. In *Altered Beast*, after the game shows you all of the beast forms, it reveals that everyone in the game are merely actors “filming” a “movie”,

who all take off their costumes and then share a drink.

The Genesis port is the closest to the arcade version. Some of the minor graphical effects have been toned down, particularly the scaling effects, though parallax scrolling has been added. In general it's a bit easier, though the music isn't quite as powerful. The wacky ending is also gone. Otherwise it looks and plays almost exactly the same. This version is found on the *Sega Smash Pack Vol. 1* for the Dreamcast, though it suffers from

**Above:** [ARC] The transformation screen, along with some of the bosses battles  
**Below:** Artwork from the [ZXI], [ARC] and [FC] versions

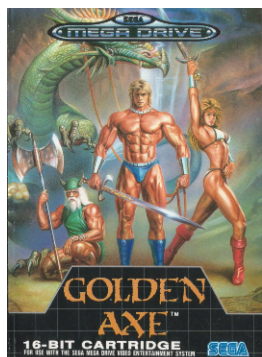
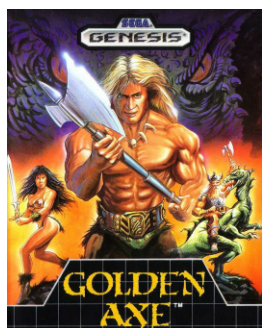




## Golden Axe

Original Release: 1989

Platforms: ARC, GEN, SMS, SCD, PCE, IBM, AMI, CPC, C64, AST, ZX, WS, GBA, PS2, 360, PS2, PS3, PSP, WII, WIN, IOS



The *Golden Axe* series was created by Makoto Uchida (*Altered Beast*, *Dynamite Cop*). It's a barbarian themed beat-em-up that's heavily inspired by the *Conan the Barbarian* stories, featuring buff warriors in tights and *Red Sonja*-style warrior goddesses in bikinis. The series is also known for its fantastic artwork which resembles classic *Conan the Barbarian* and Frank Frazetta work, though a lot of other fantasy action games borrow from these as well.

The whole series tells a tale about a mythical weapon called Golden Axe that can grant its user great power (the Japanese characters in the *Golden Axe* logo roughly translate to "Battle Axe" – there's a sword, a hammer, and an axe hidden inside the stylized kanji). The main antagonist is an evil lord called Death Adder, a towering monstrosity of a man who wears a frightening mask just to let the player know he's evil. It started as an arcade game, which later spawned two sequels for the Genesis, and another sequel for the arcade. There are also several spin-offs outside of the main series, including two role-playing games and a 2D fighter.

There are three characters to play as: Ax Battler is a typical super muscular barbarian, and an all-round average fighter; Tyris Flare is the bikini armor-clad Amazon, the resident hot chick,

princess of the kingdom, and fantastic magic user; and Gilius Thunderhead is a dwarf. Despite his diminutive stature he's the strongest, but has the weakest magic power. Gilius Thunderhead's initial attack is also the slowest of the three characters.

## Busting Heads

The gameplay of *Golden Axe* is fast paced and typical of most beat-em-ups. There's a single attack button, a jump button, and a magic button. Repeatedly hitting an enemy using the attack button will begin a combo that the player can end by either throwing the enemy away from them, or by hitting them with the blunt end of their weapon for extra damage. It's a particularly brutal animation (for the time) that keeps the game true to its barbarian inspiration.

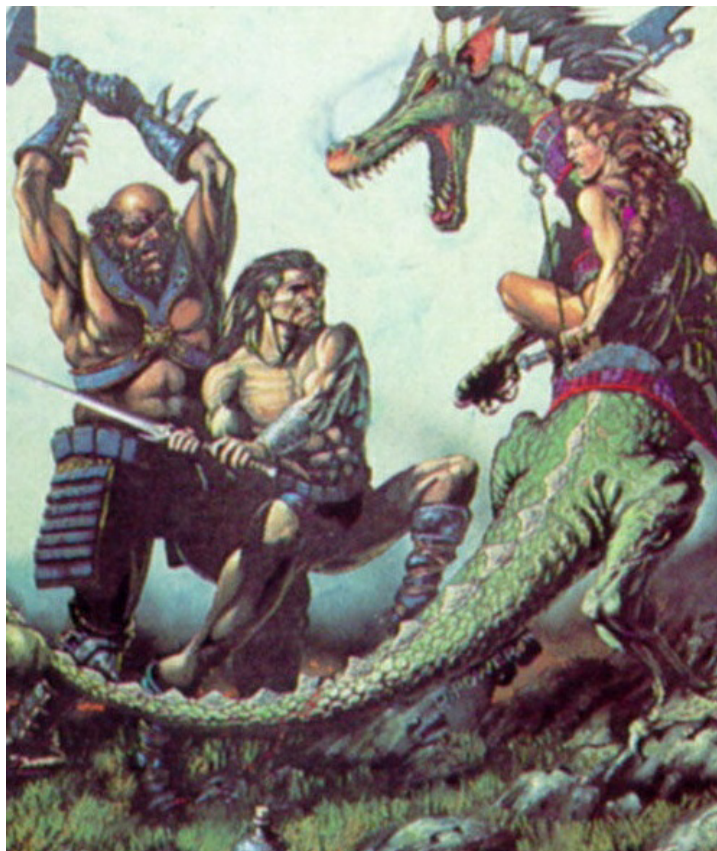
Pressing attack and jump at the same time lets you attack behind you. You can also dash forward by double tapping the joystick. Finally, if you run, jump, and press attack at the peak of your ascent you'll do a downward stab. This is very difficult to hit anything with, but will kill most non-boss enemies with a single strike. The striking nature of the animation is helped by the fact that, unlike almost every other beat-em-up you'll find, enemy bodies remain on the screen forever after being defeated.



Each level is also filled with little gnomes, which drop magical pots when they're hit. Although the type of magic depends on the character, the number of pots you have determines which level of spell you can cast. All of them will attack every enemy on the screen, but the spell level will determine how much damage it'll do.

Naturally, the stronger the spell, the cooler the effect. On a low level, Tyris Flare will summon flaming ghosts to wail around the screen. At a higher level, she'll summon a dragon to breath fire on everything. It's a quick and easy way to damage bosses, and keep the crowds of enemies under control. Between each level, a bonus round is initiated, where these same gnomes come and steal your magic while you're camping for the night. You have the opportunity to get back more magic than you lost though, by efficiently beating up the gnomes for their trouble.

After these bonus rounds, each new level begins with one of the characters writing in a journal, describing their adventure into the lair of Death Adder. The game world itself is pretty cool and remarkably well developed – one village is on the back of a giant turtle, and at another point you actually board the back of a gigantic bird. The stages are filled with various kinds of barbarians, including a pair of fat bald-headed dudes with hammers known as the Bad Brothers. There are also animated Ray Harryhausen-style



skeletons, who are some of the toughest foes in the game.

Most beat-em-ups grant you power-ups in the form of weapons, effectively doubling your strength. Since all of the players in *Golden Axe* already have weapons, the game goes one step further and lets you ride on a variety of beasts known as Bizarrians. These include a cockatrice-like creature (known as

"Chicken Leg") that whips enemies with its tail as well as two different types of dragons. The first breathes a fiery jet of flame, the second type only appears at the beginning of level three and attacks by spitting a fireball clear across the screen.

**Above:** Cover artwork for the Commodore 64 home-computer version

**Bottom-row:** [ARC] Tyris' highest fire magic, the entrance to Turtle Village, and the player select screen

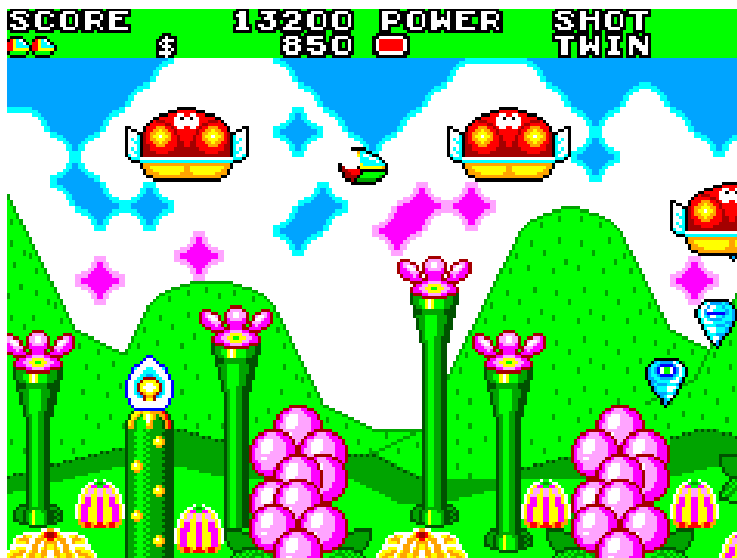




## Fantasy Zone II: The Tears of Opa-Opa

Original Release: 1987

Platforms: SMS, ARC, FC, MSX2, PS2, Wii



*Fantasy Zone II* was designed specifically for the 8-bit Master System, and shakes up the formula in a few ways (its subtitle, *The Tears of Opa-Opa*, was dropped in the Western releases). There are, once again, eight stages: Pastaria, Sarcand, Hiyarika, Bow Bow, Chaprun, Fuwareak, Sbardian and Wolfin.

Each level is broken down into several subsections that you switch between by running into warp points. Once you've cleared all of the bases in the level, you need to track down the special red warp point to encounter the boss. This is all extremely aggravating, because there's no radar, so you tend to wander around until you find some enemy generators to kill, and hopefully remember where the red warp point is to finish off the level.

The shop balloons are gone too, replaced with stationary "shop clouds" located at specific points in each level. Each shop also carries different items, with a few power-ups new to this game, like the Shield. The upside is that you can visit the shops any time you want. The downside is that when you respawn from a death, you'll be extremely underpowered until you find them. Some special power-ups are also hidden in the scenery. Additionally, there's a Power Meter, allowing you to absorb more than one bullet before dying; directly colliding

with foes will still kill you instantly though, until you find some items to extend it.

The background designs are even crazier than before, and show off some of the most colorful graphics on the Master System. Still, while the graphics are great for the system, it's a huge step down from the arcade version of the first game. Furthermore, the music is a chirpy, terrible mess, which is especially a shame after the original's catchy tunes. The FM synth soundtrack in the Japanese release is easier on the ear, but still isn't very good.

*Fantasy Zone II* was also released in the arcades on the System E board, although it's practically identical to the SMS version, with a few changes. It replaces the "Power" meter with a radar. However, even though it shows the locations of the pods, it doesn't highlight where you are. Each level is also timed, with a little "life" indicator that slowly counts down to zero. You can only take a single hit before dying, though any seconds left when completing a level will generate extra gold.

*Fantasy Zone II* was also ported to the Famicom and MSX2. Both are quite inferior to the SMS version, with terrible graphics, even worse music, constant slowdown, and in the case of the MSX2 version, choppy scrolling.





The fact that Sega designed *Fantasy Zone II* for the Master System rather than the System 16 board was quite a disappointment. So with the 2007 release of the *Fantasy Zone Complete Collection*, Sega and M2 went the extra mile to make good on this old mistake, by creating *Fantasy Zone II DX*.

It's actually a remake, but not any old remake – similar to *Game Center CX* / *Retro Game Challenge* and *Mega Man 9*, it's a brand new game developed using retro-style graphics. Rather than simply mimicking the low-res pixel art, the developers actually programmed it to be compatible with the System 16 hardware. They created a new revision of the board, called System 16C, which has more RAM than the original A and B revisions, but is otherwise functionally similar. They even burnt ROMs for use at some promotional events in Japan, and the game is currently emulated in MAME. As a result, it features an aesthetic style exactly like the original, except even more colorful and surreal.

M2 did more than just upgrade the graphics, as they fixed up the other missteps. In the original *Fantasy Zone II*, each level consisted of several subsections each with a unique background, which you could transport between via warps. This has been changed so each level has a "Bright" and "Dark" rendition – the Bright level is the default version,

but the Dark equivalent has different graphics and enemy patterns, and even tougher bosses. The Dark stages are so scary you won't find the standard Shop balloons either, and need to scavenge for hidden shops to buy things. In the Bright levels the shops pop out at the beginning of each stage/life as in the other games, so you don't need to hunt them down anymore.

## Prince of Darkness

You technically never need to enter the Dark areas, but enemies give more money, and completing these stages is the only way to get the best ending. There are three endings in total – in the bad one, where Opa-Opa turns evil, it even references the Harrier and Uriah from *Space Harrier* as coming to destroy him, further tying together the two series. Of course, in tightening up the levels, a lot of the crazier backgrounds from the original *Fantasy Zone II* unfortunately had to be ditched, but the developers picked the best and used those as a basis.

Further tweaks have been made in other areas. Opa-Opa controls slightly differently, as there's a brief animation of him turning around when switching directions. The Power meter is gone, but if you take a hit with a special weapon equipped you'll lose the weapon though still



## Fantasy Zone II DX: The Tears of Opa-Opa

Original Release: 2007

Platforms: PS2





### Monster World IV

Original Release: 1994

Platforms: MD, 360, PS3, Wii



*Monster World IV* is the only mainline entry in the series without the “Wonder Boy” moniker. This actually makes total sense, considering the protagonists is now a green-haired Arabian girl named Asha. The vaguely generic fantasy settings of the previous *Monster World* games have been replaced with a fanciful Arabian setting, making it feel a bit like Disney’s *Aladdin* from around the same era, albeit with a cutesy, manga flair. The story really hasn’t changed much though, with Asha being chosen to leave her village to rescue some missing spirits and save the world in the process.

With this final entry in the series, the RPG elements have been scaled down considerably. There is only a single city, Rapadagna, which as usual acts as the hub for the four sub-worlds, which take the form of different temples. However, there’s no real overworld to explore, as you are immediately transported to each of the four sub-worlds through a central temple in the city. In turn, these areas are almost entirely linear, although you can still grab gold to buy equipment in town, as well as health replenishments from the various vending machines found throughout.

While *Monster World IV* barely qualifies as an action-RPG any more, as a trade-off, the platforming is easily the best it’s ever been. To aid you in your

quest, Asha finds a cute flying blob called a Pepelogoo. She can grab onto it to float, use it to double jump, or throw it at switches. It’s also resistant to fire, so she can carry it on her head as a shield or toss it on flaming lava to use as a platform.

The dungeon designs are far more elaborate than the previous games, largely because they rely on using your Pepelogoo to traverse the terrain. Alas, the tasks presented can only vaguely be called “puzzles”, as most are quite simplistic. Perhaps in order to make up for the lack of exploration the dungeons are also long, really long, usually with multiple boss battles. Unfortunately the game doesn’t think up enough interesting things to do to justify their length, so dungeons begin to grow tiresome after awhile.

Other than slightly hidden chests and the usual caches of money, the only optional items to find are crystal tears spread throughout each stage. Collect 10 of these and you’ll gain an extra heart on your second life meter. This acts as a backup to the main life meter, which in turn is expanded by purchasing new armor. However, very few of these are actually hidden, so the number of secrets compared to previous games is reduced.

The combat has been changed a bit too. Unlike the previous heroes, who kept their



shield out at all times, Asha needs to press down to pull out her shield. Magic spells are also gone, forcing you into melee combat against everything. You can, however, jump and thrust downward, and even bounce on enemy heads, expanding your combat strategy slightly.

Even though it's largely a step back for the series, it's hard not to like *Monster World IV*. Asha is one of the most adorable heroines to appear in a video game, largely thanks to her expressive and fluid animations. She runs like a proper little lady, arms swaying to her side, and wiggles her butt when opening up treasure chests. When she jumps, you can see the wind against her baggy pants. The rest of the visuals are similarly gorgeous, taking advantage of the 16-bit hardware in ways that *Wonder Boy in Monster World* didn't even attempt. Every screen is bursting with vibrant color, side-stepping the grainy graphics usually seen in Genesis titles.

This is also the only *Monster World* game not composed by Shinichi Sakamoto, with the duties passed onto Jin Watanabe. The title screen theme acts as an overture, with many of the later songs offering variations on the same melody. The entirety of the soundtrack is definitely quite



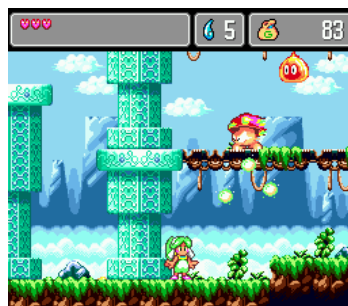
catchy, though due to the recurring motifs, they do tend to grow a bit repetitive.

Despite the change in setting, the aesthetics are clearly in line with the other *Monster World* games. Furthermore, the four spirits to be rescued are the same as the familiars from the previous game and there's even a reference to the fate of Shion.

Even though *Monster World IV* has gorgeous graphics and solid gameplay, Sega elected not to localize it when it was initially released. Although it was fan translated by DemiForce and DeJap in 2002, the game was officially localized nearly 20 years after release, in 2012, available

via digital distribution for the Wii, Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. The official translation is more faithful than the fan translation, and also uses a nicer font.

Above: Artwork for the *Complete Collection*  
Bottom: [MD] *Monster World IV* is one of the most gorgeous games on the platform

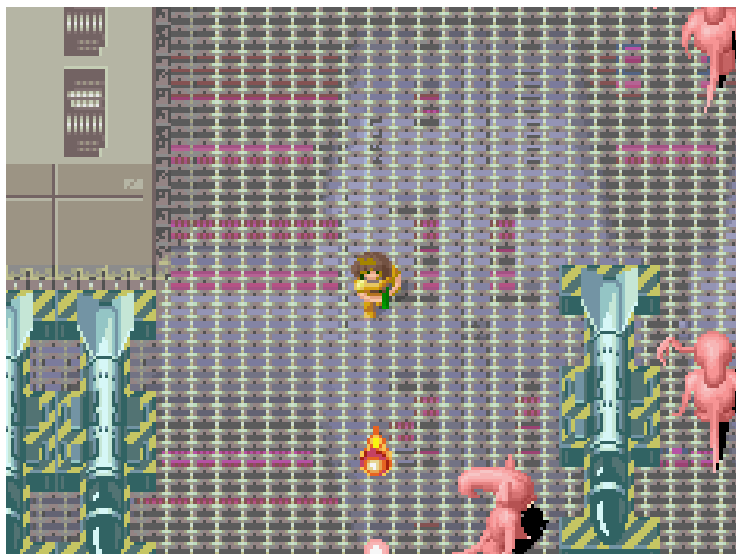
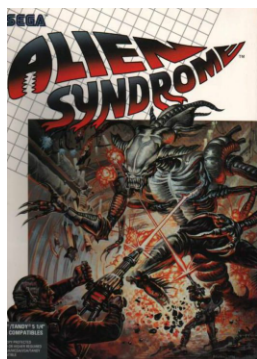
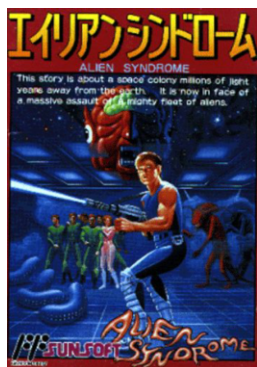




## Alien Syndrome

Original Release: 1987

Platforms: ARC, SMS, NES, C64, X68, AMI, AST, IBM, PS2, PS3, 360



*Alien Syndrome* is pretty clearly a rip off of the movie *Aliens*, since Konami had the actual license to the movie (and made their own suitable arcade entry).

Although it looks like a typical overhead, character-based shooter, *Alien Syndrome* is a rather far stretch from linear games like *Commando*. Players can take control of either Ricky or Mary (outer space commandos who are absolutely in no way related to Michael Biehn or Sigourney Weaver), or both during simultaneous two-player action. Each of the stages takes place on one of seven invaded colonies, where the aliens have trapped the humans in cocoons and biologically contaminated most of the structures.

As an insurance plan in case Ricky and Mary can't save the day, each of the colonies is set to explode after a certain amount of time. You're therefore working against the clock to find enough hostages, get to the exit, and kill the boss. The stages aren't particularly complex, but there are maps posted around that will clue you in on the locations of your comrades. In addition to your clumsy little pea shooter, you can also find new weapons like lasers and two different kinds of flamethrower, in addition to options that shoot behind your character. With the constantly spawning enemies, *Alien*

*Syndrome* manages to emulate the feel of *Gauntlet* without all of the clumsiness.

*Alien Syndrome* has no tolerance for screw-ups. You cannot continue, at all. While the levels don't pose too much of a challenge, some of the boss encounters can be quite difficult, especially if you get killed and revert to the default cannon. You're even forced to use it during the final confrontation, regardless of how well you've done.

## Absolute Terror

The high difficulty level adds to an atmosphere of complete terror. The music is tense, low-key, and incredibly creepy. A single tap from an enemy and your player will cry out a blood-curdling scream before collapsing. It's all rather unnerving.

But what really makes the game memorable are the awesomely grotesque boss designs. The first boss is a gigantic rotund ball with a little green dude sticking out from whatever would be classed as its shoulder. After taking enough hits the body explodes, leaving behind a head which morphs into some kind of twisted thing with an extended jaw and ugly horns when it attacks. The second boss appears to be a pulsating heart surrounded by blobs. The third boss is a strange, lumbering,





multi-legged creature with eyes that detach and float around the screen, which looks both goofy and horrific. The sixth boss is an alien grasshopper with what appears to be a baby's head. The final boss, which hijacks itself onto your ship *a la* the finale of the original *Alien*, looks like half of a human face stripped of its skin, leaving another head dangling from its nose, and huge distended ears that fire bullets. The "body

horror" aspect is still the best part of this classic.

The Famicom / NES version – published by Sunsoft in Japan and Tengen in America – is relatively faithful to the arcade version, even offering two-player simultaneous play and a new intro cinema. The characters walk much slower, though, and you must rescue every single prisoner before you can fight the boss. The bosses are also pretty similar, although some of their attacks had to be scaled down.

## More of a Remake

The Sega Master System version is practically a whole new game. The scrolling is gone, and instead it flips screen-by-screen like the original *The Legend of Zelda*. All of the levels are completely different (although the first stage is patterned after the second level

of the arcade game), and each feels more maze-like. Some of the enemies are the same, but the vast majority are unique to this version. On that note, while a few of the bosses have been carried over (although slightly altered), most of them are entirely new, and manage to be just as awesome as the arcade bosses, despite the lower color palette. The weapons have been cut down, so there's only flamethrower and laser power-ups. Sadly, there's no map at all.

However, the game is even more difficult than the arcade version, impossibly so. Each room starts out empty and foes slowly blink onto the screen. It's way too easy to accidentally have an enemy appear beneath you for a

**Top:** Covers from the [NES] and home computers versions, and an arcade flyer  
**Bottom:** [ARC] Some of the more gruesome boss encounters

