

NEO·GEO



SNK'S JET BLACK JUGGERNAUT LANDED IN 1991 WITH HUGE CARTRIDGES, BIGGER CONTROLLERS, AND A STRATOSPHERIC PRICE TAG. JOIN SNK FANBOY **JOHN THACKER** AS HE CHRONICLES THE HISTORY OF THE LONGEST-LIVED HOME CONSOLE EVER, AND THE FIRST TO BRING TRUE ARCADE PERFECTION INTO YOUR LIVING ROOM – IF YOU COULD AFFORD IT...

If you weren't around in 1991, you might know the Neo Geo as something of a mythical beast of the gaming world. You may have heard rumours of games that cost hundreds, maybe even thousands of dollars. Perhaps you have seen its massive arcade-style joystick controllers, or stumbled into a Neo Geo internet forum, only to have your head virtually chewed off by the regulars. Or, maybe you are one of the lucky ones who has actually played a Neo Geo, and has joined the thousands of fans worldwide who regard the system as the crown jewel of a bygone era in gaming. These unfortunate souls are doomed to live with the sad knowledge that there will never be another system quite like the Neo Geo ever again. What is so special about this system that it can inspire such fervour in its fans? Read on...

Before the days of Neo Geo, its creator, SNK – also known as Shin Nihon Kikaku, or 'New Japan Company' – was a moderately successful Japanese arcade game developer responsible for such titles as *Vanguard*, *Alpha Mission* and *Ikari Warriors*. Thanks to its success in the late Eighties in the arcades and with various NES ports, SNK decided to experiment with new, unconventional ideas for expanding its presence in the arcade market. One such idea would lead to the birth of the Neo Geo arcade hardware – MVS, or Multi Video System – and, subsequently, the Neo Geo home console, the AES.

In the late Eighties, most new arcade games came on a single large circuit board and were sold complete with dedicated cabinets, at a significant cost. Arcade operators who wanted to have the latest games had to invest

considerable money and floor space while shouldering a great deal of risk as to whether their investment would actually pay off. SNK sought to change that with its new machine. The Neo Geo MVS was a single cabinet that could accommodate between one and six different titles in the same machine, depending on which model was purchased. Instead of new games being released as entire circuit boards containing the processing logic in addition to the game ROM, games would be sold as individual cartridges that contained only the game ROM data, leaving the logic integrated onto the MVS arcade board.

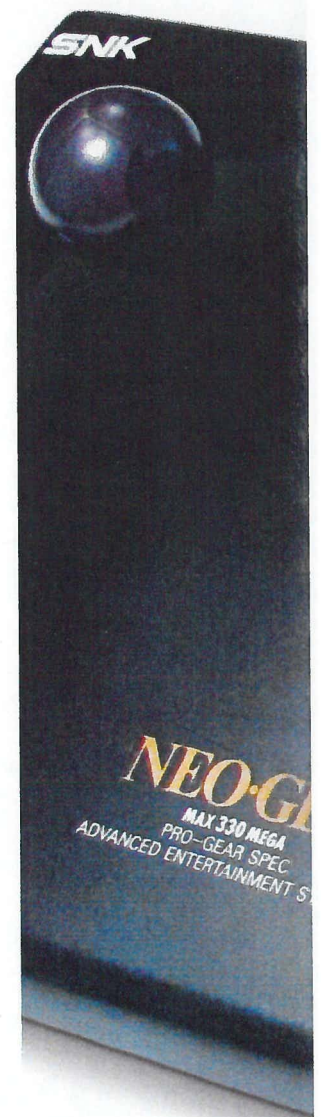
Luckily, SNK didn't skimp on the technical specs, and the MVS stood tall next to other arcade games of its era and proved to be extremely versatile as the years went on. The Neo Geo featured a fast 16-bit Motorola 68000 CPU, as well as a companion 8-bit Z80 CPU, hence the '24-bit' moniker. Multichannel stereo sound with digital audio capabilities was also integrated into the machine.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the MVS, however, was its advanced graphics capabilities. The hardware allowed for 4,096 simultaneous colours on screen, a fact that SNK later touted in advertisements when advocating its technical superiority to the Sega Mega Drive and Super Nintendo. The Neo Geo was capable of displaying hundreds of massive, flicker-free sprites simultaneously, some of which could be larger than the entire screen. The cartridge format allowed the hardware to stream graphics from the game memory extremely rapidly, allowing for butter-smooth animation that would later prove a valuable asset for fighting games and pre-rendered 3D graphics.

That leads us to the home console counterpart to the MVS: the Neo Geo AES. It is important to remember that in the late Eighties and into the early Nineties, many of the most commercially successful console games were ports of the most popular arcade games of the time. High-quality arcade ports were viewed as system sellers. In



» Some 'dog tag'-style US-released Neo Geo cartridges, featuring the 'Bigger, Badder, Better' Neo Geo logo with the game title against a black background.



AES



“ Fans worldwide regard the Neo Geo AES as the crown jewel of a bygone era in gaming ”

INSTANT EXPERT

■ **SNK actively supported** the Neo Geo AES with new releases from 1991 through 2004, making it the longest-lived home videogame console in history.

■ **Puzzled, aka Joy Joy Igd**, a launch title in Japan, was the smallest Neo Geo AES game, weighing in at just 22 megabits. The largest AES title was *The King Of Fighters 2003*, released in 2004, at 716 megabits.

■ **Of the 148** Neo Geo MVS titles officially released in the arcade, 117 had an AES home cartridge release in Japan. Of those, 93 had an official English-language counterpart.

■ **AES cartridges came** in three distinct types of packaging. The first-generation titles in Japan were released in easily damaged cardboard boxes. SNK quickly switched to a more durable, soft clamshell-type case, and eventually to a hard plastic snap case, beginning with the release of *Fatal Fury 3* in 1995 through the final release in 2004.

■ **All Neo Geo** games use identical ROM chips in the cartridges, regardless of region or format (AES or MVS). As a result, the mode and language in which a Neo Geo game plays is entirely dependent on the format and region of the system playing it.

■ **The Neo Geo AES** ‘Gold System’ was launched on 1 July 1991 in the United States and came with the console, two arcade-style joysticks, and *Magician Lord* as a pack-in. MSRP was \$649.99. The average MSRP for individual launch titles was \$199.99.

■ **Four-player gameplay** was possible on the AES. Certain titles, such as *League Bowling*, had a small 1/8” linkup port in the top of the game cartridge, allowing gamers to sync with another console running the same game. Only three games ever made use of the feature.

■ **Early MVS (arcade)** Neo Geo machines featured a memory card slot built in to the cabinet. That way, AES users with a memory card could continue games where they left off in the arcade.

■ **At some point** in the development cycle, each Neo Geo title was assigned a unique three-digit ‘NGH’ number, found within the game code itself. Because there are holes in the otherwise sequential known list of NGH numbers, it is believed that there were many Neo Geo games developed that never saw official release.

■ **‘AES’ is an acronym** for Advanced Entertainment System, another name for the Neo Geo home console. ‘MVS’ refers to the Neo Geo Multi Video System, the Neo Geo’s arcade counterpart.

RETROINSPECTION

▶ bringing arcade games home, game developers of the era were usually faced with the daunting task of reprogramming the games from the ground up for the less powerful home hardware, often with very mixed results. While some ports were able to capture the spirit of the arcade original, they were very rarely perfect, and purists were always quick to recognise omissions and compromises.

That was simply not good enough for SNK, and the idea of arcade perfection formed the foundation of the AES home console. SNK decided that its arcade

MVS games would also be made for its AES home system, and the games would be indistinguishable from their arcade counterparts.

Therefore, the AES was manufactured to be technically identical to the arcade hardware.

In fact, AES games actually used the exact same ROM chips as the arcade cartridges, although the two cartridges were not interchangeable due to different pin connectors. Thus, gamers were guaranteed the same experience at home as they had in the arcade.

Shortly following the launch of the arcade hardware and after test-marketing the AES as a rental unit, SNK decided to sell the AES system worldwide and market directly to consumers. To assist in marketing the console in the US, SNK of America created a special position known as 'Game Lord'. This was a face gamers could associate with the system who would also be responsible for getting the word out to potential buyers. Longtime game industry veteran Chad Okada was selected for the task. "SNK originally created this position because the US branch was in need of a person who knew all the aspects of videogames," he recalls. "To market the product well, they needed to know the competition and they needed someone who knew videogames as a whole, from a strategic marketing standpoint and from a gamer standpoint."

▶ MVS to AES converters (two different models pictured) allow AES owners to play relatively cheap MVS games on their AES consoles in lieu of forking over hundreds of dollars for rare AES originals.



▶ As with most collectables, counterfeit items can be a problem. These two AES cartridges look harmless enough but actually contain altered, fan-made case inserts in place of the SNK originals. Buy with caution!

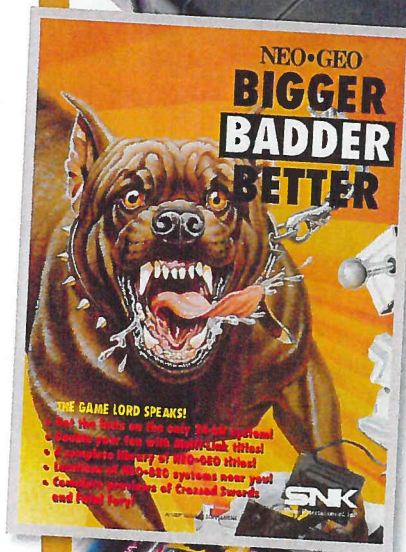
As with many things in life, perfection came at a price. The prices of the machine and its games are almost legendary in the history of gaming. Due to the advanced technology involved, the system's price was unprecedented at the time of release. The Neo Geo Gold System, which included one game, launched in the US in 1991 at \$649.99, with games averaging \$199.99 each. The console itself had a sleek, elegant facade that was completely black, reinforcing its image as an 'elite' console. The game cartridges were larger than VCR tapes, had two edge connectors

underneath, and were packed with expensive high-capacity ROM chips – and they also smelled of solder; a sure-fire way to tell a 'fresh' cartridge! To highlight its arcade roots, the system also included two large four-button arcade-style joysticks, each of which was almost as large as the system

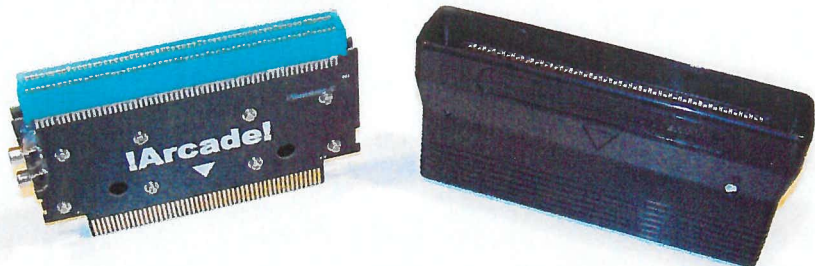
itself. At the time, the price of one AES cartridge was more than a brand new Sega Genesis console. More than one parent would lose sleep over the idea of keeping their kid happy with a fresh supply of games for this beastly unit.

Okada recognised the difficulties SNK faced in getting the console into gamers' hands, given the high price and retailers' reluctance to take a risk on the machine. "Early on, the strategy was to gain attention – not necessarily positive attention – and to market to a consumer that was older, richer, and could afford a premium-priced game system," he continues. "It was thought that we could only sell in places similar to a Sky Mall or Sharper Image. It was a difficult product to sell because of the price point."

As a result, SNK had to focus on the obvious technical superiority of the system while acknowledging the higher price tag. SNK had a very aggressive, adult-themed advertising campaign, and advertised in adult magazines in addition to the popular game magazines of the era. "It will always be known that SNK



▶ The mascot of the 'Bigger, Badder, Better' marketing campaign violently breaks off his leash to gnaw through the controller of your wimpy non-Neo game system in this classic ad.



► *Magician Lord* was a launch pack-in, and as such is very common on the used market.



COMMUNITY THE BEST NEO GEO AES RESOURCES ON THE WEB

neo-geo.com

■ This should be the first stop for anyone with even a fleeting interest in the Neo Geo. Home to the infamous Neo Geo forums and its community of rabid fans, the site also features price guides, master game lists, game reviews, cartridge photos, collection galleries, and the Neo Store, where high-end Neo goods are regularly stocked from sources worldwide.



neogeforlife.com

■ Kazuya_UK's Neo Geo reviews site has long been one of the finest Neo Geo fan sites on the 'net. Here you can find in-depth reviews for nearly every Neo Geo title, including ports to other consoles and even SNK-developed games for other platforms. The site is loaded with screenshots and is the best place to get the lowdown on whether a title is worth your time.



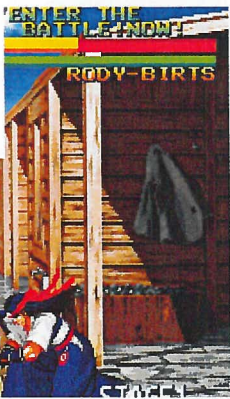
unibios.free.fr

■ The Universe BIOS, created by community legend Razooola, is a handy console modification that unlocks the full potential of the game cartridges in both AES and MVS units. Gamers can access debug modes, cheats, hidden game data, and even play the games based upon different hardware configurations. Think of it as a Game Genie for your Neo Geo! Essential.



ngdevteam.com

■ NG Dev Team marketed and released *Last Hope*, a homebrew shooter, on the Neo Geo in 2006. The cartridge was priced at \$550 and was limited to 60 units produced. The fact that it sold out instantly is a testament to the dedication of Neo Geo fans and the continued interest in new releases. Who knows what the future holds for homebrew development?



► An exclusive photo of the two rarest and most valuable AES titles ever: English *Kizuna Encounter* and *The Ultimate 11*. Unlike most English AES titles, these are believed to have only been distributed in Europe and fetch thousands of dollars each in the rare event a copy surfaces for sale.

► tried to convince consumers that the Neo Geo [AES] was exactly the same as the \$4k machine in the arcades. And this was the truth," says Okada.

Fortunately for SNK, gamers quickly recognised the technical advances that the Neo represented. The AES launched alongside a host of software titles, and no popular genre was overlooked. There were action games (*Cyber-Lip*, *Magician Lord*, *The Super Spy*), sports games (*Top Player's Golf*, *Super Sidekicks*), shooters (*Ghost Pilots*, *Alpha Mission II*, *Last Resort*, *NAM-1975*), platformers (*Blue's Journey*), racers (*Thrash Rally*, *Riding Hero*), brawlers (*Burning Fight*, *Mutation Nation*), and even a pseudo-RPG known as *Crossed Swords* – obviously a difficult genre for the arcade. The vast majority of games all looked, sounded and played great, with many of the titles featuring high-quality speech that enhanced the home experience. Because many gamers had already played these titles in their local arcade, they salivated over the prospect of playing them at home.

"Gamers obviously went bonkers over it. They loved it. They all wanted it," recalls Okada about the launch. "When the Neo Geo was released, it was the most respected powerhouse game system out. It was a system that trounced everything out at the time and made everything else look like toys."

“As gamers had played these titles in the arcade, they salivated over playing them at home”

Nevertheless, retail sales for the machine continued to struggle. Then, suddenly, an event occurred that changed everything. 1991 saw the release of a little arcade title known as *Street Fighter II*, which, as everyone knows, shook the entire games industry to its core. Gamers packed arcades for their turn to go head to head against

friends and foes alike in the genre-defining 2D brawler. Suddenly, the platformers and shooters of old weren't quite as interesting. A new type of game was in town.

Luckily for SNK, the Neo Geo hardware happened to be perfect for the 2D fighting genre, thanks to its advanced

graphics, high memory capacity and four-button controller layout, which was unusual in the era of JAMMA-based arcade boards, which traditionally used only three buttons. It turns out that SNK was developing a fighting title contemporaneously with Capcom's effort, which later became known as *Fatal Fury*. Despite having only three

selectable characters and an admittedly inferior game engine, gamers jumped at the opportunity to play a decent alternative to *Street Fighter II*. *Fatal Fury* introduced many of SNK's most enduring and beloved characters, such as Terry Bogard and Geese Howard, as well as unique gameplay mechanics, including two-player co-operative gameplay and the 'line change' system. Plus, it looked and sounded great for its time. The fighting game frenzy was so intense that SNK quickly began producing additional new fighting franchises, such as *World Heroes* and *Art Of Fighting*. The games were so successful in the arcade that SNK couldn't release new sequels fast enough – barely nine months separated the release of *Fatal Fury 2* and *Fatal Fury Special* in 1993, for example.

In 1993, SNK released *Samurai Shodown*, a bloody weapons-based fighter set in feudal Japan. This incredible game proved that SNK was willing and able to challenge genre conventions and go toe to toe with Capcom in the fighting



Samurai Shodown V Special: Neo Geo's final bow, complete with controversy

■ THE FINAL NEO Geo AES title, *Samurai Shodown V Special* (known as *Samurai Spirits Zero Special* in Japan), was released worldwide on 9 July 2004 at a retail price of ¥39,800 (\$359.99 in the US). Fans had clamoured for the release after seeing videos and screenshots revealing all-new violent fatalities for each of the beloved characters. When the AES cartridge finally arrived, fans were shocked to not only find bugs in the game's practice mode, but also that the fatalities had been removed. Fans could not understand the last-minute decision to censor the game in the age of *Grand Theft Auto* and were even more offended given the high price paid for the release. The uproar became so severe that SNK Playmore issued an unprecedented global recall of the Japanese and English AES cartridges, replacing a ROM chip inside the cartridges to allow for "toned-down" fatalities. Meanwhile, during the recall process, a talented Neo Geo fan developed a method to unlock the full fatalities in the game code of the original release using a specialised system BIOS (the 'Universe BIOS'). Of course, this disappointed fans that had purchased the game at release, only to ship it right back to SNK Playmore for what was supposedly a superior version.

As a result of the recall, there are now both 'fixed' and 'unfixed' versions of this AES release – SNK placed a small Neo Geo logo sticker on the cartridge shells to identify 'fixed' versions. Today, original 'unfixed' cartridges are very scarce and command a premium in the collectors' market, since that is the only version to contain the full fatalities hidden in the game code. Looking back, the episode serves to highlight a certain disconnect that SNK Playmore had with its loyal fans, who were certainly mature enough to handle a little blood and violence after forking over \$350+ for a game on a 14-year-old console.

At least it appears that SNK Playmore tried to send the Neo Geo off on the right note. The back of the game's English manual reads: "A FINAL FAREWELL: To all of our customers who have purchased NEOGEO ROM cartridges up till now. Thank you very much. We offer our most heartfelt gratitude for your loyal patronage over these 14 full years and hope for your continued support for our games on the many other platforms we will provide products for in the future. NEOGEO fans rule!"

game arena. The heated competition between the two companies would last through the decade and beyond as both companies tried to out-innovate each other with each new fighting game release. SNK's hugely successful *King Of Fighters* franchise, launched in 1994 and subsequently released in annual instalments through 2003, always went head to head with the hottest Capcom fighters of the day and remains a tournament favourite in Japan. Those who could afford the AES home console truly had access to cutting-edge titles, and this back-and-forth competition explains why almost half of all Neo Geo AES games are 2D fighters.

Thanks largely to the fighting genre and its cheap, modular cartridge-based design, the Neo Geo MVS was highly successful in establishing a foothold in arcades worldwide. Unfortunately, sales of the AES never really

took off, and by the mid-Nineties the system had practically vanished from store shelves. "Even with the amount of marketing we had out for the Neo Geo at the time, we couldn't get the product into big name chains," remembers Okada about the console's failure to break into the home market. Thus, AES fans were forced to source new releases from specialist game shops that could afford to advertise in game magazines, or directly from SNK via mail order. To make matters worse, the cost of new cartridges was slowly rising, and the media was beginning to give up on the console. SNK officially halted production of new Neo Geo AES consoles in Japan in 1996, although game production continued.

Ironically, it is during this time that the Neo Geo saw some of its most important releases. *Metal Slug*, developed by Nazca, was released in 1996 and gradually grew to be one of the Neo Geo's most beloved and enduring franchises. The game took the *Contra* formula and added smooth, cartoony animation, awesome music with voice effects, and a variety of outrageous weapons. The game spawned five sequels on the Neo hardware alone, and the series has been ported to nearly every system, from the Sega Saturn to the Xbox 360. *Bust-A-Move*, also known as *Puzzle Bobble*, is one of the most well-known and oft-imitated puzzle games outside *Tetris*, and has become a staple of arcades worldwide – although, for some inexplicable reason, this title never saw an official AES release.

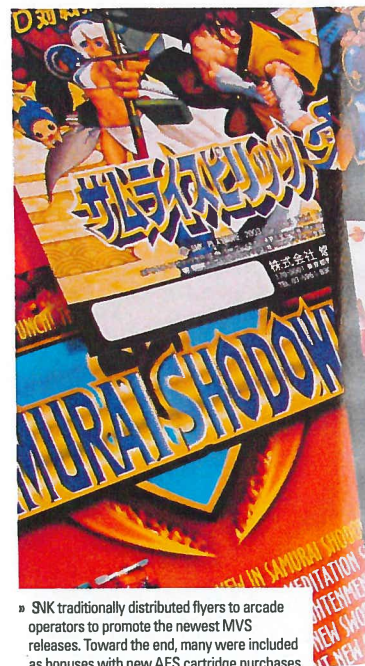
The failure of the AES at retail did nothing to stop SNK from developing new Neo Geo games, because the MVS continued to thrive. And, because AES and MVS cartridges were produced in the same factories in Japan, SNK was able to easily produce AES versions of the latest arcade releases at minimal cost to satisfy the small legion of loyal fans that remained. This explains the longevity of the AES system: despite the fact that the system failed at dethroning Sega or Nintendo, the success of the MVS system meant there was little risk to SNK in releasing limited quantities on the AES format.

As it turns out, quantities in some cases were extremely limited. It is estimated that, outside of Japanese releases and popular *King Of Fighters* and *Metal Slug* entries, many post-1995 titles were produced in quantities numbering in the low

hundreds. For example, the AES version of *Metal Slug*, despite being one of the Neo's most successful arcade releases, is one of the most valuable videogames ever, commanding up to \$3,000 for a complete, authentic English cartridge. The rarest games are believed to be the English releases of *Kizuna Encounter* and *The Ultimate 11*, with only a handful of copies surfacing over the years. The price of other rare AES cartridges began dramatically increasing and hasn't stopped since, making the AES one of the most collectable videogame systems



► The first AES title, *NAM-1975 (NGH-001)*, released to retail on 1 July 1991, next to the final AES title, *Samurai Shodown V Special (NGH-270)*, released 9 July 2004.



► SNK traditionally distributed flyers to arcade operators to promote the newest MVS releases. Toward the end, many were included as bonuses with new AES cartridge purchases.

NEO·GEO PERFECT TEN



SAMURAI SHODOWN II

- ★ RELEASE: 1994
- ★ PUBLISHER: SNK
- ★ CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- ★ EXPECT TO PAY: £20+

01 With its beautiful graphics, silky smooth animation and eclectic character roster, the second part of SNK's *Samurai Shodown* series is easily its best. The 202-meg cart featured new fighters, glorious backdrops and even slicker controls than the impressive original. A massive arcade success, *Samurai Shodown II* was a fantastic two-fingered salute to Capcom and proved that SNK's style and ambition knew no bounds. It certainly lacks the depth of later games in the series, but for sheer fun and accessibility *Samurai Shodown II* is without equal. A truly monumental fighter that still plays brilliantly today.

METAL SLUG

- ★ RELEASE: 1996
- ★ PUBLISHER: SNK
- ★ CREATOR: NAZCA CORPORATION
- ★ EXPECT TO PAY: £1,360+

02 *Nazca's Metal Slug* remains the definitive game in the series. Sure, we love *X* and *3*, but the original just does everything right. The action is fast and furious and the pacing is superb, while the level design and variation remains impressive. Bosses are extremely satisfying to defeat, the tunes perfectly suit the action, and the tongue-in-cheek humour immediately makes it stand apart from other run-and-guns. It's the glorious animation and the amazingly balanced gameplay, though, that proves to be *Metal Slug's* trump card, not to mention that the titular tank is the cutest inanimate object we've ever seen.



THE LAST BLADE

- ★ RELEASE: 1997
- ★ PUBLISHER: SNK
- ★ CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- ★ EXPECT TO PAY: £100+

03 Now here's a game that never seems to get enough love. Achingly beautiful – along with its sequel and *Garou*, it remains one of the Neo Geo's best-looking games – *The Last Blade's* deliberate pacing, outrageous depth and balanced characters have earned it an army of fans, and yet it's nowhere near as well-known as *Samurai Shodown*. Its alarmingly deep gameplay, over-the-top moves, ability to parry, and glorious aesthetics helped usher in a new era of Neo Geo gaming and proved just how versatile the hardware was.

BLAZING STAR

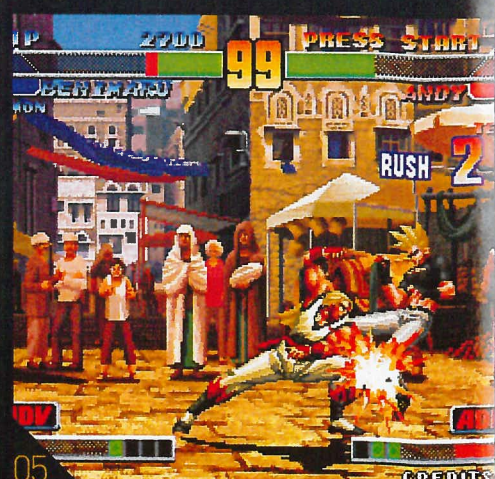
- ★ RELEASE: 1998
- ★ PUBLISHER: SNK
- ★ CREATOR: YUMEKOBO
- ★ EXPECT TO PAY: £510+

04 Sure, you can laugh at its fractured Engrish, but play Yumekobo's stunning shooter and you'll be gobsmacked. With its mesmerising pre-rendered sprites, insane bosses, and outrageous power-ups, the 346-meg *Blazing Star* always justifies its high price tag, and along with *Pulstar*, it remains the Neo Geo's finest blaster. *Blazing Star* assaults the player with excited speech, intense alien waves, finely tuned gameplay mechanics and humongous mayors. The end result is an amazing rollercoaster of a ride that you'll never want to end.

KING OF FIGHTERS '98: THE SLUGFEST

- ★ RELEASE: 1998
- ★ PUBLISHER: SNK
- ★ CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
- ★ EXPECT TO PAY: £95+

05 It would have been all too easy to select several *King Of Fighters* for our top ten, but this is easily our favourite. Everything about *King Of Fighters '98* just screams, 'Look at me! I'm so much better than everything else!' The gameplay is instantly accessible but offers a satisfying layer of depth and its cartoony visuals still look sensational, while its many and varied backgrounds are some of the most detailed around. Add in its massive roster of excellent characters and it's another essential AES purchase.



GAMES

With half the system's games being fighters, a fair few of them have made our Top 10. There are still some very classy – not to mention expensive – alternatives, though...



WINDJAMMERS

RELEASE: 1994
 PUBLISHER: SNK
 CREATOR: DATA EAST
 EXPECT TO PAY: £95+

06 *Windjammers* proves that you don't need superlative visuals or complex fighting mechanics to become an essential AES release. Essentially nothing more than a tarted-up version of *Pong* – you fling a frisbee and use angles to slip it past your opponent – *Windjammers* is one of the finest multiplayer games on the system and combines slick controls and fast gameplay to create one of the most enjoyable games around. Like the best arcade games, it's easy to get into but includes enough nuances and techniques to ensure that you'll constantly return to it.



GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES

RELEASE: 1999
 PUBLISHER: SNK
 CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
 EXPECT TO PAY: £340+

07 There can't be many Retro Gamer readers who aren't aware of this fantastic title, as we harp on about it every chance we get. Honestly, though, *Mark Of The Wolves* is basically the finest brawler on the AES and possibly the finest 2D fighter of all time. In addition to totally revitalising the *Fatal Fury* series, it boasts 11 new fighters, some of the best visuals to ever appear on the AES, and nigh-on perfect gameplay mechanics. It's expensive, but you could argue that you'd never need to buy another fighter.



NEO TURF MASTERS

RELEASE: 1996
 PUBLISHER: SNK
 CREATOR: NAZCA CORPORATION
 EXPECT TO PAY: £1,000+

08 Extremely tough to get hold of – it currently has an 'extra extra rare' rating on Neo-Geo.com – this offering is still worth tracking down, providing you can afford it. While *Neo Turf Masters* (*Big Tournament Golf* in Japan) doesn't really bring anything innovative to the table, Nazca's superb offering plays an excellent version of the sport thanks to its slick presentation, tight controls and speedy pace. There are two modes to choose from, a variety of golfers, and some beautiful courses to play on. An excellent, surprisingly deep, game of golf.



FATAL FURY SPECIAL

RELEASE: 1993
 PUBLISHER: SNK
 CREATOR: IN-HOUSE
 EXPECT TO PAY: £20+

09 Like *Garou* and *The King Of Fighters '98*, *Fatal Fury Special* is available on Live Arcade for just 800 Points. Purists may want to go for the original, and with a nice low price point it's definitely worth picking up. Essentially an updated version of *Fatal Fury 2*, improvements include a new combo system, speedier overall gameplay and a far larger roster of playable characters. Indeed, you now have access to all the bosses from *FF2*, as well as the return of several non-player characters from the original *Fatal Fury*, including Geese Howard and Duck King. It looks wonderful as well, with massive sprites and glorious backdrops.

PULSTAR

RELEASE: 1995
 PUBLISHER: SNK
 CREATOR: AICOM
 EXPECT TO PAY: £340+

10 One day we'll confirm that *Pulstar* was created by former Irem employees, but for the time being you'll just have to be content to play one of the Neo Geo's toughest shooters. Unflinchingly difficult – our hats are doffed to anyone who has 1CCed it – it requires a hell of a lot of skill to make any sort of progress but is so fantastically designed that you'll want to keep persevering regardless, especially once you've managed to get to grips with its excellent charge system. Despite its difficulty, *Pulstar* remains a sensational addition to any Neo Geo collection and is highly recommended to all hardcore shmup fans.



NEO·GEO AES

and the rest...

Undeniably expensive, the Neo Geo is host to some of the finest arcade conversions around, as the following two pages prove. How many have you played?

- 01 METAL SLUG
- 02 ART OF FIGHTING
- 03 2020 SUPER BASEBALL
- 04 VIEWPOINT
- 05 BLAZING STAR
- 06 NEO TURF MASTERS
- 07 SAMURAI SHODOWN II
- 08 FATAL FURY
- 09 NAM-1975
- 10 THE KING OF FIGHTERS '98: THE SLUGFEST
- 11 CROSSED SWORDS
- 12 ANDRO DUNOS
- 13 MAGICIAN LORD
- 14 DOUBLE DRAGON
- 15 METAL SLUG 3
- 16 EIGHT MAN
- 17 THE KING OF MONSTERS
- 18 PULSTAR
- 19 THE LAST BLADE
- 20 THRASH RALLY
- 21 ALPHA MISSION II
- 22 LAST RESORT
- 23 THE SUPER SPY
- 24 RIDING HERO
- 25 MUTATION NATION
- 26 SENGOKU
- 27 MAGICAL DROP II
- 28 SOCCER BRAWL
- 29 BASEBALL STARS 2
- 30 THE KING OF FIGHTERS '94
- 31 WORLD HEROES 2
- 32 WINDJAMMERS
- 33 GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES
- 34 NINJA MASTERS
- 35 STAKES WINNER 2
- 36 ART OF FIGHTING 3: THE PATH OF THE WARRIOR
- 37 BURNING FIGHT
- 38 KARNOV'S REVENGE
- 39 PUZZLE BOBBLE 2
- 40 REAL BOUT FATAL FURY SPECIAL
- 41 AERO FIGHTERS 2
- 42 SAMURAI SHODOWN IV: AMAKUSA'S REVENGE
- 43 CYBER-LIP
- 44 METAL SLUG X
- 45 SUPER SIDE KICKS
- 46 THE KING OF FIGHTERS '96
- 47 THE LAST BLADE 2
- 48 PREHISTORIC ISLE 2
- 49 TOP HUNTER: RODDY & CATHY
- 50 BREAKER'S REVENGE
- 51 NINJA COMMANDO
- 52 BLUE'S JOURNEY
- 53 PANIC BOMBER
- 54 GHOST PILOTS
- 55 FOOTBALL FRENZY
- 56 AERO FIGHTERS 3





04 05



06



07



11 12



13



14



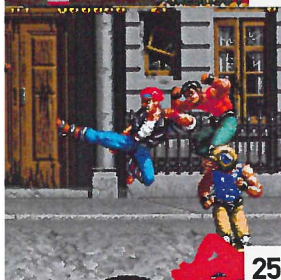
18 19



20



21



25 26



27



28



32 33



34



35



39 40



41



42



46 47



48



49



53 54



55



56

