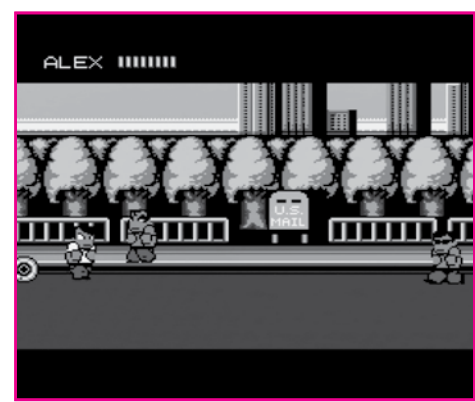
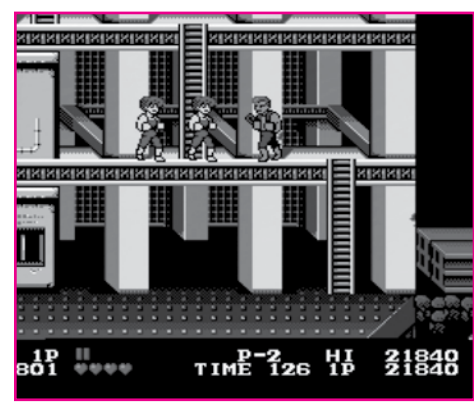


WIN INSIGHT INTO THE HISTORY AND LEGACY OF THE GENRE

Limited Run Games CLUB O' FUN NEWSLETTER

ALL ABOUT PLAYSTATION 4 SWITCH • VITA VIDEO GAMES Plus an NES Cartridge For Good Measure

Sept./Oct. 2020



KUNIO LIVES: RIVER CITY GIRLS AND BEYOND

Back in 1986, one of gaming's most enduring icons made his debut in arcades: A Japanese teen delinquent by the name of Kunio, star of Technos Japan's *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-Kun*. Outside Japan, we knew him as "Mr. K", the streetwise, cold-blooded star of *Renegade*. Same guy, same game, different graphics—and both versions proved to be big hits in their respective territories, which inspired Technos to create sequels for both heroes. Kunio's adventures have gone by many different localized names through the years (including *Crash 'N the Boys*), but we know it best as the *River City* series. The Americanized urban wasteland of *Renegade*, on the other hand, gave us the *Double Dragon* series, which took inspiration from movies like *The Warriors* to move things into a post-apocalyptic near-future for a grimmer, more realistic take on brawling.

Whether you prefer *River City* or *Double Dragon*, they're both part of the brawler genre's most important family tree: Games that trace their origins back to *Renegade*. To date, Limited Run Games has published three of them in partnership with Arc System Works, who acquired the rights to the entire franchise from Million in 2015: *Double Dragon IV*, *River City Melee*, and *River City Girls*. With the first two, you could get a sense of Arc System Works taking a run-up with the series; they're good-hearted games that demonstrate a strong understanding of each series' respective appeal, but in terms of moment-to-moment gameplay

can be a little uneven. *Double Dragon IV* (which, thanks to a quirk of sequel numeration, shipped 20 years after *Double Dragon V*) relies on assets from *Double Dragon II* for NES, turning back the hands of time by nearly three decades. *River City Melee*, on the other hand, embraces the *Kunio-kun* series' legacy of intramural sports combat with a varied collection of four-player competitive modes.

River City Girls, on the other hand, demonstrates much greater confidence. It was inspired when director Adam Tierney discovered a 16-bit Kunio spin-off called *Shin Nekketsu Kouha: Kunio-tachi no Banka*, the first time Kunio and Riki's girlfriends (Misako and Kyoko) took the lead role in a game. "I fell in love with their cute sprites and violent curb-stomps and flying kicks," says Tierney. "I reached out to one of my favorite comic artists, Priscilla Hamby, and had her draw some updated character designs. Arc loved the concept."

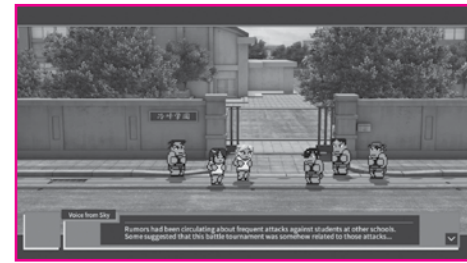
While *River City Girls* draws heavily upon classic concepts, it looks nothing like your typical *Kunio-kun* game, with lankier character designs and greater pixel detail than the chunky square sprites for which the series is known. "Arc gave us a lot of leeway and really trusted WayForward in our vision for the game," says Tierney. "*Kunio-kun* is an interesting brand in that, 50 games later, the sprites still look pretty close to the NES originals. We knew we wanted to break that pattern with our game and went pretty wild and original in our

sprites, music, storytelling, VO—everything! And all praise to Arc System Works; they absolutely embraced WayForward's vision for the game at every step."

Tierney says Arc's only real concern was to maintain the integrity of the game universe and the characters' backgrounds. "The only areas where we had any sort of guardrails were where we broke factually from the existing property, which is why Kyoko mentions, 'I don't even go to this school,'" he explains.

Tierney describes *River City Girls* as a true collaboration, with the company working closely together and focusing on their respective specialties. "Most of the ideas and production came from WayForward," he says, "but our producers at Arc would give feedback on everything: Which characters to use, which locations, even songs to recreate, because they know the *Kunio-kun* brand so intimately. Arc also had their combat experts give us feedback on the intricacies of our combat system."

The collaboration clearly paid off, as the game shipped to rave reviews and great sales. A fourth title in Limited Run's *Kunio-kun* lineup—a follow-up to *River City Girls*—is already in the works between WayForward, Arc System Works. "As Limited Run Games announced at their LRG3 event," says Tierney, "there are more adventures of Misako and Kyoko on the horizon. I can't reveal specific details, but WayForward and Limited Run Games are excited about the project!" LR



Top row, from left: 8-bit originals, *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-kun* [aka *Renegade*]; *Double Dragon*; *River City Ransom*
Bottom row, from left: Limited Run-era sequels, *River City Melee*; *Double Dragon IV*; *River City Girls*

THE TAKEOVER LINKS A GENRE'S PAST TO ITS FUTURE

The brawler genre has never been shy about tipping its hat to outside influences, from movies like *Streets of Fire* to heavy metal music to the time *Renegade* creator Yoshihisa Kishimoto spent in actual gangs. As the format roars into the '20s with the likes of *Streets of Rage 4* and *River City Girls*, that cross-pollination has become more vibrant than ever before. Matt McMuscles, who wrote and produced *The Takeover*, cheerfully acknowledges the works that shaped his own efforts—many of which, he notes, were in turn influenced by brawlers.

"Some of the special moves you see in *The Takeover* are similar to ones you'll find in *Streets of Rage 2*," he says. "Of course, those were spawned out of *Street Fighter II*'s success, so it's cyclical." In turn, *The Takeover*'s beefy, cel-shaded visuals resemble those of modern fighting games... especially when its protagonists fire off a *hadouken*-style projectile attack or strike a Terry Bogard pose.

Though McMuscles had little input into *The Takeover*'s combat mechanics ("The main designer, Pelikan13, had a build of the game in place when I joined," he says), his goal as writer and producer was to weave the narrative and gameplay together meaningfully.

"While the mechanics of creating a satisfying beat 'em up are obviously important," he says, "compelling scenarios which frame the action are what separates something like *Final Fight* or *Streets of Rage* from forgettable titles."

Neither McMuscles nor Pelikan13 simply copy other games. Instead, they find new uses for tested gameplay concepts. They also reinvent them, as with *The Takeover*'s



Punisher-inspired gunplay. "We do a lot more with the mechanic," says McMuscles. "A more involved story, along with some over-the-top combo mechanics (complete with a dedicated training mode), as well as vehicle sections—that sums up the new stuff we wanted to add."

As with the best brawlers, *The Takeover*'s influences draw from all corners of pop culture, not just games. "I've tried to match

the neon-soaked, high-contrast style of the graphics with a comic book sensibility. I have a soft spot for the edgy-but-harmless stylings of '90s Image Comics, so that's where a lot of the game's tone comes from. There's also some DNA from '80s/'90s action films—stuff like *Samurai Cop* and *Hard Ticket To Hawaii*."

McMuscles is thrilled to be at the forefront of the modern brawler revival. "For a while, it seemed like brawlers were a thing of the past. They'd evolved into action games like *Devil May Cry*," he says. "Thankfully, in the last few years, there's been a resurgence." Far from being a shortcoming of the genre, he says the simplicity of brawlers is key to their appeal.

"The brawler reminds us you don't need a bunch of icons on a map and a million side quests to be fun. All it takes is simple-yet-satisfying combat and a colorful cast of characters."

Perhaps most importantly, *The Takeover* represents one critical influence above all: McMuscles' lifelong love of the genre. "My fascination with the belt action game started with *Double Dragon* on the NES," he says. "I was a brawler fan for life. Being able to flesh out the story and characters of *The Takeover* has been kind of a dream job." LR

BEYOND RAGE: INSIDE STREETS OF RED

With a name like *Streets of Red*, you don't have to burn through many brain cells to figure out what developer Secret Base was working toward with their brawler—though producer and designer Ray Teo says there's much less of *Streets of Rage* about the game than the title might lead you to expect.

"I spent quite a bit of time studying *Streets of Rage* in preparation," Teo says, "mostly to figure out why it's so fun as a console-only beat-'em-up. But I spent the same amount of time looking into other big titles."

Teo's goal, he says, was to shake up the brawler format by challenging some basic assumptions about the genre. "I came up with the theme of 'Video Games vs. Horror Movies' very early in the design stage," he says. "One of the ideas was for each character to play completely differently, to the extent that they'd feel like they came from different games." When this proved too messy to balance effectively, the development team ultimately simplified the system to more closely resemble *Street Fighter II*'s character distinctions while focusing on more unconventional mechanics: Namely, a system that includes both upgrades and a permadeath penalty.

"Permadeath can be very frustrating," says Teo. "It wasn't my goal to make a hard game, but instead to keep players on their toes." Teo explains that the game provides a three-layer safety net before killing a player for good. "Each time players are close to dying, they'll pay attention and focus to make sure they don't cross that line," he says.

While the word "permadeath" evokes visions of the roguelike genre, in the context of a brawler it simply means the game plays more like an arcade experience... specifically, for a kid who's run out of quarters. But even then, *Streets of Red* is less punishing than vintage coin-ops. "To make sure that the game feels fair, we made sure that any enemy attacks and traps are properly broadcasted in advance," Teo says. Additionally, players can acquire skill upgrades as they fight to improve their survival rate. "Losing these upgrades might sound painful, but they are actually designed to come and go quickly, so we were able to make sure that each upgrade actually feels useful." The result, he hopes, is a game that (like the classic that inspired its name) provides a convincing and addictive arcade experience—despite being a console and Steam exclusive. LR

KNOCKOUT RUMORS

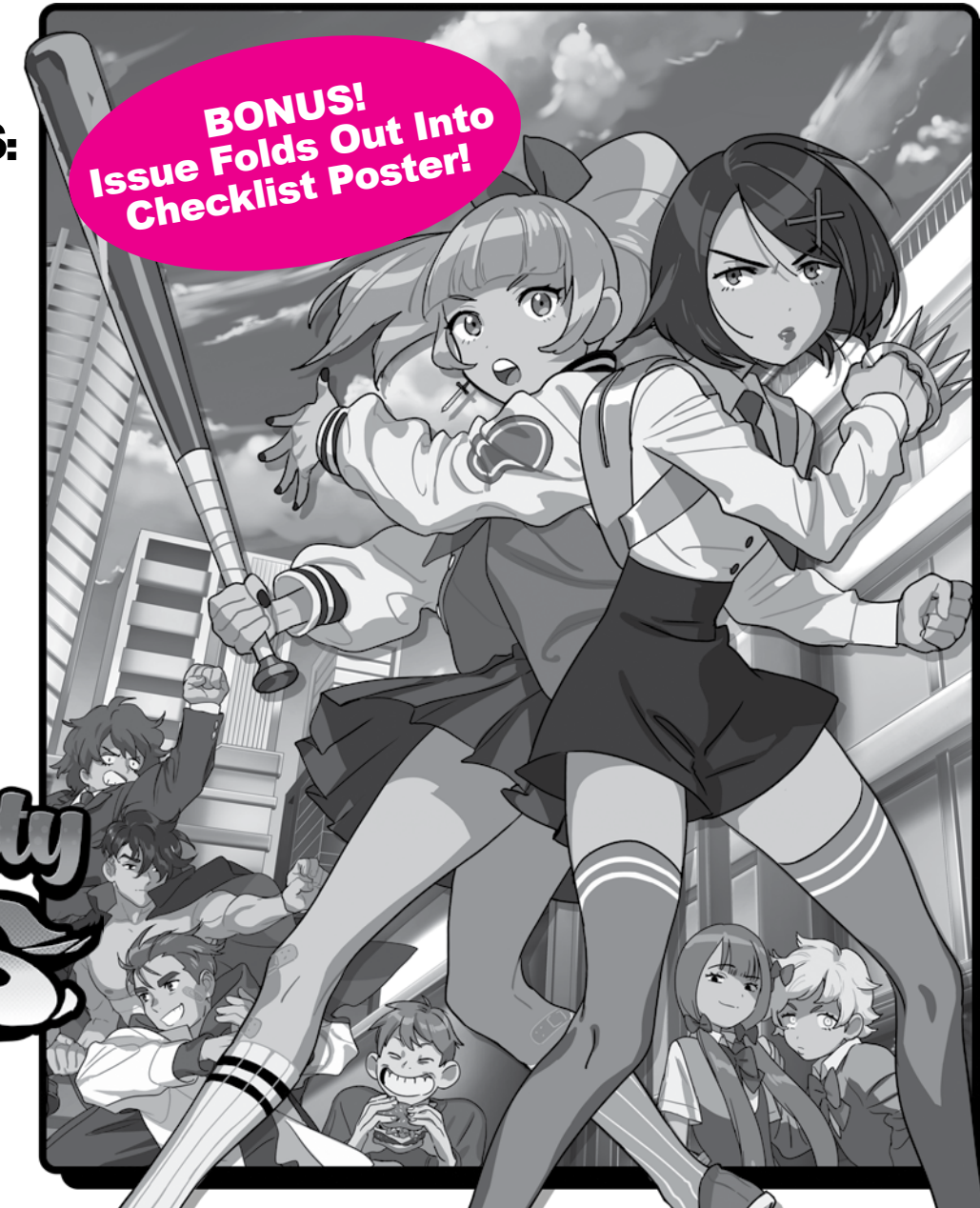
Another issue, another sack of pure balderdash—or is it? That's the miracle of rumors! Sometimes they turn out to be true. Often quite by coincidence. So grab your scorecards and golf pencils to track how much scuttlebutt pans out this time around...

- Now that the *Castlevania Anniversary Collection* is coming to physical form, could other Konami games be far behind? Let's attack aggressively!
- The brawler's close cousin the fighting game deserves love, too. Sure would be great to see the all-time king of portable fighter lineups reprinted after 20 years...
- What could a *Streets of Rage 5* look like? Would it be radically different than the sublime *Streets 4*? Perhaps a crash course in psychotherapy to finally help the streets work through their infamous rage issues.
- You know what movie property would make an amazing brawler? *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World*, which just celebrated its 10th anniversary! Seriously, someone should get working on that...

We Look Back (and Ahead) at All the HOT Limited Run PHYSICAL RELEASES:

- CURSES 'N CHAOS
- RIVER CITY MELEE
- DOUBLE DRAGON IV
- CROIXLEUR SIGMA
- PHANTOM BREAKER
- BATTLE CHEF BRIGADE
- GUACAMELEE
- DAMASCUS GEAR
- STREETS OF RAGE 4
- JAY & SILENT BOB
- STREETS OF RED
- RINGO ISHIKAWA
- THE TAKEOVER

AND WHAT'S UP WITH THE NEW...



PREZ SAYS: BRAWL NIGHT LONG

Welcome to another *Limited Run Games Club O' Fun* newsletter. This issue is all about beat-'em-ups, a genre I'm extremely fond of. As a kid, my brother and I used to walk to a place in my hometown of Danville, CA called Primo's Pizza just for the opportunity to plug quarters into *The Simpsons* arcade game. It's one of those defining childhood moments that built my love of games.

When I play these games, they take me back to those carefree days. I still remember playing *X-Men* at the movie theater during a friend's birthday and missing half of *Fern Gully* (I can't say I really cared).

GUACAMELEE: BRAWLING IN NEW FRONTIERS

Brawlers rarely stray too far from the rules laid down long ago by *Renegade* and *Final Fight*, but every once in a while a game comes along and shakes up everything. Drinkbox's *Guacamelee!* (published by Limited Run on PlayStation Vita in 2019) is one such game: It's a brawler that thinks it's *Super Metroid*.

According to Drinkbox's Graham Smith, the game actually began as something more conventional: A *Castle Crashers*-style melee title. "However, what resonated most with the team was not the gameplay, but the setting and the luchador protagonist," he says. "The team wasn't excited about a 'classic beat-'em-up' game. But we had other pitches to draw from, [such as] ideas for 'metroidvania' games where combat moves were also used for platforming. We pulled together ideas from these different pitches, and wrapped them all in the style and story of *Guacamelee!*"

Combining two very different kinds of gameplay required the team to rethink the fundamentals of both genres. "Trying to design player abilities that would feel fun in

Games have a powerful way of transporting us back to a long-gone time and place. For me, beat-'em-ups always feel like coming back to childhood. When I load one up, I remember the smell of Primo's and the sounds of the theater arcade. It takes me back to when things weren't so complicated.

I've been honored to have been able to release so many great games in this genre in the Limited Run Games lineup. I hope our releases have helped you build your own memories like the beat-'em-ups of my childhood did for me. While our memories may eventually fade, remember: *Physical is forever!* LR

both combat and platforming" was perhaps the biggest challenge, Smith says.

Fortunately, Drinkbox's Augusto Quijano says the solution was built into the problem: "In Mexico, the *lucha* style is much more acrobatic, which blended well with the platforming." Nevertheless, he admits, there was plenty of need for fine-tuning. "We experimented with being able to carry enemies around, but it slowed the action down too much. We eventually found a good solution by implementing simple 'throws' that can knock other enemies down, and more dynamic quick-grappling like *suplexes* and *piledrivers*."

"We took a lot of inspiration from *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II*—initially, all the super moves required fighting game-style inputs! We backed away from these more complex controls, as they turned out to be more frustrating than fun."

The end result speaks for itself—and *Guacamelee!* itself speaks to the creative potential that still remains to be tapped in even these exhaustively explored genres. LR



Is any genre in gaming more primarily satisfying than the brawler? Such a simple gameplay loop: Walk, punch, repeat. Throw in a jumpkick for good measure! Whatever you call 'em (belt scrollers, beat 'em ups, walk-'n-punchers), brawlers make no bones about their arcade origins. They're relentless, bordering on unfair, with endless waves of enemies who surround you and grab you from behind so another thug can introduce their fists to your face. The surest survival strategy, of course, is to drop in more quarters—to buy continues, obviously, but more importantly, to let a friend buy in. That, ultimately, is the key selling point of brawlers. They're about the power of friendship. It's what separates them from fighting games, and it's what keeps the genre going strong today with incredible modern releases like *Streets of Rage 4* and *River City Girls*. The odds never seem quite so overwhelming when you know you can rely on a friend... and a pocket full of change.
Text/layout: *Jeremy Parish*
Printed by: *Millennium Print Group*



Profiles in Limited Greatness: LEIGH ALLEN

What's your role at Limited Run?
I'm the Marketing Director, which means I assist with a lot of moving parts here at Limited Run.

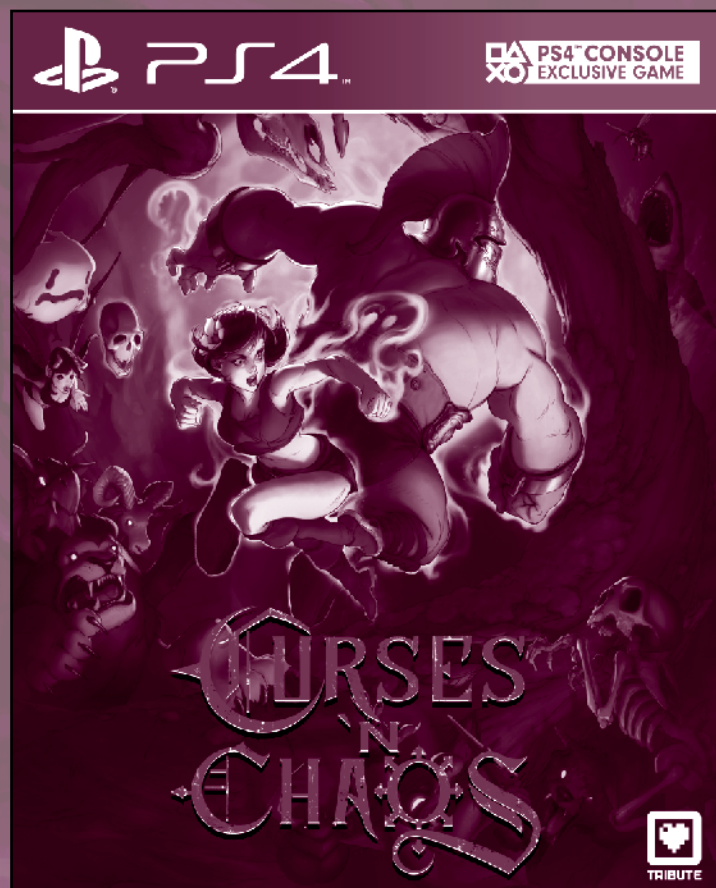
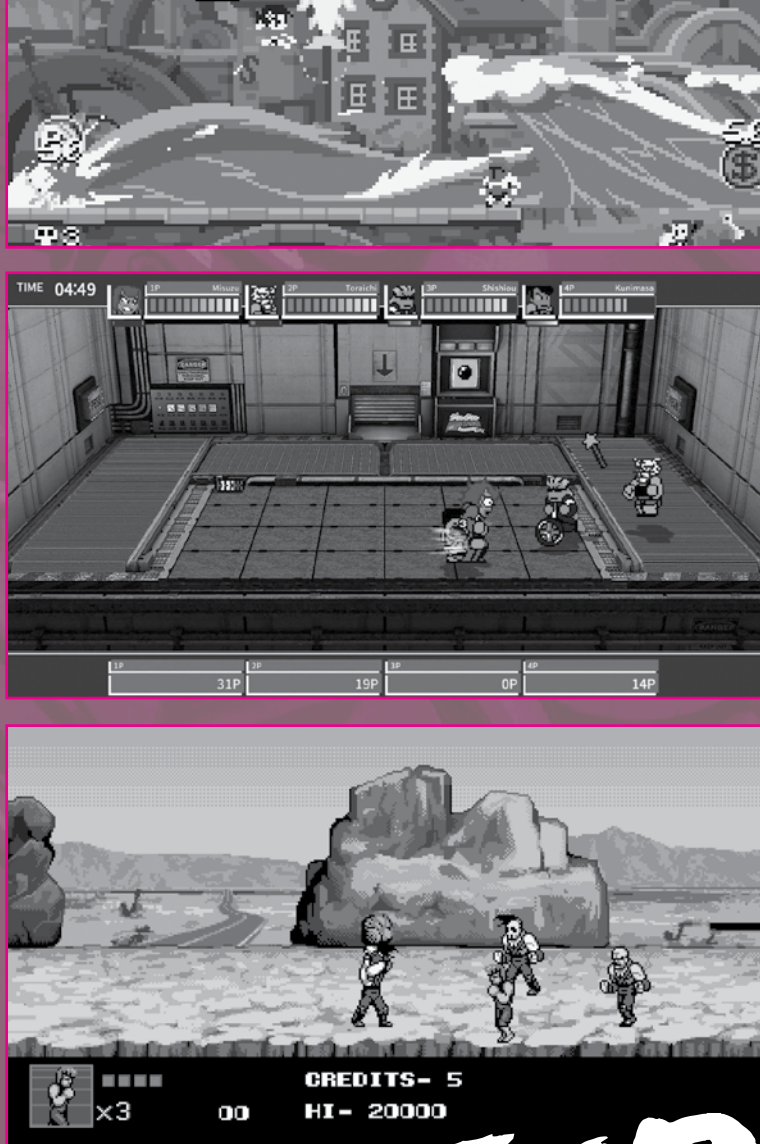
How did you get your start here?
I met Limited Run Games co-founder Douglas Bogart while I was on the MMO team for *Ghost Recon Online* (aka *Ghost Recon Phantoms*) at Ubisoft. Throughout the years, we stayed in touch, and he reached out to me to join Limited Run.

Any non-gaming hobbies?
Definitely! I guess you could consider me a foodie, but I also love photography, painting, design, and exploring.

What's your all-time favorite game?
Fallout, without a doubt. It is the reason I'm here in the gaming industry in the first place.

What's your dream Limited Run release?
BloodRayne. It's nostalgic, amusing, and stars an awesome dhampir-heroine. What more can you ask for in a game?

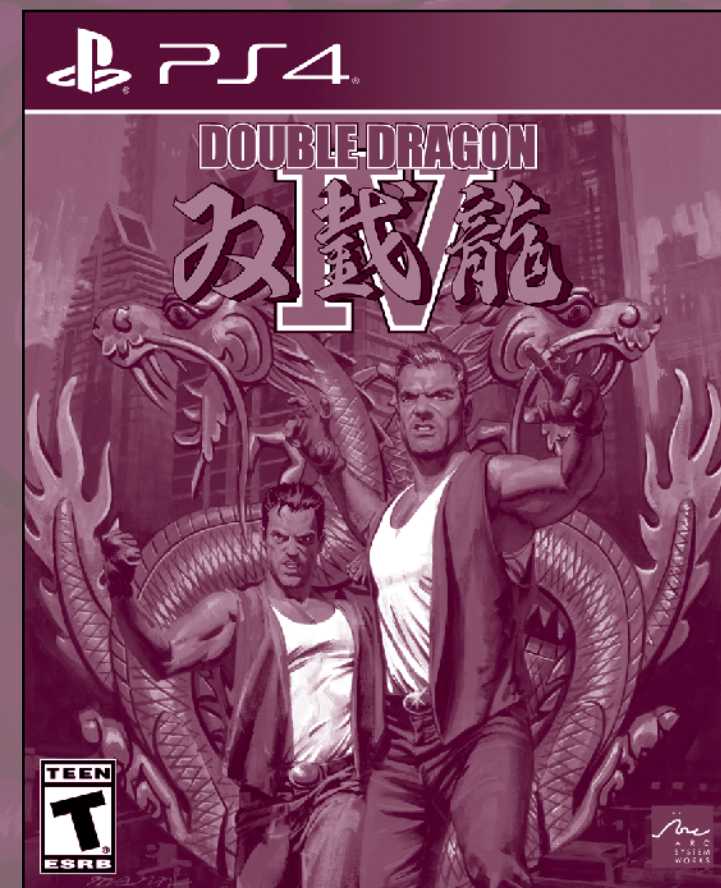
THE LIMITED RUN GAMES BRAWLER LINEUP! COLLECT THEM ALL! MORE TO COME!



Curses 'N' Chaos
PlayStation 4 (#033) | PlayStation Vita (#034)



River City Melee
PlayStation 4 (#103)



Double Dragon IV
PlayStation 4 (#104)

LIMITED RUN



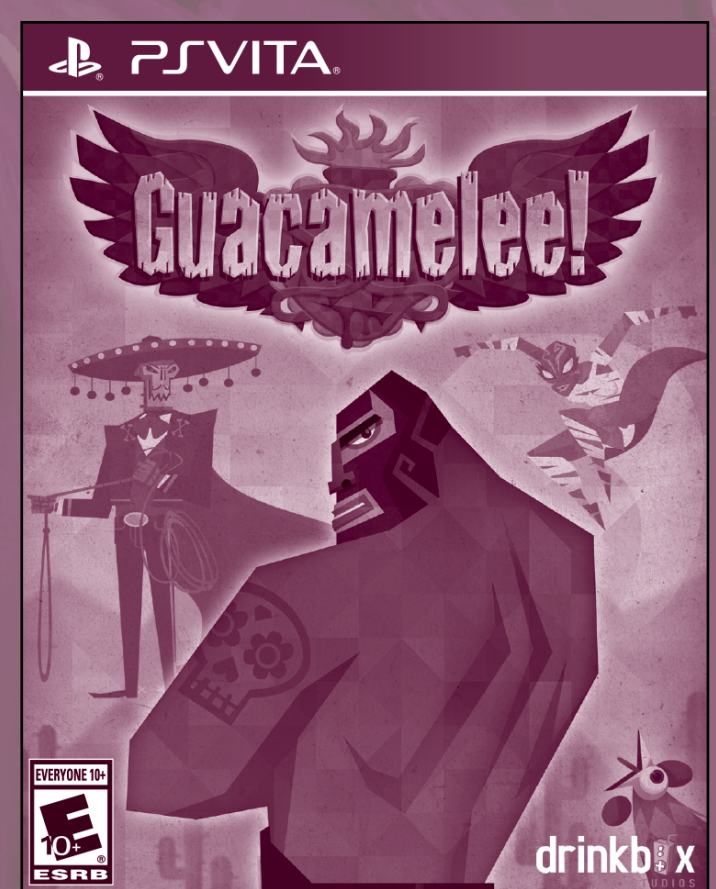
Croixleur Sigma
PlayStation 4 (#117) | PlayStation Vita (#118)



Phantom Breaker: Battle Grounds Overdrive
PlayStation 4 (#164) | PlayStation Vita (#165)



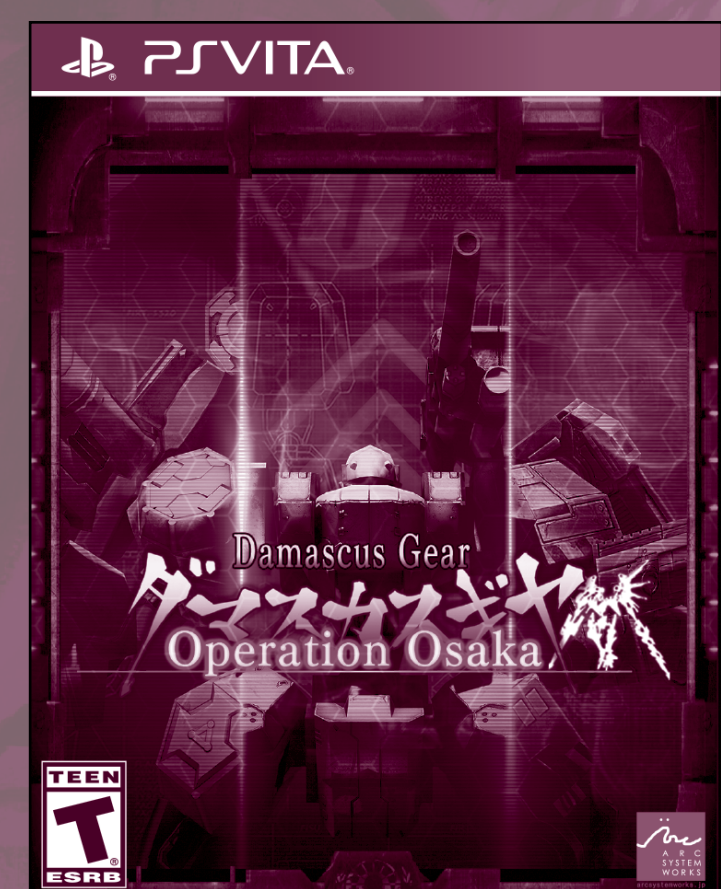
Battle Chef Brigade Deluxe
PlayStation 4 (#197) | Switch (#SW019)



Guacamelee
PlayStation Vita (#225)



Damascus Gear: Operation Tokyo
PlayStation Vita (#230) | PlayStation 4 (#286)



Damascus Gear: Operation Osaka
PlayStation Vita (#231) | PlayStation 4 (#287)



River City Girls
PlayStation 4 (#291) | Switch (#SW045)



Streets of Rage 4
PlayStation 4 (#332) | Switch (#SW065)



Jay & Silent Bob's Mall Brawl
Switch (#076) | NES



The Takeover
Coming soon!

