

A Jammin' Journey Continues

Humanature Studios' Greg Johnson masterminds gaming's greatest hip-hop revival

ToeJam & Earl may not be Sega's best-known mascot characters, but they remain an iconic and indelible part of the Genesis legacy thanks to co-creator Greg Johnson's belief in the console during the days when Nintendo ruled all.

"Back in 1990, the Sega Genesis was the underdog," Johnson says. "We saw an opportunity to be a lead title, and to have the freedom to do something really original." Johnson's current studio, Humanature, is the main force behind the alien duo's latest adventure, *Back in the Groove!* Although Limited Run Games published *Back in the Groove!* for Switch and PlayStation, its Sega Genesis spirit is strong. The original game was a wildly innovative work in the console space, incorporating elements like random level generation and unidentified power-ups that at the time were rarely seen outside of obscure PC roguelike games. *Back in the Groove!* builds on those elements while working to update them for modern gaming tastes.

"All the random-generation elements from the original game are still there, in regards to presents, terrain, and placement of objects," Johnson notes. "We simply added a lot more of everything." He admits that it's an ongoing challenge to find a mix of elements that feels definitively "*ToeJam & Earl*", with recent update patches addressing fan feedback by "trying to push the game closer to its original feel."

Still, he says, *Back in the Groove!* isn't meant to be just a rehash, and its design

History is for Weenies

ToeJam & Earl both got their start as the chilliest warriors in the 16-bit console wars, repping Sega at the peak of the Genesis era. *Back in the Groove!* is their fourth adventure to date, combining all the coolest parts of their previous games with four-player coop—and a special Limited Run Games physical release we can only describe as "sick as heck."

ToeJam & Earl (Genesis, 1991)

One of the quirkiest games ever made for Genesis, the original *ToeJam & Earl* combined roguelike game mechanics—something unfamiliar to console fans at the time—with zany, minimally violent cooperative action for a one-of-a-kind adventure.

ToeJam & Earl in Panic on Funkotron (Genesis, 1993)

For their first sequel, the dudes ditched the action-RPG stylings for a more traditional platformer-style game.

ToeJam & Earl III: Mission to Earth (Xbox, 2002)

The third adventure added a third character—Latisha—and a third dimension, using a 3D camera perspective to offer a midpoint between the first two games' styles.

features many contemporary quality-of-life considerations. "We put a lot of effort into creating four-player co-op play and online play," he says. "We still have perma-death, but we made the game a bit easier to complete," adding that the game also includes multiple difficulty levels—even individual player difficulty settings.

"In terms of new-age roguelike features, I added in a number of meta-game features which carry over from game to game, like the Power Hats and unlockable flying presents. We also added individual player-character stats to the game, and the presents Santa gives you carry over from game to game."

Perhaps most importantly to the spirit of the original, *Back in the Groove!* is a largely nonviolent experience based on cooperation and discovery rather than killing. "*ToeJam & Earl* has never been a really huge commercial success," says Johnson, "but it has brought a lot of laughter and connection into people's homes. I'm proud that it has brought some little light and joy to a world that needs more of that."

As for further *TJ&E* adventures, Johnson has hopes but acknowledges the challenges that would entail. "A lot of things need to line up," he says. "I know the co-owner of the property, Mark Voorsanger, is interested in seeing the property have more life. We're keeping our fingers crossed that something will happen with the property in Hollywood as well. That's a slow boat that requires a lot of patience!" **LR**



Above: The *ToeJam & Earl: Back in the Groove!* Collector's Edition, one of Limited Run Games' gnarliest box sets of all time. Contained inside an authentic, multilayered mystery present (styled after the in-game treasure boxes) wrapped in a *Back in the Groove!* logo obi: A poster, a jigsaw puzzle, a soundtrack (on cassette), four enamel character pins, a cardboard standee setup, and two Earthling Blind Boxes. And, of course, a complete physical copy of the game. Obviously.

Right: *Back in the Groove!* screenshots.



Limited Run

Club O'Fun

Issue 6: Jan./Feb. 2021

C.E. SHOWCASE!
FROM THE LIMITED RUN ARCHIVES!

MASSIVE SEGA SPECIAL!

TOE JAM & EARL SPACE CHANNEL 5 PANZER DRAGOON PLUS MANY MORE!

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

STREETS OF RAGE IV

IT'S A REAL KNOCKOUT

SHENMUE III

EXCLUSIVE YU SUZUKI INTERVIEW!

For Yu Suzuki, the IIIrd Time is the Charm

The man behind *Shenmue* on continuing the Dreamcast's grandest saga in the modern era

Sega's *Shenmue* debuted on Dreamcast in the final days of 1999—meaning the series is now older than Ryo Hazuki, the teen protagonist who undertakes an epic journey to learn the truth behind the murder of his father. Time has never deterred series' visionary Yu Suzuki, who has carried

mue was a truly cutting-edge gaming experience when it first arrived; fans would expect nothing less for a follow-up—nor would Suzuki want to disappoint them. "I agonized over how to secure the sizable budget it would require to get a third game made," he admits, "but I was genuine-

ly moved by all the fans who wanted the *Shenmue* story go on, even if it was in the form of a novel or anime." Ultimately, *Shenmue III* was able to stick to video game form (including a physical release by Limited Run Games) thanks to a highly successful Kickstarter campaign. Still, developer Ys Net found itself working with a tighter budget than the first game enjoyed. Suzuki says his approach for maintaining an authentic *Shenmue* feel within these constraints was to keep his focus down-to-earth.

"I will not give up on making the *Shenmue* sequels." —Yu Suzuki



While *Shenmue III* is a faithful continuation of Ryo's story, Suzuki felt it necessary to reshuffle his original plans for the narrative to accommodate the series' new form. "The original story spans 11 chapters," he says. "If I kept it at a chapter per game, the *Shenmue* series would not be completed in my lifetime! I reworked the story to incorporate content from multiple chapters."

Still, *Shenmue III* is far from the tale's end, and Suzuki vows to see it through: "As long as the fans are there, I know I will not give up on making the *Shenmue* sequels." **LR**

the torch for the series since the 2001 release of *Shenmue II*. "About five years after *Shenmue II* was released, there was a rise in the number of people asking when a sequel would come out," he says. "Community sites were created gathering fans for more than a dozen years. Those voices of support were always there with me."

Though Suzuki never gave up on his dream of continuing Ryo's story, putting a plan into action presented many logistical challenges, not least of which being Sega's complete restructuring following the Dreamcast's retirement, meaning Suzuki would need to forge ahead on his own. An open-world epic, *Shen-*

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"I strive to put conversation and everyday life in the forefront," he says. "Chinese culture and the Japanese way of thinking are just some of

RELIVING THE CONSOLE WARS

At this point in history, Sega has been out of the business of making video game consoles (2002-2021) as long as they were in it (1983-2002). Still, for millions of gamers, the name "Sega" remains a major mover-and-shaker in the medium's history: Purveyors of groundbreaking arcade boards, brilliant console hardware, and hundreds of incredible games to match. These days, the company sticks to games, but their new releases and back catalog titles alike remain as vibrant as ever. With this issue, we're celebrating Sega's hardware legacy with an extensive spread of Limited Run releases that span decades of the company's history. That includes sequels to beloved Dreamcast hits, reissues of games that appeared on Genesis and Sega CD, and even a handful of indie titles directly inspired by Sega-published games. So everybody, please, join together and sing it, just like the Genesis BIOS taught you: "SE-GAAAA!" —Jeremy

Text/layout: Jeremy Parish
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What is the Limited Run Games "Sega Family"?

Limited Run has published many games that can trace their roots back to a Sega console. In some cases, they've been modern iterations of classic works originally published by Sega themselves, such as *Shenmue*, *ToeJam & Earl*, *Panzer Dragoon*, and *Space Channel 5*. In other cases, those connections are a little more oblique—*Iconoclasts* was inspired in part by Mega Drive masterpiece *Monster World IV*—or more of a reflection of a spiritual connection, as with *Night Trap*, which appeared on many vintage platforms but is most famous for its Sega CD release. The one thing they all have in common: We love the way they remind us of our formative gaming experiences! **LR**

Community Profile: Emma

Please introduce yourself!
My name is Emma. As you'd expect, I play (and collect) a lot of games, with a focus on Nintendo systems.

What's your first video game memory?:
The earliest games I remember playing are N64 games and *Pokémon Crystal* for the Game Boy Color.

How did you start your Limited Run collection?:
I'm a big fan of the *Danganronpa* series. When I learned that several characters had cameos in *Mystery Chronicle: One Way Heroics*, I bought two copies for Vita, and have been a regular customer ever since.

What's your favorite Limited Run release?:
The House in Fata Morgana! It features the most intricate and fascinating story I've ever encountered.

What's your Limited Run dream release?:
As much as I love retro games, I'll stick to digital-only titles. It would be great to see releases for *A Dark Room*, *Death Come True*, and *Valkyria Chronicles*.



Emma's Switch collection, a third of her total Limited Run library

STAFF PROFILE: ALEXANDER ANIEL

What's your role at Limited Run?
As Japan Business Manager, I handle business development and product management for Japanese games and vinyl soundtracks, ensuring a healthy line of communication with our partners.

How did you get your start at Limited Run?
I met Douglas at BitSummit 2018. Over the course of the event, we hit it off! I helped interpret for him, and he hired me a year later.

What non-gaming hobbies do you have?
Travel! Pre-COVID, I'd managed to visit exactly 60 countries. I also love reading about history and cafe-hopping around Tokyo.

What's your all-time favorite game?
My favorite series, by far, and the one people may know me most for is *Resident Evil*. But maybe my absolute favorite is *Super Mario 64*.

What's your dream Limited Run release?
Anything *Resident Evil*-related that Capcom hasn't gotten around to releasing physically! **LR**



Swirling Rumors

You know the drill by now: Every issue, Josh and Douglas give their final approval for the newsletter text. Then, right before we go to press, our editor sneaks in a few juicy rumors that are floating around the office. It's our little secret, OK?

Nintendo fans, we haven't forgotten you in this Sega-centric issue. Odds are good that you'll be seeing some classic reissues from several beloved publishers for NES and Game Boy—sooner than later!

We're such SCUMM-bags! Now that work is wrapping on the complete *Monkey Island* collection, there may be potential for more comprehensive LucasArts box sets...

Will the saga ever end? Inside word has it that Limited Run Games has an exclusive lock on a Sega Genesis conversion of *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World!* **LR**

PREZ SEZ: WE ALL SCREAM FOR SEGA



Josh Fairhurst, Co-founder and CEO

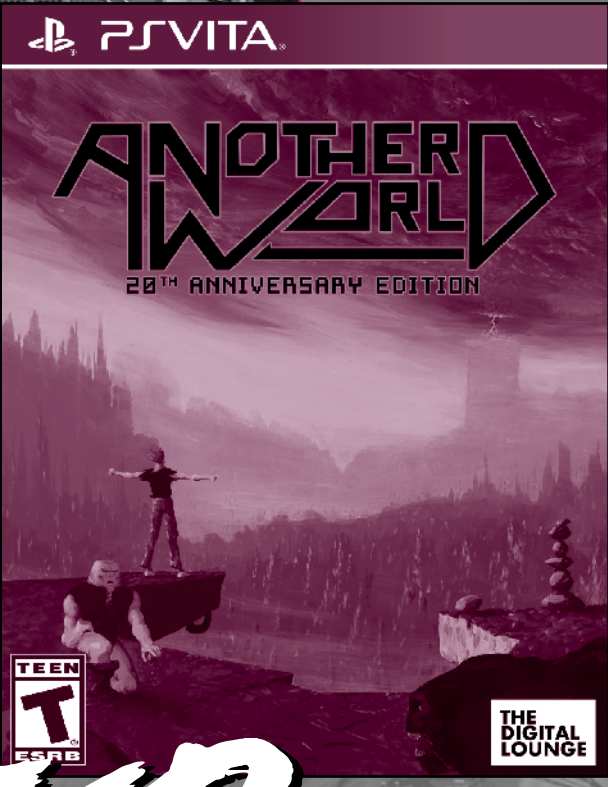
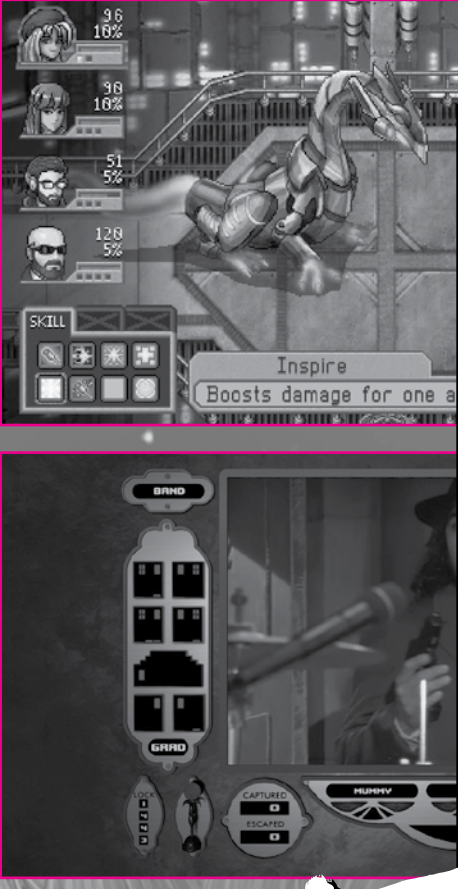
WELCOME TO THE LATEST *Limited Run Games Club O'Fun Newsletter*, this time in a form inspired by my favorite defunct magazine: *Official Dreamcast Magazine*. (Sorry EGM, *GameFan*, and *Expert Gamer*—you're all close runners-up). In the great console wars of the 1990s, I always fought for Sega... mostly because my brother owned the Super NES and wouldn't let me touch it. Our grandparents gave us the Sega Genesis, so he had no domain over it. It ended up being my go-to console for years.

In 1999, I discovered eBay, and after selling some ultra-valuable Beanie Babies (Righty and Lefty, for those keeping tabs), I had enough money to finally upgrade to a new console. I plunked my hard-earned money down at Kay-Bee Toys and secured a preorder for a Dreamcast, *Sonic Adventure*, and *Blue Stinger*. I remember anxiously counting down the days to 9/9/99. I even, regrettably, marked the day as "D-Day" in my

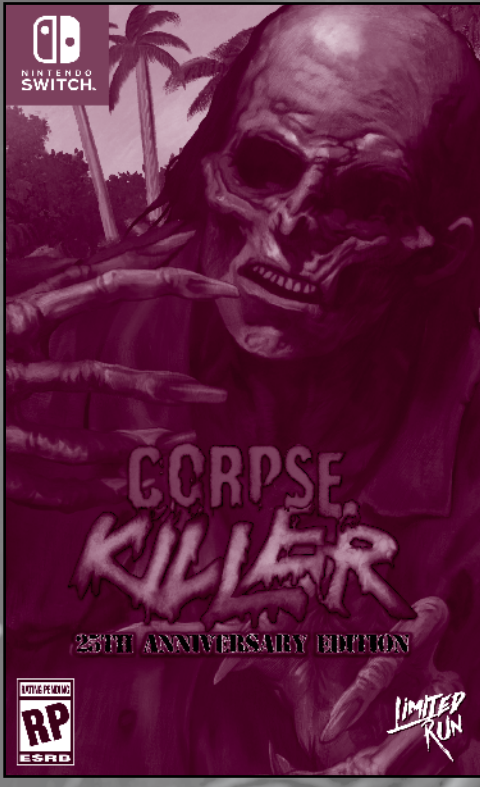
middle school agenda (as my social studies teacher would point out, 9/9/99 was definitely not D-Day). Finally the day came, and a lifelong Dreamcast die-hard was born.

Since those halcyon days, I've gone on to collect every unique Dreamcast game ever released. I'm as big of a Dreamcast fan as they come, so I don't take it lightly that I've been blessed to work on games like *Shenmue III* and *Space Channel 5* through Limited Run Games. It's been truly surreal to contribute to franchises that mean so much to me. Every time I see my Dreamcast collection, I'm reminded of anxiously awaiting launch day and the excitement of playing it after school (only to be kicked off the TV by my brother). Those physical games don't just exist to be played—their very existence on my shelf serves as a conduit back to a time and place that I sincerely treasure. I'll never be able to forget those times, because physical is, well... physical is forever! **LR**

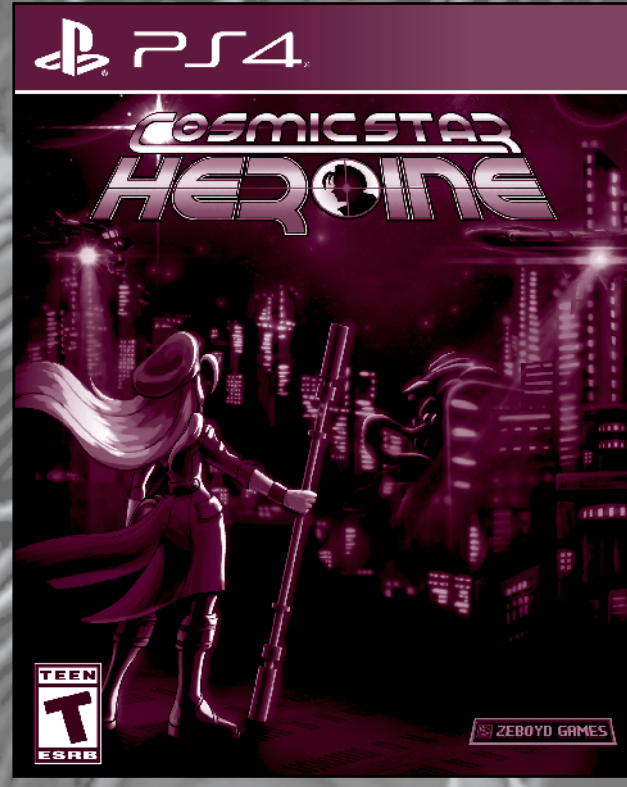
THE LIMITED RUN GAMES "SEGA FAMILY" LINEUP! COLLECT THEM ALL!



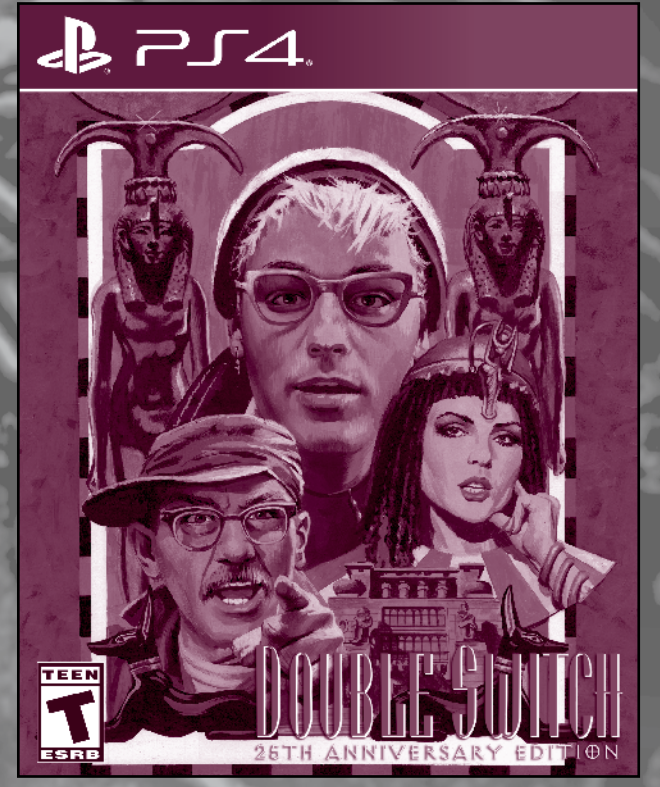
Another World
Vita (#177) | PlayStation 4 (#180) | Switch (#5W026)



Corpse Killer
PlayStation 4 (#279) | Switch (#5W087)



Cosmic Star Heroine
PlayStation 4 (#144) | Vita (#145) | Switch (#5W020)



Double Switch
PlayStation 4 (#194) | Switch (#5W041) | PC



Fire Shark
Sega Genesis



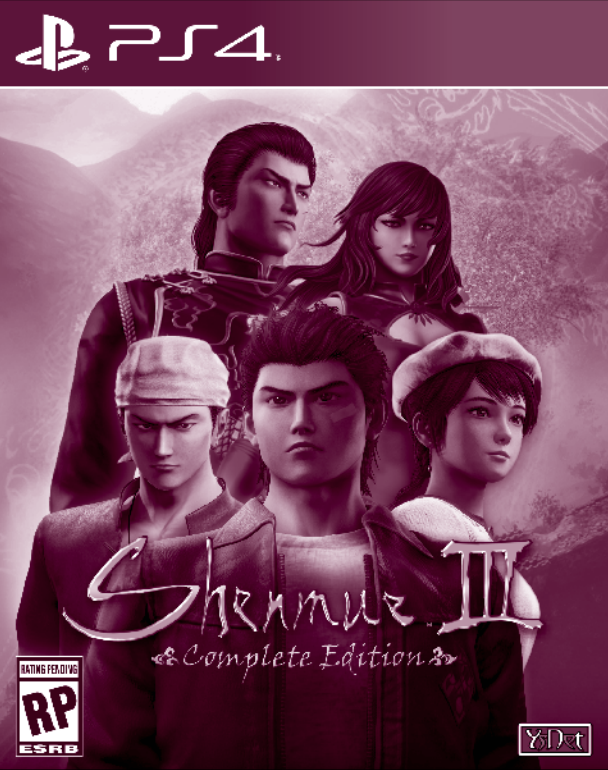
Iconoclasts
PlayStation 4 (#210) | Vita (#209) | Switch (#5W025)



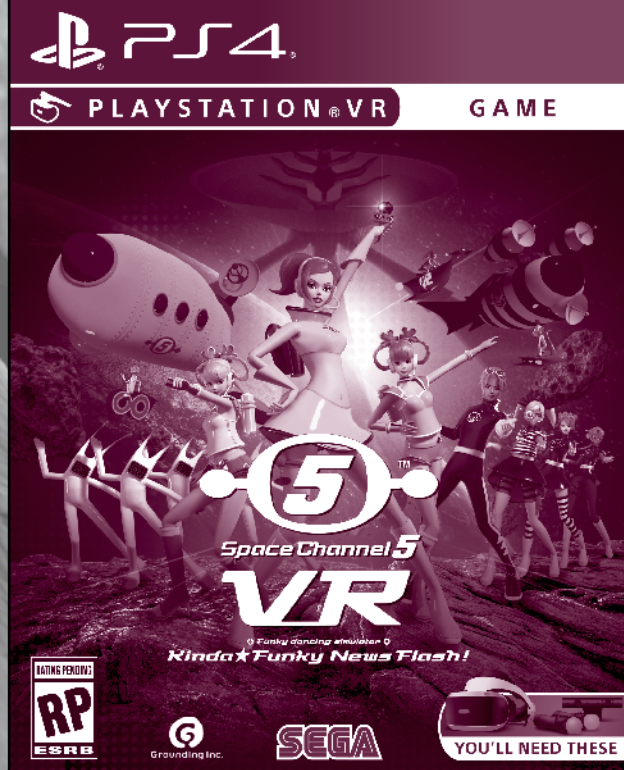
Night Trap
PlayStation 4 (#074) | Vita (#193) | Switch (#5W008) | PC



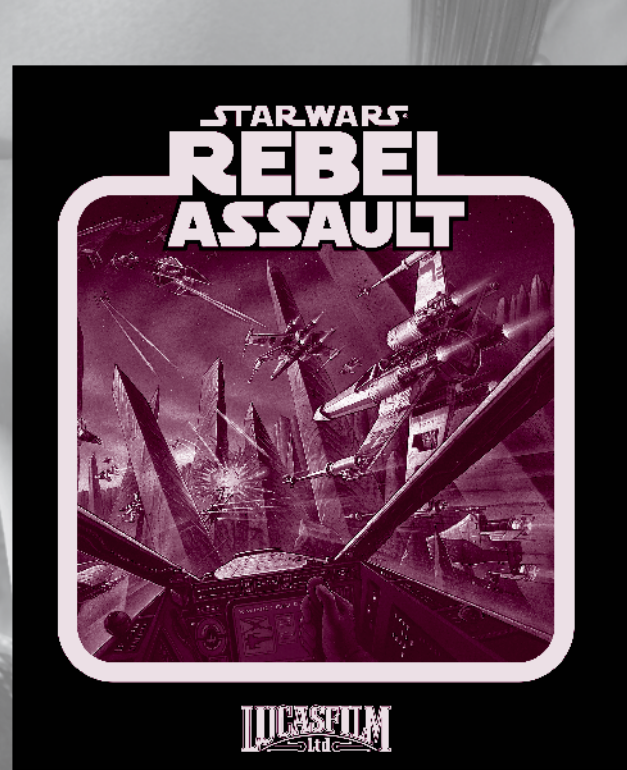
Panzer Dragon Remake
Switch (#5W057)



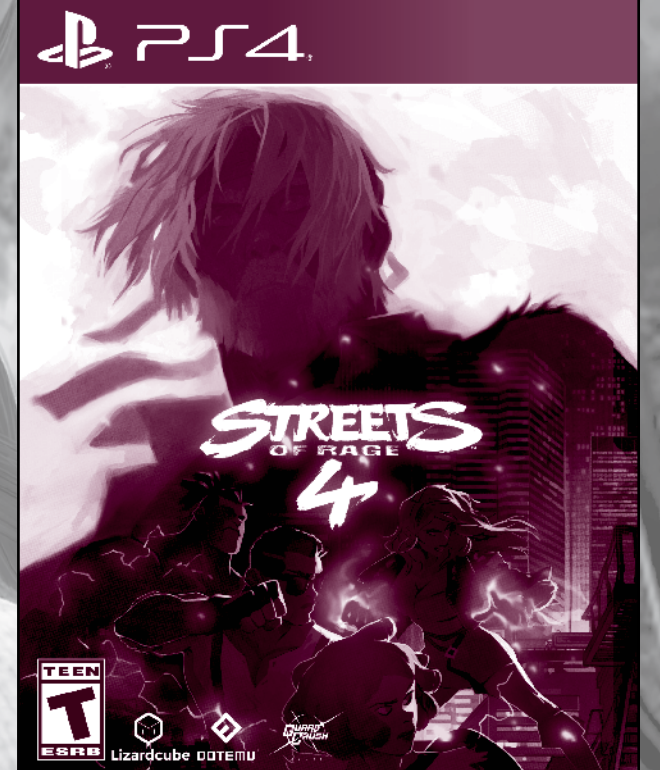
Shenmue III
PlayStation 4 (no number)



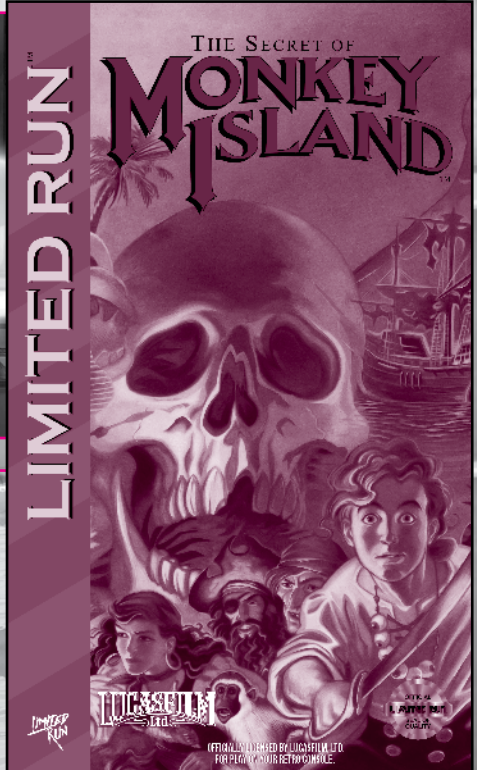
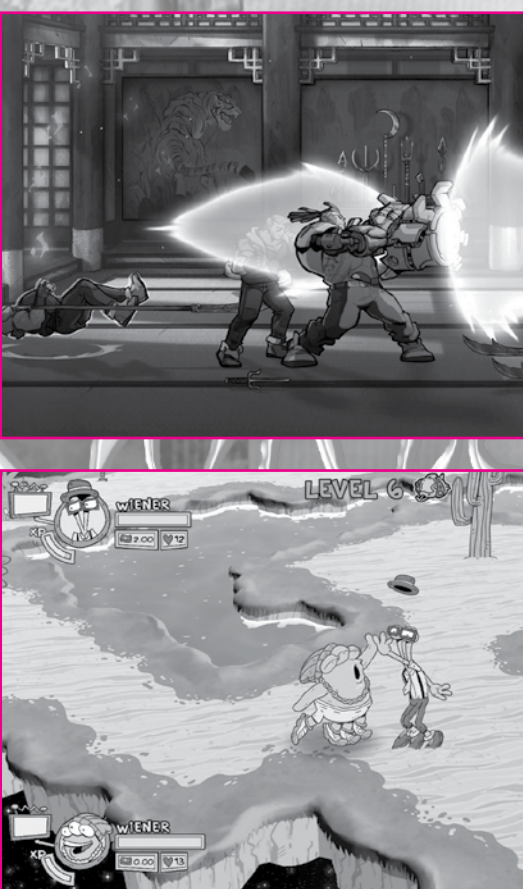
Space Channel 5 VR
PlayStation 4 (#353)



Star Wars: Rebel Assault
Sega CD



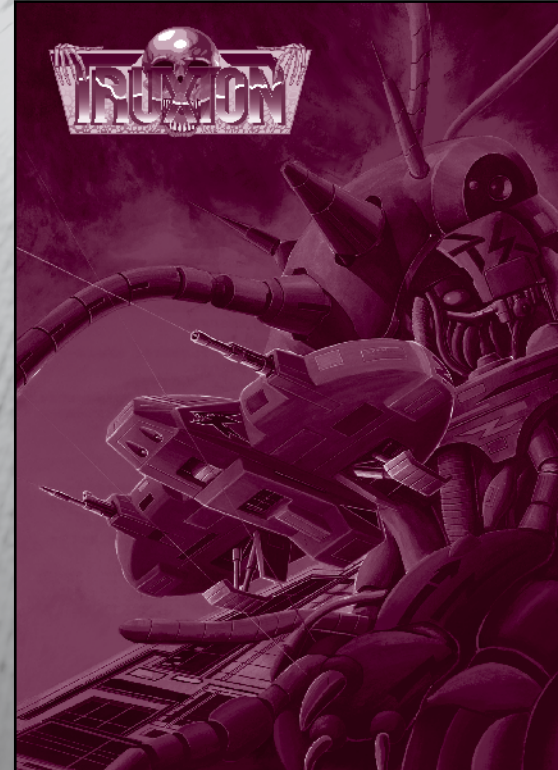
Streets of Rage 4
PlayStation 4 (#332) | Switch (#5W065)



The Secret of Monkey Island
Sega CD



Toe Jam & Earl: Back in the Groove!
PlayStation 4 (#243) | Switch (#5W029)



Truxton
Sega Genesis



Zero Wing
Sega Genesis

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