



KONAMI

GAMES OF STEEL

By Anthony Q. Casasnovas

Thanks to Greg Wilcox for his encyclopedic knowledge of Konami

Konami. That company name is about as

familiar to gamers as calluses are to porn stars. If you own a console system, chances are you also own a television, VCR, some form of toaster oven, at least two pairs of sneakers, matching curtains and bed sheets, and maybe even a Konami game, maybe.

Synonymous with quality in the video game industry, Konami is satisfyingly unlike Perdue, which is synonymous with chicken and parading around dying senile founders in the produce industry. While you may not find a Konami-developed title at the local butcher shop or in the fresh meats department at Super Wal-Mart, chances are you'll find a plethora of Konami games at the same Super Wal-Mart's electronics department and most likely, a Konami arcade game at the Super Wal-Mart's arcade. What does this mean exactly, if not that Super Wal-Marts are slightly evil all-encompassing monstrosities of consumer culture? Well, nothing really, except that Konami is probably the strongest third-party publisher/developer of video games, ever.

We owe Konami almost more than we owe our own mothers. While those dear sweet women may have stretched their delicate birth canals in order to push us into the modern world (Editor's note: What an unfortunate fuckin' mistake.), Konami continues to stretch the limits of gaming with unique games and non-stop hours of enjoyment, both at home, with your cousin Michael, or at the arcade, with your distant third cousin, Michael. To you, oh great Konami, we bow down to your small, bound feet and wish that you would transform us into a car-and-alligator-dodging amphibian, to keep or donate to a friend.



In the beginning...

Konami's long history begins simple enough: Father ruthlessly has his way with mother while dressed as a pirate and smelling the part. Mother is forcefully inseminated. Father takes a long, hard swig from his bottle of power, grabs a musket, kills and devours a whole stork. A baby is born. That's how it all begins, unless you believe in that whole "Big Bang" Theory. That's a bunch of hoey, though. Babies aren't born like that, right?

So, beginning in 1969, Konami enters the electronic entertainment arena in Japan. The first products were arcade machines that were primitive in nature – consisting of stones, twigs, and dye from berries. It wasn't until 1978 that Konami's Block Game hit American soil. Luckily, bland first impressions don't always seal one's fate, Mr. Rogers pushed on and so would Konami, doing so with Scramble in 1980. Konami continued to capitalize on the consumerism encouraged by an actor-turned-president and did quite well porting arcade games such as Scramble, Super Cobra, Track and Field, and Roc n' Rope to the Vectrex, Atari 2600, and Colecovision. Konami would soon shoot to the top. A Reagan associate would soon get shot in the gut.

Blessed are those who lend a helping hand.



While growing in size and increasing production, Konami hadn't really become a household name in the same manner that Don Knots did in his prime. You see, Konami was a sack-cradler, a company that made its money by caring for others. The company created hardware and software, and US publishers did all the importing. Take for example, Frogger. Konami Developed this epic challenge of frog vs. machine vs. log for the arcades, Sega published it, and home versions are without even a nod of the cap to Konami. That's about as wrong as a grown man watching an Olsen Twins straight-to-video movie.

This strategy helped Konami survive the gaming industry crash of 1983. They collected the licensing fees from manufacturers producing most of their carts for home systems. Later Konami would form its long-lasting bedroom relationship with

Nintendo. During one night of sweaty, post-bukkake pillow talk, a spent Miyamoto whispered in his foreign tongue to a somewhat sticky Konami, "If you build the PlayChoice-10, they will



The Life and Times of Konami

1978



Block Game (T.T. Block), first game developed by Konami

1980



Scramble comes out: it's the first arcade title to be available on home entertainment system

1981



Sega widely distributes Frogger, takes most of the credit for its success:



Future selling rights are in dispute. Konami later prevents Sega from releasing a GameGear version of Frogger.

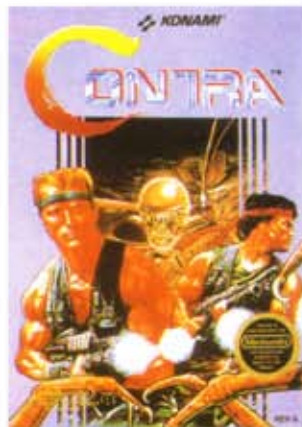
1982

Up, Up, Left, Down... no wait... Down, Right, Up, Up... how'd it go again?

Cheaters around the globe celebrated a sort of revolution in being underhanded with the discovery of the now legendary Konami Code. Sure, some secrets and Easter eggs existed in a spattering of games, but Konami made tapping out complex series of commands in return for extra lives, ammo, and such a staple. First usable in Contra and Gradius, the code functioned in practically every NES game developed by Konami from then on. My thumbs are still too swollen and arthritis-ridden to tap out the unforgettable: Up, Up, Down, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, B, A, Start.

Nintendo throws a [third] Party for Konami

The year is 1985. I wrestle a broken Man-at-Arms figure from my younger brother before pistol-whipping him with Megatron until he breaks into tears, soiling his Super Friends underoos. While we scarred each other with action figures, got loopy on Nerds candy and ran each other down in Dukes of Hazard Power Wheels in a child's version of a D.U.I., our mentally underdeveloped peers were enjoying what would amount to years of successful titles from Konami on the NES. In fact, it was the first third-party company licensed to make games for Nintendo's home systems. Enter into



the lives of gamers: Gradius, Contra, and Castlevania. Fans of sports gave up actual physical activity for Double Dribble and Blades of Steel. This game featured groundbreaking voice technology which sounded a lot like an AM radio signal submerged in warm tapioca. An era of double-tapping destroyed countless controllers when Track and Field was released. The clunky gray box had found itself a compatible mate in Konami.

Insert Coins Here

Through the 80's and 90's Konami remained as strong as a gamma-ragin' Ferrigno. It was a powerhouse in 1994, producing titles for the 3DO, Genesis, Saturn, Playstation, PC-Engine, and any other system in need of solid third-party support. However, arcades were once again in the upswing. Konami was successful back in the early days of arcade gaming when two colors onscreen made teenagers drool in awe. In the early half of the 90's they made their big return. The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles license made mucho money and smart arcade owners owned more than one machine. Corey Feldman (voice of Donatello) supposedly autographed a limited number of these machines, most of them winding



The game Silent Service is the first time that Konami works with the game developer Rare



Acquires Tiny Toons license rights from Warner Bros.

Begins developing for the Japanese NEC PC Engine, which competed with Nintendo in Japan



Konami releases its first Sega-CD game, Lethal Enforcers:

Senators "Smoking" Joe Lieberman and Herbert Kohl, draw attention to Konami's Lethal Enforcers among others as an example of video gaming gone wrong.



1989

1990

1991

1992

1993

1983

Konami negotiates to buy the rights to Sega. More legal wrangling with Sega over the rights to Pengo & Zaxxon.

Konami establishes a partnership with Coleco, venturing outside an existing agreement with Parker Bros.

Konami decides to start publishing games themselves. Pooyan being the first game they release.



1984

Konami reaps licensing benefits from its deals even as the VG market bleeds money.

1985

Konami becomes Nintendo's first 3rd party licensee. Granting them great autonomy.

1986

Konami starts to release games like NES



1987

Ultra Games Created:

Konami's current logo is created



1988



up in the same landfill populated by thousands of unsold E.T. Atari 2600 carts. They remained hot with character licensing that included the X-Men, Simpsons, and Aliens.

However, Capcom and Midway stepped into the mix, putting Konami to shame. Even *Lethal Enforcers'* brightly colored pistols couldn't stop this downfall from happening. *Run n' Gun* was overshadowed by *NBA Jam* and *Street Fighter II* was everything that *Yie Ar Kung fu* wasn't. Konami attempted to fight back with *Martial Champion*, but alas, this title made *Pit-Fighter* look like an AM2 game. During this time a small group of Konami programmers left to form the company Treasure, and even this new company began to outdo Konami in the coin-op industry.

Not until 1998 would Konami break this arcade slump, doing so by creating the unique, the original, the Clint Howards of gaming, *Beatmania*, *Guitar Freaks*, *Fisherman's Bail*, and *Dance Dance Revolution* all proved that real interactivity over the same old plot-driven action titles full of senseless button mashing could attract even non-gamers to arcades. Next time you see a granny holding her catheter sack while getting jiggy at DDR, you have Konami to thank.

Konami: Next Generation

The fact of the matter is Konami is probably one of the greatest long-running game companies out there – perhaps even edging out Enron as the finest corporate business of ALL TIME. The current and upcoming generations of videogames will undoubtedly turn to Konami, resting assured that a quality product will be churned out like the creamy butter of the Dutch. The current state of affairs shows new found interest in old franchises: the *Metal Gear Solid* Series, *Castlevania*, and *Contra Advance* are still amongst the ranks. Whereas new series and licenses are bought and lost regularly: *Silent Hill* and the Disney license are still profit earners but the loss of ESPN means that a new iteration of *Double Dribble* will never be drawn up. I would like to personally thank Konami for the hundreds of great games they have provided me... and curse them to hell for the countless days of my life they have so greedily stolen. III



Konami and Nintendo: An Ultra Combo

In 1987, due to a wave of crappy titles by lesser third-parties, Nintendo issued a policy reducing the number of games a developer could produce a year to five. Konami needed much more action than that, "Only five times a year? Honey, you must be joking." Ultra Games was born, as were a couple of insignificant titles: *Skate or Die*, *Mission: Impossible*, and *Metal Gear*.



The Red, White, and Orange go Red, White, and Blue.

In the mid-90's Konami opened up shop in Chicago to better associate themselves with American publishers. The company later expanded to both Silicon Valley and Hawaii. Recent rumors site that pressure and conflicts surrounding Konami and Sony may result in the closing of the Silicon Valley location.

Konami signs as a developer for Saturn and Playstation, rather than as a developer for Nintendo b/c Nintendo has an exclusivity clause in their developing contracts.



Konami begins to develop games for the older target market that patronizes the Saturn and Playstation.



Konami begins to show favoritism towards Playstation as it begins to look like the Saturn is fading. Most Saturn projects are scratched.

"High-end" arcade hardware, known as the Cobra board, developed in conjunction with IBM, is debuted.

Konami continues to develop the most interesting and innovative arcade games, like *Beatmania*, *Water Ski*, and *World Kicks*.



1994

1995

1996

1997

PRESENT