

RETRO GAMING HACKS™

*Tips & Tools for
Playing the Classics*



O'REILLY®

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*With a foreword by Al Lowe,
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HACK
#16

Play Retro Games on Current Consoles

Sift through the many classic collections on PS2, Xbox, and GameCube.

Playing retro games with inexpensive plug-and-play hardware [Hack #15] is quite convenient if you don't already own any video game systems. But what if you do? What if you're used to using your Wavebird, Dual Shock 2, or Controller S for all your gameplay, and want a retro game solution that will work with your system(s) of choice?

Well, there are quite a few game publishers willing to accommodate you. Now that retro fever has taken hold, you can buy collections of classic games, emulated or reprogrammed to play on modern-day gaming systems. Although they typically retail for a budget price of \$19.99, the quality of the packages can vary. In this hack, I'll give you the rundown on all the major classic game collections on the shelves, and some preliminary information on upcoming releases that will hopefully be out by the time you get this book.

Publisher-Based Collections

The compilations listed next feature a variety of games from a single publisher; sometimes encompassing all the games that a classic publisher ever released on a single system—and then some!

Midway Arcade Treasures. The original Midway Arcade Treasures was one of the first retro collections to hit stores. As its name so aptly implies, it contains emulated versions of Midway's classic arcade hits. There are currently two volumes in stores, with another on the way this year. They are available for PS2, GameCube, and Xbox.

The first volume includes the oldest of the old classics. Highlights include Spy Hunter, Defender, Joust, Paperboy, Smash TV, Robotron 2084, Sini-star, Marble Madness, Satan's Hollow, etc. All in all, 24 games are on the disc. (Not included are arcade games that Midway distributed in the United States, but no longer holds the rights to, like Pac-Man and Space Invaders. Pac-Man can be found in Namco Museum, listed later in this hack.)

The second volume, Midway Arcade Treasures 2, features some more recent classics: Mortal Kombat II and 3, Gauntlet II, NARC, Total Carnage, Pit Fighter, Xenophobe, etc. There are 20 games in total. Both volumes include a wealth of bonus content like developer interviews, making-of video segments, and art galleries.

I recommend you buy either the GameCube or Xbox versions of the games. All three are virtually identical, but since the GameCube and Xbox have four

controller ports each, you can play the three- and four-player games like Rampage, Gauntlet, and Rampart without having to buy extra hardware. (Rampage just isn't Rampage unless you've got three giant monsters!)

Atari Anthology. Interestingly enough, the most famous of retro game publishers was the last to the party with their compilation. They certainly packed quite a bit of content inside, though. Atari Anthology features 18 classic Atari arcade games and a whopping 67 Atari 2600 games. It is available for PS2 and Xbox.

The arcade games are ones you'll all remember: Battlezone, Asteroids, Centipede, Tempest, Super Breakout... even Pong. The games play identically to the originals (although at first it can be a pain in the butt to use a joystick for Tempest and Centipede instead of a spinner or trackball). The games are all bordered by artwork that imitates the design of the arcade machines, but I found this to be rather poorly implemented, because the playable area of the screen shrinks and it's hard to pick out details.

The Atari 2600 titles here might not include the ones you remember best, mostly because many of the most memorable titles were either licensed games (and the license has long expired) or created by Activision (who have their own anthology available, described later). So you won't find Pac-Man, Raiders of the Lost Ark, or Space Invaders on this disc.

The games you do find range from the truly classic (Yar's Revenge, Adventure, Demons to Diamonds) to the I-wish-I-could-forget-them (3D Tic Tac Toe, Atari Video Cube, Atari Math Gran Prix, Video Checkers). Well, at least Quadrun is here (the original game sells for about \$400 now).

The disc also includes some great extra features. There's a large art gallery in which you can view box art, manuals, and artwork for every game in the collection. My favorites are the extra gameplay modes, especially Hot Seat. In this mode, you begin by playing the game you've selected. But after a minute or so, you're switched to another game, then another. If you pick the arcade version of Crystal Castles, for example, you'll be switching back and forth between it, the home version of Crystal Castles, and the shooting game Outlaw. As the games go on the intervals get shorter, and you're challenged to essentially keep track of your place in three games at once!

Intellivision Lives! This collection is unique in that it was created by some of the original programmers who developed the library of games for the Intellivision. (For more about these guys, who are called the Blue Sky Rangers, see [Hack #35].) Over 60 of the games that Mattel created for the Intellivision are in this package.

Atari Retro on the Go

Depending on your portable system of choice, there may be a classic Atari collection for your mobile lifestyle. Atari Retro (<http://www.mobilewizardry.com/multi-platform/atariretro/index.php>) is a software package available for Palm, Pocket PC, and Nokia Series 60 Smartphones that includes seven games on a single MMC card.

Also available is Retro Atari Classics for the Nintendo DS system, which features versions of ten different Atari games. These are not emulated; they are entirely reprogrammed and redesigned to take advantage of the DS' dual-screen, touch-enabled hardware. You can slide the Breakout paddle with your finger, for example. It also includes “remix” versions of all the games, which feature graphic updates by popular graffiti artists.

You'll also find many of the titles described in this hack for the Nintendo Gameboy Advance, including Activision Anthology and collections from Midway and Namco.

Since the games are split up by category, it can be a little difficult to find the game you're looking for. In fact, the manual doesn't even list them all. So to find out all the games in the collection, you have to visit each “machine” in a virtual arcade that serves as the game's hub screen.

Some of the classics to be had include *Astrosplash* (a space shooter made *much* easier by using the PS2's controller instead of the Intellivision's original painful design), the strategy game *Utopia*, and of course *Baseball* (this used to be called *MLB Baseball*, but like the rest of Intellivision's stellar sports lineup, the licenses have long run out).

Those who remember the Intellivision might be wondering how the system's controller—which featured a numeric keypad that was used heavily in many games—is emulated. Pressing the Select button brings up an image of the classic controller on the TV screen, pasted over the game display. You can then use the analog stick to move a cursor around and push the buttons. This is a limited, but understandable, solution.

Bonus features include historical information, a handful of previously unreleased games, and interviews with the Blue Sky Rangers. You can even view classic Intellivision TV commercials.

Activision Anthology. This was one of the very first retro collections to hit shelves—and still one of the best. It helps, of course, that Activision's Atari 2600 titles were some of the best software on the system (and based on orig-

inal ideas, thus the company still owns the rights to publish them). But what really makes Activision Anthology worth a purchase is the amount of polish that went into its design.

First things first. There are 45 classic games on this PlayStation 2 disc, all from the 2600. If you owned one, or even if you didn't, you know about or have played Activision's games: Pitfall, Freeway, Ice Hockey, Kaboom, River Raid, Stampede... any of this ringing a bell? There are a few previously unreleased games here as well, and the emulation on everything is fantastic.

That's just scratching the surface. One of the best touches to Activision Anthology is the photorealistic 1980's vintage gaming setup that serves as the main menu. The game cartridges are accessible from a classic spinning organizer, and a stereo off to the side of the TV set plays a classic 80's soundtrack, featuring brilliant songs like "We're Not Gonna Take It," "Tainted Love," "Take on Me," and "Safety Dance."

Adding this soundtrack to the mix makes the games even more fun, and a variety of unlockable extras—including new video modes that map the game display onto rotating cubes or trippy patterns—are available for scoring high on every game. Even Activision's 2600 version of the Data East/Capcom shooter Commando is on here—wonder how they arranged that?



A version of Activision Anthology for the Game Boy Advance was released to rave reviews, not only for the accuracy of the emulation but because Activision included in the package many games from the Atari 2600 [homebrew development community](#) [[Hack #75](#)].

Namco Museum. Namco Museum titles, featuring the company's classic games like Pac-Man and Dig Dug, have been released for a number of different systems, including the [PSone and Dreamcast](#) [[Hack #17](#)], but the package currently on shelves is available for the Xbox and PlayStation 2.

In comparison to the packages listed so far, Namco Museum's game list is paltry. The classics available when you boot the game number only seven: Pac-Man, Ms. Pac-Man, Galaga, Galaxian, Dig Dug, Pole Position, and Pole Position II. If you score over 25,000 points on the two Pac games, you'll unlock two more: Pac-Mania and Pac-Attack.

The games are reprogrammed rather than emulated, which means that you might find them to be slightly different than the arcade games you remember or just completely wrong. For example, if you know any [Pac-Man tricks](#) [[Hack #81](#)] you might be disappointed to find that they don't work at all in the Namco Museum version.

The rest of the collection is filled out with what Namco dubs “Arrangement” versions of the games. These are similar to the classic games, but with 3D graphics and some new gameplay elements. In Pac-Man Arrangement, there is a new ghost named “Kinky” (not even kidding you), and panels on the floor let you dash at high speed, knocking out ghosts in your path. Unfortunately, some of the arranged games feel unfinished—there are no sound effects to be heard in Pac-Man Arrangement, for example, just music.



Namco has released a Museum collection for the Sony PSP handheld. It features many more classic games (seventeen instead of seven), head-to-head play over WiFi, and Arrangement versions that are much better and well-suited to the portable hardware.

NES Classic Series. Leave it to Nintendo to do things differently. Rather than releasing multiple Nintendo Entertainment System titles in one console package, they split the games up into single budget-priced releases for the Game Boy Advance system. Currently available for \$19.99 each (although you can find most of them cheaper now) are Super Mario Bros., The Legend of Zelda, Ice Climber, Excitebike, Donkey Kong, Xevious, Bomberman, Pac-Man, Metroid, Castlevania, Dr. Mario, and Zelda II: The Adventure of Link.

The emulation is decent, considering that the games had to be compressed to fit onto the GBA’s smaller, differently proportioned screen. At twenty bucks each, buying a complete collection might be a bit expensive, but it’s not difficult to imagine people dropping the cash for one or two special favorites.

That said, some of these releases are pretty much rip-offs, since you can find many of these games [hidden within others](#) [Hack #19]. For example, if you buy the game Metroid: Zero Mission for the GBA and complete the main game (which is tons of fun and not especially taxing) you’ll unlock the same version of Metroid that sells for \$19.99 on its own. And it’s tough to justify an entire Hamilton for NES Pac-Man when the Namco Museum and Pac-Man Collection games for GBA include the same game plus a few more.



There are more than double the number of classic games available on the Game Boy Advance in Japan than in the United States. If you want to pick up some Famicom Mini titles, as they are called, check out “[Collect Classic Handhelds](#)” [Hack #11].

Single-Series Collections

The second category of neo-retro game releases focus not on a single publisher's lineup, but on collecting all (or most of) the installments of a particular series. These can be a boon to collectors, especially as the price of the originals continues to escalate.

The Legend of Zelda Collector's Edition. This was only made available as a promotional giveaway, although there were quite a few ways to get it. You could subscribe to Nintendo Power magazine, register some other Nintendo games on the company's web site, or buy a GameCube and get it included for free. The promotions are all over, but many discs routinely go up for sale on eBay or in the used bins at outlets like EB Games and Gamestop.

The disc includes the two Legend of Zelda games for NES as well as the two N64 installments of the series (Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask), all emulated to run on the GameCube hardware. The only emulation glitch comes in Majora's Mask; at times the sound will skip. This is a minor flaw though, especially for a collection that was essentially given away for free.

Sonic Mega Collection. Originally a GameCube exclusive, an updated version of this collection is now available for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox. It is just what you might think it is—a compilation of the 16-bit adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog. The only games represented are the Genesis installments of the series, which means that Knuckles Chaotix for the 32X or Sonic CD for the Sega CD are sadly not present.

Bonus games depend on which version you buy. The GameCube only features Sega platformers Flicky and Ristar as unlockable secrets, but the PS2 and Xbox games feature those two plus well-regarded Genesis hits Comix Zone and The Ooze.

Mega Man Anniversary Collection. Another blue-clad hero gets his own multi-platform collection? It's true. Capcom has collected the ten games in the main Mega Man series, which were originally released on the NES, SNES, and in arcades, and put them all together for GameCube, PS2, and most recently the Xbox. You may wish to avoid the GameCube version, as the jump and fire buttons are reversed from the original NES layout, which has caused many players no end of frustration.

Classics to Come

And the hits keep on coming. Flush from the success of Mega Man Anniversary Collection, Capcom has announced that an arcade collection for consoles is on the way. As mentioned earlier, Midway Arcade Treasures 3 will

be out this year, featuring some more recent racing titles. And a collection of classic Taito games is planned for release in Europe, though no Stateside release has been announced.

No, the retro game craze won't be over until the last remaining publisher has finally put out a collection of its arcade classics... and by that time, the next generation of console hardware will be available, so they'll probably start re-releasing the oldies all over again. What a great racket!