



Can you believe this series is 25 years old? In this installment of Retro Rearview, I take a look at Konami's legendary run-and-gun shooting series, *Contra*! So hit the jump (with a badass sommersault backflip) and ready your machine gun!!

Originally released in arcades in 1987, Contra told the story of two soldiers Lance Bean and Bill Rizer and their fight against the evil alien force simply known as 'Red Falcon'. You and a partner (definitely preferable given the hardcore difficulty of the games!) fight your way through several different levels: jungle, a frozen tundra, and underground bases on your way to the alien hideout in your mission to defeat the evil Red Falcon!

Luckily you won't have to rely on just the standard-issue rifle for this mission, along the way you'll encounter several powerups, like the Laser which shoots a concentrated beam of energy at the enemy, the Rapid fire which increases the firing rate for your currently equipped weapon, and last but definitely not least the Spread gun, which rains energy shots in five different directions, cutting a cone-shaped swath of destruction through any hapless enemies in its path.

Retro Rearview: CONTRA

Written by DarkTetsuya

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Contra's legacy went on to span several games, let's see if I can cover them all:

Contra - Arcade/NES/MSX2/C64/DOS/Amstrad CPC/ZX Spectrum) - As for which version of the original is my favorite, I'm actually torn between the NES version -- more specifically the Famicom original, as it had extra animation and scenes not present in the US release, and the MSX2 version which while it was limited to one-screen-at-a-time scrolling, you had a life meter which allowed for more

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Iso there were several extra levels not in any of the other versions.

Super Contra - Arcade/NES/DOS/Amiga - Red Falcon returns for revenge in this game, featuring mostly the same style of gameplay featured in the original. Although the 3D levels from the original were replaced by top-down vertically scrolling missions similar to something like Ikar

Warriors. Interesting

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y the arcade edition featured upgradable weapons, which the NES port lacked.

One last note about the first two games, as you've probably heard the European releases of the first two games on NES were redubbed 'Probotector' and 'Probotector II: Return of the Evil Forces' and all the humans were replaced by robots.

Operation C - Game Boy - The first installment of Contra to appear on the Game Boy, this version also introduced a new 'Homing' weapon which would later reappear in future installments.

Contra III: The Alien Wars / Contra Spirits - SNES/GBA - The first 16-bit entry in the Contra series, players can now carry and switch between two guns at once, as well as utilize a 'smart

bomb' to wipe out all enemies on the screen. Naturally being on the SNES, Alien Wars utilized the 'Mode 7' feature for rotation in some of its top-down maze-like levels.

Contra Force - NES - So this was originally supposed to be an unrelated Japanese game called 'Arc Hounds' but that game never materialized in Japan, instead it became this. Featuring multiple characters and a power-up system more akin to Gradius than Contra, Contra Force was definitely a 'unique' game.

Contra: HARD CORPS - Genesis - The only installment to appear on SEGA's 16-bit system, Contra: HARD CORPS had multiple characters you could play as, in addition to branching paths for multiple endings.

Contra: Legacy of War / C: The Contra Adventure - PSX - Much like The Legend of Zelda had 'those games' nobody ever talks about except to say 'LOL, wow those games *sucked*', this is what Contra had.

About the only notable thing that Legacy of War had going for it is they actually attempted to use the red/cyan '3D Glasses' in the initial release, almost 20 years before things like Avatar. Fortunately, the game was so bad, it never even *had* a Japanese release! I've never personally played the sequel, 'C: The Contra Adventure' ... but I don't imagine it being that great, either. (It didn't even have a two-player mode! I mean Operation C didn't either but no reason they could've!)

Contra: Shattered Soldier - PS2 - Now *this* is more like it! For the initial PS2 release of the series, the game returns to its side-scrolling, hard as *FUCK* one-hit-and-you're-dead run and gun shooting roots. Featuring several side-scrolling levels (either on foot or racing on vehicles like flying motorcycles), Contra: Shattered Soldier was a refreshing change of pace from the smoking turds Appaloosa Interactive crapped out on the PSX. (

Not sure whether or not it's good news, but the company folded as recently as 2008.

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Neo Contra - PS2 - I'd heard this one wasn't as great as Shattered Soldier was, but I've never played it. The game takes place entirely in overhead stages, the jump button replaced by a 'dash' feature to avoid enemies and bullets.

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Interesting aside about these PS2 releases, the soundtracks for these were both done by folks who have also contributed to the BEMANI note smashing stuff (Like formerly of Konami is Akira Yamaoka, who composed some of the songs on Shattered Soldier) which also leads to interesting crossovers, like one of the songs in Neo Contra made an appearance in 2008's beatmania IIDX 15: DJ TROOPERS:

Contra 4 - NDS - I've only ever tried a demo of this game, but rest assured what I played definitely lived up to the Contra pedigree... balls-to-the-wall hardcore side-scrolling run and gun shooting action! So if you haven't picked it up I totally recommend it, can't be more than 10 bucks by now anyway...

Contra: Rebirth - Wiiware - I saw someone play this on twitch.tv, it looked fun, but kinda short (was only five levels) but I think it's only like 1000 wii points, so check it out if you can!

Hard Corps Uprising - XBLA/PSN - Interestingly this is a sequel of sorts to Contra: Hard CORPS on Genesis... why they didn't attach the Contra name to it is anyone's guess, but what I've seen of it looked like fun. Contra-style run and gun shooting but with a definite 'anime flair' to the visuals, definitely seems like a fun game.

Untitled Contra Sequel - 3DS - At last year's e3, Konami teased an all-new Contra title coming soon... apparently this will be the first entry on Nintendo's newest platform, the 3DS. If it's anything like Contra 4 (but in 3D) then I highly recommend watching for future developments on this game!!

And that's gonna bring my Contra retrospective to a close, I hope you enjoyed it!! As for upcoming articles on OLR... well sadly WonderCon 2012 coverage won't be happening this year, but I do have a couple of articles in mind coming up soon, so watch for those!