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Preservation of *Strikers 1945*

INTRODUCTION

Strikers 1945 was one of the most popular arcade games from the late 1990s up until the early 2000s in Japanese domestic market and in South Korea. It was released in Japan in 1995 by Psikyo, followed by two sequels—*Strikers 1945 II* (1997) and *Strikers 1945 III* (also known as *Strikers 1999* in Japan). Its original platform is the upright cabinet type arcade version, but it also has various platforms in video game consoles such as Sega Saturn (1996, by Saturn), PlayStation (2001, by Agetec), and PlayStation 2 (2003, by Taito as part of Psikyo Shooting Collection Vol. 1: *Strikers 1945 I & II*). It has also been ported to the Internet as an emulated online version. This paper will discuss *Striker 1945*'s three different formats, comparing the way of conserving and preserving the main functions and features. The contrasts and comparisons will yield a conclusion about the proper strategy and method of preserving the game.

As an example of what has been called the vertically scrolling 'Shoot 'em up' genre, *Striker 1945*'s main goal is to clear eight stages and to survive. Like other shoot 'em up games, the basic game play strategy is straightforward, dealing with a variety of weapons and their collection to equip in the player's vehicle. What matters most in *Strikers 1945* is fast reactions, which are mostly achieved by memorizing patterns of attack from enemies in order to avoid them more efficiently. Although it has a fictional storyline set in 1945, about a fight between imaginary villains and a world-wide alliance to save the planet, no one who

played it, in my experience, seemed to care much about itself. More correctly, as one of the followers of the shoot 'em up genre's burgeoning around early 1990s, *Strikers 1945* does not have much originality and/or creativity.

Established in 1992, Japanese game company Psikyo (彩京) mostly focused on arcade games, especially vertically-scrolling shoot'em ups and pornographic mahjong games, which were the major leading genres of video games in arcades in Japan and South Korea at that time. *Strikers 1945* is Psikyo's 4th game out of 23 arcade games released, which in many cases were slightly transformed versions of each other.

ORIGINAL VERSION (Arcade Version)

Striker 1945 offers two modes: single player and two players. The CRT color monitored cabinet provides a vertical display with raster standard resolution, following JAMMA (Japan Amusement Machinery Manufacturers Association) conversion class conventions. The cabinet has one joystick, which allows movement in eight directions and two buttons, one for the bullet and the other for the fire bomb. Sound is amplified mono from one channel. Further details are as below:

- Main CPU : 68EC020 (@ 16 Mhz)
- Sound CPU: Z80 (@ 4 Mhz)
- Sound Chips: YMF278B (@ 33.8688 Mhz)
- Video resolution: 224 x 320 pixels
- Screen refresh: 59.30 Hz
- Palette colors: 4096

As the game begins, you have five options regarding your choice of airplanes, all of which are based on historical airplanes from the World War II period. There are eight levels in total within the entire game. Each level has a different enemy with a unique power. Players have to deal with these enemies using three ways of attack. The first one is normal

shooting from the equipped weapons, which you can upgrade by collecting bullet-like power-up symbols. While your aircraft is powered up by four symbols at maximum, you can also charge your weapon's power by holding the bullet button, instead of tapping it to shoot bullets. Lastly, there is the bomb that you can acquire by collecting bomb-shaped symbols, which you can release by pressing the bomb button. Obviously, each airplane has different bullets and bombs, and accordingly tactics differ based on the type of airplane. There is one trivial fact, which even the writer did not know about after many years of playing this game. It is the fact that the given pilots would appear topless if you finish each level by acquiring all gold medals, which were the hidden rewards built into the original arcade version.

Examples of the original arcade version of *Strikers 1945* are unfortunately rare as the arcade culture in general has almost become extinct world wide. Only in places dedicated to recreating the arcade experience such as Barcade in Brooklyn, New York, can you 'experience' games similar to the coin-operated version of *Strikers 1945*. According to the Vintage Arcade Preservation Society (VAPS) Arcade Census, there are 38 members who own some version of a *Strikers 1945* machine out of 4,469 members. Only three of them own the original machines. Three others have conversions in which the game's circuit boards have been placed in another game cabinet. The remaining 32 collectors hold copies of the game's circuit boards which they have yet to put into a generic machine case. On the VAPS website, *Strikers* ranks at 20% on a census list of titles owned by members, with the most owned games ranking at or near to 100. The site's popularity list places the game at 4%. The rarity of *Strikers 1945* in its original condition, as well as low demand within the arcade gaming community make it a good choice for preservation. You can also buy the used game cabinets on eBay. As of April 14, 2011, there are no original *Strikers 1945* cabinet

and three circuit boards available. The boards are all priced below \$100 on the “Buy It Now” option.

CONSOLE VERSION (Saturn, PlayStation1, 2)

Maintaining a similar environment to the original arcade cabinet and joystick, the first difference between the arcade version and the console version of *Strikers 1945* is the aspect ratio of the monitor. Vertically scrolling action games are best suited for arcade machines with tall screens. Screens on home computers and consoles tend to be wider. So the console version game is presented in letterbox to keep the aspect ratio of the screen.

Other than the difference in format and presentation, the major issue of the console version is the fact that the US console version is a port of the arcade game *Strikers 1945 II*, instead of the original *Strikers 1945*. Of course, this version does not offer the special features and topless pilots. The PlayStation version is available from Amazon: 15 new ones from \$39.99 and 17 used ones from \$8.13 can be found as of April 14, 2011.

ONLINE VERSION

There are several websites where you can play the emulated online flash game version of *Strikers 1945*. The transfer to the online world creates unavoidable changes and gaps from the original. The first difference is in the frame size. Maximum size is far smaller than the computer monitor, which is already much smaller than the original arcade cabinet and the console version television monitor in most cases. Another significant shortcoming lies in the subtle differences between the sense of controlling a joystick versus a computer keyboards. Also, a grave weakness of the online version is its limited color. While the game

itself does not have much originality and creativity, one of *Striker 1945*'s few unique virtues, which many consumers mentioned, is its handsome graphic look—different landscapes on each level depict hundreds of objects on the screen in great details. In comparison, the roughly emulated visuals of the online version are very disappointing. Anyone who used to be a serious player will also notice that the speed in general is slightly faster than the original.

Other than the appearance, the online version has many other critical drawbacks. First of all, you have no options regarding the aircraft that you will use. Given that each airplane represents a vintage, and that each player tends to have a favorite aircraft, this is not something that can be overlooked. In addition, you cannot play in a two player mode. Again, this is a significant limitation for players since collaboration by two players in the original game was very helpful in clearing levels. Finally, charging up your weapon by holding the button is not available either in this version.

CONCLUSION

Strikers 1945 is not in perfect condition when it comes to preservation. The original arcade version is not easily available; the console version does not provide the same rendition or environment, and lost most of the major features and functions, the online emulation loses important features and functions. The arcade game in general has too many distinct features that no other port can offer.

Therefore, the approaching VAPS collaboration might be an excellent strategy for working on preservation of both the game elements and the original arcade cabinet. With 7,357 members who own 4,270 different games from 71 countries, its main mission is to

track and save physical pieces of arcade videogames. It runs two important databases, one being the previously mentioned list of member holdings, and the other, the Killer List of Videogames, which specifies technical descriptions about each arcade title. Members communicate regularly with each other, and their knowledge and passion would be valuable to a preservation effort.