

Retro Rearview: Nothing Sweet from *this* Transylvania!

Written by DarkTetsuya

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Apologies for the Rocky Horror joke (just youtube it) but I did spend most of my halloween watching it on tv... (and one song does make reference to Transylvania, so there. :P)

Technically this one's late for Halloween (which was Sunday), but I figured since FOX can get away with showing Treehouse of Horror a week late, I think I should get a pass, too. Anyway the series I picked for this installment is Konami's long-running series about the Belmont's war against the evil Lord Dracula, *Castlevania*! So grab your whip, and hit the jump below to travel to Transylvania!

Originally released in 1986 for the MSX computer in Japan, as *Akumajo Dracula*, or 'Demon Castle Dracula', the game puts players in the boots of Simon Belmont. He has been given the task of destroying the evil Lord Dracula. Traverse several different levels along the way through Dracula's castle, leaping over pits, and collecting bags of money to score points, as well as weapons, hearts or occasional food items to restore your health or grant invincibility.

Some of the weapons include Holy Water, Boomerang Cross (*How it's shaped like that and still comes back, I'll never know*), the Throwing Axe, or the faithful Dagger. Using the hearts you've collected by whipping candles throughout Simon's trek on his way to the evil Lord Dracula, each subweapon consumes a certain number of hearts, so be sure and use them sparingly! Additional powerups include a pair of upgrades for Simon's trust whip, the Vampire Killer (*Which interesting to note, was the European MSX title for Castlevania when it was released in that region.*) which strengthen his whip, making dispatching Dracula's various undead minions much easier.

But, even with a fully powered whip, Simon's journey won't be an easy one! Between the

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relentless army of zombies, flying bats, skeletons, (Some that even come back to life after being whipped!) and other infamous horror movie mainstays, Simon will have his hands full dealing with Dracula's army. And on top of all that, Simon will have to occasionally make a series of tricky jumps over bottomless pits, or water... but if you're not careful an enemy may bump into you and send you falling to your death.

Should you survive all the barrage of enemies and pits, eventually you'll make it to the final showdown with the Dark Lord himself! But alas, even after defeating Lord Dracula, he still managed to come back many many times! Here's a look at some of the various titles in the series (*There's way too many to go into detail about all of them, but I'll cover as much as I can!*):

- *Castlevania (NES/Famicom Disk System/PC/C64/Amiga)* - The original game also came out on a variety of PCs and consoles when it was released, there was even a 1993 re-release for the Japanese Famicom (which also added an easier difficulty, which also started Simon off with 10 lives!)

- *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest / Dracula II: Seal of the Curse* - Much like many 'Part II's of the NES days, this one was drastically different from the original. Featuring more of an 'Action-RPG' feel than straight 'run to the right and kill things' formula of the original, this one was quite a change for fans used to the original. Unfortunately due to alot of the cryptic hints, players would usually find themselves lost with no idea where they were supposed to go or what they needed to do next.

- *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse / Akumajo Densetsu (Legend of Demon Castle)* - Quite possibly the best of the NES/Famicom releases, this third game, players are cast in the role of Simon's ancestor, Trevor Belmont (or Ralph in the Japanese version) Fortunately Trevor is not alone in his quest to defeat Dracula, as he's aided by three other people: Sypha, a young priestess who makes up for her lack of physical strength by wielding powerful magic, Grant DaNasty, a pirate who wields throwing knives, and can climb on the walls or ceiling, and Alucard, the son of Dracula, who shoots fireballs and can transform into a bat to fly around. The game is still tough as nails though, so you'll need all of everyone's different skillsets in order to put the nail in the coffin again for Dracula! (

Bonus Easter Egg! Enter 'HELP ME' as your name to start with ten lives! US version only)

- *Super Castlevania IV / Akumajo Dracula (SNES/SFC)* - The first 16-bit installment of the Castlevania series, this was more or less a 'retelling' of the original game on NES, only this time

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with much better visuals/audio! Additionally Simon now has the ability to whip in multiple directions, making dispatching Dracula's minions even easier! Naturally being on the SNES/SFC, the game featured massive use of the system's 'Mode 7' scaling and rotation, featuring maze-like levels that rotated around our hero, so you'll never know which way is up!

- *Akumajo Dracula X: Chi no Rondo / Castlevania: Rondo of Blood* (PCE/TG16) - Perhaps the most legendary of the Castlevania games, for the longest time since its release in 1993, this game was only available via stores that sold games imported from Japan. Starring the descendant of the legendary Simon Belmont, Richter Belmont must take up the Vampire Killer and destroy the evil Lord Dracula and free his beloved Anette! Luckily he won't have to do it alone, as along his journey he rescues Anette's younger sister Maria Renard, who plays much differently than Richter. She uses animals as her weapons, like doves, turtles, and other creatures. You've probably heard this one featured during

Classic Game of the Week

, and for good reason,

it's fucking awesome!

You can either find it in the PSP 'Dracula X collection' or on Nintendo's 'Virtual Console' for the original PCE version.

- *Vampire Killer/Castlevania: Bloodlines/Castlevania: The New Generation* - Even the SEGA Genesis wasn't safe from Dracula's wrath! Taking place in the early 1900s, Bloodlines doesn't take place in Dracula's castle! Instead you choose either John Morris (who plays like Simon/Trevor) or Eric Lecarde, who wields a spear. The game plays like a traditional Castlevania title, walking through levels, killing enemies and grabbing items/powerups. (*Bonus Easter Egg: Enter the Sound Test menu, and play BGM 5, and SFX 73. When you enter the game, after you get fully powered up, the game's music will play a remix of a classic Castlevania track!*)

- *Akumajo Dracula X2: Gekka no Yasokyoku (Nocturne in the Moonlight)/Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* - Quite possibly my favorite game in the series, it picks up right at the end of Dracula X, when Richter fought Dracula in the final showdown. After the fight concludes (you can't die, Maria will come to save you if you do 'die') then the story picks up four years later, Richter has gone missing and it's up to Alucard (who fought alongside his ancestor in Dracula's Curse) to find out what happened to him! Along the way you'll run into a much older Maria Renard (who as an aside is actually playable in the Japanese-only Saturn version of the game) all the while exploring Dracula's castle (which unlike most of the other games up to this point, was an action-RPG much like Simon's Quest was, in fact, this game helped coin the term 'Metroid-vania' for games like this with action-RPG elements and a huge world to explore! This game also got a *Classic Game of the Week* nod, so what are you waiting for?! Check this one out!

- *Akumajo Special: Boku Dracula-Kun/Kid Dracula (Famicom, Game Boy)* - Here's an interesting one, a more 'light-hearted' take on the Castlevania series, this game starred a chibi-fied cute version of Alucard in an action-platform game. I don't quite remember the story (*It's all in Japanese anyway*) so I couldn't tell you what's going on... But it's a neat game with somewhat of a Megaman-style vibe to it, walking through levels, shooting fireballs at the enemies and journeying through levels to reach Dracula. Pretty fun for a less-serious take on the long-running series.

- *Akumajo Dracula: The ARCADE/ Castlevania: The ARCADE* - While not the first time the series has been to arcades (that honor goes to the original game, which was released in the US as 'HAUNTED CASTLE' But this version was interesting because much like many of Konami's other motion-controlled games (like many of the BEMANI ones from the last article I did about that series), this one tried to re-create what it's like to actually be in Simon's shoes, whipping bats, skeletons, and other undead by using a special controller. The game plays like an on-rails shooter, but instead of shooting you use the whip controller to attack enemies or use your special items, just like the traditional Castlevania games. Sadly I haven't played this one, so I couldn't tell you how it is. Perhaps if Konami would release a Wii/PS3-Move enhanced version then more people would get to play it.... but until then you'll just have to luck into an arcade that has it, or go to Japan!

Castlevania has quite a long history of great games (and admittedly, a few not-so great -- like the two N64 games) and the series is still continuing today, with the release of *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow*, which is also a rarity because it was developed by Hideo Kojima, and I say it's a rarity because it was a game he's involved in that didn't have the words 'Metal Gear Solid' in the title. Apparently the game has an old-school feel to it, even though early footage looks like a God of War clone... I haven't checked it out personally, but it does sound like a great game, so you should check it out!

Anyway that's going to put a nail in the coffin for this installment, I hope you enjoyed it! While we're on the subject of Hideo Kojima though, I think my next article may spotlight some of his other games (He *has* done more than Metal Gear, you know) So stay tuned for that one!