



Samurai Shodown II is similar to *Street Fighter II*, but fighters get to use weapons.

Samurai Shodown

PUBLISHER: SNK. DEVELOPER: SNK. Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous). 1993.

Although it borrows the basic one-on-one structure of *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*, *Samurai Shodown* is a highly original game, thanks to its innovative use of weaponry. Each of the game's 12 fighters (including ronin, ninjas, and a fencer) has a different weapon, such as a sword, a katana, or even a pet that can be sent on the attack. There are also a number of non-weapons maneuvers (which come in handy when the player has been disarmed), such as various punches, kicks, and special moves. Exciting, engaging, and extremely popular among Neo Geo owners, *Samurai Shodown* includes a special POW rage meter that fills incrementally with each hit taken. When it's full, the fighter will become temporarily more powerful, helping make comebacks pos-

sible. Nice character graphics, animated backgrounds, and excellent sound effects add to the fun. The Genesis and Sega CD versions are missing the character Earthquake, an American ninja. Also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, SNES, Neo Geo CD, and 3DO, the latter version being the only one to contain the death animations and red blood from the original Japanese game.

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The extreme popularity of the original *Samurai Shodown* made sequels inevitable. The first, *Samurai Shodown II*, keeps the weapons-based formula intact, but polishes things up a bit with better graphics, crisper controls, and the ability to pull off a super move when the POW meter is full. In addition, players can now roll forward and backward, block enemy attacks, taunt the other fighters,

and duck and jump to avoid high and low attacks respectively. Tam Tam, a Maya hero from Mexico, has been removed, but there are several new playable characters, including: Cham Cham (the catlike sister of Tam Tam); Neinhalt Siegar (who wields a gauntlet gun); Nicotine Caffeine (a monk); and Genjuro Kibagami (who wields a katana). A new female boss, Rashojin Mizuki, is also introduced, and hidden boss Kuroko (the judge sitting in the background during matches) is now playable. In short, *Samurai Shodown II* is even better than the original game. Both feature art by some of the animators who worked on *Ninja Scroll*, a 1993 anime film. Also released for the Neo Geo CD.

Samurai Shodown III: Blades of Blood

PUBLISHER: SNK. DEVELOPER: SNK. Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous). 1995.

Like the first two games in the series, *Samurai Shodown III* is a weapons-based fighter. However, it adds a new feature in which each playable character has two selectable versions: Slash, who is essentially the standard character, and Bust, who is basically the evil version of the character (for example, Nakoruru's animal companion is a hawk in Slash mode and a wolf in Bust mode). The animation is smoother this time around, but the overall atmosphere is darker. Certain characters, including Cham Cham and Earthquake, are missing, but there are several new ones, including: Shizumaru Hisame, who wields an umbrella; Gaira Caffeine, the nephew of Nicotine; and Rimururu, who battles using ice. All the previously existing characters have been redesigned, and there are now three difficulty levels: novice (with automatic blocking), intermediate (standard), and advanced (continual fully charged power bar, but no blocking). One complaint with the game is that certain characters can pull off stronger attacks than others, making it rather unbalanced. *Samurai Shodown III* is a fine game, but it falls a bit short of its progenitors. Also released for the Neo Geo CD and PlayStation.

Samurai Shodown IV: Amakusa's Revenge

PUBLISHER: SNK. DEVELOPER: SNK. Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous). 1996.

In *Samurai Shodown IV*, Slash and Bust options return from the previous game, as does the trio of difficulty levels. There are now 17 playable fighters (up from 12 in *SS III*), including veterans Charlotte, Tam Tam, and Jubei Yagyu, along with newcomers Kazuki Kazama (fire jutsu expert) and Sogetsu Kazama (water jutsu expert). Air blocking has been removed, as has the ability to charge up your power meter at will. Also, bombs, food, and other objects are no longer thrown into the arena. New features include: *Mortal Kombat*-style fatalities; a timer for single-player mode; the ability to forfeit a round (by committing "suicide") and start the next round with a full POW gauge; and taunting the other player by purposely getting rid of your weapons. *Samurai*

Shodown IV is brighter and more cartoonish than *SS III*, but it still looks fantastic. Overall, it's an excellent game that fans of the series can be proud of. Also released for the Neo Geo CD. Followed by: *Samurai Shodown! 2* (NGPC), *Samurai Shodown 64* (arcade), and *Samurai Shodown: Warriors Rage* (PSX).

Samurai Shodown V

PUBLISHER: SNK Playmore. DEVELOPER: Yuki Enterprise. Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous). 2003.

Released late in the life of the Neo Geo, *Samurai Shodown V* marked the return of the series after a seven-year hiatus. The weapons-based fighting action is similar to previous games, but the Slash and Bust system has been removed (though some fans complain that remnants of the Bust mode were simply replaced by certain new characters). Also removed are fatalities, combo slashes, and sidestepping. A new defense button lets players duck, roll, jump back quickly, or jump forward quickly. Positioned beneath the health bar is a sword spirit gauge that drains when the player performs fighting moves, but refills with inactivity. The fuller the gauge, the stronger the attack. When low on health during the final round of a match, players can slow down time for their opponent. Graphically, *SS V* is a bit disappointing since it came out much later than previous games, but doesn't take the expected leap forward. Regardless, this is a nice looking game that fighting fans will enjoy. In the English language story mode, the dialogue scenes have been removed. The game was also released for the Xbox, but with the dialogue scenes restored and translated to English. Followed by: *Samurai Shodown Anthology* (PSP, PS2, Wii), which includes the previously Japan-only *Samurai VI*, and *Samurai Showdown Sen* (Xbox 360).

Savage Reign

PUBLISHER: SNK. DEVELOPER: SNK. Fighting, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous). 1995.

Savage Reign is a tournament-style game in the mold of *Street Fighter II*, but it does add an interesting design element. Each stage contains an upper level (which is in the back-