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I. INTRODUCTION
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Aero Fighters 3 is the third installment of the Aero Fighters series of games. In this arcade vertical shoot-em-up (or shmup for short) game, you control an aeroplane as you fly over various places in the world and shoot at military enemies as you go. It's a pretty simple game; dodge enemy fire, grab power-ups and point bonuses, blow up whatever you come across, and take down the big bad boss at the end. It's a nice shmupping formula that you'll see again and again in other shmups that will come after this one, and that formula will be improved upon as well.

This sequel is very different from its two predecessors, taking place in a very

strange WWII-like setting with touches of weirdness here and there. Even the player planes are changed, as they're now WWII planes instead of modern jets. So for this game, you get all-new planes, old and new pilots, all-new stages, all-new enemies, and all-new bosses among others. The gameplay, of course, is still the same: good ol' fashioned shmup fun :)

II. CONTROLS

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There's not really much to it. Joystick moves your plane, A button shoots, and B button bombs. Easy enough...

III. GAMEPLAY

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It's a simple concept, but one that works. You move your plane around, dodging enemy fire and shooting at enemies as you go; just like that. Apart from the main view (where all the action takes place), there are also letters, numbers, and icons on the gaming screen.

First, your score is shown at the top-most part of the screen. It'll increase as you grab and blow up stuff, and you'll be rewarded with an extra life (only once) if it reaches 300000 or 400000 (depending on the machine's settings). Note that if you continue, your score will be reset.

And speaking of lives, they're displayed just below your score. You start the game with 1 to 99 lives (again depending on the machine's settings, but it's usually 3), and you lose one when an enemy bullet hits you or you collide with an airborne enemy. Once you're out of lives, it's pretty much Game Over... unless you continue, that is.

Continues also depend on the machine's settings. It's usually set so that you can continue an infinite number of times, but it could also be set so that you can only continue a set number of times (like once, 5 times, or 10 times); it could also be set so that you can't even continue at all! Also, continuing at the final stage will force you to restart that stage (or not, once again depending on the machine's settings).

And finally, you have your bombs at the bottom of the screen; you start out with either two or three (depending on your chosen plane), but you can collect more. Also, you can only stock a limited number of bombs (the number varies for each plane). Bombs are used for your plane's bomb attack, a powerful attack that does a lot of damage, covers a wide area, and nullifies enemy bullets. Bomb attacks use up one bomb; and if you run out of bombs, then you can't do bomb attacks anymore.

There are items that you can collect throughout the game. These items are listed and described here:

- Power-Up - A bullet (not the enemy kind) with a P on it. Grabbing this will strengthen your plane's firepower (each plane has different power levels); the max level is limited though, and will revert back to the previous level after you've fired enough with it. If you grab this item while you're already at the max level, you'll score 2000 points instead and your max level firepower will be recharged.
- Full Power - A bullet (again, not the enemy kind) with an F on it. Grabbing this will boost your plane's firepower to the maximum level immediately. If you're already at max, then you'll just score 10000 points instead and your firepower will be recharged.
- Bomb - A bomb with a B on it. Grab these to use them for the bomb attack. If you already have a full bomb stock when you collect this, then you'll just score 10000 points (a waste of a bomb, in my opinion). You cannot collect more than your bomb capacity.
- Currency - Either a Dollar, a Yen, or any other currency (depending on which plane you chose). Anyways, these are point bonuses; grab them, and you score 200 to 10000 points depending on where you grab them. The higher they are on the screen when you grab them, the higher their point value.

This game has a total of 8 stages, and all of them end with a boss battle. Once a boss is destroyed, you fly on to the next stage. If you take too long fighting a boss however, it'll self-destruct and leave you with no points; but you'll still fly on to the next stage afterwards.

After you complete all 8 stages, you'll be treated to the ending of your plane's pilot. If it's a 2-player game, then you'll be shown a joint ending of your two planes' pilots. However if you let the final boss escape (unlike all the other bosses, it doesn't self-destruct), then you'll be shown a bad ending instead. Nevertheless, the game isn't over yet; after the ending, you'll fly through all 8 stages again and this time the challenge will be harder. This is known as a second loop.

The game ends when you run out of lives and don't continue, or you finish all 8 stages twice. And that's all there is to it...

IV. PLANES

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The following will explain all the planes that you can play in this game.

NORMAL PLANES

There are 10 planes to choose from, varying in speed, firepower, appearance,

and pilot. In a 2-player game, both players can only select one of 5 pairs of planes. The following info will describe what these planes are, what they can do in the game, and who their pilots are.

VOUGHT F4U CORSAIR

Pilot:	Power Levels:	Bomb Capacity:
Robo-Keaton	3	5

If you've never seen a Corsair before, your first glance at the outsized propeller and "bent" wings might leave you with the feeling that either this warbird was assembled from parts that didn't match or it has met with some sort of disaster. But from all these outsized and mismatched parts came one of WWII's greatest fighter planes. It could outfight, outclimb and (if need be) outrun any prop-driven enemy. The F4U was the first Navy craft to have landing gear which retracted flush into the bottom of the wing, though it took some effort. Vought engineers designed the Corsair's wheels to swivel 90 degrees and retract straight back to fit flat inside the bottom of the wing. Two panels then closed over the gear making a perfectly smooth fairing. The idea was to mate the most powerful engine with the smallest and cleanest possible airframe.

(Source: The Aviation History Online Museum <<http://www.aviation-history.com/>>)

The pilot:

Keaton is your typical American military guy... in a tin can of a robot body. All patriotic, all heroic, and all that stuff; not even rust will stop him from performing his duty.

The plane:

The F4U fires a rapid and broad straight shot. For its subshot, it shoots forward drill missiles that bore into whatever they hit. Finally, its bomb attack has the plane transforming into a giant Robo-Keaton who'll then proceed to wreak havoc on anything he touches. You can move him around, and pressing the A button at the right moment will have him shoot a laser all around him (you can shoot this laser up to three times). This bomb attack lasts quite a while (and you can extend its duration by shooting the laser); also, all enemy bullets are nullified during this entire time.

Overall:

The F4U is a nice good plane, possessing fast speed and decent firepower. Its bomb attack is quite odd, but it can be pretty strong with the proper usage.

NORTHROP P-61 BLACK WIDOW

Pilots:	Power Levels:	Bomb Capacity:
The Blazers	3	7

The Northrop P-61 Black Widow was the largest and heaviest fighter aircraft to enter service with the USAAF during the Second World War. It was also the first American aircraft specifically designed from the outset for the night fighting role. It made its operational debut in the South Pacific in the summer of 1944 and was the standard USAAF night fighter at the end of the war. Unlike other USAAF fighters such as the P-47 Thunderbolt or P-51 Mustang, the Black Widow did not chalk up a particularly impressive number of kills; because by the time of its entry into service, the Allies had already established almost overwhelming air superiority over virtually all fronts, and enemy aircraft were rather few and far between, especially at night.

(Source: Joe Baugher's Webpage <<http://home.att.net/~jbaugher1/p61.html>>)

The pilots:

The Blazers is a special three-person squad, able to accomplish any mission assigned to them. And for this mission, they are to rescue their master's daughter who is in possession of some secret documents. They'll do whatever it takes to complete this mission.

The plane:

The P-61 shoots a fast straight shot; and once powered up enough, it also fires diagonal shots for a nifty spread pattern. For its subshot, it shoots aimed shots at enemies; it's a nice auto-targeting system, but sometimes it doesn't shoot at where you want it to. And for its bomb attack, the plane loops over and drops down 5 huge missiles that create a row of explosions upon impact. Both the missiles and their resulting explosions do damage.

Overall:

Decent speed, strong though concentrated bomb attack, and firepower with a lot of coverage. The P-61 is a good and effective plane.

MITSUBISHI A6M REISEN (ZERO FIGHTER)

Pilot:	Power Levels:	Bomb Capacity:
Hien	3	5

Codenamed "Zeke" by the Allies, the Mitsubishi A6M Reisen was the most famous Japanese single-seat fighter. It took part in almost every major action where the Japanese Navy was engaged. The Zero Fighter's legendary status mirrored the fortunes of the rising sun, in which four years the sun would finally set. For the Japanese and its former enemies, the A6M was the symbol of Japanese air power. The A6M fighter marked the beginning of a new epoch in naval aviation and was the first shipboard fighter capable of surpassing land-based aircraft. With its tight turning radius, it was an extremely deadly weapon in a dogfight. (Source: The Aviation History Online Museum <<http://www.aviation-history.com/>>)

The pilot:

Hien is a ninja, one of the coolest kinds of humans on the planet. Ever loyal

to his Shogun, he follows orders without hesitation; all for peace, honor, and the way of the Ninja... I suppose.

The plane:

The Zero shoots shurikens. Yes, shurikens. And these shurikens are replaced by hi-speed kunai daggers at max level. For its subshot, it fires boomerangs that travel to the side and then return to the plane. And for its bomb attack, the plane transforms into a large phoenix (possibly a result of secret ancient Ninja arts). This phoenix damages whatever it touches (and it also nullifies any enemy bullet that hits it), and it can also shoot fireballs (with the A button, of course). It takes a while for the phoenix to change back into the plane.

Overall:

The Zero is a fast plane; it also has fast and rapid firepower, but it's pretty thin. And it also has a nice life-saving bomb attack that can be quite strong.

AICHI M6A1 SEIRAN

Pilot:	Power Levels:	Bomb Capacity:
Mao Mao	2	5

The Aichi M6A1 Seiran (Mountain Haze) was a unique airplane in WWII in that it was developed by the Japanese Navy to fly off specially designed submarines. The aircraft had floats to enable it to land near the sub for recovery at the end of each mission and the wings folded to allow for storage in a watertight hanger on the sub's deck. Several Seirans were completed by the end of the war, but their first operational mission was ended by the Japanese surrender. (Source: HobbyLinc <<http://www.hobbylinc.com/>>)

The pilot:

Mao Mao is a Japanese megastar; she sings, she acts, she does all that popular idol stuff. And in between all that, she manages to find the time to fly a jet fighter (or in this case, an aeroplane) and save the world. She's one amazing (and hot) pilot ^_^

The plane:

The M6A1's main shot is a simple but decent straight one. For its subshot, it shoots lasers that automatically head to the direction of the nearest enemy and tear through anything in their path. And finally, its bomb attack is quite unique; instead of a typical mass destruction attack, the plane unleashes a shockwave that stops time (and also does some damage). Everything except the player planes are frozen in place, allowing you to freely shoot at the helpless enemies until the effect wears off.

(Note: This plane's bomb attack actually has a glitch. By holding down the B button instead of just pressing it, the shockwave will just stay in place around your plane. You can hold it down for as long as you can, even long after the time stop effect has worn off. This shockwave can act as an offensive shield (but it doesn't nullify bullets). And once you finally let go of the B button, the shockwave will finally disperse as normal.)

Overall:

The M6A1 has average speed and very good firepower. However, its bomb attack is quite variable; it could either do great damage or crap damage depending on how you use it, so use it well.

IL-2 STORMOVIK

Pilots:	Power Levels:	Bomb Capacity:
Chaika & Pooshka	2	7

A heavily armored ground-attack monoplane, the backbone of the Soviet ground-attack units in WWII. Its deadly efficiency originated not only from powerful weapons, but also from unprecedented (and for years not overcome) armoring of all vital elements: pilot cockpit, engine, cooling system, and internal bomb bays. Other earlier and contemporary aircraft (with few exceptions) had armor as an addition to the airframe, and suffered from its passive weight.

(Source: Russian Aviation Museum
<<http://www.internetelite.ru/aircrafts/index.html>>)

The pilots:

Chaika & Pooshka are sisters, and they need money for their father's medicine. Pooshka gets a crazy idea: if they save the world, they're sure to be rewarded with the money they need. Chaika doesn't like this, but there's nothing she can do except come along for the ride...

The plane:

Once powered up, the IL-2 shoots a diagonal V-shaped shot. To make up for the lack of straight forward fire, the subshot consists of building-shaped missiles (I'm not kidding) that shoot off straight forward; these odd missiles are slow but they're quite strong. And by the way, it's not just the missiles that are weird; for its bomb attack, giant Russian dolls fly over the area and bomb everything in sight. This bombardment, unfortunately, is quite weak; plus, the bombardment time varies for each bomb attack (it could be very short or pretty long). And to top it all off, there's a delay before the enemy bullets are nullified.

Overall:

Decent speed and strong firepower make this plane a nice choice. It's just unfortunate that its bomb attack is weak and erratic, a mere bullet eraser and not much else.

POLIKARPOV I-16

Pilot: Power Levels: Bomb Capacity:
Spanky 4 6
(Whity in Jap version)

When the tiny I-16 flew for the first time in December 1933, it was far ahead of any other fighter design in the world; featuring retractable landing gear, a cantilever wing and variable pitch propeller. Although not among the best remembered aircraft of the 1930's, it was nevertheless a very able and rugged machine and featured prominently in the events of the time. The Polikarpov I-16 achieved classic status at a time when the Soviet Union seemed, to many, to be incapable of producing anything worthwhile. In the years just preceding World War II, when the I-16 debuted, the Soviet Union was disparaged in the West as a technologically backward nation. There was considerable truth to this view, but not when it was applied to the sphere of weaponry and weapons systems.

(Source: The Aviation History Online Museum <<http://www.aviation-history.com/>>)

The pilot:

Spanky is the strangest out of all the pilots here. He still intends to save the world via his aeroplane... but he's a *dolphin*! A *talking* dolphin!! A talking dolphin *pilot*!!! What the hell!?!?

The plane:

The I-16 shoots a simple and fast straight shot; this is complemented by its subshot, blasts of water that shoot off forward. This plane also has a super-shot; holding down the A button and then releasing it will shoot a water blast that blows right through anything in its path. The longer you hold down, the more powerful the supershot will be (up to three water blasts). Finally, the bomb attack consists of a giant water blast that's shot off forward after some charging up. Yeah, this plane is very water-themed (after all, its pilot is a dolphin).

Overall:

It's got average speed and strong firepower and bomb attack (though it all goes only forward). A pretty good plane overall.

DORNIER DO-335 PFIEL

Pilot: Power Levels: Bomb Capacity:
Malcolm 3 4

The Dornier Do-335 Pfiel (Arrow) was arguably the best piston aircraft of the time. It was the only military aircraft of the time to have a push-pull powerplant/airframe. It was the only aircraft of WWII to have an ejection seat. It was the only aircraft that had explosive bolts in the rear fuselage designed to separate the tail section in order to facilitate a successful bailout if necessary. And it was also the fastest piston powered aircraft, with a maximum speed of 417 mph at an altitude of 26,000 feet. Nothing in the Allied inventory could catch it.

(Source: 214th WWII Museum <<http://www.214th.com/ww2/>>)

The pilot:

Malcolm is a hotshot. He's very confident that his most awesome and amazing piloting skills will lead him to an easy victory here. Will he be right...?

The plane:

The Do-335 fires a wide straight shot, and it shoots homing missiles for its subshot. It also has a supershot; hold down the A button and then release it to fire a stream of shots (these only go a certain distance, indicated by crosshairs). The longer you hold down, the more shots are fired but the shorter the distance is. Finally for its bomb attack, the plane emits towards its front a bright blast of light that damages whatever it touches.

Overall:

It's got good firepower and a strong bomb attack, and it's also the fastest of all the normal planes here. If your reflexes are up to it, this can be a great plane to use.

JUNKERS JU-87 STUKA

Pilots: Power Levels: Bomb Capacity:
Kowful & River 4 7

The Ju-87 was the most famous Sturzkampfflugzeug (German dive bomber) on World War II, instantly recognizable by its inverted gull-wings and fixed undercarriage. The Stuka's design included some innovative features, including an automatic pull-up system to ensure that the plane recovered from its attack dive even if the pilot blacked out from the high acceleration; and wind-powered sirens on the wheel covers that wailed during dives to scare its victims. The Stuka was sturdy, accurate, and very effective; but also slow, unmaneuverable, underarmed, and vulnerable to enemy fighters.

(Source: Wikipedia <<http://en.wikipedia.org>>)

The pilots:

Two veteran pilots from AF1 return in this game: the strong Viking Kowful, and the old but capable Lord White. But what reason could they have for flying together in one plane...?

The plane:

The Ju-87's main shot is a simple straight one. For its subshot, it fires napalm that burns right through anything in its path; at max level, these are replaced by big missiles that pack quite a punch. And for its bomb attack, the plane loops over and releases a bomb that erupts into a huge and powerful explosion upon impact.

Overall:

The Ju-87 has slow speed, strong firepower, and a strong but concentrated bomb attack. A classic example of a powerhouse.

WESTLAND WHIRLWIND

Pilots:	Power Levels:	Bomb Capacity:
Alex & Pictus	3	6

The Whirlwind was developed to fulfill a requirement for a long range escort fighter. The type was a stable and pleasant aircraft to fly and had a formidable amount of firepower for the time. Unfortunately, development was delayed by the unreliable Peregrine engine. Also, the type suffered from an unusually high landing speed (80 mph) which meant that the type couldn't operate from short grass fields. These issues led the type to see only limited production.

(Source: British Aviation Resource Center
<<http://www.warbirdsresourcegroup.org/BARC/index.html>>)

The pilots:

Alex is a young boy, and Pictus is his pet cat. For whatever reason, he has decided to join the fight to save the world. However, he doesn't have a plane of his own; so he decides to borrow one of his father's planes...

The plane:

The Whirlwind shoots a decent straight shot. For its subshot, it fires big missiles that kinda float about. These silly missiles do big damage upon impact, and they also stop enemy bullets; you can also delay their release by holding down the A button. Finally for its bomb attack, several bombers fly over the area and bomb the heck out of everything in sight. Nothing on-screen is spared but it takes a while for bullets to be nullified, so don't expect this bomb attack to save you from immediate danger.

Overall:

It's got decent speed and strong (but kinda erratic) firepower; its full-screen bomb attack is also pretty strong, though quite slow to come out. Used right, this can be a pretty good plane.

FAIREY SWORDFISH

Pilots:	Power Level:	Bomb Capacity:
Cindy & Ellen	1	7

The biplane was clearly an obsolete concept by the beginning of the Second World War; and so it is somewhat surprising that one biplane, the British Fairey "Swordfish" torpedo bomber, proved to be a highly effective weapon. The Swordfish remained in first line-service through the entire war in Europe, and even outlasted aircraft designed to replace it. The Swordfish saw little action during 1939 and the first few months of 1940, operating mostly in convoy escort and for naval cover. Its first real action was in April 1940, when it served in the naval battles that accompanied the Nazi invasion of Norway. (Source: Air Vectors <<http://www.vectorsite.net/indexav.html>>)

The pilots:

Today was supposed to be a special day for Ellen, but unfortunately the world decided to come under attack on that very same day. So first, her daughter Cindy must save the world; hopefully after that's done, she can finally get on with her wedding...

The plane:

The Swordfish fires a single thin straight shot; once powered up, this changes into a fast and wide straight shot. For its subshot, it launches canister bombs that drift off to the sides and explode either after a while or upon colliding with an enemy; the resulting explosions of these bombs do a lot of damage. And for its bomb attack, the plane loops over and drops down three torpedoes that explode into big splashes of water upon impact. Both the torpedoes and their splashes do big damage.

Overall:

The Swordfish is a tricky plane, with slow speed and a strong but concentrated bomb attack. When powered up, it also has some good firepower; but you're in trouble when it powers down and there's no power-up to grab...

SECRET PLANES

There are actually two hidden planes (though they're not exactly planes) in this game, and accessing these two requires a code. Here's how to select them:

At the plane selection, hold down the B and Start buttons (do not release them for the entire duration of the code) and go Down every time the rotating plane is facing directly towards you. After four Downs, the timer will run out and (assuming you did it right) one of the two secret planes will be selected. Which secret plane you get depends on the column that your cursor's on; the left column gets you the Aka Usagi, while the right column gets you the Diabloon. Remember that you must start entering the code by the plane's first facing; before then, you can move the cursor wherever you want.

So, what are these two secret planes exactly?

AKA USAGI (RED RABBIT)

Pilot:	Power Levels:	Bomb Capacity:
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The Aka Usagi is a rabbit-shaped player ship from Rabio Lepus (also known as Rabbit Punch), a semi-cute horizontal shmup that Video System released prior to the Aero Fighters games. This old shmup is cute and fun, but also extremely hard.

The pilot:

Kotomi is a young girl, and the enemy has kidnapped her sister (a princess). And so off she goes to the rescue with her cute rabbit ship...

The ship:

The Aka Usagi fires a small but strong straight shot. For its subshot, it shoots strong homing missiles; and at max level, these missiles flash and blow through anything in their path. And for its bomb attack, the ship flashes as it speeds up and becomes invincible; for a short while, the ship can absorb bullets and ram into enemies to damage them.

Overall:

It has fast speed, strong firepower, a life-saving bomb attack, and it's kinda cute too. A very awesome ship to use; I guess that's why it's a secret ;)

DIABLOON

Pilot:	Power Levels:	Bomb Capacity:
"The Man"	7	2

The Diabloon is a car that's outfitted with jet engines and two chainguns. It comes from Turbo Force, another Video System game released before any AF game. This old game is a vertical shmup, and it involves flying cars among other ridiculous things.

The pilot:

Who is "The Man"? This shadowy male figure is very mysterious; no one knows who he is, no one knows what he looks like, and no one knows what his motives could be...

The car:

The Diabloon shoots a simple straight shot. This shot gradually becomes stronger as it powers up until it finally transforms into a rapid spread shot at max level. Curiously, this car has no subshot; but it does have one of two possible bomb attacks (determined randomly). The first one protects the car with an energy shield; while this shield is in effect, everything harmlessly passes right through the car. And the shield lasts for quite a good while too. For its other bomb attack, fireballs bombard the entire area and devastate everything in sight. This rain of fire is powerful, lasts pretty long, and nullifies bullets nearly instantly.

Overall:

This car is very fast, and one of its bomb attacks is very powerful. However, the Diabloon is quite a hard car to use; building up its firepower takes quite a while (woe unto you if you die and lose all that power), and the bomb attack is annoyingly random as well.

COMBINED SHOTS

In a two-player game, the planes can also fire combined shots. These are large powerful shots, and either plane can fire them. To shoot combined shots, both planes must be overlapping each other exactly and there must be no bomb attacks happening at the time.

Here are the combined shots that the planes can shoot:

- Corsair/Black Widow - Extremely wide rows of shots. The widest combined shot.
- Zero Fighter/Seiran - Big shuriken-shaped shots.
- Stormovik/Polikarpov - Three-wave ripple shots.
- Pfeil/Stuka - Triangular wave shots.
- Whirlwind/Swordfish - Round shots shaped like a cat's head.
- Aka Usagi/Diabloon - Three carrot-shaped shots in a spread pattern. The most powerful combined shot.

V. STAGES

There are a total of 8 stages, taking place in various locations around the world. What follows is a description of each stage; the places, the enemies, and the bosses. It should be noted that the stages you play are based on a branching system; this system will be explained as well.

STAGE 1: JAPAN

In this stage that you always start in, you'll be flying a bit over the city. Planes, tanks, a couple of boats, and the Tokyo Tower are your only enemies here; but don't take them lightly, though. Soon, you'll reach the Capitol; and once that's destroyed, the boss will emerge from some sort of rift. This boss is a giant tank, and it's got plenty of cannons and a giant 3-cannon turret to take you on with. And under that giant turret is another turret that's smaller but shoots a lot more.

After this boss is destroyed, a strange plane with an eye will emerge from it. This will actually determine which stage you'll go to from here. Destroy the left wing, and you'll go left; destroy the right wing, and you'll go right. If you destroy both wings at once, then you'll go to whichever wing was destroyed second. Whatever you do, the plane will escape once it loses a wing. And that's how the branching is done.

Back to the game now. Going left from here will get you to Stage 2A, while going right will get you to Stage 2B.

STAGE 2A: GERMANY

You'll be flying over a naval base in this stage. You'll encounter planes, boats, tanks, and lots of structures to destroy before finally reaching the boss, a large battleship. It has gun turrets, it launches aircraft at you, and it even gets support from tanks.

STAGE 2B: LIBYA

In this desert area, you'll be fighting gun turrets, tanks, planes, and choppers. You'll make your way through the desert and then fly over a giant tower before finally facing the boss, a giant armored vehicle. Apart from its main cannons, it also has large cannons for arms; it actually has four kinds of cannons for each arm, going through its cannons every time you blow up an arm.

STAGE 3A: EGYPT

This desert area is actually a bonus stage, full of non-shooting tanks that leave behind currency when you blow them up. You'll gradually fly faster and faster over this stage, making it harder to collect the currency.

STAGE 3B: PACIFIC

This bonus stage sees you flying fast over the ocean. The only thing to shoot here is an indestructable bomber that leaves behind power-ups every time it's hit. Go ahead and collect all those power-ups, but be careful not to collide with the bomber...

STAGE 4A: U.S.A.

You begin this stage by flying over a canyon. A large aircraft will be your first enemy here, but you'll also face planes, a few vehicles, and gun turrets that emerge out of the canyon walls. Past the canyon are three large rock formations; what these three rocks do are actually random every game. A rock could break apart and send lethal rock debris at you, a rock could be a hidden platform for a giant missile, a rock could be a massive gun turret in disguise, or a rock could have a marking of a body part engraved on it (each body part marking has its own attack pattern). After the rocks, you'll battle the boss; a giant bomber. Watch out for the giant bomb that it'll eventually release...

After the boss, the strange plane will appear again. Go left for Stage 5A, and go right for Stage 5B.

STAGE 4B: ENGLAND

You'll be flying skywards over the city in this stage. Missiles, missiles, and more missiles are all over this place as well as some small blimps. Once you finally reach the clouds, you'll battle the boss; a giant rocket. This rocket looks similar to AFI's rocket final boss, but it's much bigger and less alien. Take out its sections one by one (and watch out for its support rockets) until you reach the warhead, then take that out too!

Once again, the strange plane will appear after the boss. Left is Stage 5B, while right is Stage 5C.

STAGE 5A: ENGLAND

This is actually just Stage 4B, except it's harder and there's no strange plane here. Note that you cannot get to this stage from Stage 4B.

STAGE 5B: FRANCE

In this stage, you'll be flying over a battlefield. You'll first be greeted by a very large bomber (it releases mines that explode into bullets when left alone), then it's off to battle planes and tanks as you make your way to an air base. And once at the air base, you'll chase after a gigantic bomber but it doesn't end there. After destroying the bomber, a large robot will emerge from it and fly after you; that's the boss. This thing will shoot at you with guns and lasers, quickly moving from side to side as it goes.

STAGE 5C: PANAMA

You'll be flying over a certain famous canal in this stage. Turrets on rails, a few boats, a couple of large ships, and lots of planes are your enemies here. After all that, you'll come to a dark straight canal where lights will reveal the boss; a large battleship with lots of gun turrets both big and small.

STAGE 6A: CELTIC

This sea area is a bonus stage, where planes will come in and fly all over the place. All of these planes leave behind power-ups, but they're not completely helpless; leave them flying around for too long, and they'll start shooting at you.

STAGE 6B: ENGLAND

In this bonus stage, you'll be flying skywards as you shoot down falling rocks. Each rock breaks up into two smaller rocks that drop power-ups when destroyed. Beware, because these rocks are pretty tough. Don't crash into them...

STAGE 6C: EGYPT

Another bonus stage that takes place in a desert. In this one, a bomber will move left and right while dropping bombs. The bomber cannot be destroyed, but the bombs can (they leave behind power-ups). Watch out, though; any bombs that you miss will explode into bullets upon hitting the ground.

STAGE 7A: LIBYA

This looks like Stage 2B, but it plays differently; here, you're already flying over the giant tower. Your only enemies here are two bombers, and that's it. Just past the tower, you'll encounter the sub-boss; a very large enemy platform that hovers around. Plenty of gun turrets on this platform...

After the sub-boss, you'll fly on to the desert where a giant squid will emerge from a hidden trapdoor with water. Yes, this is the boss; it attacks using its central eye and two tentacles. It also has some sort of angel marking on it, and it attacks using that as well.

Afterwards, the strange plane will appear again. Go left for Stage 8A, and go right for Stage 8B.

STAGE 7B: THAILAND

In this stage, you'll come from the sea, fly over a village, and then head on to a forest full of ruins. Along the way, you'll fight a solitary bomber and then the sub-boss; a flying statue with four heads rotating around it. While the heads shoot at you, the statue will rain down white fire and a few bullet waves too. Once the statue is destroyed, a weird eye will escape from it.

At the end of the stage, the weird eye will emerge from one of the ruins. As you've guessed, it's the boss. This eye will then transform into a copy of your plane; it's almost an exact copy, except it's bigger. And its attack pattern actually differs depending on which plane it's copying (e.g., its attacks as a Seiran differs from its attacks as a Swordfish).

This boss can also transform into other forms, though it usually sticks to the plane form (all of these forms are monochrome-colored, by the way). One of these other forms is the hovercraft boss from AF1; it fires a lot and moves around pretty fast, just like the original. Another form is Mambu the giant fish, the very rare final boss from AF2; don't assume that it's harmless, because this form defies the original and shoots at you. And finally, this boss has a very rare form. There's this small tower in the Japan stage of AF2. Y'know, the tower that transforms into a robot, shoots at you, and then falls off the building that it was on. That is its very rare form; if it transforms into that, it'll shoot at you and then it'll "fall off" and blow up for an easy victory. Very hilarious, but remember: it's very rare, so don't depend on it.

After this, the strange plane will once again appear. Left is Stage 8A, and right is Stage 8B.

STAGE 7C: UKRAINE

This stage sees you entering enemy territory as you fly over the sea. Waves of planes will occasionally harass you, especially since they head straight for you. You'll also fight two sub-bosses as you make your way over the sea. The first one is a very large bomber; it has a bunch of turrets, and after a while it also launches two planes at you. These two very tough planes will endlessly do swooping attacks on you until they're destroyed. After the bomber is the second sub-boss, a round ship with a single two-gun turret. This ship moves fast and shoots big bullets, so it's not to be taken lightly.

Finally, you'll reach dry land and the boss; an enemy base. It's defended by lots of gun turrets and two bigger ones. The turrets can't be completely destroyed; the small turrets will just be replaced a while after being blown up and the bigger turrets will just reveal more dangerous cannon clusters. Just focus on the base itself...

And yes, the strange plane again. Left for Stage 8A, right for Stage 8B.

STAGE 8A: ATLANTIC

In this final stage, you'll be flying underwater above wreckage both ship and plane alike. Your only enemies here are submarines, though depth charges will occasionally sink and try to blow you out of the water. Halfway through the stage, you'll come across a chasm; and from this chasm, the sub-boss will emerge and engage you. This sub-boss is a combination of three bosses from the two previous games; it's the space machine (from AF1) with Tenukie the ghost

(from AF2) as its body, and the monkey (from AF1) is riding the whole thing. This sub-boss has a lot of various attacks, and they involve at least one of the bosses in one form or another. Possible attacks include fast bullet waves, fireball attacks from the monkey, sweeping laser attacks from Tenukie, small ghosts being summoned, and even a nothing attack where the sub-boss lets you shoot at it freely. Yep, very random and very varied...

After the sub-boss, you'll battle some more subs and fly through some more depth charges. And after all that, you'll finally encounter the final boss; a large alien submarine. It only has a few weapons at first; but once it starts to break apart, it'll reveal many guns, cannons, and torpedo launchers. And when it starts to break even more apart, a familiar eye will appear in the sub and try to keep it together; as it does this, it'll attack you with fast bullet waves and laser blasts. And when it can no longer hold on, it'll finally emerge from the destroyed sub (covered in wreckage and with some of its tentacles dangling). From here, it'll continue its bullet wave and laser blast barrage while moving from side to side.

And about that eye, it's the same eye that's on the strange plane. So yes, you have finally chased down the eye; and now, it's time to end this...

There's actually an alternate final boss here, but its appearance is very rare. This final boss is a massively gigantic sea creature, but strangely enough all it does is swim right past you and leave behind lots of full powers. It does not attack, and you cannot shoot it. Afterwards, the stage is complete and, instead of your normal ending, you get a special ending involving a penguin. All this sounds highly unbelievable, doesn't it...?

STAGE 8B: SPACE

You'll be flying through space and over Mars in this final stage. There'll be lots of asteroids here, and all of them (except for one of the larger ones) have hidden guns. Halfway through the stage, you'll encounter the sub-boss; a huge but stationary version of the eyeball final boss from AF2. This one has hidden weapons that regenerate after being destroyed, releases smaller eyeballs to assist in its attacks, shoots laser beams and bullet waves, and even gets help from AF1's monkey.

Past the sub-boss are a few more asteroids and a couple of wild gun turrets. And then, it's time for the showdown with the final boss; a UFO. It'll launch from the base and commence its fast swooping attacks; this thing moves fast and shoots fast too, making it quite hard to hit and avoid.

But sometimes instead of the UFO, you encounter a black sphere. It'll launch, introduce the alternate final boss using neon messages, and then transform into that alternate final boss; Soh-Takeko, a mahjong tile in a schoolgirl outfit. It'll slowly walk away to the left; but along the way, it'll perform silly actions. And of course, these actions have attacks to go along with them; these attacks include fast rapid bullet shots and mahjong stuff being thrown at you.

And in case you're wondering, the bad endings of the eye, UFO, and Takeko are indeed different. The sea creature's ending is also different, though it's not exactly a bad ending.

VI. MISCELLANEOUS

NAME CHANGE

In Japan, this game is originally known as "Sonic Wings". Perhaps it was renamed for outside-Japan releases so that this game won't be confused with a certain speedy blue hedgehog. Who knows...?

AERO FIGHTERS vs STRIKERS 1945

The Strikers 1945 games are shmups just like the Aero Fighters games. Not only that, but the two game series also happen to be very similar to each other. Similar bullets, similar power-ups, similar gameplay style, and even similar fonts. However, the two game series were made by two different game companies (AF by Video System, and Strikers by Psikyo). So what's going on here?

Perhaps the answer lies in the credits of these games. A few names in AF's staff list (like Shin Nakamura and Wataru Yamazaki) also show up in Psikyo's many shmups. I can only conclude from this that some of the staffers moved on to Psikyo and continued to create and refine their shmup style there. This may not be the correct answer though, so don't take my word for it.

Still, it's kinda nice to think that Aero Fighters is the granddaddy of all Psikyo shmups even though it's not a Psikyo shmup itself ;)

SPECIAL APPEARANCES

A few certain things make special appearances in this game. But what exactly are these things...?

- In the Germany stage, there's this naval yard that you can destroy to expose three submarine ports; the rightmost port is always unoccupied. But when you destroy the yard, you can see for a very very brief moment a fish in the empty port. You can see it better if you stop time using the Seiran's bomb attack and then destroy the yard; the fish will be there until the freeze effect wears off, and then it vanishes. I honestly don't know what this fish is all about.
- Sometimes when a rock formation in the U.S.A. stage breaks apart, it leaves

behind a large sculpture of the head of Villiam (a pilot from AF1). This happens very rarely, though.

- Sometimes, certain things replace certain enemies. An example is the large gun turret that comes out of the canyon walls in the U.S.A. stage; sometimes, a creature of some sort comes out instead of the turret. There could be others like this for other enemies, but note that all of this occurs very rarely.

If you see any other special appearances in this game that's worth mentioning, please tell me about them.

COMPARISON

As stated before, this sequel is very different from its two predecessors. But what exactly are these differences?

- To begin, the screen is still horizontal. AF1 started out on a vertical screen, but AF2 and AF3 play on a horizontal screen. This is because AF2 and AF3 both run on the Neo-Geo arcade hardware, which doesn't support vertical screens. A vertical game on a horizontal screen does look a bit weird, but it still plays fine nonetheless.

- There are now 10 planes to choose from, and all of them are new. They all have all-new firepower, and of course they're all WWII planes instead of the previous two games' modern jets.

- The planes in AF3 each have different power levels and bomb capacity, unlike the ones in AF1 and AF2 where all of them have the same power level (3) and bomb capacity (6). Also, AF1 and AF2 didn't have supershots and combined shots.

- 6 pilots from AF1 and AF2 make their return in this game. Of course, this means that the other 4 pilots are newcomers that debut here in AF3.

- All of the other pilots aren't completely gone, though. They make cameo appearances in some endings in this game ;)

- Here in AF3, both players can only select a certain pair of planes. This is similar to how it was done back in AF1; but unlike in AF1, the two players can at least switch between the two planes.

- AF3 has 18 stages, much more than AF1's 8 and AF2's 10. You only play 8 of them though, and you play through them in a branching system; there are no randomly selected stages here.

- All of the enemies and bosses in this game are all-new. Only a few are old familiar enemies from the previous two games.

- This game retains AF2's currency system. However, the currency's appearance now depends again on the plane just like in AF1.

AERO FIGHTERS 1999

Strikers 1999 (also called Strikers 1945 III) is the third installment of the Strikers 1945 series of games. Considering the major similarities between Aero Fighters and Strikers, I've decided to give some AF pilots to Strikers '99's pilotless jet fighters just for the hell of it :D

F/A-18 SUPER HORNET

Pilots:
Cindy & Ellen

Reason:
This plane is very missile-themed (it shoots missiles galore, and it even bombs with a big super missile), just like AF's F-14 Tomcat. So Cindy and Ellen should feel right at home here. Why them and not Keith? Well, he may have piloted the F-14 first; but he's only appeared in one game and he's just pretty boring overall...

F-117 NIGHTHAWK

Pilot:
Blaster Keaton

Reason:
He's piloted the F-117 in AF, so I say let him pilot it here too. Either regular ol' Keaton or Robo-Keaton will do just fine. I've also considered Silver and the Blazers for this plane, but Keaton has been in every AF game unlike the other two; so if anyone should represent, it should be him :)

F-22 RAPTOR

Pilot:
Mao Mao

Reason:
The F-15 Eagle's full of lasers, and so's the F-22 Raptor here; so Mao is a perfect candidate for this plane. And it'll be more perfect if the F-22's cluster bomb attack is replaced with Mao's signature time-stopping bomb attack. Just imagine, freezing a boss in place just as it shows its orb. Then just simply get near it without fear of retaliation and BOOM!!! Easy TB* :D

*Technical Bonus

AV-8 HARRIER

Pilot:
Lord River N. White

Reason:

The AV-8 Harrier is a British plane, so it should have a British pilot. There are 4 of them in total (actually 5, but Cindy and Ellen are already in another plane), and among them I've decided to go with good ol' Lord White. He's appeared more times than the others (Villiam, Bobby, and Alex (and Pictus), all of whom have appeared in only one game each).

F-4 PHANTOM II

Pilot:

Hien

Reason:

There's actually nothing ninja-ish about this plane. In fact, the only closest thing would be its Samurai Sword bomb attack. Sure, it's "Samurai" and not "Ninja" but it's still Japanese; and that's reason enough for me to put Hien in this plane. Now all that's left is to replace its main shot with shurikens and kunai daggers...

X-36 WARLORD

Pilot:

Spanky (Whity in Jap version)

Reason:

Ah yes, the kickass secret futuristic concept jet fighter. So why have Spanky pilot it? Because it's funny! Sure, I could've given it to Malcolm; but that would be too obvious and dull. So there, the world's only dolphin pilot should fly Strikers '99's best and most abused plane. Never underestimate the power of dolphin! :D

VII. CONCLUSION

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And there you have it, the lowdown on this arcade game. I hope that you found the info in this FAQ useful; or at least, you found this FAQ to be a nice read.

If you wish to contact me (the author) about this FAQ or anything else, just e-mail me at: <bbhood21@yahoo.com>

Thanks for reading this FAQ :)

VIII. SPECIAL THANKS

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The Aviation History Online Museum, Joe Baugher's Webpage, HobbyLinc, Russian Aviation Museum, 214th WWII Museum, Wikipedia, British Aviation Resource Center, Air Vectors

- Various info on the real life planes that are featured in this game.

Destroy All Monsters

- Scans and info on the game Aero Fighters Special/Sonic Wings Special.

Gemant and his Neo-Geo Super Tricks Guide (Italian)

- Provided info on the game's really super secret stuff.

Shapermc

- Provided the staff lists of Aero Fighters and Gunbird.

Shmups.com

- A kickass website and community about shmups :)

IX. VERSION HISTORY

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v1.1 (01/06/2004)

- Added new info on secret planes, and added more info on the combined shots.
- Added more info on some stages, and added new info on a very rare final boss.
- Added the Special Appearances section in Miscellaneous.

v1.0 (12/20/2003)

- Added info on the Seiran's bomb attack.
- Added info on all the stages. Phew...

v0.9 (12/09/2003)

- Initial release.

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Aero Fighters 3 FAQ (arcade)

v1.1 (01/06/2004)

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