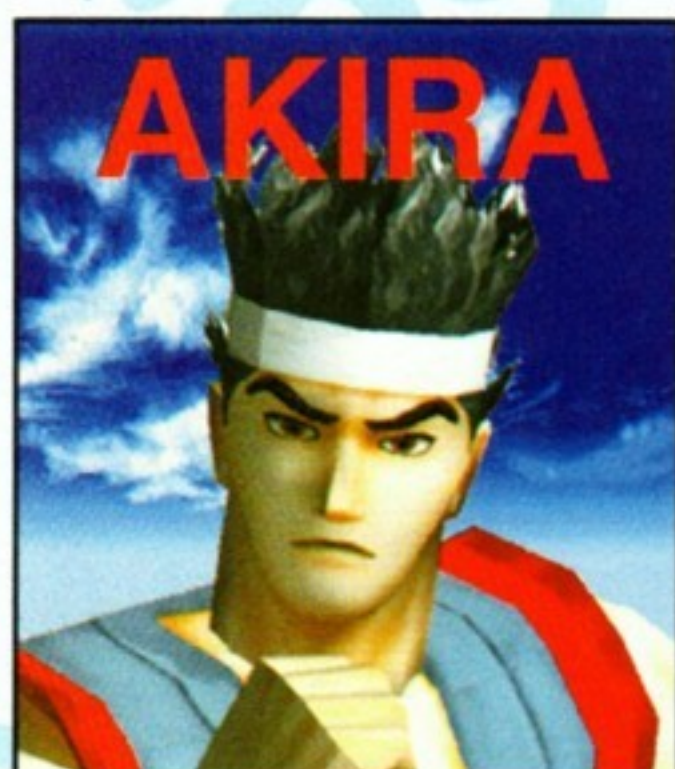Once again SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE returns to the premiere next generation 3D fighting game, with more in-depth techniques and tactics exposed. This month, we take a look at the way the combination attack system works and examine the game's lead character - Akira Yuki - surely the most powerful fighter in the world!

AKIRA

O f all the characters in Virtua Fighter 2, Akira is by far the most difficult character to master - that's why we've tackled him first. Although he is difficult to learn (as in the first VF), once mastered he is by far the best fighter in the game (unlike the first VF). What must be stressed from the very beginning is that he plays quite unlike any of the other fighters, and if you're used to the likes of Sarah or Jacky, you're not going to adapt as quickly to Akira as you would to say, Lau. The advantages are that Akira's sheer wealth of attacks at close-range is enough to take care of any situation. Still, here's a slightly more in-depth pros and cons list for Akira.

ADVANTAGES

1. His special moves are incredibly powerful - some of them can inflict more damage than throws from Wolf or Jeffry.
2. Sega and AM2 wanted to him to be the coolest character, so he does benefit a lot from the best-looking moves!
3. At close range, he has the very best attacks and a huge choice of them to boot.
4. Supplementing his close-range fighting still further is the range of Pai-style attack reversals.
5. He has the Stun Palm of Doom (SPoD)!

DISADVANTAGES

1. Akira has a distinct disadvantage at ranged attacks, revelling only in close-range bouts. If opponents keep at a distance, they stand far more chance than Akira.
2. He only has an average level of speed - Sarah, Pai and Lion for example can dart in, strike and dart out before Akira can respond.
3. His special moves, although powerful, are extremely difficult to execute compared to other characters.
4. He has no sequential button pressing combinations, apart from a crap PP and PK.

SURE-FIRE KILLING TECHNIQUES

Akira has some of the most truly terrifying and indeed effective combination attacks in the game, and here is where we begin to go into depth on them. It must be said that there are many, many more (we haven't even begun to touch on those which use Akira's knee as a floating technique), but these will be plenty to be getting on with. However, first of all, we'll discuss the oft-mentioned Stun Palm of Doom.

AKIRA HAS THE BEST ATTACK IN THE GAME!

A true test of Akira mastery has to be the Stun Palm of Doom (usually referred to as the SPoD). It begins with a simple palm to the chest and follows up with an immediate reverse body check and finishes with Akira turning and planting two more palms into the hapless opponent's back. The actual move seems pretty simple, but the entire thing is executed in less than a second! This is incredibly difficult but if you master it, the rewards are immense. For a start, it's incredibly damaging and secondly it just looks the business! The difficulty level of this move alone is enough to put most people off, so follow SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE's recommended approach.

1. Press G+P+K for the Stun Palm
This is, of course, the easiest part of the move to perform. Simply press all three buttons at close range for this move.
2. Press back-down/forward-P+K
This is the true test of timing. You need to start entering the command as the Saturn responds to the first G+P+K move. The down/forward-P+K part should be finished off immediately after the G+P+K has hit. This causes Akira to perform a shorter, sharper version of the reverse body check.
3. Press back-P
This is pretty easy to input because the reverse body check of the last part of the move takes a while to finish and you should be hammering that punch button for all your worth!

Step 1: press all three buttons at close range for the stun palm.

Step 2: the hardest bit, with much precision timing required.

The final part of the Stun Palm of Doom is relatively easy to produce.

AKIRA'S DEVASTATING COMBINATIONS

Akira has two primary moves for scoring a floating hit. The easiest is one half of the forward double kick for which he is famous (forward-forward-K). This is supposed to be followed up by another kick, but in fact, its recovery time is so short you can immediately follow up with all manner of devastating techniques. This move is particularly effective when behind the opponent. The second good floating move is Akira's knee. The only problem here is that the move is so dif- >>

COMBINATION METHOD #1: SEQUENTIAL BUTTON PRESSING

Every character has what we will call "built-in" combinations such as PKs, PPKs and of course PPPKs. These are strings of moves which the fighter knows already and that you can access via what is usually just a case of sequential button-pressing. Akira is the worst character for this (with just a measely punch-kick combo) with Lau being the best. All of these were revealed in the moves list published in issue three. This method is by far the easiest way to score multiple hits.

The barrage begins with a single punch button.

And another...

And indeed, another. Now just press kick...

... For the pay-off. The easiest combo to perform.

Virtua Fighter 2

Press back, down-P+G for this staggering trip... This leaves plenty of time for...

... The forward-forward-K floating attack. Lion stands no chance as...

... The power upper-cut (down/forward twice then P) hits home!

>> ficult to successfully execute on a continual basis - in fact, some rate it as being more difficult to produce than the Stun Palm of Doom! So, let's just stick to the kick eh? The basic technique to remember here is that Akira's really powerful moves (dashing shoulder charge (back-forward-forward-P+K) and the power-uppercut (down/forward-down/forward-P) are easily blocked on their own. Use a floating move to make them defenceless and then use the power move in question.

Again we'll start off with the back, down-P+G trip...

... And once again pull off a forward-forward-K floating kick.

This time finish off with a shoulder charge (back-forward-forward-P+K) for excellent damage!

An easy one to remember. Perform the stagger trip...

... And simply follow up with a power upper-cut (down/towards-down/towards-P).

A master's combo, this one. Again, start with the stagging trip (back-down-P+G)...

Do the floating forward-forward-K and be quick to perform the motion again...

You can get another kick in just as before and if you keep pressing K...

... You manage to perform both kicks - a stagger plus three-hit combo. Excellent.

ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUES #1: THROW REVERSAL

This is sometimes known as a counter, although since we've used that phrase elsewhere, we're going to call it by its proper name - the reversal. Any throw that is used on you that uses P+G pressed together is pretty cheesy and a cheap way to score a hit. AM2 have decided that you can escape such throws by pressing P+G shortly thereafter. Timing is essential here - you have to press your P+G to escape almost simultaneously, so for the most part, you need to anticpate when a cheap throw is going to be used on you. If you perform a move that needs a lot of recovery time (like most of Wolf's or Jeffry's) you ought to be pressing those buttons like mad during that short period of time. Performing a throw reversal seems to be the only technique that appears to work during recovery time.

Lau is a pain with cheesy P+G throws, along with Lion, Pai, Sarah and Jacky. Akira's sorting him out here.

Some P+G throws can end up with you behind your opponent. After a throw reversal, this is bad news for the "thrower".

AKIRA'S BREAK-STANCE THROWS

Akira is unique in that he has throws which don't actually cause any damage - they just throw the opponent off-balance for a short while. The advantage here is that you can follow-up with practically any move you fancy. The chart belows shows exactly what is guaranteed to work. To be honest, although these throws are easier, SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE recommends sticking to the throws which end up with Akira behind his opponent. This offers far more potential for deadly combinations. However, the movements required for all of Akira's throws are pretty similar, so sometimes you might end up with a break-stance move when in fact you wanted, say, a reverse body check. That being the case, this information does have its uses.

This one's in the intro - back/down with P+G produces the surprise exchange...

... Follow up with the shoulder charge (back-towards-towards-P+K).

A break stance opener (here back-P+G) catches out Jeffry...

Initiate a PK combination for two free hits...

Here's that kick in the PK combo...

And finish off with a dashing elbow (forward-forward-P).

This a good one with the down-P+G break-stance throw. Keep down pressed...

... Enter back-forward-P to finish off the double-handed shove...

ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUES #2: ATTACK REVERSAL

This is limited to Pai (who could do it in the first game), Kage and Akira. Basically, this involves anticipating an attack and executing the appropriate reversal move simultaneously (full moves list in SEGA SATURN MAGAZINE issue three). Pai and Kage are pretty limited in what they can reverse, whilst Akira can reverse anything but the commands to do it are more difficult. It's also worth noting that Wolf has a reversal too - but it isn't so effective, only working on mid-level kicks aimed at him. The advantages of these reversals are obvious - if you can anticipate an opponent's move, you can actually use it to score damage against your foe! This is an essential technique to remember because many so-called Akira and Kage masters completely ignore the reversals. Do so at your peril!

Pai's an old hand at this.

Akira's the best at reversals.

Wolf's reversal is limited.

Kage's is actually quite useful.

ESSENTIAL TECHNIQUE #3: COUNTER-STRIKES

Learning how to counter is essential in pulling off truly spectacular floating combinations. In examining this, we'll check out the three stages involved in any attack.

1. Attack Generation
This is the time taken for you to input the move, be it a special move which has an intricate joypad combination or just pressing the punch button.

2. Move Execution
The move is now in full force and if you connect with the opponent, it hits and you are for this split-second, invulnerable (unless your opponent hits you at *exactly* the same moment.

3. Recovery Time
After every move an amount of time elapses before your character can perform another technique - this is known as recovery time. Typically, special moves take far longer to recover from. The difference in recovery time is what makes floating combinations possible.

Countering is pretty straight-forward. You receive extra damage if you manage to hit your opponent during point two (if he misses you) or during point three. What is also good is that if you are using a move which floats the opponent (such as a knee), the force involved actually sends them flying *higher* into the air. This means that your basic floating combos are guaranteed to work and you have the chance of scoring more hits via more ambitious combinations.

An example of a floating move (Jacky's knee) NOT being used as a counter. Notice the height.

The same move used to counter Lau's roundhouse kick sends him flying much higher, meaning better floating combos.

COMBINATION METHOD #2: STAGGER HITS

Virtua Fighter 2 improves on the original by incorporating staggers - rather than just take a hit or fall over, a particularly weighty blow sends an opponent reeling, unable to respond. During this time of vulnerability, the attacking party has time to get in a free hit, or series of hits (usually sequential button pressing combos). Good moves for staggering: Akira's break stance throws (which basically throw an opponent off balance) and mid-kicks (down-forward and kick - most characters have these). The latter move works incredibly well against opponents who are blocking.

Lion's mid-kick has a staggering effect on opponents who are crouching and blocking. This sends his foe reeling backwards defenceless...

An uppercut swipe (up-punch) is an easy hit to score on a staggering opponent. The CPU player does this a lot.

COMBINATION METHOD #3: "FLOATING" HITS

This is by far the most difficult way to execute a combo, but it is essential that you learn it - hence the small section on "floating" seen in last month's Master Class. If you aren't clear what it means, basically every character has at least one move that sends an opponent flying into the air when it hits. Once this occurs, the opponent is helpless until he lands on the ground. During this time, you're free to inflict whatever hits you desire. Three examples of floating combos were in last month's Master Class, but basically any character who has a knee attack (forward-kick) can score an easy float.

Unlike VF1, Sarah's knee has definite floating combo potential (forward-K).

Follow this up with a Sarah combination of your choice...

Here we've gone for the three punches followed by a knee.

The initial knee keeps them in the air where they can't fight back.

The punches inflict small amounts of damage, this final knee is the pay-off.

BASIC MOVE COMBINATIONS

Akira is different from the other Virtua Fighters in that he has moves which he can seamlessly chain together. For example, a double handed push is achieved by pressing down, pulling back and pressing forwards with punch. A degree of time is required to "charge" the down part of the move, so why not start with a low kick? This way you can chain two hits together with minimum effort - and this case, the double handed push is far easier to execute. Some more examples follow...

A basic combination - down-kick can be held to charge...

... the down-back-forwards-P double-handed shove technique.

Another very simplistic combination. Start with a PK combination. Here's the punch...

... And there's that kick. While this is being executed, press forward-forward...

... With P to chain a dashing elbow into the technique.

The down into forward with P move produces this palm strike...

... Which can be followed up immediately with a forward-forward-P dashing elbow.

NEXT MONTH

Shun Di is exposed, along with one of the Bryant silbings...