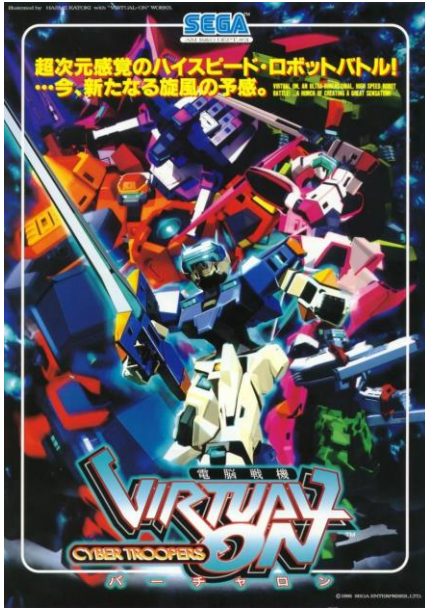


Mecha Game Recommendations



[Virtual On](#) (1995)

Codifying mecha combat in a manageable way is no easy task. Especially when in the 90s, games moved into three-dimensions. Virtual On tackled this problem by having two players control mecha through a series of fixed vectored dashes, coupled with locked-on attacks. In addition to the ranged combat, you also had another system for melee and that's before we get to the twinstick controls. This was and is a tough game to learn and mastering it took years of practice. It's worth it though, as Virtual On lays the groundwork for many other games, not just ones that involve mecha. This is because Virtual On uses a hard lock system that orients the player to an enemy, either when they do a dash attack or jump. The mecha design was also handled by [Hajime Katoki](#), who has also shaped the legacy of mecha toys, anime and games over the years.

[Armored Core](#) (1997)

[Armored Core Project Phantasma](#) (1997)

[Armored Core Master of Arena](#) (1999)

While these are three separate games, it's best to look at the initial PlayStation trilogy as a set that need to be played together. Set in a dystopian future, humanity has hidden underground after a calamitous war. Corporations now rule society and mercenaries called Ravens do their bidding. Ravens are unique, as they are the only ones able to pilot complex mecha known as Armored Cores. This is because Armored Cores are fully customizable and getting the loadout right for each mission is half the battle. As a series of games, these are the other side to Virtual On's more automatic locking setup, as you manually move an aiming window to get a lock instead. You also have to deal with things like paying for ammunition and repairs, not to mention energy management mid-mission as you boost around. With mecha design by [Shoji Kawamori](#), who also came up with the customization setup, these are hugely influential games with a very pertinent legacy.





[Omega Boost](#) (1999)

Developed by [Polyphony Digital](#), this is their only non-racing game to date. With a pretty tortured development history, it was only until staff from [Panzer Dragoon II Zwei](#) got involved that the game started to come together. The premise has humanity losing a war against sentient machines, with a last-ditch effort to send a mecha called the Omega Boost back in time and stop the war before it starts. The game itself is unique in how it allows you to acquire targets within a sphere and fly around locked targets in order to take them out. Despite the on-rails shmup related staff, this game is not on rails and is actually far more freeform. Yes, enemies tend to come in

waves but the manner in which you take them out is closer to space-based mecha combat than planar dragon piloting. Again, this utilized the mecha design talents of [Shoji Kawamori](#) and is somewhat of a forgotten gem these days, as Polyphony Digital [no longer lists the game on their official site](#).

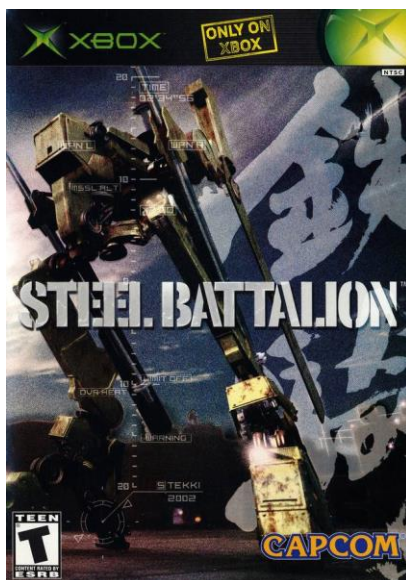
[Super Robot Wars Alpha 3](#) (2005)

There are a great many [Super Robot Wars](#) games to choose from. Having started back on the Game Boy in 1991, this series of tactical RPGs has had its ups and downs. Many regard [Super Robot Wars F](#) and [F Final](#) as the best releases but I prefer Alpha 3. Not only for its excellent pacing and thoughtfully crafted difficulty but also its amazing line-up of mecha. You also can't brute force your way through Alpha 3, compared to some of the more modern Super Robot Wars games.



[Steel Battalion](#) (2002)

There's a reason why no MechWarrior or Heavy Gear games are on this list and that reason is the original Steel Battalion. A hugely ambitious mecha simulator, it featured a massive and very complex controller to pilot your Vertical Tank. Battles were also incredibly tense as you only had one life for the whole game and if you didn't eject in time then it was game over. It also had some truly fantastic and even ground-breaking mecha design by [Junji Okubo](#). If you still want to play the definitive mecha simulator at home then Steel Battalion is simply the best game of its kind. Avoid the [updated Xbox 360 version](#) that uses Kinect though, it's truly awful.



[Carnage Heart](#) (1995)

A very different mecha game where you didn't directly control your mecha, called Overkill Engines (or OKEs). Instead, you programmed them and they then fought on your behalf. The result was somewhat voyeuristic gameplay of your mecha taking on targets based on your pre-determined commands. While this sometimes came across as a tactical RPG, it was far more than that based on all the prior programming that went into each unit. Featuring excellent mecha designs by [Kow Yokoyama](#), it definitely put [Artdink](#) on the map when it came to unique mecha games.



[Another Century's Episode](#) (2005)

[Another Century's Episode 2](#) (2006)

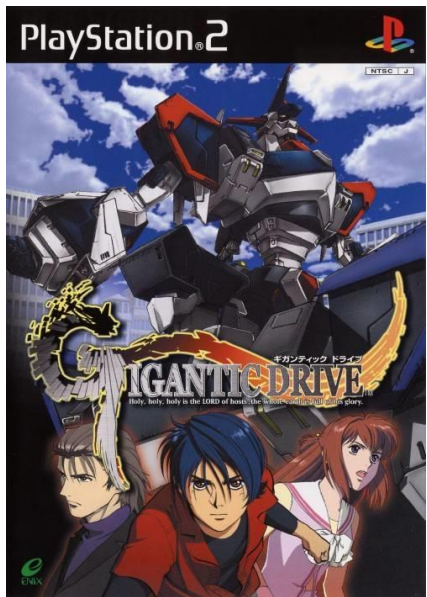
[Another Century's Episode 3](#) (2007)

Some people rate Konami's [Zone of the Enders](#) games but they were always flawed in terms of implementation. The ranges were inherently disconnected. [From Software](#) solved this with their Another Century's Episode games by creating a more restrictive analogue boost to link the ranges. Each game built on this functionality and its playable roster of units, my personal favorite is the second entry but they work well as a set of games too. The [Portable](#) version is not that shabby, but you can skip [R](#) entirely.

[Assault Suits Valken](#) (1992)

One of the earlier Masaya games in the Assault Suits series, Valken followed on from [Leynos](#) on the MegaDrive (though narratively it pre-dates it). Like Leynos it was a horizontal scrolling shmup of a sort but far less restrictive and a lot more explosive, not only in terms of the weapons but also the breakneck pacing. While it was released as Cybernator abroad, that version was cut-down compared to the Japanese original. While I also like [Metal Warriors](#) quite a lot, without Valken that game would have likely never existed. Also avoid the PS2 remake, it's thoroughly dire.





[Gigantic Drive](#) (2002)

The successor to [Remote Control Dandy](#), Gigantic Drive took the premise of controlling a mecha from the ground level up and made it even more compelling. Not least due to the inclusion of analogue controls for the arms. Based around an alien invasion, the player has to use an assortment of mecha to defend against an army of invading monsters. It was one of the best games [Sandlot](#) ever made and went on to influencing all manner of other games.

[Gundam The Blue Destiny](#) (1996)

The myth that all Gundam games are awful is simply untrue. The Blue Destiny games are probably the finest evidence of that. Set during the One Year War, the player is a grunt on the front-lines in a relatively underpowered mecha (initially at least). What made the game though was its shift to a claustrophobic first-person viewpoint. Especially as the pacing was incredibly fast, trying to keep tracking of enemies during a fight made for a uniquely tense experience and one that fantastically echoed the host anime as well.

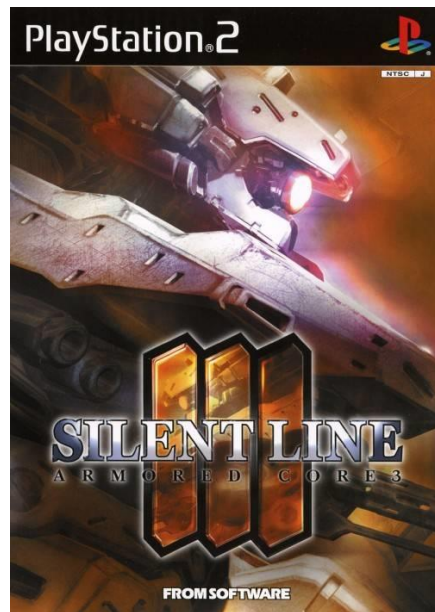


[Metal Wolf Chaos](#) (2004)

This is one of those games where the premise eclipses an actually very good game. Despite the fact you are the President of the United States of America in a mecha suit of armor trying to take back your country after a coup d'état, Metal Wolf Chaos is a thoroughly excellent third person shooter. Set at ground level, you have to work through levels to free your country with an obscenely large arsenal of weapons. This is an, admittedly rather cheesy, mecha gaming classic. The HD remake, [Metal Wolf Chaos XD](#) is also decent and worth a look if you cannot get the original Xbox version.

[Armored Core 3 Silent Line](#) (2003)

While there have been a lot of Armored Core games over the years, only a few have been truly special. Games like Master of Arena and Verdict Day are indeed amazing but my favorite game in the series is Silent Line. Mostly down to the improved customization, a new organic AI setup, a proper first-person cockpit view and some truly brilliant missions. It even had a fantastically good musical score too. As Armored Core has always squarely sat between the arcade and simulation tendencies in terms of design, Silent Line completely nailed that approach. Avoid the PSP release though, while it isn't all that bad it is but a shadow of the PS2 original.

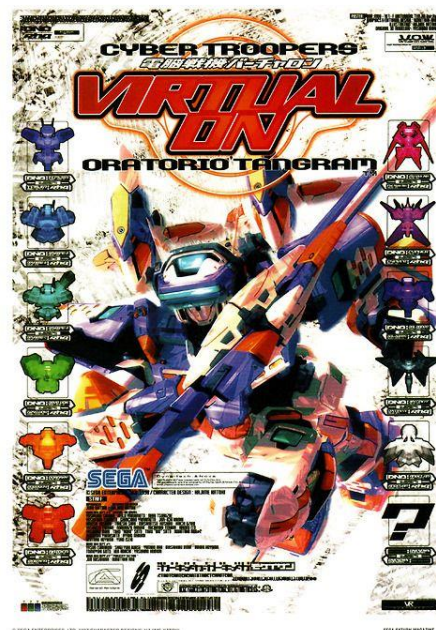


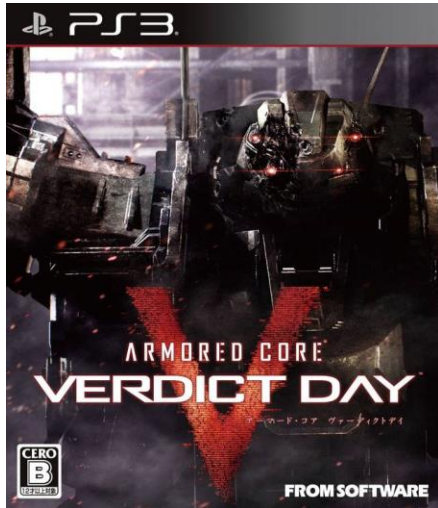
[Gundam Battle Universe](#) (2008)

The fourth entry in the Gundam Battle series by Artdink and arguably the most polished. It also featured over 200 playable units and a fully playable Xi Gundam. The game itself was a streamlined third person shooter, with an orbit lock-on setup. Playing missions allowed you to upgrade each mobile suit and in turn make subsequent missions easier. On a regular console this might have felt too simplistic, but it worked great on handhelds.

[Virtual On Oratorio Tangram](#) (1998)

Quite an interesting evolution over the first Virtual On, as that was more analog in terms of its input whereas Oratorio Tangram was more digital. In that circle stepping was handled by a button press, as was dash cancelling. You also dash in the air and change direction mid-dash, the latter was known as Watari dashing, named after the game's creator [Juro Watari](#). Again, this used twinsticks and had a steep learning curve. Many games after this relied upon Oratorio Tangram's setup, something the [Gundam Extreme Versus](#) games would later show.





[Armored Core V](#) (2012)

[Armored Core Verdict Day](#) (2013)

These ideally need to be played together but these were a major departure from the classic Armored Core games and were a lot grittier as well as more technical in terms of the controls. They also had an interesting online setup, especially Verdict Day, as matches were team based, with players receiving instructions from commanders that could see the whole map and give orders to teammates. Verdict Day also extended the sense of conquest, as you could join factions. This was somewhat similar to [Chrome Hounds](#) but was arguably more involved and sophisticated.

[Front Mission](#) (1995)

Probably the definitive mecha tactical RPG in a strategic sense. Given a very gritty real robot setting and mecha designs by [Kow Yokoyama](#), Front Mission was an exacting game. While [Super Robot Wars](#) came first, Front Mission was far more demanding in terms of player strategy. This was done to really emphasize the cost of war and that every move you made mattered.



[Assault Suit Leynos 2](#) (1997)

Despite being a named sequel to the first Leynos, this played more like a jacked-up version of Valken. So much so that the speed and potency of the combat resulted in the camera having to zoom in and out for various confrontations. Again, this was a classic horizontal scrolling shmup, but Leynos 2 was also more militaristic in its approach to mecha combat.

[The Super Dimension Fortress Macross](#) (2003)

Developed by [Sega AM2](#) and built off their [Aero Dancing](#) games, this was one of the best Macross games ever made. However, while the fighter mode combat was well handled, the limitations on GERWALK and Battroid mode, with the latter unable to fire missiles, felt overly restrictive. Effectively an arcade focused flight game, the mecha aspect was used to dogfight more nimble enemies and to shoot down incoming missiles. The missions were taken from the TV series and movie and featured additional variable fighters in the backend.



[Gungriffon](#) (1996)

[Gungriffon II](#) (1998)

[Gungriffon Blaze](#) (2000)

Around the time of Armored Core, [GameArts](#) also had a very good stab at making a more militaristic mecha game. Set in the first person, it offered a more believable setting and combat. The player piloted an Armored Walking Gun System (or AWGS) mecha as they traversed massive battle fields also teeming with similar enemy units. Gungriffon was also graphically particularly advanced for the time and, despite a moderate learning curve with the controls, quite tactile too. Heavily inspired by the functional parameters seen in VOTOMS, the AWGS mecha in Gungriffon utilised rollers in their feet but unlike the AT's in VOTOMS could also fly for a short period as well.

[Gundam Extreme Versus Maxiboost ON](#) (2020)

The Gundam Versus series started back in the arcades in 2001. Developed by Capcom, it was a simpler arena brawler and quite slow paced with it. In 2010 all of this changed with the release of [Gundam Extreme Versus](#) in the arcades. This sped up the combat, utilized dashing and close combat feints called rainbow dashes. The moniker “extreme” was well chosen, as this game operated at a breakneck speed on a par with games like Virtual On Oratorio Tangram. So by the time Maxiboost ON came around, not only did the game have a huge roster of units but had been successively balanced in the arcades, resulting in peerless multiplayer gameplay. This is arguably the best Gundam Versus game to date and picks up where Virtual On’s legacy left off.





[Senko no Ronde](#) (2006)

[Senko no Ronde DUO](#) (2010)

[Senko no Ronde 2](#) (2017)

These games are technically arena combat arcade games, but they actually merge various gaming genres at once. The basic combat is based around fixed length dashes and dash attacks, like Virtual On, but instead from a top-down view. The reason for the view change is that there are a lot more projectiles involved, and you can also turn into a massive boss akin to a [danmaku shmup](#). Merging these two setups results in a really involved multiplayer game that isn't really like anything else.

[Zeonic Front](#)

(2001)

On the surface this looks like a third person mecha shooter, but it becomes quickly apparent that you cannot just rush in with your guns blazing. This is because most enemy attacks will kill you in one hit or at least very quickly. You also have additional teams of mobile suits available that you can switch between, and you can also plan their routes before missions start. The result is something a lot closer to how mobile suit combat is depicted in the One Year War, where strategy and tactics are as important as piloting skill.



[Armored Trooper VOTOMS](#) (2007)

Despite the popularity of the VOTOMS series, the majority of its games have been terrible. The one exception to this was a game made by [Yuke's](#) in 2007. Instead of trying to recreate the controls of an AT, they instead treated this like a regular third person shooter with typical analog controls. The game also used an orbit lock-on system but only when you had line of sight. So breaking in and out of cover was a useful strategy to employ. The smart choice here though as that the complex roller dashing setup for the ATs was handled by the animation, with the emphasis on the lock-on and combat for the controls. The only bad things about this game was that the main reticule had a snap-to center behavior that couldn't be switched off and the on foot sections weren't really necessary and detracted from the mecha combat.

[Macross Delta Scramble](#) (2016)

Much like the Gundam Battle, Artdink's handheld Macross games were surprisingly decent. Delta Scramble was the fourth instalment (if you overlook [Macross 30](#), that was a different kind of game entirely) and had a solid roster of units and was also the most balanced. The main improvements over Sega AM2s Macross game was that Artdink's games allowed you to fire missiles in battroid mode. The result was something that felt more like Macross should, all with the focus and pacing of Artdink's handheld gameplay. Effectively a third person shooter, the speed of the variable fighters meant areas were far larger than the Gundam Battle games and combat was more accurate to the various host anime as well.



[Daemon X Machina](#) (2019)

Developed by ex-From Software staff and again with mecha design by [Shoji Kawamori](#), Daemon X Machina was a high-speed third person shooter where you piloted mecha called Arsenals. While there were cursory on-foot elements for the pilots and an incoherent plot, the gameplay was a more polished version of what [Armored Core 4](#) and [Armored Core For Answer](#) offered. Especially as the giant Immortal enemies you faced were more potent and involved versions of the Arms Forts in For Answer. The customization setup was a bit different though, as you could modify certain parts and weapons with chips you picked up. You also had a really great co-operative online mode.

A Few Extra Points...

- **Regarding BattleTech, MechWarrior and Heavy Gear** – Having played a lot of mecha games over the years, I have come to realize that many of the Western attempts in the genre tend to be derivative of something Japanese developers have generally done better. Steel Battalion is arguably the best mecha simulator out there, and the classic Armored Core games nailed customization with intricate combat. Even the Yuke's VOTOMS game usurps the likes of Heavy Gear. So while I have played things like MechWarrior, I don't rate them or enjoy them as much as the games listed above.
- **Not A "Top 10" List** – This is not a "top 10" list or anything like that, but some of the games listed above are also included in [my favorite mecha games article](#). Instead, this is a broader set of games that are recommended due to their execution and/or uniqueness.
- **Abstraction** – Video games are effectively an abstract ruleset. They may be framed in such a way to look like you are shooting aliens or jumping across platforms, but the actual functionality is abstracted in terms of their controls. What makes mecha unique in this regard is that they are also an abstract ruleset for a vehicle that does not or likely cannot exist. That means mecha games are an abstracted ruleset of an abstracted ruleset. Understanding the context of where mecha come from and how they work in a cultural sense is as important as comprehending how they operate in gaming.
- **Zone of the Pretenders** – With all the games listed above, the Zone of the Enders titles are very derivative of games like Virtual On. With the exception that the ranges aren't properly linked in Zone of the Enders. I have [written about this at length](#), so I won't repeat it here suffice to say that there are far better games on this list that offer a great deal more than the Zone of the Enders games do, with the Another Century's Episode titles being an excellent example of this.