

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF THE GAME BOY ADVANCE



Celebrating ten years of Nintendo's 32-bit handheld

Last month marked ten years since the release of the Game Boy Advance in the UK. The successor to the Game Boy Color's crown, the GBA offered SNES-quality games in handheld form for the first time and became hugely successful in the six-and-a-half years it was active.

The Game Boy Advance also marked the final generation of the Game Boy family, eventually being replaced by the DS and subsequently the 3DS. What's more, it was the final stage in an era that turned Nintendo into the dominant force in handheld gaming. Whereas nowadays we have glasses-free 3D,

polygonal graphics, CD-quality sound, fancy video clips, touchscreen gaming and wireless connectivity, the Game Boy Advance was the last handheld to focus on the simple things. It was built on the foundations of two action buttons, two shoulder buttons, sprite-based games, chiptune music and a whole lot of fun.

It's time to raise your glasses, then, as we toast the ten-year history of the Game Boy Advance and everything that the tiny wonderbox managed to accomplish in that glorious decade. Join us as we look back on the good times, the less-than-good times and the times that will live on in gaming history.

23 August 2000

After years of speculation about its top-secret Dolphin console and Atlantis handheld, Nintendo officially reveals the GameCube and the Game Boy Advance at its special Space World show in Tokyo. The GBA is a 32-bit handheld with a widescreen LCD display and a special processor developed by British technology company ARM. "The industry has always wondered when someone would invent a better Game Boy," says Nintendo of America's Peter Main. "Well, now we have."

22 June 2001

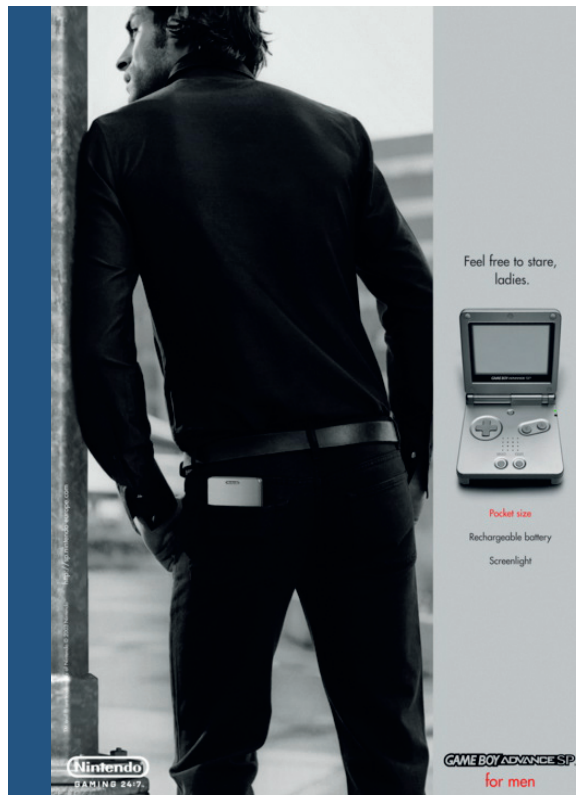
The Game Boy Advance is released in the UK. There are nine games in its launch line-up, which include *F-Zero: Maximum Velocity*, *Castlevania* and *Super Mario Advance*, an enhanced remake of *Super Mario Bros. 2*. The Super Mario Advance series would go on to spawn remakes of *Super Mario World*, *Super Mario Bros. 3* and *Yoshi's Island*.

11 January 2002

Advance Wars is released. It's actually the fourth game in the Nintendo Wars series (dating back to *Famicom Wars* in 1988) but it's the first time one is released in the UK. *Advance Wars* is a turn-based strategy title and quickly becomes one of the GBA's most praised games. *CVG* gives it nine out of ten and calls it "an outstanding example of what can be achieved on the GBA with a little thought and effort—absolutely blinding".

February 2002

In the lead up to the release of the improved Game Boy Advance SP, a number of risqué adverts start to appear in videogame and lifestyle magazines. One of these shows a man lying in bed with a naked lady and claims the SP is "the second best thing to do in the dark", while another shows a buff man with an SP wedged in his back pocket and bears



● Risqué ads characterised the SP's early marketing. This one was a bum note.

a message telling ladies it's fine to stare at his bum. Well, there's nothing like a bit of two-way sexism.

27 March 2002

Nintendo holds a swanky celeb do at the launch of Pockets, a special exhibition in London's West End celebrating "the humble pocket in all its forms". Curated by fashion designer Wayne Hemingway, the exhibition is really a cunningly

disguised advert for the Game Boy Advance SP, set to be released the next day. Cue loads of press photos of model Catalina Guirado, Danny Goffey from Supergrass, Ralf Little and Keith off *The Office* playing the SP. Odd.

28 March 2002

The Game Boy Advance SP hits the UK. As well as being much smaller than the standard GBA, it also has a rechargeable battery and, most importantly of all, a screen with a built-in light so it can be played in the dark. Much like the way in which the DS Lite later replaces the DS, the SP quickly becomes the standard for the system and Nintendo soon stops production of the original GBA.

3 May 2002

The GameCube is launched in the UK, along with the GameCube to Game Boy Advance Cable. This enables the GBA to connect to the GameCube so that both systems can be used together, although *Sonic Adventure 2 Battle* is the only game that's compatible with it on day one. Due to the hassle involved and the shortage of games that support linking up, the cable doesn't really take off and is only ever used to its full potential in a handful of games, such as *The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords Adventure*.

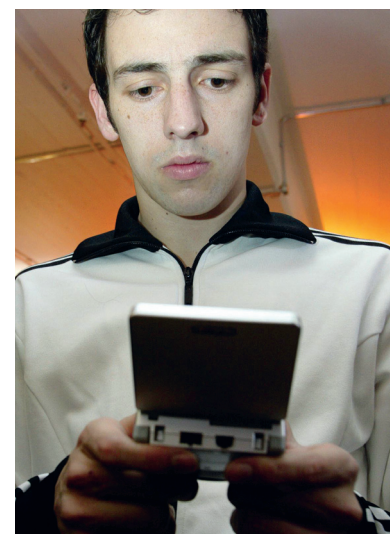
September 2002

The Nintendo e-Reader is released in America. It's a barcode reader that plugs into the GBA's cartridge slot and lets the player scan special cards that have information on them. These can contain anything from mini-games and NES games to Pokédex-style information on

"The industry always wondered when someone would invent a better Game Boy. Now we have"



● Sadly, the cable that linked the GBA to the GameCube wasn't well supported.



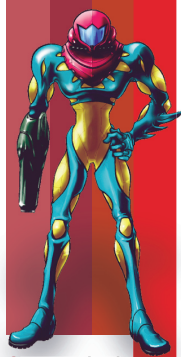
● Ralf Little's probably played for too long here. Needs some sun, he does.

Feature

Game Boy Advance



Plenty of celebs were snapped with a Game Boy, including Dita Von Teese.



Samus had a massive redesign for *Metroid Fusion*, her GBA hit.

certain Pokémon and extra levels in games such as *Super Mario Advance 4*. While it's an interesting piece of kit and the potential it has is promising, sales of the e-Reader are poor and it never makes it over to the UK.

29 November 2002

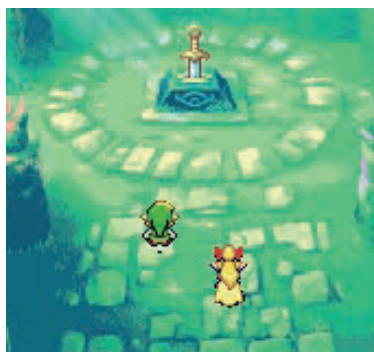
Samus returns to the UK as *Metroid Fusion* is launched. It's the first new Metroid adventure since *Super Metroid* was released nearly ten years previously and sees our space heroine investigating an explosion on a space station designed for biological experiments. To this day, *Fusion* is still widely regarded as one of the best games in the Metroid series.

28 March 2003

Link makes his Game Boy Advance debut in *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past & Four Swords*. This is essentially two games in one, featuring both a Game Boy Advance re-release of SNES classic *A Link To The Past* and also a brand new Zelda adventure that's playable with up to four people using the Game Boy Advance Link Cable. Not many people get to enjoy *Four Swords* in the intended way, however, because doing so requires not only four GBA systems but also four separate copies of the game and the link cable as well. Happily, however, that's going to change in 2011. To celebrate 25 years of Zelda, *Four Swords* is set to be re-released completely free of charge on DSiWare, meaning that DSi and 3DS owners will be able to play through the GBA classic for exactly zero pounds and zero pence.



Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire sold a massive 13 million copies from 2003 on.



The Zelda series did well out of the GBA, with several games released.

20 June 2003

Nintendo responds to gamers's requests for a GBA equivalent of the Super Game Boy by releasing the Game Boy Player. Much as the Super Game Boy allowed players to play Game Boy games on a television using the SNES, the Game Boy Player attaches to the bottom of the GameCube and enables GBA games to be played on a TV. It lacks the Super Game Boy's fancy border and enhancement features, however, and is fairly basic in terms of what it has to offer.

22 June 2003

On the second birthday of the Game Boy Advance in the UK, Nintendo announces that it has sold two million GBA and GBA SP units in this country alone. It's a pretty impressive achievement for a games system that got off to a slow start when it was first launched.

25 July 2003

Nintendo launches *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire*, the third generation of Pokémon games, in the UK. Set in the region of Hoenn, *Ruby* and *Sapphire* feature 135 brand new Pokémon, including starters Torchic, Treecko and Mudkip. Combined, the games go on to sell a total of 13 million copies

Your memories

We asked ONM readers to share their fondest Game Boy Advance memories. Here are just a few of the hundreds we received...

"Finishing *Golden Sun: The Lost Age* while standing in the rain with my best friends. Sweet moment."

Ross Davidson

"Playing *Super Mario World* on a handheld rather than a television blew me away."

Daniel Grana

"Playing *F-Zero* and *Mario* to death. So many fantastic games since then – still proud to own all of them."

Mark Pascall

"A ten-hour drive to Wales. Squinting at a non-backlit screen of Hoenn Pokémon and beating the league."

Matt Davies

"When I got *Golden Sun*, I got up at 6am to catch the sun coming in the window so I could see the screen. Best morning ever."

Deborah Malone

"Sitting there with no game, just turning it on and off to hear that beautiful jingle."

Stefan Matthews

"Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga wins gamers over with its sharp sense of humour and addictive gameplay"



worldwide, the biggest-selling title in the history of the GBA. An enhanced version, *Pokémon Emerald*, is released later on, selling a further six million copies.

23 September 2003

The Game Boy Advance 'does' London Fashion Week, which essentially means Nintendo sponsors the event by slipping a Game Boy Advance SP onto every table. What does that result in? You guessed it: more snaps of celebs playing the SP. Dita "Used To Be Married To Marilyn Manson" Von Teese and Davinia "Ex-Hollyoaks Woman" Taylor are among those papped with their elegant mitts wrapped round the dinky delight.

21 November 2003

Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga hits the UK. It's the first game in the much-loved Mario & Luigi series and immediately wins gamers over with its sharp sense of humour and addictive gameplay. It goes on to spawn two DS sequels, *Partners In*

● The Mario & Luigi series was born on GBA and gave rise to two DS titles.

● Boktai's solar needs had many UK gamers praying for sunny days.



Time and Bowser's Inside Story, both of which are also brilliant.

9 December 2003

In the lead up to Christmas, Nintendo releases a statement confirming that the Game Boy Advance has passed the ten million sales mark in Europe, three million of which are the new Game Boy Advance SP model. Nintendo claims that the SP is "the must-have gadget this Christmas, whether you're a dedicated games player or an occasional *Tetris* dabbler". Indeed. The number of games available for the Game Boy Advance also goes on to break through the 400 mark over the festive period.

14 May 2004

Konami releases *Boktai* for the GBA. It's a unique game, in that it has a special cartridge with a solar panel on it. Your character is a vampire hunter and in order to top up your special abilities and defeat stronger vampires, you have to play the game in direct sunlight. As a result, many die-hard gamers venture outside for the first time in their lives.

18 June 2004

Nintendo releases a special edition of the Game Boy Advance SP called the Tribal Edition. This is a silver coloured SP with a tattoo design on the case, which, according to Nintendo, is "based on ancient designs originating from Polynesian and Indian culture". A marketing chap for Nintendo Europe says: "We feel we have created a product



● This RPG-like spin on Nintendo's most famous brothers was packed with charm.



● The sun's power was literally in your hand, thanks to *Boktai*'s in-cart solar panel.

in the Tribal Edition that reflects the sentiments of today's youth – rebellion, attractiveness and spirituality. The new console allows gamers to express these emotions in a fun and interactive way, enabling them to communicate their individuality." Which is what we all want while we play *Hamtaro: Ham-Ham Heartbreak*, after all.

16 July 2004

After confusing Western gamers with never-before-seen characters Marth and Roy in *Super Smash Bros. Melee* on the GameCube, Nintendo releases *Fire Emblem*, the game they starred in. This marks the first English-language game in the *Fire Emblem* series (it's actually the seventh instalment) and quickly gains a cult following, no doubt helped by the fact that Marth and Roy were absolute badasses in *Melee*.

12 November 2004

While fans of solo *Zelda* games had been happy enough with the *Link To The Past* re-release the previous year, they still continued to yearn for an original *Zelda* adventure to play on their GBAs. Their prayers are answered with the release of *The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap*. It's a Capcom-developed game in which Link seeks out a tiny race of people to help him rescue *Zelda* from the evil Vaati, who happens to be a powerful sorcerer. Despite its fairly short length, *The Minish Cap* ranks among many *Zelda* fans' favourite games, partly thanks to its ingenious dungeon design.

Feature

Game Boy Advance

“The GB Micro has the sharpest and greatest screen ever seen on a handheld system”



13 December 2004

Square releases the first of its series of GBA *Final Fantasy* remakes with *Final Fantasy I & II: Dawn Of Souls*. Taking the original two NES games and giving them a SNES-style upgrade, it's roundly praised by fans, especially those who have never played *Final Fantasy II* before (it hadn't been released in English on the NES). By the end of the system's lifespan, Square Enix will also have gone on to release GBA remakes of *Final Fantasy IV*, *V* and *VI*, thereby cementing the GBA's status as an awesome handheld for RPG fans.

11 March 2005

The Nintendo DS launches in the UK amid reassurances from Nintendo that the Game Boy name isn't dead yet. Game Boy Advance owners around the world breathe a sigh of relief to find the DS has a slot for GBA cartridges, allowing gamers to buy the new system without having to abandon their older games. The DS Lite, released a year later, will also have the GBA slot, but it is then dropped in 2009 with the release of the DSi.

24 June 2005

Nintendo had pencilled in this date for the UK release of *WarioWare: Twisted*, a superb GBA game with a built-in motion sensor that let players control the action by tilting and turning the console. Months later, it still hasn't been released and by the middle of 2006 it becomes clear that the game has been scrapped. Rumours that this happened because the EU is unhappy with the mercury levels in

the tilt sensor aren't true – it had a piezoelectric gyroscope, which means it doesn't contain any mercury. Instead, a Nintendo representative at the time says that it's partly down to delays in the EU testing process. Whatever the actual reason may be, a picture of the UK packaging released by Nintendo is the closest that we'll ever get to seeing *WarioWare: Twisted* on these shores.



Roy rocked the arena in *Melee*, but had never been seen by UK gamers.



Here's more Link-based mischief, this time from *The Minish Cap*.



The *Fire Emblem* games got a GBA release after *Super Smash Bros. Melee*.

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September 2005

Eager to show its continued support for the GBA despite the launch of the DS earlier in the year, Nintendo releases an improved version of the GBA SP with a fancy new backlight instead of the front light that the system featured until this point. The backlight gives the SP screen much more vibrant colours and reduces glare. The new SP is considered the best version yet, but is released in very limited numbers in Europe.

4 November 2005

The Game Boy Micro, the final Game Boy system, hits UK shops. As the name suggests, it's tiny, measuring just 10cm wide with a two-inch screen. Despite having arguably the sharpest and greatest screen on a handheld system ever – something we'd say is still the case today – the Micro is released too far into the DS's lifespan to make an impact and so doesn't go on to sell in huge numbers, instead becoming something of a cult favourite among Nintendo fans. If you can find one online, we'd recommend snapping it up straight away.

Shades Of Genius



All-Blacks SP

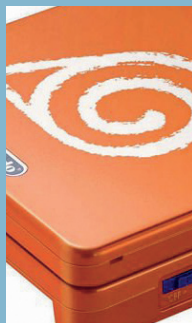
A special edition of the Game Boy Advance SP was released in New Zealand ahead of the 2003 Rugby World Cup. The limited edition features the All-Blacks logo and is tricky to get hold of these days. As you'd expect, it's pretty much all black, other than the white logos.

There are 27 known GBA designs and 61 known versions of the GBA SP. Here are some of the rarer ones



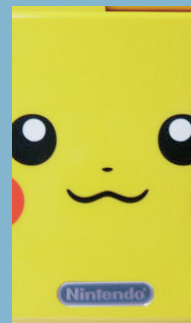
Donkey Kong SP

To celebrate the release of *Donkey Kong Country* on the Game Boy Advance, Nintendo made 1,000 special banana-coloured SPs. These were given away in a raffle to Japanese gamers who'd bought both *Donkey Kong Country* and *Donkey Konga 2* for the GameCube. Lucky.



Naruto SP

After the anime series *Naruto* took off in Japan, Nintendo released a special edition orange-and-blue SP with the mark of the Hokage on the back and a free copy of *Naruto: Path Of The Ninja* to go with it. Unfortunately, unlike *Naruto* himself, it can't split itself into multiple copies.



Pokémon Editions

A total of seven different Pokémon-based SPs were released over the years, each featuring a different Pokémon. Groudon, Rayquaza, Kyogre, Torchic, Venusaur and Charizard each get their own version but this Pikachu one is clearly the best.

◀ Tribal designs apparently captured the zeitgeist of youth in the Noughties.



◀ This box shot is all that UK gamers will ever see of *WarioWare: Twisted*.



◀ Spyro provided the GBA's swan song as the system passed into the eternal night...



6 February 2006

Drill Dozer is released in the US, the only Game Boy Advance cartridge that has a built-in rumble feature. *Drill Dozer* is a platformer starring Jill, a member of a bandit collective called the Red Dozers. A rival gang steals a precious family heirloom, so Jill sets out with her big drill to get it back, complete with a whole load of rumbling, drill-based action. Jill will go on to appear as an assist trophy in *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* on the Wii.

8 December 2006

On the same day Nintendo launches the Wii, the official GBA MP3 Player is also released in the UK. Previously known as the Play-Yan in Japan, where it was capable of playing both music and video files, the stripped-down MP3 Player is a GBA cartridge with an SD card slot, allowing you to store MP3s and listen to

them on the move using your GBA, DS or – most conveniently – GB Micro. Due to all the Wii hullabaloo, however, the MP3 Player is roundly ignored and it doesn't really take off. It's becoming clear that the GBA is in its final death throes.

2 November 2007

Legend Of Spyro: The Eternal Night is released. It's the UK's last GBA game, marking the system's official death after six-and-a-half years. In its lifetime, the GBA and SP sold an impressive 81.51 million units, but their tale has finally ended. Most gamers look back on the system with fondness as they think of the countless great games for it, including Mario, Metroid, Zelda, Pokémon, Mario Kart and all those RPGs. There'll always be a warm place in our hearts for the GBA; Let's hope Nintendo start reviving these classic games on 3DS eShop. +