

Super Smash Bros. Melee Fox FAQ

by CunningKitsune

Updated to v5.00 on Aug 31, 2009

Guide to Ace Arwing Pilot Fox McCloud, Version 5.00

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Version 1.00 Created: Sunday, April 18, 2004

Last Updated: Friday, August 28, 2009

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Contacting the Author

If you wish to get in touch with me concerning this guide or any other meaningful topic related to SSBM, feel free to do so. If you send me an e-mail, include a relevant phrase in the subject line (something along the lines of "About Your Guide"). Do not leave it blank and expect me to answer your e-mail, as I will not under any circumstances. If you do e-mail me, complete with subject line, I will do my utmost best to answer you quickly and to the best of my abilities. For future reference, you will probably have the most success speaking with me on Fox-related matters, since I play almost exclusively as him; however, I am also able to offer advice on a variety of other Smash-related subjects as well. I am a member of all the sites authorized to possess this guide, and my name is CunningKitsune on all of them, if you would rather get in touch with me via PM's or whatnot there. Constructive criticism and any additions or other observations concerning this guide are always appreciated. Thank you in advance for reading this, and I sincerely hope that it fulfills its purpose.

About the Guide

The principle aim of this guide is to enhance the reader's abilities with Fox McCloud on a technical as well as psychological level. Nearly all of the content in this guide is centered on Fox as a one-on-one combatant; this is the format in which Fox best performs, in addition to being the definitive format for high-level tournament play. Note also that all views and advice contained within apply to Fox in the NTSC version of SSBM. This guide also uses quite a bit of the modern SSBM lingo (shuffling, short-hopping, waveshine,

etc.). Definitions of a good deal of the terms used in this guide are included, but others may be found on the internet. There is a very concise modern terms list for SSBM that covers virtually every aspect of modern SSBM lingo, in case you are still stumped (see item 2 in the "References" section).

The first section of this guide, The Basics, is just that. It introduces Fox McCloud as a character and gives information on all of his moves. An exhaustive statistics list courtesy of Mew2King and co. is included. In addition, listed for each move is its respective frame data courtesy of SuperDoodleMan. I thank both of these players for the time and research that they have put into this game and the enormous amount of data that they have made available to the Smash community.

The second section, Advanced Techniques, introduces you to the higher-level techniques that Fox and the SSBM cast can perform, as well as some unique to the vulpine himself. The Improving Your Game sub-section delves into the inner workings of playing Fox on a psychological level and gives the reader insights into Fox's play styles and how to optimize the performance of their Fox in battle. The sub-section on the shine gives statistics of, techniques with, and uses for the kitsune's reflector in battle, including a section on the infinities.

The third section, Character Match-ups, deals with Fox's match-ups against each and every character in the game, himself included. The information presented includes comprehensive analyses, assorted tips and tricks, and various suggestions for each match-up. This section is ordered by the current established Smashboards Melee SBR Tier List in order to organize the information as relevant to the current tournament metagame and to make the information more accessible to readers interested in higher-level play.

The fourth section, The Casual Fox, is dedicated to Fox on non-tournament-level terms. It is a good stop for readers interested in Fox as an SSBM character, but not wanting to play him seriously at tournament-level.

The fifth section of the guide references various useful links for most any player. The threads include such topics as mindgames, edge-teching, and DI.

The sixth and final section of the guide simply gives credit wherever it is due and cites people directly related to and essential for the writing of this guide.

Notes on SuperDoodleMan's Frame Data

IASA = Interruptible As Soon As, meaning some of the animation can be cut off by doing an attack or something.

Auto-cancel = After an air attack is done doing damage, there is often an animation of the character returning to their falling state, during which you can't do anything. Some attacks are such that that animation will not give any lag upon landing.

Land fall special lag = After many "B" recovery moves, your character will flash black and not be able to do anything. When they land from this, even though the falling animation may be the same, the time it takes to recover on the ground is dependant on which move you did.

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I. The Basics

A. Introduction

Super Smash Bros. Melee is Fox's second visit to the Smash Bros. scene, and frankly, he has never been better. Although he has lost the stun capability of his blaster from the N64 version, he retains most if not all of his moves from the previous game, and then some. As a fighter, Fox is second to none in the hands of a very experienced, fast-paced player. His lightning quick moves, fast, effective finishers, and unparalleled ability to spam his projectile weapon combine to form a fighter who is more than capable of dealing with anything thrown his way. The new player, however, must be careful with Fox; more often than not, slow-moving or unwary players are caught off guard by the jerky, erratic nature of his moves. Also, there is always the natural tendency to continuously Illusion themselves right off the stage or fall off the edge in a Tornado Kick. Once he is well under your fingers, however, you will find that Fox can control any fight against any character using his incredible speed and versatility and more than a little blaster fire.

As with any character in the game, excelling with Fox requires a sizable input of time. He is especially heavy in terms of technical feats, and this in many cases causes newer players to shirk the "burden" of learning Fox in favor of characters that are more user-friendly and accessible at lower levels, such as Sheik. You will find, however, that once you have begun to explore Fox as a competitive character and discover the will to invest the necessary time and effort demanded by his technicals that he can be a highly rewarding (albeit at times frustrating) character.

1. Pros and Cons

Pros:

- Lightning speed on nearly every move
- Little overall lag
- Is a fast-faller
- The shine
- Fast L-cancels
- Very short short-hops
- Great at controlling the fight
- A perfect combo character
- Very adaptive playing style

- Fast, effective finishers
- Fast foot speed and overall speed
- Infinities
- Very powerful grab game

Cons:

- Relatively light-weight
- Fast-paced, demanding, and often unforgiving controls
- Is a fast-faller
- Many opportunities to self-destruct
- Recoveries can be Caped or edgeguarded well
- Low to medium range
- Demanding technicals give rise to consistency issues in the absence of consistent practice

B. Fox's Moves

1. Ground

Jab

Button: A

Damage: 2-3%

Speed: Very high

Priority: Medium-high

Range: Relatively short

Start Time: Nonexistent

Lag Time: Virtually nonexistent

Knockback: Extremely low

Total frames: 17

Hit frames: 2-3

IASA: 16

Window of the second punch: 3-31

Second punch starts: 6 (or later)

This move has a very fast come-out time, but don't expect it to send the opponent flying across the arena or inflict great damage. Rather, the natural purpose of this move is, obviously, to lead into a Straight and series of Rapid Kicks. There are other (better) uses for this move, too. Because of its high speed and natural tendency to prep opponents for equally speedy attacks, the Jab is a necessity in close-range combat, where it can tie up foes' timing and virtually negate all slow, high-lag power moves. At medium to high percentages, the Jab and its compatriot Straight can pop opponents up into the air slightly, a position where you can easily up-smash them for the kill. At lower percentages, toss in a few Back Kicks to tack on damage and lift your enemy high enough into the effective diameter of the up-smash. Take advantage of the Jab and Straight's high speed and tendency to lift foes off the ground to grab and up-throw them and open the door to combos. You can also use the Jab out of a shuffled neutral- or down-aerial; this will get your opponent into combo position and will hit them before they can retaliate (this is recommended only at higher percents, however, as crouch-cancels can very readily interrupt your string and put you in a disadvantageous position). Yet another use for the Jab and Straight is out of a waveshine (an advanced technique explained later) again as a form of prepping your foe for a potentially lethal up-smash (if you feel that you will not be able to fit in the up-smash before your foe has a chance to shield) or grab. Regardless, be wary of your follow-up to a prep Jab; at times, enemy DI (particularly on the floatier characters and at higher percentages) can shift them out and away from your chosen follow-up, giving them the time that they need to return with a sex kick or whatever else that they may have in store for you (such as the aforementioned crouch-cancel). Of all things, you certainly do not want to give your foe a significant opening

both to escape your potential combo and to return fire.

If anything, the main use of the Jab and Straight is to break through your foe's defenses in close combat with pure speed, and then take advantage of that lapse to initiate Fox's excellent comboing abilities. For example, many times it will be the quick Jab that will stun your opponent long enough for you to slip in with a quick jump-canceled grab to an up-throw and a series of juggling up-aerials or an up-smash. Jabs are also handy to tie up an opponent's hands should he or she attempt to shut you out with a quick flurry of high-speed or high-priority attacks; a well-placed Jab there could cause them to input a bunch of "dead" buttons during the stun time and interrupt their flow long enough for you to turn the tide of the battle in your favor with a simple combo off of a jump-canceled grab, for instance. Jabs are also handy to knock your opponents out of their aerial "stunned" animation and make it somewhat easier for you to land a jump-canceled grab, which you can follow up as you see fit. Against fellow fast-fallers, a well-placed Jab to interrupt a hasty recovery jump could cause them to fall low enough to force an up+B recovery out of them and give you an opportunity for a quick dash-in shine (more than lethal in dittos as well as against Falco); Captain Falcon and most other characters as well can fall prey to the subsequent edge-hog and edge-guarding via ledge-hopped back-aerials.

Still another use for the Jab is as a quite effective stand-in for the shine in match-ups against characters that cannot be caught in shine combos per se. For example, should you land a drill kick on characters such as Game and Watch, Kirby, Jigglypuff, Falco, other Foxes, and Roy, try to fight your urge to shine instantly and instead throw in a Jab, which can put these fall-over characters in position for a follow-up jump-canceled grab or lethal up-smash (character-dependent, of course). Keep in mind that you should not exclude shines from aerials from these match-ups entirely; not only do they keep you perfectly safe from shield-grabs, but you can also play "wake-up games" with your opponent, so to speak. That is, try to predict and follow how your opponent gets back on his or her feet from the shine and punish accordingly with a dashed jump-canceled up-smash or jump-canceled grab. Switching shines and Jabs in said match-ups also prevents your opponent from catching on too quickly to your strategy and resorting to crouch-canceling, which can lead to some nasty turn-around situations (see below). If you notice your opponent begin to crouch-cancel, take advantage and start shining from aerials; due to their crouch-canceling, you can then follow the shine with a grab, should they not react fast enough, and follow from that, and the shine also prevents easy crouch-cancel counters on their part.

Against characters that fall to the ground from the shine, the Jab can force a reaction if a player either continuously misses techs or chooses not to tech. Jabbing an opponent who is lying on the ground very frequently (but not always) forces them to stand up in place. You can use this easy opening to come in with a jump-canceled grab or up-smash. This technique is especially useful against Falco and other Foxes.

If you plan to Jab into the Straight and a series of Rapid Kicks, try to initiate the series at a very close proximity to your target; this way, it will take longer for them to scroll or directional influence out of the Rapid Kicks. However, be wary that Jabs and Straights do not go well with crouch-canceling; when coupled with these moves' virtually nonexistent knockback, crouch-canceling puts you in a very bad situation that will allow your opponent his choice of retaliation. Be especially wary of characters that frequent their crouch-cancels, such as Peach (down-smash); Yoshi (down-smash); Samus (down-smash and down-tilt); Mario and Dr. Mario (down-smash); Sheik (down-smash and down-tilt, which will set you up for a potentially lethal forward-aerial); and Mr. Game and Watch (down-tilt that will set you up for a follow-up of the

player's choice, usually a forward- or neutral-aerial). Crouch-cancels from virtually all other characters also can lead to trouble for your Fox, so be wary of your opponent's style and take note of whether or not he makes frequent use of his crouch-cancel.

Straight

Button: A, A

Damage: 2-3%, 3%

Speed: High

Priority: Medium-high

Range: Relatively short

Start Time: Nonexistent; must closely follow use of Jab

Lag Time: Virtually nonexistent

Knockback: Extremely low

Total frames: 20

Hit frames: 3-4

IASA: 19

Window of the kick-jabs: 1-20

Kick-jabs start: 6

The follow-up to the jab, which can lead into a series of Rapid Kicks. A one-two punch with a Jab and Straight can lead nicely to a powerful up-smash at 90-100%. The Straight is very much similar to the Jab, but with one exception: when Fox Straights, he takes a slight step forward. If you time the rhythm of your Jabs and Straights, you can advance on your enemy very slightly with a Jab-Straight, Jab-Straight series (be careful not to press any other buttons during the waiting time for the Rapid Kicks; otherwise, you'll go into those instead of what you had intended to do, which is, for the most part, not really a bad thing). The step forward that Fox takes can also quickly put you in range of your opponent should your initial Jab very slightly miss him or her. You can also follow the Jab-Straight with a quick waveshine into a grab or most anything else Fox can do. Keep in mind, however, that adding in the Straight after a Jab also gives your opponent another opportunity to input DI, which may cause you to miss your chosen follow-up.

Rapid Kick

Button: A, A, A...

Damage: 2-3%, 3%, 1%...

Speed: High

Priority: Low

Range: Relatively short

Start Time: Very slight (a few frames) during transition from Straight while Fox lifts up his foot

Lag Time: Very slight (a few frames) as Fox replaces his foot

Knockback: Extremely low

Intermediary animation: 6 frames

Hits: 3-4, 10-11, 17-18, 24-25, 31-32

1 full cycle: 36 frames

A simple yet semi-effective way to add on damage, Rapid Kicks closely follow the Jab and Straight punches. Larger opponents can be caught in this move for upwards of 15% of damage, depending on where they are when you begin the series and their percentage when you first begin hitting them with it. For this reason, you should initiate the series as close as possible to the opponent so it takes longer for them to DI out of your flying feet. Opponents who habitually crouch-cancel and who do not react in time in between each of the Rapid Kicks can be caught in them for quite a while before they scroll or DI out and away from you. Also, be adept at very quickly executing the Jab and Straight (with two swift taps of the A button) to catch the opponent closer to yourself when you start the Rapid Kicks. When you see your opponent begin to

crawl out of your Rapid Kicks, follow immediately into a down-tilt, grab, or other fast move so as to give yourself the best chance to cut off their response.

Be sure not to Rapid Kick for long periods of time; your opponent oftentimes can escape from a set of Rapid Kicks before you are actually finished with it, and any number of their moves can cut through your low-priority kicks. Also, be aware that many characters, particularly lighter ones with lower falling speeds, can DI out before your first set of Rapid Kicks ends; this can result in Fox being hit with a sex kick as he is replacing his foot from the kicks. Players can also DI your initial Jab or Straight if they react fast enough, in which case your Rapid Kicks may not always be your safest option. If they can get out of range of the last few strikes of your final set of kicks, they will be ready to react before you thanks in no small part to the Rapid Kick's post-move lag. Be wary of this, especially at higher percents and while facing characters with slower falling speeds; in both instances, their amount of directional influence may allow them to hit you before you are out of your post-move lag.

Truth be told, the Rapid Kicks hold very little weight in Fox's developed meta-game. Their effects are not powerful enough to secure a mainstay spot in his repertoire, and they are not the most effective of follow-ups to the quicker Jab, which is far more versatile than the Rapid Kicks could ever hope to be. At best, the Kicks can be an interesting add-on move for a variation in technique or style or to respond somewhat to crouch-cancelers (albeit a weak and risky response, at best). Be sure not to make these Kicks your principle follow-up to your Jabs and Straights as you have far more powerful options in jump-canceled grabs and up-smashes.

Fox Kick

Button: Left/Right tilt + A

Damage: 4-9%

Speed: High

Priority: Medium-high

Range: Medium; straight variation has longest range

Start Time: Virtually nonexistent start-up; one of the fastest tilts in the game

Lag Time: Very slight amount as Fox replaces his foot

Knockback: Decent

Total frames: 26

Hit frames: 5-8

A simple one-foot kick. Beginning Fox players tend to spam this move even more than the blaster, for some random reason. Regardless, it is Fox's regular kick and doesn't exactly excel at damage or knockback, in addition to leaving you open for a tiny bit as Fox withdraws his foot. Don't rely on this too much; quick Jabs and Straights are more reliable than this at low percentages (in addition to leaving you open for far less time), and the slight lag time afterwards will stop you from effectively pursuing foes at higher percentages (which is when you should use shuffled sex kicks). Fox's forward-tilt does come out rather quickly, however, and therefore carries a decent amount of priority with it. The forward-tilt itself is almost as fast in execution speed as your Jab, but with greater range and knockback, and it is because of this that the forward-tilt is a good defensive option when your opponent is at higher percents. You can often intercept an incoming attack with a well-placed forward-tilt, if you react in time. Remember that you can combine the forward-tilt with a reverse wavedash to further improve your defensive abilities.

Remember that this single attack essentially consists of three attacks: a kick aimed about level with Fox's head, another nearly straight out in front of him,

and yet another at a low angle near the ground. The angle in which you tilt the control stick for the attack determines which variant you will use (even a slight difference in the angle will change which variant you use); there is no clear-cut way to explain the angles, but with enough play you will "feel" where you need to tilt in order to execute a certain variant. In addition, each variant sends its foe at a different angle in the knockback, i.e., the high at a higher angle, the straight at a relatively straight angle, and the low at a relatively low angle (essentially a trip).

The straight variant has the longest range of the three, and also has an interesting property to it. Since it pushes the enemy a good distance away, it can be used effectively to combat crouch-cancellers, a very important attribute for close-range melees involving characters that utilize crouch-canceling as a significant part of their game, such as Samus and Mr. Game and Watch.

The upper variant is not really used as much as the other two variants. It does not have the crouch-cancel-stopping ability of the straight variant, and with the withdrawal time of the move factored in, you cannot reliably combo out of it to boot.

The lower variant can be used as a form of edgeguarding (obviously because Fox's foot extends slightly below the stage) that can catch many opponents out of the air. A nifty technique in and of itself, but if you want other options for edgeguarding, you can go for the down-tilt to pop the opponent back into the air (where you can do more with them) or the vulpine's powerful shine (the shine will be discussed in great detail later). Ledge-hopped and shine-turned back-aerials are also very effective forms of edgeguarding in addition to powerful methods for dealing a quick and lethal off-stage hit. If anything, the downward-angled forward-tilt can function as a mild substitute for the dsmash; indeed, due to its short animation and down-time, it presents a safer alternative overall that can very often allow you to cover multiple edge-guarding options at once (but do not expect it to net you a stock by itself; it may at times require a bit of follow-up to get the job done).

Back Kick

Button: Up tilt + A

Damage: 5-12%

Speed: High

Priority: Deceptively high

Range: Medium

Start Time: Nonexistent

Lag Time: Virtually nonexistent

Knockback: Decent

Total frames: 24

Hit frames: 5-11

IASA: 23

This move is deceptively powerful and in itself is capable of KOing opponents at higher percentages (around the 130's). A natural follow-up to the hilarity that is Fox's down-throw (against foes not well-versed in teching or DI), it can also aid in juggling your opponent following an up-throw (against experienced foes), where it can hit them often two to four times before they float out of its reach, depending on their percentage and amount of DI. The Back Kick is a natural partner with the down-tilt and Jab, both of which throw your opponent into the air in their own way. An interesting property of the kitsune's up-tilt is that, although it appears that he only strikes above himself, his up-tilt actually has the ability to hit both in front of and in back of him in a certain small radius. This is not exactly game-breaking, but it does improve your ability to juggle from the ground with this move.

The up-tilt is quite an effective move, but sometimes it can get thrown aside in the usual Fox approaches of shuffled neutral- and down-aerials to waveshines or jump-canceled shines. Regardless, there are more than a few ways in which you can use it effectively. For example, the up-tilt makes a powerful anti-aerial weapon due to its strangely-high priority and its speed. It is surprising how well this single move disrupts approaches; simply turn your back to your enemy and let loose with a few well-timed up-tilts to catch your foe and ready him for a back- or up-aerial or up-smash. Another way to make use of the up-tilt is as a follow-up to a down-aerial that is DI'ed behind your opponent, preferably when he or she is shielding (note that an up-tilt from a down-aerial is not a stable combo, and as such it is best to DI to the back in order to avoid easy retaliation from your foe in the form of a shield-grab or other shield counter; the fact that he or she is shielding prevents the down-aerial from turning him or her around to face you and thus creating an opportunity to break out of your "combo"). From your position behind your opponent, your up-tilt can either catch them as they attempt to escape their shield, or it can eat away at their shield should they insist on holding it up for some time. If the up-tilt hits, you can follow (depending on the character and the percentage) with the usual up- or back-aerial, up-smash (turned around for the sweet-spot, if necessary), or more up-tilts to an up-smash or turn-around grab to the usual up-aerial juggling. It is of course entirely possible for your opponent to escape the shield in between your up-tilts, so be prepared for that possibility as well. You can apply this same up-tilt follow-up to a shuffled neutral-aerial that lands you at your opponent's back except without the fear of your initial move turning them around to face you (thus making it an ideal pressure move whether or not your opponent is shielding; remember that even this is not a stable combo, however, but rather a follow-up).

If you want to get unnecessarily creative with your edgeguarding, you can actually get some use out of the up-tilt there, too (with good timing, of course; its priority alone will more often than not allow it to plow through a good deal of recoveries). Your best follow-up should you choose to go this unique route would be a back-aerial to send your opponent back out again, perhaps for good this time, or, if you are facing a floatier character, an up-aerial may allow you to deal the killing blow right then and there. Of course, you have better and more efficient forms of edgeguarding as discussed earlier (shine-spikes, the down-smash, and ledge-hopped back-aerials come to mind), but the innate speed of the up-tilt allows you to cover multiple return options at once, like a downward-angled forward-tilt.

Fox Tail

Button: Down tilt + A

Damage: 5-10%

Speed: High

Priority: Medium

Range: Medium

Start Time: Nonexistent

Lag Time: Slight lag time after the attack while Fox swishes his tail back to its normal position

Knockback: Significant

Total frames: 29

Hit frames: 7-9

IASA: 28

One of Fox's longer tilts in both range and total frame time, this move pops opponents up into the air, readying them for an up-smash, up-tilt, or juggling via up-aerials. On less experienced opponents, i.e., those that do not know how to tech or DI, you can get an easy launch off of the down-tilt from a down-throw, but otherwise I would advise you to steer clear of that generally in-

effective route as the up-throw, up-tilt, and up-smash are obviously far more powerful launchers. On a side note, keep in mind that the hit box for this move is in front of Fox, not on both sides of him. In other words, don't try to hit an opponent at your rear with this move; that's why the down-smash is here.

The down-tilt, although not the most versatile or powerful of Fox's moves, has its own uses in battle. It can be used to circumvent spent shields as it creeps underneath toward your foe's feet, and it also functions at higher percents as a strange alternative vertical KO move. In addition, you can use the down-tilt for edgeguarding since Fox swishes his tail over the edge (keep in mind that this will rarely if ever hit sweet-spotting opponents, thus making it a sort of innovative punishment for a missed sweet-spot). With your opponent off of his or her aerial feet, you are free to push them into the open air yet again with a neutral- or back-aerial, or you may be able to kill right then and there with an up-aerial. With proper timing, a Fox Tail also can break up foolhardy, hasty charges, more often than not brought on by your blaster spamming, since the tail extends in front of the vulpine.

Remember that the down-tilt is not fast enough to form true combos from your neutral- and down-aerial approaches; its short and front-facing hitbox also forces you to be in a certain position for it to connect. Regardless, you can still use the down-tilt as a sort of spacing fixer after a shuffled neutral- or down-aerial. For example, should you underestimate the distance between yourself and your opponent in your approach, a follow-up down-tilt could give you the range to connect and prep your opponent for an up- or back-aerial. You can also use this technique to deal with players who insist on constantly wavedashing backward to deal with your approach. If you so choose, you can also use the down-tilt as a means of punishing predicted techs and wake-ups (although grabs are generally a more powerful option overall).

Roundhouse Kick

Button: Left/right Smash + A (Left/Right C-Stick)

Damage: 8-15%

Speed: Relatively high for a Smash

Priority: High

Range: Medium-low

Start Time: Noticeable start-up frames as Fox winds up

Lag Time: Noticeable lag once the attack finishes; again, watch yourself at lower percentages

Knockback: Significant, although not high for a Smash

Total frames: 39

Hit frames: 12-22

Charge frame: 7

Although not as powerful an attack as his wing mate Falco's, Fox's forward-smash is relatively powerful and fast, always a good combination and can be used effectively as an edge-guarding tool. Avoid it at low percentages, however, as your opponent may be able to hit you while you are in the lag from flying past them (especially if they are crouch-canceling). Also keep in mind that because of the move's noticeable wind-up time and good amount of post-hit ineffective frames, the forward-smash is very exploitable by shield grabbers (the fact that Fox moves himself forward during the attack also makes spacing the forward-smash properly an often-unnecessary and risky chore); considering Fox's built-in vulnerability to chain throws and juggles given to him by his fast-falling, chances are you would rather avoid falling into one of those.

Overall, this is certainly not Fox's most desirable Smash; that honor belongs to the up-smash. However, it is useful in its own right to plow through frontal defenses and still allow you time to pursue at higher percentages. The forward-smash is also a useful tool in conjunction with the reverse wavedash mind game.

Your goal in this is to charge toward your opponent while watching their character very closely for signs of movement. If you see them begin to wind up an attack, immediately wavedash backwards and follow with a forward-smash right into their face. However, note that you may have to decrease your wavedash's regular horizontal movement in order to connect fully with the forward-smash. You have two ways of going about this. You can wait a short amount of time before air-dodging into the ground and thus perform a triangle jump, which will not carry you as far as a wavedash would, or you can change the angle of your control stick for the wavedash's air-dodge. You do this by tilting it slightly below one of the diagonal notches around the control stick instead of into one of them. Thus, your angle for a shortened wavedash should be between the downward-diagonal notch and the downward notch. This too will shorten your wavedash; you will see the primary reason for doing this below.

The forward-smash itself has its own form of a sweet spot; in this case, it is more like a "sweet time." The move is more powerful nearer to its initial attack point. For example, you forward-smash while your opponent is falling to earth from a jump. You have been forward-smashing (that is, been in the animation of it) for about a quarter of a second or so when your opponent falls onto your forward-smash. You will notice that you will not get the "solid" hit of the forward-smash, but rather a "soft" hit (which is you essentially stepping on your foe) which produces far less knockback than a properly positioned forward-smash would have. For the most part, you should not concern yourself with properly timing the forward-smash. Nearly 98% of the time, the timing takes care of itself.

Although the forward-smash is not the most versatile or powerful of Fox's smashes, it too has its own (mainly situational) uses. As mentioned above, it is a handy edgeguarding tool against characters who lack good horizontal recovery options (Dr. Mario for his utter lack of horizontal range and Captain Falcon for his easily-predictable recovery are some such characters). It can also be used on-stage as a way to punish missed techs, preferably resulting in your opponent being pushed off-stage where your ledge-hopped back-aerials can finish the job (this is particularly effective in the fast-faller match-ups and against characters whose recoveries can be exploited for easy kills). You can also make use of the forward-smash as a way to punish badly-planned approaches; simply wavedash back to space yourself correctly and let fly with the forward-smash. Again, keep in mind your vulnerability to being shield-grabbed with the forward-smash; it is best to play it safe and not make heavy use of this move unless the situation is entirely appropriate (this is especially so in edge-guarding).

Flip Kick

Button: Up Smash + A (Up C-Stick)

Damage: 10-18%

Speed: High, for a smash of this caliber

Priority: Relatively high

Range: Medium

Start Time: Short in terms of a Smash

Lag Time: Noticeable after the initial hit. You must wait for Fox to flip completely around back onto his booted feet before you can move again; time your follow-up to this move so that you begin it as soon as you can move again.

Knockback: High

Total frames: 41

Hit frames: 7-17

Head invincible (but not snout) on frames: 1-9

Charge frame: 2

This move, known to all competent Fox players, is the vulpine's notorious up-

smash. Able to KO very consistently at relatively low percentages (an average of 90-100%), you will see this used as often as possible by any Fox player who knows what he or she is doing, and for good reason. It is fast, almost too fast when combined with its startling power. Remember that the up-smash changes its knockback power depending on which part of the circle created by Fox's flipping feet hits the opponent. Generally, the most knockback occurs between the outermost area (the perimeter of the circle) and the innermost area (slightly around Fox's body). If you hit the opponent too near Fox's body or on the very edge of the "circle" you will get essentially a "soft" hit, which will not produce as much damage and not nearly as much knockback as a properly positioned up-smash would. Rest assured, though, that it is not extremely difficult to position this attack; it will become a natural feeling for you with enough play. Of course, always try to achieve the proper positioning in order to increase knockback and give yourself more time to recover and resume the chase.

Also, be aware that soft-hitting an opponent will not stun them for as long, and they may be able to recover and hit you back before the up-smash actually ends. If you are truly talented at positioning Fox, you can strike opponents in front of you with the diameter of this attack; chances are its stunning priority will win out and punch through their defenses. Enemies in the rear can also be hit by this attack, but this will nearly always result in a "soft" hit; the down-smash is best for covering both sides of your furry hide. For more craziness, try wavedashing out of the shine and into a killer up-smash. In addition, you can up-smash right out of the shield. To do this, you must, of course, be in the shield, and then jump and immediately smash up on the C-Stick. The C-Stick will cancel your jump, much like Z for jump-canceled grabs, and Fox will up-smash straight out of his shield. This is a very powerful technique indeed, and if you can show your opponent that you can do it consistently, it may make him think twice about his next move. You will find that you can pull off more than a few kills with the up-smash out of shield as an extremely powerful and effective punisher for all manner of technical mistakes that your opponent makes, from botched fast-falls to slow aerial-to-shine transitions to shielded dash attacks to missed L-cancels and much more. Modern-day play, however, focuses much more on technical aptitude and precision spacing, both of which very often make up-smashing out of shield an undesirable option; keep it as a tool, however, against characters such as Marth that fear misspacing their aerals or as a means of punishment after a misspaced follow-up on your shield.

You can also up-smash out of a run. This is not at all difficult to do, and may aid you in maintaining or beginning your combos or adding pressure onto your opponent. While you are running, simply quickly press up and "A" simultaneously (a jump-cancel; this must be perfectly synched, which is not exactly hard to do, but if you make a mistake, you will probably end up jumping), and you will perform a probably slightly charged up-smash. The same general effect is achieved when you jump-cancel into an up-smash using the C-Stick, but you are not given the ability to charge the up-smash easily while you are enroute to the spot you were running to (note that you can charge C-Stick smashes with the "Z" button, but it is extremely awkward to perform). The main use of the running jump-canceled up-smash is to catch your opponent out of the air right before he or she hits the ground and is given a window to get away from your combo. You can also use it to zoom in with a pre-charged up-smash during the lag from one of your opponent's moves and begin some damaging juggling. In addition, a charged jump-canceled up-smash is an often-lethal finisher for your fast-faller chain throws, something to take into consideration for the ditto match and the Fox-Falco match-up. As with most maneuvers, however, this is not to be repeated incessantly as even the up-smash is prone to shield-grabs.

Remember that you can also up-smash out of a run via dash-canceling, that is, by pressing down while running to cut your speed and momentum and then immediately afterwards smashing up+A or up C-Stick. Note that if you use the C-Stick for this maneuver you can continue to hold down on the control stick, thus granting you a crouch-cancel that you can use to oppose other dash- or jump-canceled up-smashes or simply to shrug off retaliating hits, such as dash attacks.

In terms of follow-ups and launchers, there is very little in Fox's arsenal that can stand toe-to-toe with his up-smash. As mentioned previously, the up-smash has more than its fair share of possibilities in battle. Jab to up-smash is great to tie up your opponent's timing while simultaneously opening him to a lethal hit. Waveshine to up-smash is a Fox favorite, particularly when done out of a dodge at very close range or out of a connected down-aerial. The up-smash is also the finisher of choice for Fox's infinites, which are discussed near the end of the guide. Like the up-tilt, a well-timed up-smash can do wonders to turn the tables on an approach, even one as speedy as your own shuffled neutral-aerial when spaced and timed correctly; although a risky endeavor, an anti-aerial up-smash can pay off in more than a few instances, especially when it leads to juggling or death right after breaking the opponent's advance. Mind-gaming into an up-smash from dash- or wave-dances is also a viable option, one that is made more effective by the up-smash's tendency to push shielding opponents away and out of easy shield-grab range (they will instead have to wavedash out of the shield to reach you, provided they are not a character with an extendable grab). Of course, a lone up-smash by itself can lead to up-aerial juggling or a back-aerial to edgeguarding, and it is the perfect companion to finish off a round of up-tilts from an up-throw or otherwise.

In general, the up-smash is Fox's most versatile Smash in terms of power, speed, and utility. It is a very effective killing move that comes out quickly and sends the opponent airborne for a significant distance, opening him or her to all manner of often-lethal follow-ups and combos (provided the up-smash did not finish the stock then and there, that is).

Fox Split

Button: Down Smash + A (Down C-Stick)

Damage: 9-15%

Speed: Relatively high

Priority: Relatively high

Range: Medium-high; hits on both sides

Start Time: Fast

Lag Time: Oh, the lag time. After performing this painful attack, Fox must pick himself up and spin around to resume his forward fighting stance.

Knockback: Decent

Total frames: 49

Hit frames: 6-10

Legs invincible on frame: 6

IASA: 46

Charge frame: 2

A decent smash at higher percentages, the down-smash should be used sparingly as it has very noticeable recoil as Fox twists around to resume his fighting stance. Used as an edge-guarding tool, it sends opponents off at a hideous angle (especially effective on fast-fallers) if you can get Fox's foot to jut out over the ledge and into your foe's face. Indeed, you will find this move quite effective in dealing with opposing space animals at the edge (simply wait for the distinctive *ping* of their respective Illusions and time your down-smash to connect with them just as they reach the edge) as well as characters with easily-read recoveries. In addition, you can flow easily into this move should your opponent air-dodge your ledge-hopped or shine-turned back-aerial

(going into a properly-positioned forward-smash is also an option there). A successful down-smash tech read near an edge can also put your opponent in a quandary as the move's downward angle can set up for shine-spikes augmented by ledge invincibility frames.

Be wary with the down-smash, however. Granted, it is a Smash, but that does not automatically make it a killer move; on the contrary, the down-smash will rarely if ever kill someone (except during edgeguarding, of course), and the lag time is definitely not worth using it as a primary killing move as you would the up-smash. If you try this move at low and low-middle percents, you will get hit back, no questions asked, especially if you hit a crouch-canceling opponent. The down-smash is a good ender for a combo that has pushed your opponent to the edge of the stage since by then its knockback power will have increased, and it comes out faster than the forward-smash does to boot. If you need a fast reaction, the down-smash can also punish opponents that you see rolling behind you. Only try this at the high-middle and above percents as there the move will knock them off their feet long enough for you to recover and resume your stance.

Taunt: "Come on!"

Button: Up Control Pad

Fox leans far back to the ground and beckons to the opponent with a curling finger and a "Come on!" as he motions toward himself with his head.

Duration: 110 frames, or 1.833333... seconds (thanks, Mew2King!)

"Come on!": 31 (thanks, SuperDoodleMan!)

OK, so it doesn't do any damage; it's not even a move, technically.

Nevertheless, there is nothing more annoying than hearing Fox taunt you from across the stage while blaster fire crashes into you over and over again.

Besides which, mind games are always fun...and useful. See if you can irritate your foe into making a hasty, unorganized charge at you. You'll be surprised at how easy it is.

2. Running

Jumping Side Kick

Button: A

Damage: 4-7%

Speed: High

Priority: Medium

Range: Relatively high (horizontal distance)

Start Time: Very fast

Lag Time: Very noticeable after the initial effective moment as you fly past your target, but it doesn't take you too long to recover.

Knockback: Enough to pop opponents into the air slightly.

Total frames: 39

Hit frames: 4-17

IASA: 36

Not exactly the most powerful move, this kick does have considerable horizontal reach and does a decent job of plowing through a row of fighters. It is an average follow-up to mind games involving dash-dancing and wavedashing since it comes out pretty quickly, but you have far more effective options. If you do use it, make sure to do so when you can clear your opponent; you do not want to give them a chance to pivot around and smack you. Look out for shield-grabbing, too. For these reasons, it is generally better to perform multiple shuffled sex kicks instead of this move repeatedly; the kicks are far faster and have far less lag time than the Jumping Side Kick, in addition to being more powerful and allowing you far more effective follow-ups. Don't rely too heavily on the dash attack, especially at higher levels of play.

Despite these taboos against the dash attack, it has its own unique uses. Since the dash attack is not nearly as safe as shuffled neutral- and down-aerials, you must be careful only to use this in relatively safe circumstances, much like the down-smash. For example, should you notice that your opponent is not prone to putting up his shield, you can often land a dash attack to begin juggling with up-tilts and up-aerials or simply get a larger launch (or kill) from an up-smash. Mind-gaming into a dash attack out of dash- and wave-dancing is also a somewhat viable option, and you can even launch opponents into the air after a shuffled neutral-aerial or two for juggling or the usual death by up-smash. A more off-the-wall way to use the dash attack is as a strange form of edgeguarding; the dash attack basically puts up a long-lasting hitbox at the edge which if it connects with your returning opponent will set them up for a forward-, down-, or up-smash (depending on percentage and DI, of course). Innovative, yes, but not as efficient and effective as other previously-discussed methods of edgeguarding. If by chance you are facing a less-than-competent player, you can effectively juggle them on your foot with this move. You hit them once, and while they are in the air, you turn around immediately and do the same thing again. Watch out for the strange "anti-gravity" effect, though. All told, the dash attack should only be used offensively if you are able to space it properly; while the attack is prone to shield-grabs, correct spacing will put you on the other side of a shield and in fact afford you an advantageous position as you can begin pounding the shield with up-tilts from the safety of your opponent's back.

Another often-neglected use for this attack is against boomerang-happy Link and Young Link players, strangely enough. Most starter Fox players would resort to the Reflector to bat away the Hylian heroes' weaponry; this is if you do not really care about advancing on your opponent or allowing them to advance on you since you have a moment of time when the projectile hits your Reflector that you are "frozen" there. The time is not significant, but it could cost you your advance and thus your trademark game-winning pressure. If you dash attack into the boomerang instead of reflecting it, the collision will cancel your kick and send the boomerang back towards them, within which time you should have Fox-trotted or simply run right up to them and begun a nasty shine combo. The same maneuver can be done with Jabs and Straights, but owing to their already lightning-quick speeds, the collision cancel will do essentially nothing. The forward movement from the dash attack also allows you some advance on the Links as well, again making it a more effective form of dispatching the boomerang, and the longer hitbox on the dash attack removes practically any need of timing on your part as well. Do not forget that there is also a tiny bit of lag for Link and Young Link when they grab their returning boomerang; try to use that to your advantage, too.

The dash attack also factors in to an advanced technique named the "boost grab" (discussed under "Advanced Techniques," appropriately enough). This grab when used with Fox doubles the distance of his running grab.

3. Air

Flying Kick

Button: A

Damage: 7-12%

Speed: Very high

Priority: Relatively high

Range: Medium-low

Start Time: Very fast

Lag Time: Without L-canceling, too high for a Fox player. With L-canceling, you can combo into all sorts of things.

Knockback: Medium

Total frames: 49
Hit frames: 4-31
IASA: 42
Auto-cancel: <3 37>
Land lag: 15
L-canceled: 7

This kick is interesting in that Fox's foot stays out for quite a while, giving the move a large chance of hitting a foe (Fox's "sex kick"). Average damage and very fast come-out time comprise this move, Fox's basic aerial attack. Note that the damage that this move inflicts decreases with the amount of time that Fox has his foot out; thus, the strongest attack will occur at the very beginning of this move.

Shuffled (short-hopped, fast-fallen, L-canceled) neutral-aerials are one of Fox's two key approaches, the other being a shuffled down-aerial (although this option has largely fallen out of favor in Fox's modern metagame). The sheer speed with which the neutral-aerial comes out coupled with its good priority allows you an extremely powerful advance that is difficult to break should you apply enough pressure on your opponent. Their best solution to your approach is a backward wavedash to reposition themselves and space for either a jump-canceled grab, forward-smash, or other fast, high-priority attack; your answer to this is to make your shuffle as crisp and clean as possible in order to create the least possible down-time. You can then follow your shuffle with a quick Jab to reach out and cut off your opponent's response while also opening them to a jump-canceled grab or an up-smash.

The beauty of the shuffled neutral-aerial approach is its nigh-complete safety and versatility. A shine or Jab (preferably shine) after one of these will do one of a few things: it will either prevent shield-grabbing (scoring a hit with the shine on those who attempt to shield-grab and setting up for all manner of follow-ups); allow you to escape and reset the confrontation should your opponent continue to hold up his shield throughout your shuffled neutral-aerial and shine sequence; or allow you more follow-ups and combos should the neutral-aerial connect on an unshielding opponent. Should you connect with the shine (again, preferred over the Jab for its speed and your ability to jump-cancel it quickly and not get shield-grabbed as you would if you were to Jab a shield, although you could stagger a Straight a bit after the Jab to catch attempts at grabbing), you have your choice of any number of often-lethal follow-ups thanks to your waveshining. Up-smash out of a waveshine after a shuffled neutral-aerial is a favorite of Fox players due in no small part to its dual stun and kill characteristics that cause even a single connected aerial to lead to very damaging juggling (or infinites, if you prefer that route); another major follow-up after a connected neutral-aerial to waveshine is a jump-canceled grab that can lead to juggling or simply a lethal up-aerial. If your foe insists upon survival DI'ing into your neutral-aerials repeatedly, you can often string together two or three before he or she is knocked too far for you to continue.

Keep in mind that shining after a shuffled neutral-aerial should not be your constant muscle-memoried reflex; for example, at higher percents, should you connect with the aerial, cut out the shine entirely and instead follow your opponent's trajectory with a dashing jump-canceled up-smash to finish him while you have the opportunity (especially effective against floatier opponents). You can also chain your shuffled sex kicks on heavier characters, your first kick knocking them forward and your subsequent kicks catching them out of the air and sending them sailing once again. However, you must follow your foe's DI and switch off between sweet-spotted and non-sweet-spotted hits for it to be most effective.

All told, the neutral-aerial has become the preferred approach aerial in Fox's modern metagame. Besides a fast L-cancel with safe, effective follow-ups and combo options, the neutral-aerial also avoids problems with DI and Smash DI that the down-aerial encounters (due to the down-aerial's numerous weak hits) and even provides a few options for edge-guarding. For example, on-stage neutral-aerials can catch opposing Foxes and Falcoes out of early Illusions while still giving you time to chase. Similarly, running off-stage and jumping with a neutral-aerial provides a long-lasting wall of priority that can combat Illusions, Firefoxes and Firebirds, Falcon's up-B, and a multitude of other recovery options.

Tornado Kick

Button: Towards Tilt + A (Towards C-Stick)

Damage: Usually 5-18% (varies depending on number of hits)

Speed: Relatively high

Priority: Medium-low

Range: Medium

Start Time: Very fast

Lag Time: The Tornado Kick doesn't L-cancel as well as Fox's other aerials; regardless, without it, you are facing a considerable amount of landing lag time.

Knockback: Very low

Total frames: 59

Hit frames: 6-8, 16-18, 24-26, 33-35, 43-45

IASA: 53

Auto-cancel: <5 49>

Land lag: 22

L-canceled: 11

A rapid series of aerial kicks that can add on a decent amount of damage. If you don't L-cancel this, you will find yourself facing considerable lag time once you land. This move is known to inexperienced Fox players everywhere as one of the two main causes of self-destructs; because of Fox's sensitive controls, the unwary player attempting to edgeguard can slide off the arena in a Tornado Kick with even the slightest touch of the control stick or "A" button. Stick to neutral- and back-aerials for far more effective aerial combat. The Tornado Kick stops on its own accord and carries very little knockback other than the very first kick in the series, which has decent knockback and stun. This means that a quick-witted foe could hit you right when you finish the move, as chances are they haven't gone anywhere, particularly at low percents. The neutral-aerial also has far cleaner and faster L-cancels, still another reason why it is superior to the forward-aerial.

Regardless of its generally low knockback, the forward-aerial's one redeeming factor is its very first hit, which carries with it decent knockback and stun. In order to use the forward-aerial most effectively, you must shuffle it to make better use of that one strong hit, meaning you must fast-fall and L-cancel right after the first hit connects. That first hit sets your foe up rather nicely for a good deal of your follow-ups thanks to its horizontal knockback, including a dashed jump-canceled up-smash, which can lead further into juggling or a lethal up-aerial. Once your sex kicks begin to send your foe too far away for you to combo or pursue effectively, you can begin gradually switching off to shuffled forward-aerials; these will keep your foe within a manageable comboing distance, or enough so for you to tack on enough damage to make your finisher of choice lethal (this is a rather risky course of action, however, due to the risk of accidentally connecting with a shield).

Overall, a shuffled forward-aerial's uses are akin to those of a sex kick's; you simply receive less knockback, a smaller hit box, and a shorter move duration. In exchange, however, you get better aerial comboing at higher

percents, which could lead quickly into an up-smash for the kill. However, other than these instances, you will find that Fox's forward-aerial does not play nearly as crucial a role in his gameplay as his other aerials do; indeed, in modern play, this aerial has essentially been entirely phased out of Fox's repertoire as even the possible mix-ups that it provides simply do not outweigh its lack of versatility and risky lag (even when L-canceled).

Reverse Spin Kick

Button: Away Tilt + A (Away C-Stick)

Damage: 8-15%

Speed: Very High

Priority: Medium

Range: Medium

Start Time: Very fast

Lag Time: Significant without L-canceling. Not as cleanly L-cancelable as the neutral-aerial, but still somewhat fast.

Knockback: Medium

Total frames: 39

Hit frames: 4-19

IASA: 38

Auto-cancel: <3 24>

Land lag: 20

L-canceled: 10

The backwards partner of the Flying Kick, this has the same significant stay-out time and fast come-out time (essentially Fox's "reverse sex kick"). If you can begin juggling your foe (usually with the aid of an up-throw or short-hopped up-aerial), you can combine this kick with fast-falls and effectively bounce your foe through the air and out of the arena. In addition, you can finish juggling or aerial combo strings with a well-placed back-aerial to send your foe off-stage (at times, you may have to shine-turn into the back-aerial in order to hit with its sweet-spot; see the bottom of the next paragraph for instructions on the shine-turn). Along with the neutral-aerial, the back-aerial constitutes the backbone of your aerial game. You can short-hop into this move if you feel it is necessary; just watch your timing on the lengthy L-cancel. At times, players may opt out of fast-falling a short-hopped back-aerial in order to space out of range of an opponent's shield grab and bait them into a potentially lethal opening. The back-aerial is especially handy for punishing jumps near the edge; as opposed to the neutral-aerial, this aerial allows you to reach out with an attack and then retreat a good ways (by comparison, the neutral-aerial does not grant this aerial mobility, strangely enough) should you misread your foe.

Remember for all aerials that you can jump right out of a shield or shine and into the aerial of your choice; you do not want to waste precious frames waiting for your shield or shine to lower completely to launch another attack. An out-of-shield back-aerial is one of your most powerful out-of-shield options and can very quickly grant you the momentum needed to put together a suitable counter-attack.

In addition, the back-aerial functions quite well in an edgeguarding/edge-hogging capacity. If you grab the edge to make it more difficult for your opponent to return and you see that he is going to land squarely on the stage anyway, you can perform an interesting form of edgeguarding with a bit of quick reaction time and finger work. To do this, you must drop from the edge, and then immediately jump back up (so that it appears as if you jumped up from the ledge) and use a back-aerial to knock your opponent away yet again. You can repeat this as many times as you wish as long as you can grab the ledge again after each attempt. Of course, doing this requires that you can anticipate the trajectory of your opponent's comeback, so you may need to

vary the length of your drop and jump in order to hit them with the strongest hit time of the back-aerial. Against larger characters and characters with easily-predictable recoveries, a connected ledge-hopped back-aerial often means death when followed up with more ledge-hopped back-aerials or even a simple shine-spike.

However, depending on your opponent's proximity to the stage, you may have to adjust your tactics with the edgeguarding back-aerial. For example, when close to the stage, your opponent may opt to air-dodge your back-aerial hoping both to avoid that hit and return to the stage; you can combat this by forcing an early air-dodge toward the stage, DI'ing toward the stage, fast-falling and L-canceling your back-aerial, and following with a down- or forward-smash to send your foe out again (remember to wait for the air-dodge's invincibility frames to end, if necessary). When your opponent is above and away from the stage, you can take this opportunity to earn an easy kill by jumping toward your opponent, activating your shine (stalling the jump-cancel a bit if you need to compensate for your timing), turning around in the shine so that your back is facing your opponent, and jump-canceling the shine into a back-aerial. For many characters, the speed and angle at which the back-aerial comes out is tough to handle, and if you force an air-dodge, so much the better; simply return to the stage and continue edgeguarding with a down- or forward-smash (or up-smash, if you can get a lethal one to connect).

All things considered, the back-aerial, when combined with the neutral-aerial, forms the core of Fox's modern aerial arsenal. Use both wherever applicable as their strength, speed, and safety afford you options in a multitude of situations.

McCloud Flip

Button: Up Tilt + A (Up C-Stick)

Damage: 9-16%

Speed: High

Priority: Medium

Range: Relatively close-range

Start Time: Fast

Lag Time: Fox flounders about on the ground for a bit trying to right himself if you don't L-cancel this. This is especially obvious when short-hopping this.

Knockback: Relatively high

Total frames: 39

Hit frames: 8-9, 11-14

IASA: 36

Auto-cancel: <7 26>

Land lag: 18

L-canceled: 9

Another member of Fox's four most feared moves, it is the McCloud Flip that gives the vulpine his incredible aerial knockout ability. This move, which has increased greatly in power since the N64 version, easily kills even the heaviest of opponents, Bowser and Ganondorf included. Those two heavyweights can usually be killed with little trouble at around 110-120% with the McCloud Flip on stages with an average ceiling height. On low-ceiling stages, such as Corneria, the percentage decreases to around 90-100% (particularly around the fin). A fun trick is doing the Flip in a short hop, allowing you to begin some very damaging juggling (this is an especially viable option as a means of punishing a predicted tech or wake-up). Remember to fast-fall once you commence juggling in order to fit in follow-up Flips for the kill before the enemy hits the ground.

Although it is possible to use a shuffled up-aerial as a launcher, out of a

shield or otherwise, its main purpose is (obviously) as an often-lethal juggler. Your two main launchers for up-aerial juggling are the up-throw and the up-smash, both of which are often preceded by a waveshine (remember that you can also up-smash out of shield for the launch, too). The up-aerial is also a viable option from the ledge; simply ledge-hop into it, making sure to fall the correct distance so as to connect with its powerful sweet spot. You can often kill from the launch that this gives you if you can turn the confrontation around with a well-placed back-aerial or another up-aerial (as appropriate). If you want to get creative with your off-stage kills, you can drop from the ledge and jump up into your opponent with an up-aerial; an innovative kill, but it can sometimes be risky against certain recoveries, especially those with high priority.

The anatomy of a sweet-spotted hit on the McCloud Flip is quite strange. Usually, the most powerful hits occur at the tips of Fox's feet (or the tip of the target's body), where you will usually get one clean stroke. If the first stroke of the move hits on your enemy's body, you will usually get one hit and then a finishing stroke. The sweet spot is quite consistent, though. Usually, you only get the "slap" of a failed McCloud Flip if you fall away from the target too fast (such as in fast-falling) or are way too far away for the second stroke to hit. Holding up during the move seems to help clarify these failed sweet spot issues. However, be aware that opponents can DI the initial hit up and escape the more powerful second hit if you are not close enough to them; this tactic is especially prevalent in today's DI-intensive gameplay.

Drill Kick

Button: Down Tilt + A (Down C-Stick)

Damage: Usually 1-16% (varies depending on number of hits)

Speed: High

Priority: Medium-low

Range: Close-range

Start Time: Very fast

Lag Time: Significant if not L-canceled; if L-canceled, there is virtually no lag time.

Knockback: Nonexistent

Total frames: 49

Hit frames: 5-6, 8-9, 11-12, 14-15, 17-18, 20-21, 23-24

Auto-cancel: <4 31>

Land lag: 18

L-canceled: 9

A move that sends Fox spiraling downwards at his opponent in a flurry of kicks, the down-aerial itself has no actual knockback and therefore is best used to set up combos and follow-ups focusing on the Jab and the shine as starters. The other feasible use for the down-aerial is as part of one of Fox's "infinite shine" techniques. Note, however, that the down-aerial is not a spike as Falco's is; if you try to use it as such, you will drill yourself through your opponent and into the abyss.

The two moves that truly combo from Fox's down-aerial are the Jab and the shine; in conjunction with these two moves, you can start off a powerful combo that can lead to death or heavy damage via juggling (or an infinite to death, if you are able to go that route). Thanks to the down-aerial's quick, extended hit frames and good L-cancel speed, you can switch it in and out with the shuffled neutral-aerial as your primary approach (although the down-aerial has largely fallen out of favor in this regard for modern Foxes). It is also an excellent out-of-shield option, particularly against characters who can be waveshined in that the down-aerial provides you with an extremely safe opening for a grab or up-smash as well as the added damage from the drillshine itself.

Once you pin your opponent, shielding or not, in the down-aerial, you have more than a few options available to you. If you DI behind a shielding opponent, you can take chunks out of their shield or prep them for juggling with repeated up-tilts; a repeated in-place waveshine also does wonders to destroy shields and force an escape attempt. Should you run into the front of a shield or otherwise land on top of your opponent in the down-aerial, make sure to shine in order to stop any attempts at shield-grabbing and open him or her to a potentially-fatal up-smash or grab. If you notice that your opponent constantly attempts to shield-grab, not holding up his or her shield past the shine, you can sub in a Jab to prep for an up-smash to the usual juggling. Even at the front of a shield, repeated down-wavedash shines can make opponents be cautious about attempting to do anything out of the shield lest they get caught by the shine and are dragged into one of Fox's characteristic lethal follow-ups. Out of a down-aerial to shine, you can switch things up against opponents who insist on holding their shields up throughout your entire assault by grabbing directly out of the shine (explained later). For players who jump out of their shields, you can jump-cancel the shine into a neutral-aerial or a falling up-aerial, both of which could lead to death by edgeguarding (given the right environment) or a vertical kill, respectively; if you anticipate correctly the angle of their jump, you can also connect with a back-aerial.

The down-aerial has also traditionally been used as a ledge-hop option; for example, a common punishment after forcing a Sheik to up-B on-stage is to jump from the edge with a down-aerial and continue into a waveshine (possibly with a few drillshine repetitions tacked on) and the requisite up-smash. While still certainly a viable choice, this option has fallen out of favor recently due to its consistency issues. For example, the repeated hits of the down-aerial combine with varying character heights to yield varying L-cancel timings. As well, the small amount of stun on each hit opens the possibility for a sudden reversal should you miss with the remainder of the aerial. Furthermore, the down-aerial's repeated hits make it especially vulnerable to DI, especially Smash DI; indeed, it is entirely possible for your opponent to Smash DI out of the down-aerial and buffer into a shield or crouch-cancel, followed by a grab, which as usual is not a favorable scenario for a Fox. All told, use this aerial with caution; while it can grant you powerful options, it likewise also has a few flaws which can endanger your stocks, hence why the neutral- and back-aerials have largely supplanted the down-aerial in modern Fox play.

The highest-level use of Fox's down-aerial is as a part of one of his infinite shine techniques, all of which are discussed in detail near the end of this guide.

4. Throws

Fox executes his throws quickly (within half a second of the beginning of the throw), so be ready with follow-up attacks. Fox also has a short reach, so compensate for that by using dash-grabs, jump-canceled (for added speed) or boost grabs (for added range) whenever possible. Of course, all buttons listed are while Fox is holding on to the opponent. Generally, stick to the up-throw for all-purpose comboing and juggling use and the forward and back throws to get your foes off the arena. The down-throw is flashy, but it is teched and DI'ed far too easily to be feasible in a higher-level fight (although it has its uses).

Grab

Total frames: 30

Grab frames: 7-8

Running Grab

Total frames: 40
Grab frames: 12-13

Knee
Button: A...
Damage: 3%
Speed: High

Fox knees his opponent while they are stuck in his grip, pure and simple. Use this to add on damage and create a farther throw. Be careful not to get too knee-happy though, or your foe will rotate out of your grip before you get to the fun part. Kneeing also gives your opponent time to input DI, so it may benefit you to forego kneeling and instead get right on to the usual up-throw so as not to jeopardize your follow-up. At stage edges, however, a few knees could give your forward- or back-throw enough power to send your opponent a decent distance, giving you time to set up your edgeguard. It can also ensure a lethal follow-up, an important piece of information to keep in mind when a match is particularly hotly contested.

Elbow Bash
Button: Towards
Damage: 3%
Speed: High

Fox's forward-throw isn't very powerful; its most common use is to get the opponent off of the arena, where they are vulnerable to shine spiking and edge-hogging and -guarding. When combined with the speed of a jump-canceled grab, you can often slap unwary opponents across significant portions of the stage; after a while, many will dodge or use an escape move (such as Bowser's Whirling Fortress) to avoid your grab, but you can easily adjust and either wait for the dodge to punish or wait for and follow the escape move.

In teams matches, the forward-throw can sometimes buy you time during two-on-one situations if you can hit the free opponent with the body of the one being thrown.

Skeet Blaster
Button: Away
Damage: 7%
Speed: High

Fox's back-throw is flashy, but not very powerful. Yet again, its primary use is to get opponents off the edge and into the open air, where you are better able to control them with blaster fire, edge-hogging and -guarding, and shine-spiking.

Star Blaster
Button: Up
Damage: 7%
Speed: High

Fox's most useful throw, the up-throw gets your opponents into the air and ready for juggling or a deadly up-aerial as a finisher. It can also be used multiple times, with Fox hurling opponents into the air, blasting them, and catching them again during their descent (Fox can chain his up-throw on fast-fallers, which can often mean a single grab leading to a lost stock or a significant chunk of damage). Combo this with the up-tilt for repeated beatings or the up-smash for a big hit (both of which are common in nearly all match-ups, but since fast-fallers can be hit multiple times by both the up-tilt and up-smash, particularly if they miss their tech, the two moves are especially

powerful there). At lower percentages, the up-throw can be used in combination with the up-tilt and up-smash until usually around 30-40%, and possibly 50% on the larger characters. Mix in Jabs and Straights to tie up returning enemies and lower their defenses for another up-throw.

Remember that your enemies can DI your up-throw quite well, so be ready to follow them and catch them out of the air with a jump-canceled grab or a jump-canceled (charged, if possible) up-smash, or even a shuffled up-aerial, if you can manage it. Not kneeling opponents in your grip and progressing quickly and smoothly from the initial grab to your up-throw both can make DI'ing the up-throw more difficult.

Be careful with the up-throw on floatier characters such as Marth and Luigi. The green plumber's sex kick is very potent, and his slower falling speed may allow him to regain his stance in the air as you are traveling up to meet him. Be aware that his sex kick, like all others, comes out very quickly, and due to the unique interworkings of Luigi's slower falling speed and Fox's faster falling speed, he may be able to hit you with it multiple times on your descent. Marth is also a risk to use the up-throw on. His slower falling speed also will allow him to regain his stance in the air, and virtually all of his aerials possess more than enough priority to bite through any of yours; his forward-aerial is particularly troublesome in this regard. If you can work around these things, however, you will find that Marth is quite vulnerable to your up-aerial, and dies quite easily to it, in addition, so do not by any means completely phase out the up-throw from your repertoire in the Marth match-up; at early percents, you can often tack on a good 50% or so from a single grab thanks to two or three up-aerials. To ensure success, try approaching Marth from behind for up-throw follow-ups whenever possible.

All things considered, however, the up-throw is easily Fox's most powerful throw of choice. Its ability to link to other potent follow-ups, combined with the sheer speed of Fox's jump-canceled grab, gives you a very powerful (and often lethal) means of punishing opponents who favor hiding inside their shields.

Floor Blaster

Button: Down

Damage: 4%

Speed: High

Ah, the down-throw, bane of non-techers and non-DI'ers everywhere. This is a natural starter for the down- and up-tilts should your foe fail to tech or DI it, and both tilts can throw opponents into the air as you prepare to juggle them. For the ditto match, you will need to know how to tech or DI out of the down-throw yourself so as not to fall prey to otherwise easily-avoidable combos like the down-throw to up-tilt, down-tilt, or up-smash, all of which can lead to lethal up-aerials themselves if the initial hit does not kill you. It is not at all difficult to tech or DI out of a down-throw, however, and it is a skill necessary for you to get out of these aforementioned combos.

There are indeed two ways to get out of the down-throw, one in which you actually tech (that is, hit L or R as soon as you hit the floor and either roll away or stand up immediately), and another in which you simply DI (directional influence) to the right or left as the down-throw begins.

Actually teching out of the down-throw requires some timing abilities. If you perform a down-throw in Training Mode on 1/4 speed setting, you will notice that you bounce slightly when Fox down-throws you. You must press L or R right when you hit the floor from that bounce, and that is the timing for actually teching a down-throw (except it is done in normal 1 speed in the game, of

course). You'll need to roll away from your tech (using the control stick in the desired direction at the same time that you press L or R), because if you tech and stand up immediately, you give Fox the time that he needs to pull off a quick Jab or waveshine where he stands (which is not all that difficult), both of which are more than capable of being strung into the very combo that you were trying to avoid in the first place. Remember that you are not perfectly safe even if you tech-roll his down-throw; Fox can follow where you tech and hit you during your post-roll lag with a jump-canceled up-smash, if he reacts quickly enough, in which case he will lead that into an enormous juggling combo or finish you with an up-aerial, if the up-smash hasn't already killed you. This is in fact a sufficient reason to "test" opponents with the down-throw; should you notice a habit of theirs in terms of teching, i.e., always teching in the same place or direction, you can score easy up-smashes.

You can also DI left or right out of the down-throw and possibly away from any stationary moves that the Fox had planned for you if you did not tech or DI his down-throw (the up-tilt and up-smash are the most likely candidates for this, both of which can be strung into a very damaging juggling combo leading up to an up-aerial finisher). DI stands for "directional influence," and it is influencing the trajectory you are sent when hit by an attack by pressing the control stick in the desired direction. Basically, you simply hold left or right throughout Fox's down-throw, and you will pop out in the direction that you pushed. Be warned that it is far easier for Fox to punish you for this than it is for him to punish a tech-roll; you are not given any moments of invincibility using DI, and you do not travel as far, either. This makes it a cinch for Fox to catch you with the tip of his tail in his down-tilt if you did not DI enough, or even jump-cancel an up-smash very quickly and hit you with that. As always, he will lead you into a juggling combo and finish you off if you are not careful. Of course, all of this can be applied to the player whom you are down-throwing as well.

All of the above is well known by experienced players of the game. If you are facing even a slightly experienced player, expect them to always DI or tech out of your down-throw. Be sure to follow their techs to the best of your abilities with a quick jump-canceled up-smash; this will put them in the best position for you to set up the juggling you had in mind. Your best alternative, however, is to stay away from the down-throw for the most part. You will not always be able to predict correctly the direction of their tech, and if you miss, they may be able to hit you while you are in the post-move lag from your up-smash. Be aware of this throughout all of your higher-level matches, and be sure to rely far more on your up-throw than any of your other throws as you grow in your experience. You will find that it can be chained into juggling combos and, especially, lethal up-aerials, far more often than you think.

However, do not entirely discount the down-throw from your arsenal. At higher percents against floatier characters, such as Jigglypuff and Samus, against whom you no longer have reliable up-throw follow-ups, the down-throw can be quite useful (assuming that you are able to read techs, that is). Both of these characters favor shielding a great deal (for the very fact that they naturally become immune to lethal up-throw follow-ups at higher percents), and the down-throw is the perfect antidote for this should you notice tech patterns and tendencies.

It is also possible to "throw-spike" an opponent with the down-throw. You must of course be facing out into open air when you grab them, and ideally you will grab them out of the air either right above the edge of the arena or above nothing. You will know whether you did this correctly once you down-throw. If you did, the throw will essentially meteor-smash them downwards to their death in a gigantic spike. Generally, though, this technique is far too random and impractical to be used consistently. Enemy directional influencing also throws

the down-throw off quite easily. Unless you are facing a very inexperienced player, drop this from your routine entirely.

5. Special Moves (Ground or Air)

Blaster

Button: B...

Damage: 1-3% a shot

Speed: High

Priority: None

Range: Very long range (projectiles tend to do that), but the lasers themselves disappear after 34 frames (a little more than half a second).

Start Time: Fast; Fox pulls out his trusty Blaster very quickly.

Lag Time: Little, if firing when grounded; none if short-hopped (the Blaster auto-cancels).

Knockback: None

Ground frame data:

Total frames (single shot): 23

Shot comes out: 12

Air frame data:

Total frames (single shot): 36

Shot comes out: 10

Other data:

-Repeated shots fire every 10 frames.

-Laser lasts 34 frames

-Auto-cancels upon landing

The third member of Fox's most feared moves, Fox's blaster is a spammer's delight, simply put. Combined with his lightning running speed and the fast come-out and withdraw time of the blaster, Fox can snipe opponents from afar, forcing them to come to him in a blind haste. Although they do not stun, unlike Fox's N64 blaster, the lasers cannot be out-prioritized by any move in the game except for, of course, a shield of some kind, and with simple button timing you can keep Fox firing for a virtually limitless amount of time. A well-known fact in the Smash community is that the vulpine's blaster was too powerful for the current tournament stage set, which included Hyrule Temple. The quick fox and his equally quick blaster were practically made for that large stage, and Fox players became very adept at scampering about the stage, sniping their opponents to high percents. Because of this (and multiple other camping issues), it was agreed upon very early to ban Hyrule Temple from standardized tournament play; the same rationale was applied to Yoshi's Island 64 and its far-off disappearing cloud platforms.

The Blaster is a handy gauge for your opponent's skill level, also. At the beginning of the match, wavedash backwards and begin blasting your opponent (including Ness, but probably not Fox or Falco, as everyone and their brother knows about their Reflectors). Watch carefully how they react; if they charge toward you (which is mostly the only thing most characters can do), you know they have some competence in the game and should plan accordingly. Watch for them to roll towards you, also, in which case you can anticipate the length of their roll and knock them out of it (remember that there are periods of vulnerability before and after the roll that you can take advantage of). If they shield, chances are you're playing a not-so-smart player, but don't let your guard down nevertheless; a blind, unplanned charge with Fox will usually end in you getting hit hard. Plan your advances accordingly, and use the vulpine's Blaster to force your foes to you lest they take too much damage. You should be wary around characters such as Ness, Falco, and other Foxes as they all have simple ways to combat the Blaster (however, you can take advantage of the lag created by these characters' anti-projectile methods, the PSI Magnet and shines, respectively, with a simple technique covered two paragraphs down).

As a side note, Fox's blaster shots cancel Sheik's needles, so do not be afraid to start a projectile war with her as it is certainly a plus to make the ninja come to you. Your blaster cannot stop all of the needles from a long-charged attack, however, so be wary.

Despite the loss of Hyrule Temple and its massive spamming potential, you can still spam the Blaster on most medium and large stages due to your foot speed. Captain Falcon, with his faster foot speed, may be able to keep you from consistently spamming the Blaster, but nearly every other enemy can be sniped out with ease; indeed, a defensive counter style combined with ample Blaster use is suggested for a multitude of character match-ups, such as Jigglypuff, Peach, and Marth. You can augment your other attacks during the match with the Blaster to increase their comboing potential. Around 30-40% on most opponents is a good comboing percentage for Fox, and with the Blaster that goal is nowhere near out of reach. As well, should you knock your opponent far off-stage (for example, if they properly DI'd your up-smash at higher percents), remember to fire your Blaster as they are returning to tack on free damage (but not so long that you forfeit your timing window for a proper edge-guard, of course).

Note that you can short-hop, fire off Fox's laser, and then fast-fall in order to make yourself into a moving turret (abbreviated SHL for "short-hop laser" or SHB for "short-hop blaster"). This technique, whose uses are covered in more detail under "Advanced Techniques," makes use of the Blaster's ability to auto-cancel, that is, remove any and all lag, upon landing. This allows you to weave in and out of your opponent's range all while tacking on damage and allowing yourself lag-free frames to respond however you deem necessary.

Fox Illusion

Button: Left/Right Smash + B

Damage: 3-7%

Speed: Actual execution is very fast, but pre- and post-move lag keep it from being truly fast.

Priority: Low

Range: The Fox Illusion sends you across a far horizontal distance and cuts through opponents. You can control the distance incrementally by pressing "B" again as you are moving when you want to stop.

Start Time: Large for Fox. Obviously not a melee move.

Lag Time: A little lag at the end as Fox steadies himself

Knockback: Below average; sends opponents into the air

Total frames: 63

Fox starts moving away: 21

Hit frames: 22-25

Time to press B and stop Fox: 20-24

Can grab edge as early as frame 29

Land lag: 20

Land fall special lag: 3

This move sends Fox towards the opponent at a blindingly fast (albeit low-priority) speed. The Illusion is a good surprise move for unwary players or even as an escape method, but be aware that it begins with a significant start-up animation lag time, and it ends with lag, as well. Be sure to position yourself while using this move to land far enough away from your opponent to compensate for the lag. Hitting "B" as you are moving shortens the Illusion incrementally. Also, the Illusion is the preferred means of recovery if you are level with the stage; it is surprising how many easy KO's a Mario or Dr. Mario can score with a quick flip of his Cape on a Fire Fox recovery (this recovery can also be Caped with good timing, so be wary). With good timing (and the aid of the distinctive "ping" sound made at the start of the Illusion), an opposing Fox or Falco can shine you out of this, but should they miss, they will be sent

flailing into the air where you can return the edgeguarding favor with a back-aerial or a lethal up-aerial. Remember also that this attack, even though its actual execution speed is fast, carries very little priority itself. Even a precisely-timed jab or tilt can cut through it and stun or kill you.

Do not spam this move, obviously; it has both pre- and post-move lag to it, in addition to a verbal cue (the distinctive "ping" sound) and a relatively low ability to be comboed out of, which is obviously the backbone of most of your plans as Fox. In a nut shell, use it sparingly, and try as you progress to phase it out of your on-stage game. You will find that you will play far faster and more unpredictably without it. Your primary use for the Illusion is obviously as an alternate (often preferable) recovery move to the Fire Fox, but you can also use it as a surprise means of escape from tight situations; for example, a ledge-canceled Illusion across the stage can do wonders to buy you time during your returning opponent's invincibility frames. In teams matches, the Illusion can also pop your partner into the air after their up-B, allowing them to up-B again while granting them additional recovery options thanks to the added height.

Fox can also stall infinitely on the ledge with his Illusion. First, you must of course be hanging on a ledge. Next, press back (away from the stage) on the control stick or C-stick. Now, you must quickly hit toward and B to activate your Illusion as close to the ledge as possible (note that being very close to the edge is essential to executing this technique correctly as you must cut down on your frames spent away from the ledge in order not to lose your invincibility frames). When performed correctly, this will allow you an innovative means to stall on the ledge if you so desire. However, this technique is somewhat more difficult (if not impossible) on some of the more awkward locales in the game, such as Battlefield's unnervingly small ledges. Fox's Firefox stalls overall are far more versatile than the Illusion stall, but that should not stop you from trying to add a little spice to your Fox's technical gameplay every now and then. Do not, however, rely excessively on this technical feat as there are far more consistent (and technically easier) means of retaining extended control of the edge.

Fire Fox

Button: Up tilt + B

Damage: 7-14%, plus more depending on how much the starting flames hit.

Speed: Medium

Priority: Medium-low

Range: Pretty long; good enough to be Fox's principal recovery move

Start Time: Medium-length beginning time as Fox charges up

Lag Time: Very, very little once you land.

Knockback: Average

Total frames: 92

Hit frames: 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 43-72

Other data:

- When to aim: 42

- Can grab edge during first part as early as 16

- Can grab edge during moving part as early as 73 (if firing straight into a wall, if you go downward at the edge, Fox will stop firing to grab it)

- Grabs edges from both sides

- Land lag: 6

- Land fall special lag: 3

Fox's other means of recovery, the Fire Fox is a bit of a gamble to use since it can be Caped and edge-guarded pretty easily, not to mention that its priority enables many attacks to plow right through it; a player well-versed in timing can even grab you out of it, assuming that they are positioned correctly. Regardless, the Fire Fox has considerable range and is more versatile than

the Fox Illusion as a recovery move. You should try to aim for the edge of the stage most often with this move to compensate for its relatively low priority, but watch for your foe to perform a reverse short-hop or a reverse wavedash to an edgehog; obviously, your aiming for the ledge then will lead to a loss of one of your stocks. It is your call on whether to aim for the ledge or above it, but always keep in mind the Fire Fox's vulnerability to other attacks and the possibility of a Caping by Mario or Dr. Mario (on a side note, Dr. Mario's White Sheet extends slightly below the stage, so be wary of this as you recover in a match against him). Whichever route you take, do not aim it straight at your foe. Unless they are spaced out at the moment, they can and will cut through your Fire Fox with a properly-timed attack, which is not exactly a very difficult task. Indeed, the default response of many opponents once they see you charging the Fire Fox is to time a forward-smash or other such attack with the Fire Fox's charge time; should you aim straight for them, you have probably lost your stock right there, and if you did not choose to aim at them in that instance, they still have the option of chasing you through the air or anticipating your landing point and dealing with you there. Your best responses to such tactics are 1) to vary your recoveries (even Fire Foxing when level with your opponent if you can condition them always to anticipate an Illusion when you are level with them) and 2) to use DI while falling from an upward Fire Fox to curve in and out, sometimes away (as you would do to grab the edge from your fall and avoid anything your opponent throws at you from the ledge, for the most part) and sometimes toward. Again, you must use a combination of variation and repetition to make your recovery as unpredictable as possible at all times.

The structure of certain stages can aid your ability to sweet-spot the ledge with the Fire Fox without rising above the ledge itself. Stages with smoothed or sloped ends, such as Final Destination and Dream Land, can use up some of the forward momentum of your Fire Fox and enable you to grab the ledge without rising above it and making yourself far more vulnerable than you would like to be. For example, you are playing on Final Destination and are knocked off the left side of the stage. You use your second jump and activate your Fire Fox when you are a small distance below and to the left of the edge (a south-west position, in essence). You need to recover to the stage, but do not want to open yourself to your foe by rising above him or the stage. What you would do in this case is aim the trajectory of your Fire Fox at a slight upwards angle into the side of Final Destination. Thanks to its smoothed sides, the stage will use up the Fire Fox's forward momentum and thus shorten its traveling distance, enabling you to rise up to the ledge and grab it. You can then return to the stage safely and without worry of opening yourself to your opponent by rising above the stage. You can use this same technique to rise upwards and slightly over the ledge by decreasing your trajectory towards the stage by a small amount; this will cause the stage's side to use up less forward momentum and make you poke slightly over the ledge in your Fire Fox. It is your call when to use either of these two methods, but you must still be wary of Capings (particularly by Dr. Mario) and enemy down-tilts. Note that this same technique may also be used against flat-sided surfaces, although obviously with a change in the angle of the Fire Fox.

There are also a couple of infinite stalling tricks with the Fire Fox, but they do require some quick coordination on your part. The first variation is a simple stand-alone Firefox stall on an edge. To do this, you must first be grabbing the ledge. You then press back to fall away from the edge but immediately cancel your backwards momentum by quickly performing a Fire Fox. If done correctly, you will grab the ledge again immediately after the Fire Fox's start-up and thus be given the temporary invincibility that grabbing a ledge provides. Another method of performing this tactic is dropping straight down from the edge (not away from it) and jumping again immediately after, activating your Firefox when you feel that you are even again with the ledge

(you should not hear Fox's second jump sound effect, ideally); you will grab the ledge again and can repeat as needed. If you do either of these methods quickly enough, you can stall for the rest of the match, but it takes very good coordination and is rather situational to boot; in addition, most tournaments ban this sort of stalling trick (Peach's "wall-bombing" is another example of a stalling trick). It is possible for your foe to counter this tactic by somehow grabbing the ledge, possibly by a reverse wavedash or reverse short-hop, but if you do it quickly enough, this will not be possible.

Another flashier variation on the above tactic is incorporating a jump-canceled shine before your Firefox. This has been dubbed the "ShineStall" by SWF's TheCape and the "Infinite Lube Stall" by SWF's noob-lube69. The general idea is the same as above, that is, you must drop from the ledge to begin the stall. However, after dropping, you then shine and jump-cancel that into your Firefox which will allow you to grab the ledge again and continue the cycle. In effect, you will create a veritable wall of damaging flames and shine-spikes that can make it nigh impossible for many characters to return safely without being tied up by your flames or getting shine-spiked right at the ledge.

Although situational, both of the above stalls have their own applications that can come in handy in certain match-ups, largely dealing with stalling through recoveries and attempts to sweet-spot. For example, should a returning Marth attempt to sweet-spot, simply stall on the ledge with the Firefox and by the time that he has used his up+B, you will still be invincible and will be holding onto the ledge, causing the Marth to fall to his doom and netting you a stock. Stalling on the ledge also forces your opponents to go above you for their recoveries; you should then be able to predict accordingly where they will be heading and send them out yet again, if not for that stock's final time (this is especially handy against Sheiks).

As a side note, the Fire Fox can often come in handy in teams matches as a means of hitting your partner (with the start-up flames) after they have used their up-B to grant them another up-B by knocking them out of their stun time; this is particularly useful when performed as a ledge-hop (as one would for a Fire Fox stall) as Fox can quickly clamp back onto the edge and reduce the risk of this maneuver. Even hitting your partner with the move itself is permissible as the upwards angle grants them more options to return safely to the stage (as well as returning the use of their up-B).

Reflector

Button: Down tilt + B

Damage: 5%

Speed: Highest possible (1 frame, or 1/60 of a second)

Priority: Very high

Range: Close-range, but reaches out a bit on either side of Fox with slightly more range on the back end.

Start Time: Instantaneous

Lag Time: Again, if you reflect something or don't jump-cancel it, the Reflector has a small amount of lag time.

Knockback: A set distance for each character (dependant on traction)

Total frames: 39 (or more)

Hits on frame: 1

Reflects: 4-(release+1)

Jump cancel-able: 4-(release+1)

Lag upon release: 19

(Shield) Hit lag: 3

Reflection lag: 19

Other data:

-Stun time for each character:

The second number is if they "land." It happens always from an aerial re-

flector and sometimes from a land one if it hits their back.

Captain Falcon: 33...9
Donkey Kong: 33...10
Fox: falls
Kirby: falls
Mr. Game and Watch: falls
Bowser: 32...11
Link: 33...9
Luigi: 34...11-9 (much more likely)
Mario: 34...9
Marth: 35...9
Mewtwo: falls
Ness: 34...9
Peach: 35...9

If you Reflector the first frame in the air from a jump, you will fall enough to jump-cancel from the ground on frame 6. So a cycle could take as little as 8 frames.

Here it is, the fourth, deadliest, and most powerful member of Fox's most feared moves. Contrary to beginning-player belief, the vulpine's Reflector is not used solely to deflect projectiles, although that is a big part of it. By now, those inexperienced smashers must be thinking, "What can you possibly do with this crazy thing other than reflect stuff?" The list goes on and on and on; this move more than any other sets Fox apart from his wing mate Falco (and virtually every other character) in the tiers. An entire section will be devoted to the uses of this powerful move, which include winning priority wars, killing at very low percentages, destroying your foe's plans of projectile spamming, setting up for a combo, and the infamous infinite shine techniques (Fox's Reflector is affectionately known as the "shine" in the Smash community; ask any seasoned player and they will know what it is). The insanity increases once you master L-cancelling, fast-falling, and wavedashing, all of which will be discussed later. To start, know that you can cut the Reflector animation short by simply jumping up out of it and that you can turn around while in the Reflector (the use of this will be shown later). If you have read most of everything up to this point and have a good grasp of the terminology of SSBM, you have already been exposed to a great deal of what the shine can do. The exclusive shine section, however, delves even deeper into the uses of this exceedingly powerful move.

6. The Physics of Fox

Don't let the word "physics" scare you; it simply refers to each character's innate weight, traction, falling speed, and other similar properties.

Obviously, Fox, being the little guy that he is, can be killed easily and quickly while in inexperienced hands. Players who have not mastered his more advanced techniques tend to spam one or two moves, and wonder why their button mashing leads them to repeatedly Illusioning themselves off the stage. The truth is, Fox can be very difficult to KO effectively. He is a fast-faller, one of a few characters, including Falco and Captain Falcon, who fall at an accelerated rate compared to the other fighters. This can work for or against you. If Fox is knocked upwards, his fast falling may allow you to live for another hit or two. On the other hand, if Fox goes flying horizontally too far, he will plummet out of reach of the ledge, which chances are your opponent will be hanging onto. You can increase Fox's falling speed by holding down on the Control Stick at the peak of his relatively short jump (a "fast-fall"). Experienced players use Fox's fast-falling to their advantage, plummeting quickly to earth to avoid being juggled and to increase greatly

their comboing speed. As a Fox player, you must acquaint yourself with using his fast, jerky moves in order to increase your already blinding speed. Once you can implement the more advanced aspects of Fox into your game, such as L-canceling, fast-falling, short-hopping, and wavedashing, you will not be surprised when you can get an opponent well above 100% (or remove a stock) within the first 30 seconds of the match. If you do not know yet, Fox is overall the fastest character in the game, and his speed will let you live for quite a while if used properly and in combination with proper DI.

Below are tons of statistics pertaining to Fox and virtually everything that he does (note that 1 frame = 1/60 of a second; thus, there are 60 frames in a second). I give an immeasurably huge amount of thanks to Mew2King and those who helped him for finding, recording, and compiling all of these statistics and many, many, many more. Thanks a lot, Mew2King and co.; this section could not exist without you guys. Thanks are also in order for SuperDoodleMan for his frame data cited below each respective move in the above sections as well as his contributions here in the form of frame data for Fox's ledge maneuvers, jump, air- and ground-dodges, roll, dash-to-run frames, and turn-jump threshold.

Ground Dodge Rating: 63.6363...%; 14/22 frames; dodge starts on second frame; invulnerable 2-15 out of 22 [SDM]. RANKING: Best in game (among others)

Air Dodge Rating: Starting Time: 3 frames. Invincible Time: 26 frames (frames 4-29); invulnerable 4-29 out of 49 frames [SDM]. RANKING: Same as every other character except Peach, Zelda, and Bowser.

Roll Rating (both rolls): 51.612903225806451%; 16/31 frames; both rolls start on fourth frame; Invulnerable 4-19 out of 31 frames [SDM]. RANKING: Group C, third best in game (among others).

Clobbering Item Attack Starting Speed (Beam Sword, Home Run Bat, Lip's Stick, and Star Rod): A-5 frames; forward tilt + A-12 frames; dash A-6 frames

Item Throwing Speed: A/Forward + A-7 frames; Back + A-7 frames; Up + A-6 frames; Down + A-5 frames; Aerial A/Aerial Forward + A- 6 frames; Aerial Back + A-7 frames; Aerial Up + A-6 frames; Aerial Down + A-6 frames; Dash + A-4 frames. RANKING: Best in game (among others)

Fire Flower and Ray Gun Shooting Speed Starting Time: 10 frames. RANKING: Group C, third best in game (among others)

Home Run Bat Smash Attack Speed: 30 frames. RANKING: Group G, seventh best in game (among others)

Running Stopping Speed: 18 frames. RANKING: Best in game along with Falco.

Running Turning Speed: 30 frames. RANKING: 16th in game.

Item Pick-up Speed (using A): Pick-up Speed: 2 frames. Total Time: 7 frames. RANKING: Best in game (among others)

Barrel, Crate, and Party Ball Pick-Up Speed: 24th in game

Weight: 75. Weight measures how far characters are knocked horizontally. Mario = 100 (average). RANKING: 22nd heaviest.

Walking Speed: 1st in game.

Running Speed: 2nd in game.

Falling Speed: 3rd highest in game. Fox has the highest acceleration speed while falling.

Fast-fall Falling Speed: 48. RANKING: 3rd fastest in game.

Traction Rating: 237 (69.3%). RANKING: 12th in game.

Wavedash Length: 13th farthest in game.

Ducking Rating: 17th in game.

Crate Carrying Speed: 26th (slowest) in game.

Landing Recovery Time From a Jump: 4 frames. RANKING: Group B, second best in game (among others).

Jumping Speed: 4 frames. RANKING: Best in game (among others). Every second jump takes 1 frame. [SDM] Airborne on frame 4; air time: 35 frames; earliest fast-fall: 18; fast-fall air time: 27 frames; short-hop air time: 21 frames; earliest fast-fall: 12; short-hop fast-fall air time: 15; second jump earliest fast-fall: 21.

First Jump Height: 7th in game.

Second Jump Height: 6th in game.

Total Jump Height: 6th in game.

Shield Release Recovery Time: 15 frames. RANKING: Group B, second best in game (among others)

Ledge Attack Horizontal Range (0-99%): 4th in game.

Ledge Attack Power (0-99%): 8% (6% at close-range). RANKING: Group C, third best in game (among others)

Ledge Attack Power (100-999%): 8%. RANKING: Group D, fourth best in game (among others)

Ledge stand (<100%): Total frames: 34. Invincible frames: 1-30.

Ledge stand (>100%): Total frames: 59. Invincible frames: 1-55.

Ledge roll (<100%): Total frames: 49. Invincible frames: 1-34.

Ledge roll (>100%): Total frames: 79. Invincible frames: 1-62.

Ledge attack (<100%): Total frames: 54. Invulnerable frames: 1-21. Hit frames: 25-34.

Ledge attack (>100%): Total frames: 69. Invulnerable frames: 1-53. Hit frames: 57-59.

Ledge jump (<100%): Total frames: 51. Invulnerable frames: 1-14. Soonest fast-fall: 34.

Ledge jump (>100%): Total frames: 51. Invincible frames: 1-19. Soonest fast-fall: 39.

Horizontal Aerial Moving Speed: 26th (slowest) in game.

Horizontal Aerial Falling Distance: 25th in game.

Super Scope Shot Rapidness: One shot every 6 frames; 10 shots per second; lasts 5-6 seconds if shot nonstop. RANKING: Group A, best in game (among others)

Rapid Attack Speed: 7 frames apart in rapid A (last hit takes 8 frames) between a set of 5 kicks. Total time until set of hits repeats: 36 frames. Average speed: 7.2 frames apart, 8 1/3 hits per second.

Blaster Schematics: 10 frames apart; the first shot is 12 frames (exactly 6 shots per second). Aerial blaster shots are also 10 frames apart; the first shot is 10 frames.

Grabbing Range (Relative approximations): 12th in game.

Grabbing Release Power: 2% (this is how much damage a character receives when he or she escapes your grab due to another character hitting you)

Grabbing Speed: Grab-7 frames. Total Time-30 frames. Dash Grab-12 frames. Total Time-40 frames.

Grab-Attack Starting Speed: 5 frames. RANKING: 2nd in game (among others)

Horizontal Projectile Speed Rating: 1st among selectable characters.

Projectile Lasting Time: 34 frames. RANKING: 3rd shortest in game.

Forward/Backward Throw Power Rating: Forward: 28th place. Backward: 50th place. Both rankings are out of 61.

Vertical Throw Power Rating: 18th place. Ranking is out of 30.

Forward Smash Rating: 22nd place.

Fully-charged Forward Smash Rating: 21st place.

Dash becomes run at frame 12.

Turn-jump threshold: 17.

Fox's Shine Distance along the Ground

If your opponent is holding no direction, then their own weight and traction determine how far the shine will send them. If they are holding down, their distance will be shortened, and they will stay on their feet.

Character	No Direction	Holding Down
Dr. Mario.....	13 ft.....	6 ft
Mario.....	13 ft.....	6 ft
Luigi.....	33 ft.....	15 ft
Bowser.....	12 ft.....	5 ft
Peach.....	8 ft.....	4 ft
Yoshi.....	12 ft.....	6 ft
Donkey Kong.....	9 ft.....	4 ft
Captain Falcon.....	9 ft.....	4 ft
Ganondorf.....	10 ft.....	5 ft
Falco.....	----	5 ft

Fox.....	----	.....	5 ft
Ness.....	14 ft.....	6 ft	
Ice Climbers.....	25 ft.....	11 ft	
Kirby.....	----	.....	6 ft
Samus.....	12 ft.....	5 ft	
Zelda.....	8 ft.....	4 ft	
Shiek.....	10 ft.....	5 ft	
Link.....	7 ft.....	3 ft	
Young Link.....	----	.....	5 ft
Pichu.....	----	.....	5 ft
Pikachu.....	----	.....	4 ft
Jigglypuff.....	----	.....	5 ft
Mewtwo.....	----	.....	10 ft
Mr. Game and Watch...	----	.....	8 ft
Marth.....	15 ft.....	7 ft	
Roy.....	----	.....	7 ft

---- = Character will fall to the ground.

All tests were done on Final Destination. Other surfaces and/or inclines will affect distances.

Credits: element_of_fire for making this list.

II. Advanced Techniques

A. Introduction

The Smash community regards Fox McCloud as the most difficult character to master at high levels of play. His unparalleled speed, incredibly fast jump time (4 frames, or 1/15 of a second), and fast-paced controls can push even the most skilled Melee player to the limit. Although Fox's basic moves are powerful when combined with his speed, it is his advanced aspects that make him such a powerful character. The following techniques form the basis of nearly everything that the vulpine can do, and they can also be applied for the most part to every other character with slight adjustments for timing. In this section, you will learn how to perform these critical techniques and how to apply them to your game. Once you have mastered them, you will quickly see why many players hold Fox in such high esteem. With his controls and these techniques well under your fingers, your Fox will become a potent, unstoppable (and admittedly show-offy) force.

1. L-Canceling

What it is: Cutting in half the recovery animation of an aerial attack, allowing you quickly to begin another attack.

How to do it: Press L, R, or Z ("L" for most players) when landing from an aerial "A" attack. Specifically, you "land" when you begin to see dust clouds forming around your character's feet. Pressing L, R, or Z at this time will stop the recovery animation and return your fighter to his or her fighting stance, ready to launch another attack. Again, keep in mind that L-canceling is only applicable to aerial "A" attacks, not special "B" attacks. In addition, remember that in order to get the cleanest L-cancel possible, you may have to press your canceling button of choice extremely slightly before your character hits the ground, particularly if you are fast-falling your aerial of choice. This is to compensate for the small amount of time that you spend in actually pressing the button itself; you will find that at high-level play, even a few frames here and there can be of great importance to your character's well-being, as well as your win-loss ratio.

Uses: L-canceling is the defining technique for high-level Melee players. Using it will greatly speed up your character and open many doors to comboing. In combination with the lightning-quick Fox, L-canceling can be downright deadly.

So many uses exist for L-canceling that it is nearly impossible to name them all. Of course, the technique's primary use is to cut in half the lag time after an aerial attack. You will quickly notice whether you have done the technique correctly; it is most noticeable with Link's Sword Plant (his down-aerial), which has massive recoil lag as Link yanks his sword from the ground. Bowser's back-aerial also possesses a tremendous amount of lag when not L-canceled correctly as Bowser tilts himself back onto his feet. If you are unsure whether you are L-canceling correctly, try it first with these characters' moves and then move on to Fox's naturally fast moves. As you progress to higher levels of play, you will find that you can easily pick out missed L-cancels even with someone as fast as Fox; indeed, these missed cancels can often decide an entire stock, or even the match itself.

L-canceling also factors into an immensely powerful technique (and with Fox, an essential one) named "shuffling," which stands for "short-hop, fast-fall, L-cancel." Shuffling broken down appears as such:

- 1) Short-hop with X, Y, or the control stick
- 2) Your choice of an aerial "A" attack
- 3) Fast-fall by pressing down on the control stick at the peak of your short-hop (critical for proper shuffling to reduce empty air time and to allow a fast flow into the L-cancel)
- 4) L-cancel (pressed earlier than you would at first think to compensate for Fox's extremely quick fast-fall)

With the aid of shuffling, you can string together moves you never could otherwise and open even more options for attack. In fact, a lack of shuffling with Fox costs you your two chief approaches, both of which are capable in themselves of comboing into Jabs, waveshines to up-smashes or grabs, and even transitions into infinites. For techniques and combos involving shuffling and L-canceling, see the description text under each of Fox's respective aerial "A" moves in section one.

2. Wavedashing

What it is: An unorthodox method of movement in which you "glide" along the ground. While in this movement, you can use all of your attacks. With most characters, wavedashing is as fast as running.

How to do it: Air-dodge diagonally into the ground immediately after jumping. The game converts your motion in the air to horizontal motion, resulting in a strange movement where you essentially "glide" across the ground in a cloud of dust. Try it first with Luigi in Training Mode, set on a slow speed (start with 2/3 or 1/3 if you need to). You will know you did it correctly when you see Luigi go sailing smoothly along the ground. Once you are comfortable with the technique, move on to Fox. Note, however, that Fox jumps much faster than Luigi does, so you will need fast fingers to wavedash correctly (if you wait slightly too long with Fox to dodge into the ground, you'll do what is called a triangle jump, a variant of wavedashing which has its own uses and merits and will be discussed later). All told, the sequence of button inputs for a wavedash reads as follows:

- 1) Jump with X, Y, or the control stick
- 2) Air-dodge
- 3) Position your air-dodge at an angle into the ground using the control stick;

it is the angle at which you put the controlstick for the air-dodge that determines the length of your character's wavedash.

Uses: The wavedash is another member of the group of advanced tactics that make Fox such a powerful character. With this technique, you open a wealth of options for mind games and even some possibilities for comboing.

Most players use wavedashing for "offensive defensive" movement, essentially. While wavedashing, you are able to use any attack as if you were still standing on the ground. This allows you to cover your retreats with fast Jabs and Straights or even Fox Tails or up-smashes if you are feeling particularly evil. If you want, you can drive your foes further back with forward wavedashing, and then sprint away and blaster spam them to higher percentages. During close battle, you can wavedash backwards to avoid an incoming strike and then immediately wavedash forward into an up-smash, Fox Tail, or other pre-juggling move. You can also edge-hog using wavedashing by wavedashing off the edge facing towards the ledge. Fox will immediately grab the ledge; this is far faster than doing a normal backwards jump to grab the ledge and is very useful, so use it well. Wavedashing is also used for spacing and positioning; for example, you can wavedash back from an opponent's advance to space correctly and then answer with a down-tilt, forward-smash, or something of the like. This is very handy for opponents who tend to get too aggressive, almost to the point of blindly launching attacks and not thinking of their foe's possible answers.

Wavedashing is also a very handy tool in the ever-important mind games department. Especially with a fast faller and jumper like Fox, the strange movement that wavedashing grants you can be used to fake out your opponent and make them flinch, allowing you to rush in unopposed and do some serious damage. The most common way to do this is to run as quickly as possible at your opponent, making it seem as if you are making a hasty, poorly planned attack. When they wind up an attack to smack you, the proverbial baseball, away from them, immediately wavedash backwards. While they are still in the lag, wavedash or run forwards (if running, you might need to fox trot, yet another technique that will be discussed later) and hit them with any attack; a jump-canceled up-smash works wonders as a powerful punisher in such instances. A fast dash-grab or jump-canceled grab is also an effective choice. Once you learn how to work with wavedashing and its myriad of mind games, you should observe every character's moves and memorize what their start-up frames look like. If your eyes are fast enough, you can see what attack your enemy is about to use during your headlong dash and determine its lag time and how much time you will have to hit them back.

Wavedashing is also used to combat L-canceling. If an opponent comes down on you with an aerial attack and L-cancels it, you are not given enough time to hit back. Wavedashing solves this. If you see your enemy about to use an aerial attack on your head, wavedash to either side before they land. This will clear you of their attack and let you hit them back. Be sure not to triangle jump, as that usually will not move you far enough away to avoid being hit.

Still another (quite important) use of wavedashing is as a means of regaining your footing on-stage after grabbing the ledge. This involves simply wavedashing up from the ledge and onto the stage (preferably while your invincibility frames from grabbing the ledge are still active). If you wavedash on-stage fast enough after grabbing the edge, you can retain a small portion of invincibility that will enable you to push your opponent away from you and gain yourself some much-needed breathing room. Performing this maneuver into a shine is quite useful in that you can often catch unwary opponents off-guard and continue into a damaging combo thanks to the shine's single-frame speed and its

inherent safety.

Wavedashing in combos is not entirely necessary, but does show that you have some serious skill. Players do this to position themselves better for follow-up strikes. The idea behind this is that since every character's start-up dash animation has some amount of lag to it, you can wavedash instead to move instantly and continue attacking, useful for such things as properly positioning yourself for that properly-timed up-smash that will lead to more juggling. On a side note, wavedashing is an essential part to reaching the epitome of Fox technical skill; it is a member of the feared "infinite shine" combos. In theory, a flawless player could do one of these forever (up to 999%). In order to be truly infinite, however, you would need either to invert the process (since no stage extends forever) via a method known appropriately enough as the inverse infinite shine or start an infinite next to a suitable wall to keep your opponent pinned. More than anything, the infinite shine combos are the vulpine's greatest chance to flaunt his technical abilities as well as your own, but a majority of Fox players find that his other advanced techniques are far more practical in battle and still carry the power and synergy needed to take home a victory. Regardless, being able to wield an infinite or two can do nothing more than improve your game and give you yet another tool with which to take off stocks; as such, the final part of the shine-exclusive section examines Fox's infinities in deeper detail, providing analysis and instructions on each of them.

3. Shield-grabbing

What it is: Simply put, it is grabbing out of your shield.

How to do it: While in a shield, simply press A. This causes your character to grab directly out of his or her shield without having to take the time to lower it.

Uses: This technique is simple to do and extremely useful. Indeed, this technique in itself separates the low-level Smash players from the intermediate; it limits your opponent's options and forces him or her to know how to L-cancel, fast-fall, space, and follow up correctly since if he does not (particularly with L-canceling), you can shield his attack and then quickly shield-grab him. Once grabbed, you follow up with the usual up-throw to up-smashes, up-aerials, and up-tilts as you see fit, tacking on easy (and at times significant) damage. Know this technique well, and use it whenever possible, but be warned that shield-grabbing's role in higher-level play is far more limited due to players' greater proficiency with spacing and technicals; indeed, going for a few too many shield-grabs at these levels can open you to punishment, especially at the hands of more range-oriented characters, such as Marth.

4. Short-hopping

What it is: As the name implies, it is hopping a small distance above the ground.

How to do it: There are two ways to short-hop: with the control stick and with the X/Y buttons. I suggest you begin with the X/Y buttons. To short-hop with them, you must tap the button extremely quickly and release just as quickly. The game judges whether or not you short-hop based on how long your finger stays on the button, not on how much force you put into pressing it. Thus, you must be able to get your finger (probably your thumb) off of your button of choice very, very quickly or flick the control stick as quickly as possible. Common opinion holds that it is easier to fast-fall if you short-hop with X or Y.

Short-hopping with the control stick is a bit more complicated. It works best while in a run since you already have the stick tilted towards where it needs to go for you to short-hop. To short-hop with the control stick, you must move it with more than a little bit of pressure at a slight angle above the respective side angle of the shape around the stick. You can fast-fall also if you quickly snap down the stick from its short-hopping position, but watch your timing. You can also short-hop from a standstill position, but it requires an awkward position and movement of the control stick; overall, it is much easier to short-hop using X and Y. Again, remember that short-hopping is judged based on how quickly you release your jumping mechanism of choice; as such, do your best to flick the control stick as required by your short-hop to give yourself greatest chance at pulling off the short-hop.

Uses: Short-hopping is used strictly for comboing, or at times for edge-guarding and Fox's short-hop laser, or SHL (see later on in this section). The idea is that if you jump a shorter distance off the ground, you can get to the ground far faster than from a normal jump and then execute another attack in a shorter amount of time. All told, short-hopping functions in edge-grabbing (short-hopping off-stage to grab the ledge, also accomplished by wavedashing), comboing (as a member of the shuffling technique), and even in mind games, to a certain extent ("empty" short-hops and short-hops after which you wavedash backwards are examples of this).

5. Dash-canceling

What it is: Canceling the forward movement of your dash by crouching, allowing you to fake out the opponent or use an attack other than your running attack at a moment's notice.

How to do it: While dashing, simply crouch (press down on the control stick). This will slow or completely stop your forward movement.

Uses: Though certainly not as versatile as L-canceling or short-hopping, dash-canceling does have its merits. Mastery of this technique with Fox will give you more options to mess with your opponent's head and his game, in addition to allowing you to utilize your ground attacks in a faster manner, therefore increasing the amount of pressure you can apply with your onslaught.

One of dash-canceling's uses is in mind games, especially with a fast runner like Fox. You can charge headlong towards your opponent, effectively feigning a hasty, random, almost last-ditch attack. However, when you see the start-up frames of their retaliatory attack or anticipate such an attack, you can dash-cancel your dash and end up directly in front of them (spaced as necessary, of course), ready for a long-distance down-tilt to sweep them into the air, or a powerful forward-smash, or, if you are really daring, a down-smash underneath their shield. You can also dash-cancel so as to position your opponent in the furthest possible effective diameter of Fox's up-smash. If you can pull this off, the up-smash should plow through their defenses, out-prioritizing their retaliatory strike and sending them airborne. Keep in mind only to do this if you see or anticipate them going into their own attack; otherwise, your opponent will shield the effective moment of the up-smash and shield-grab you or otherwise space you out with a forward-smash from a reverse wavedash or something of the like. Speaking of shield-grabbing, you can use dash-canceling to trick your foe into putting himself into a shield, thinking he is ready to grab you out of your dash. What a surprise awaits him, however, when you screech to a halt out of range of his grab and ready to sprint forward into your own grab.

A more situational use of dash-canceling is to interrupt the opponent's own dash with a down-tilt or forward-smash in Melee's version of chicken. If you find yourself hurtling towards your enemy who is also flying towards you, dash-

cancel your dash and quickly judge the distance between yourself and your enemy. Then sweep them off their feet with a down-tilt or simply roll over them with a forward-smash. You can also run through your opponent to his backside, dash-cancel, and then forward-smash or dash attack in the opposite direction (especially handy should your opponent be in his or her shield since many players' natural reaction to an enemy behind them is to short-hop out of the shield with a back-aerial). A dash attack connected here could very well lead to fatal juggling or a lethal up-smash.

Dash-canceling is also used to allow ground attacks at fast speeds. Normally, you can only use ground attacks while standing still, walking, or wavedashing. Dash-canceling allows you to use your dash to get to the enemy and then quickly launch into a ground attack once you have reached him. You can use this to apply continuous pressure to the other guy, hunting him down incessantly with the fox's fast running and then dash-canceling into any attack you wish, whether it is a simple Jab to throw them off their feet, a down-tilt to prep them for juggling, or an up-smash for the killer blow. Note that a wavedash at the end of a dash (spaced correctly from your opponent and where you anticipate your wavedash to put you) also provides the same general effect.

6. Crouch-canceling

What it is: Crouching (holding down on the control stick) when you are hit, increasing your defenses and greatly reducing the attack's normal knockback and stun.

How to do it: Hold down on the control stick when hit or while being hit.

Uses: Fox isn't exactly the bulkiest or heftiest of characters; therefore, his natural tendency is to be knocked off of the stage very easily and frequently. Crouch-canceling partly solves that problem. With it, you can increase the vulpine's resilience to enemy strikes and greatly increase his lifespan. When coupled with Fox's already outstanding evasion abilities, crouch-canceling can keep you in the game more than long enough to hit back and finish your foe. However, be careful with crouch-canceling around ledges. Granted, it can potentially save you from a strike meant to get you off-stage, but on certain moves, the downwards DI of the crouch-cancel can in fact amplify the effects of that move and make it even more difficult for you to return (keep in mind your fast-falling) and at times can even cost you a stock; this is especially apparent with down-smashes from Peach (easily the most flagrant offender), Samus, and Sheik.

Crouch-canceling is more situational than anything; if you are hit, hold down on the control stick to reduce the knockback, plain and simple. The only practical technique you can use with crouch canceling is what has been dubbed the "crouch-cancel counter," or "CCC," which conveniently works quite well with Fox. What this triple-consonant acronym means is using an attack out of your crouch-cancel to take advantage of your own reduction in received stun time and knock-back and your opponent's lag from his or her connecting hit. A down-tilt as a counter works wonders to prep for juggling or an up-smash; a quick up-smash is also a potentially-lethal option; even shines and Jabs from crouch-cancels are problematic for opponents and can lead to their usual well-known follow-ups. The crouch-cancel counter is a good answer for a high-damage opponent who has just taken your stock and insists upon pressuring you further. A grab out of a crouch-cancel is especially useful given the potency of Fox's grab game; make use of this near the beginning of your stocks and if your foe utilizes weak jabs in an attempt to sieze control of the scuffle. Likewise, be wary of this concept when facing such characters as Marth, whose powerful grab game on fast-fallers can take entire stocks when combined with edge-guarding.

7. Dash-dancing

What it is: Constantly turning around in the start-up animation of your dash, allowing you to quickly jet in either direction at any time you choose.

How to do it: Quickly tap the control stick back and forth; you should see Fox as if he is split between running in two separate directions, his head appearing in one direction and then disappearing quickly only to reappear facing the other.

Uses: Dash-dancing functions in mind games for the most part but can also add fluidity and a certain sense of preparedness to your game. Since dash-dancing allows you to jet off in any direction at any time, you can frequently use it to fake out the opponent or prepare yourself for the direction of your foe's directional influence if you knock them to a certain height.

Nothing in the world is funnier than the look on someone's face when they first see you dash-dancing. To them, it will appear as though you are just randomly hitting towards and away on the control stick and creating a screwed-up animation. Little do they know that you have something else up your sleeve. You can slightly vary the lengths of your individual dash-dance animations and allow yourself to essentially dash-dance across the level. The value of this technique is that you are slowly advancing on the opponent, pushing them back, while simultaneously opening up the dual options of fight or flight. The fight component comes in when you can make them blink and think that you are going to charge at them. More often than not, they will unleash some random attack, trying to catch you off guard. If your eye can catch the start-up frames of their attack, you can immediately judge the type and length of the attack and whether it has any lag time for you to take advantage of. If it does, plow in with a shuffled neutral-aerial and string together an improvised combo, one that hopefully includes plenty of juggling via fast-fallen up-aerials and perhaps some air time courtesy of the up-tilt. If the attack is a decently fast one (meaning there is not much lag time for you to leech off of) you can immediately dash-dance away and continue your charade until they either come after you, in which case your quick speed should prevail more often than not, or they flinch again, hopefully with a higher-lag move.

You can also combine dash-dancing with the wavedash and triangle jumping in yet more of the vulpine's mind games. These tricks take into account three things, all of which depend on the type of attack being used and who is using it. These criteria are priority of the enemy attack, its speed, and, of course, its lag time. As mentioned before, dash-dancing can psych the opponent out into thinking you are going to do something that you really will not do. Instead, you will do something seemingly random that will throw them for a loop if it succeeds. The trick is yet again to get your foe to blink, this time using a combination of sudden reverse wavedashing and dash-dancing. Use the dash-dancing to get your foe on his toes, and when you see an opening, charge forward. Your enemy should be ready with a retaliatory attack; otherwise, they have fallen entirely for your ruse, and you can dash-grab them or whatever else you deem necessary. If they let loose with an attack, wavedash backwards (make sure you still end up in decent range of them, however), and soar in with a powerful jump-canceled up-smash (at medium to high percentages) or the ubiquitous shuffled neutral-aerial. If you want to control your range from them on a finer level, try delaying your diagonal dodge into the ground for the wavedash; the result is a triangle jump, a spin-off of the wavedash that will move you in smaller, more controllable increments while still allowing you your attacks. You can also make use of differing angles of the control stick to adjust the length of your wavedash as you see fit, although the precision required for this can be somewhat daunting for new players.

The fluidity of motion that dash-dancing grants you comes in handy for quick repositioning (to dodge attacks and then quickly weave back in to make the best use of any possible lag) as well as fast spacing (for when you would like that shuffled neutral- or down-aerial approach to have the most range as possible, or you would like to readjust so as to land behind your opponent and pressure him or her with up-tilts or shines against the shield, for example). Dash-dancing while an opponent is lying on the floor or while he or she is flying low-altitude through the air can give you the reaction time you need to respond to their choice of wake-up or tech, allowing you to follow it and punish accordingly with a jump-canceled up-smash or a jump-canceled grab to whatever fits the situation, whether it be chain throws, an up-smash, or up-aerial juggling (preceded as appropriate by up-tilts, of course).

8. Jump-canceled Grabs, or Standing Dash-grabs

What it is: While running, you phase into a grab that is in the standing position, not the lowered position, while still moving forward. Some characters have a longer reach in a standing grab than a dash-grab, and the standing dash-grab occurs faster than the regular dash-grab.

How to do it: While running, you must press up on the control stick or press X or Y, as if you are going to jump, but then immediately press Z (note that since Fox jumps incredibly quickly, you may at first need to work on your timing in order to feel how this works for him; you will find that pressing your choice jumping mechanism and pressing Z occur essentially simultaneously). This will cancel your jump and begin your grab, but your character will be standing up instead of sprinting forward in a lowered position. Note that you can also use jump-canceled grabs right out of the shine itself (useful for foes who insist on holding up their shields for long amounts of time against your shine) in the same fashion. Simply perform the same inputs as above except use the button that you use to jump-cancel the shine. I have found that learning to jump-cancel using the control stick makes jump-canceling grabs out of the shine much easier, although this holds to personal preference, of course (keep in mind that I full jump-cancel the shine using the control stick; if you jump-cancel it using X/Y, simply use those for the jump-cancel grab).

Uses: Jump-canceled grabs are useful in a surprising number of situations. Since Fox's moves are all naturally quick and rather jerky, you need to be quite adept at cutting even the tiniest amounts of time off of your lag time and reducing the amount of time that you are "stagnate," meaning not moving or attacking. These issues will most often arise in heated close combat. The jump-canceled grab is helpful because it occurs faster than a dash grab, allowing it to be used out of anything from a shuffled attack to dash-dancing to Jabs. It also spans a good-sized area, that is, the amount of time that you are "grabbing" and can grab someone is significant. Note that while jump-canceled grabs outdo dash-grabs in terms of speed, dash-grabs are superior in terms of range; however, the modern metagame has nearly entirely discarded dash-grabs in favor of jump-canceled grabs due to the aforementioned speed advantage as well as the far shorter recovery time (that is, jump-canceled grabs are far safer in terms of post-move lag than are dash-grabs).

Jump-canceled grabs can be performed on numerous occasions. These include continuing to apply pressure to an opponent after your shuffled attack has knocked them away and, most significant of all, a follow-up to all manner of mind games.

Fox McCloud, with his natural speed and agility, is made to apply pressure. You must always be doing something that appears even remotely threatening in order to keep the opponent on his or her toes and guessing as to what you are going to do next. For example, once you have batted the opponent away with some

attack, don't sit back and wait for him to tech and come back to you; rather, you must continue the chase. Fox-trot out of the attack that you used to send your foe flying and see if you can catch him out of the air with a well-timed jump-canceled grab. If successful, up-throw and follow up as you usually would, or hurl him or her off of the stage and proceed to edge-guard and edge-hog or, if you so desire, shine-spike. If you don't trust yourself with timing on the grab, you can always fox-trot to pursue and use shuffled neutral-aerials or up-aerials to finish your opponent. You can also Jab out of shuffled aerials to stop your target's momentum and set up for jump-canceled grabs; this same idea can be applied in close combat to tie up your foe's fingers and timing and again open him or her to a damaging (or lethal) grab.

Mind games work well with the jump-canceled grab and its lower relative, also. Combine fox-trotting and wavedashing or triangle-jumping to fake out the opponent and charge in with a fast grab, or use the aforementioned dash-dancing mind game to fake out your foe and break him with a dash-grab. Thanks to the jump-canceled grab's sheer speed, you can often catch shielding opponents by surprise with a fast grab to up-throw when they would normally expect a shuffle or two out of you.

Jump-canceled grabs' other major use is in chain throwing with Fox's up-throw. Although not nearly as devastating as, say, Sheik's chain throws, Fox's are nevertheless a powerful tool to have at your disposal in the proper match-ups. Against opposing Foxes and Falcos, Fox can chain jump-canceled up-throws to quite high percents before correct DI enables an escape; before then, you simply finish with a charged up-smash to up-aerial juggling, often lethal even by themselves. Note that during chain throws, you will need to follow your enemy's DI, which is not exactly a difficult task; simply pay attention and react accordingly.

9. Fox Trotting

What it is: Repeating your initial dash animation many times in succession; since Fox's initial dash animation is faster than his actual dash, you can accumulate bursts of speed that are otherwise impossible.

How to do it: To Fox trot, you must flick the control stick in the desired direction to perform your initial dash; once this initial dash is complete, you then do it again as many times as desired, each time gaining a burst of speed.

Uses: Fox McCloud is the epitome of pressure. Nearly all of his attacks are incredibly fast, and when combined with his blaster and quick running speed, he is an incredibly unnerving foe to face. Only Captain Falcon has the edge on Fox in running speed, but since Fox's main weapon in battle is his amazing combo ability, you as a Fox player need to be able to move as quickly as possible, whenever possible. It only makes sense that increasing your running speed even more could augment your ability to pressure your opponent and initiate your close-range combos faster. At best, you should Fox-trot whenever possible to add on that burst of speed needed to catch an opponent off guard with a sudden surge or to facilitate that combo string that you initiated. Remember that you can dash-cancel your fox-trot and then immediately dash or fox-trot again. However, keep in mind that in order to do much of anything out of your Fox trot, you will need to wavedash out of it.

Admittedly, modern-day play has all but discarded Fox trotting; the speed increase that it provides is rather immaterial when weighed against the burden of added inputs. In the end, simple running has proved to be a more efficient and consistent mode of transportation, and in competitive play, efficiency and consistency win the day.

10. Triangle-jumping

What it is: A relative of wavedashing, it is essentially a delayed version of that technique in which your jump and subsequent dodge into the ground form a triangle. This does not cover as much horizontal distance as the wavedash, but it has its own uses.

How to do it: Similar to the wavedash, you must jump and then quickly (not immediately) air-dodge into the ground. Unlike the wavedash, triangle-jumping is done after your character's feet leave the ground, creating, appropriately enough, a triangle.

Uses: Triangle-jumping is essentially a delayed variant of the wavedash. The game doesn't convert your air-dodge into horizontal distance, however, so triangle-jumping will get you nowhere near as much horizontal distance as wavedashing will. This has its plusses and minuses. A plus is that you can more accurately control where your character will end up after the triangle-jump (since it occurs in smaller, faster increments). This is an advantage in mind games in which you wish to respond to your opponent's mistake with a shuffled aerial, forward- or down-smash, or even the down-tilt, since your triangle-jumping response won't carry you as far away as would a wavedash. Another plus is that since Fox cannot attack again until near the end of his wavedash, you can use triangle-jumping to get yourself into the frames where you can attack again quicker after dodging.

Because of its lack of horizontal distance, however, triangle-jumping has a few flaws. If you try to use it evasively against characters with a decent reach, they still may be able to hit you even though you triangle-jumped backwards. Another flaw is that, again, since triangle-jumping doesn't cover as much horizontal distance as wavedashing (and requires more vertical time), it is not as effective a technique as wavedashing when combating L-canceled aerals via spacing. In addition, the vertical time from the triangle-jump may very well put you in reach of your opponent's retaliatory L-canceled aerial. Use wavedashing to counter these techniques.

All told, triangle-jumping has largely been discarded by the current metagame. Modern players wield a respectable amount of technical ability, and most are able to control the length of their wavedashes such that triangle-jumping is rendered almost entirely obsolete. Triangle-jumping is now regarded as more-so a failed wavedash than as a legitimate advanced technique of its own; the direction and focus of the modern metagame support this.

11. Short-hop Laser

What it is: Short-hopping, firing a blaster bolt, and immediately fast-falling into another cycle of this series, if you so wish, or into anything else that you want to do.

How to do it: As stated above, you must short-hop, fire a blaster bolt, and then immediately fast-fall. The fast-fall should be as fast as you can make it. You can SHL both forwards and backwards, obviously, but going backwards is much more difficult because of the danger of an improperly-positioned or late push of the control stick for the backwards jump. If you press "B" for your Blaster once this has happened, you will perform a backwards Fox Illusion, which will more often than not zip you off of the edge unless you have enough extra space and react quickly enough to shorten it.

Uses: Fox's SHL, due to his blaster's inability to stun, is nowhere near as powerful a technique as his wingmate Falco's. For Fox, the SHL functions as a mind game to egg your foe on and get him to come towards you. It also turns you

into a mobile turret while also allowing you to blaster spam. The mobility of the SHL will allow you to respond more quickly to what your opponent's answer for your blaster spamming is and also lets you follow effortlessly into nearly anything that Fox can do thanks to its auto-canceling: a quick Jab to stun the opponent, a down-smash for when he gets too close, a shuffled neutral-aerial to begin pressuring him, etc. If you see yourself becoming idle during the course of the match and you do not want to give your opponent some clear time to think and plan, whip out your SHL and make him solve that problem instead. If anything, Fox's SHL is your tool to prevent the match from stagnating and your foe from gaining some time to think clearly. You can also toss in quick SHLs as you are poking for an opening with dash-dancing and wavedash positioning and spacing. Use it when you can.

One thing that Fox's blaster has over Falco's is his ability to fire two shots within the span of a single short-hop (the short-hop double laser, or "SHDL"). Obviously, you cannot fast-fall your short-hop to get the second laser, and you need quite speedy fingers to make it from X or Y over to B in time (remember that with the SHDL you literally only have a few frames to hit the first laser before the second laser is cut off by your landing). As such, you should make a point of sliding your thumb from button to button in order to cut the down time you would otherwise experience while lifting and lowering your thumb. However, if you are looking for the easiest method to SHDL, simply short-hop using the control stick; this frees up your thumb and requires it only to press B repeatedly for the laser itself. Regarding the SHDL as a technique in itself, it is in many ways rendered obsolete in battle by the simple SHL; not only is the SHL a very swift projectile that can get in damage here and there, it is also far more efficient than the SHDL in terms of speed and air time thanks to the quick fast-fall and auto-cancel. Show off if you wish with the SHDL, but realize that a simple SHL is far more reliable in heated combat. At best, the SHDL is a flashier variant that can pour on more blaster fire at safer ranges; while operating with comboing and pressure in mind, however, the SHL is your best bet.

12. Waveshine

What it is: Wavedashing out of Fox's shine and into whatever you may want to do.

How to do it: Simply put, you activate Fox's shine with down + B and then wavedash (not triangle-jump) out of it (see above for how to do the wavedash). Make sure you make each of the inputs for the waveshine clearly. For example, when you press "X" or "Y" to jump out of the shine (it is unnecessarily harder to waveshine with the control stick), make sure you press the button and hold it long enough for the game to actually register a jump. Remember, since it is not necessary to short-hop for a wavedash, you do not have to brush your finger off the side of the button or move it off of there incredibly quickly. Just focus on making sure that the game knows that you plan to jump with a decent press of your jump button of choice. This will help increase your consistency with waveshining. Remember also not to rush the transition period from the shine to the wavedash; if you temper your speed, you will be able to control the length of your wavedash (as well as perform repeated perfect wavedashes) far better and more consistently.

As a Fox player, you should take note that backwards waveshining is not the exact opposite of forwards waveshining. Indeed, for many players, the "feeling" of having to set the control stick for the wavedash in the direction opposite to the one that Fox is facing does have an impact on their consistency with the move. To deal with this seemingly subconscious feeling, a few players opt to turn around while in the shine in order to do a forwards wavedash. However, even this adjustment poses its own problems to waveshining consistency; the

shine cannot be jump-canceled while reversing direction mid-shine, and as such any jump inputs during that time will not register and will keep you stuck in the shine longer than you would like to be there. Note also that the frames spent while turning around, however slight, may detract from your ability to make it to your opponent before the shine's stun disappears. For the most part, though, this should not be too significant a problem.

Uses: Oh, the uses... The parts of the waveshine work together to produce an effect that is both interesting to see and powerful in battle. The shine that starts the waveshine is meant to crack your foe's defenses with its obscene priority and come-out time. The wavedash afterwards is meant to cancel your shine lag and propel you in the direction of your opponent, where you can better connect with your follow-up strike. Waveshining is a huge asset at close-range and for your comboing abilities, and it is also a necessary component of Fox's drill shine infinities, if you so wish to get into those.

Your best lead-ins to a waveshine are shuffled neutral- and down-aerials, with the neutral-aerials into waveshines preferably connecting at lower percents (provided your opponent is not crouch-canceling). If you wish, you can also dash-cancel into a waveshine to your follow-up, although the close range and lack of a true approach in this makes it a risky (and situational) feat. As well, take note that (particularly at higher percents and with floatier characters) only the down-aerial truly combos into a waveshine. While a neutral-aerial technically does combo into a shine, it also sends your opponent slightly into the air (assuming that your hit did not meet a shield); as a result, your follow-up shine will push your foe back to the ground, severely decreasing the shine's usual stun time and very often resulting in your opponent punishing you with anything from a grab to a crouch-canceled Smash attack. This is an easily-avoided hole in your approach game, so take special note of it and make certain that you never approach (or play) mindlessly.

You have many options open to you when you connect with your waveshine. You can quickly Jab your foe from a waveshine to make sure he does not react before you and further open him to more comboing options. A Straight is usually not necessary after a waveshine, and you have more powerful options than your Rapid Kicks. You can down-tilt from a waveshine, also. This has the added bonus of having a good amount of reach and popping your foe into the air, where he can be juggled to high percents or simply finished off with an up-aerial. You can up-smash from a waveshine as prep for juggling or as a finishing blow, or you can down-smash from a waveshine if your enemy is at a higher percent and the down-smash will get him off the edge. If you see that it will not, you are better off with another option that you can chain into more combos or juggling.

A forward-smash from a waveshine isn't necessarily your best option; due to its recoil time after its initial effective hit, you won't be able to pursue your foe and continue or even begin any combos. In this case, the forward-smash generally loses its position in the waveshine sequence to the far more powerful up-smash, obviously your best smash option out of a waveshine. You should stick to the up-smash for the vast majority of waveshine smashing that you plan to do, but remember that the forward-smash can be used to hit opponents off of the edge if you are near it or your foe has horrid horizontal recovery. Try shuffling neutral-aerials out of a waveshine; the button timing and coordination is a bit tricky, and you may have to reposition your hands very quickly during the course of your shuffling from the waveshine, but the end effect is worth it. You gain more distance from your short-hopped aerial while also gaining more than enough time to continue your combo thanks to Fox's supreme shuffling prowess. A forward-aerial is another option available to you from a waveshine, but it really is not a good one since you will not be able to connect with its multiple hits and it does not L-cancel as well as the neutral-aerial does; however, at higher percents, that first hit of a shuffled forward-

aerial sets up well for a jump-canceled up-smash that a shuffled neutral-aerial would not have allowed. Regardless, you should generally use shuffled neutral-aerials instead of shuffled forward-aerials. Obviously, the back-aerial best applies during backwards waveshines, but it too has its uses in getting foes off-stage and ready for edgeguarding.

A short-hopped up-aerial is a novel trick to perform from a waveshine if you can pull it off. It will lead you into juggling, as does most of what comes from a waveshine. A short-hopped Drill Kick can lead into one of Fox's infinites, if you choose that route, or can tack on some damage in preparation for an L-cancel into a Jab to a lethal up-smash finisher. You can even grab from a waveshine (preferably with the faster jump-canceled grab), most often into the up-throw that will lead into more combos or juggling or occasionally into the respective throw that will get your opponent off of the edge.

13. Boost Grab

What it is: Canceling your dash attack into a running grab, giving you far more distance than a normal running grab (in Fox's case, twice as much).

How to do it: Run and press A, and then press L or R slightly afterwards. You will begin to do a dash attack, which will then be canceled into a running grab with double the normal distance.

Uses: Certain technical data regarding the boost grab, or "dash attack-canceled grab," for a more unwieldy term, in relation to the other grab types can help shed some light on the boost grab's uses as well as those of the other grabs. According to testing performed by the `suicide_fox`, jump-canceled grabs possess half as much range in terms of Fox's position as a normal running grab; a boost grab, on the other hand, possesses almost twice the range. However, during a grab, there are only 2 frames where the grab can actually connect. Normal standing grabs and jump-canceled grabs have much more range in front of Fox with his hand as it is swiping and around 3/4 of a body length registering as grab areas. On the other hand, running and boosted grabs (both have the same animation) have more range behind Fox with grabs registering from his hand backwards to the end of his tail as he finishes. Thus, a running grab in relation to a standing grab has more range in terms of position and with the actual grab. However, jump-canceled grabs have much less lag. With boosted grabs, the added distance can put you out of range of an enemy counterattack should they dodge your grab attempt.

The added distance of the boost grab is obviously what allows it to stand out amongst the other grabs. Not only does it enable you to avoid a good number of counterattacks from missed grabs as mentioned above, but it also allows you to string together combos with grabs where a normal grab would simply cause the combo or string to fall flat. The boost grab is also handy even from long distances; due to the lack of Fox players that actually make use of the boost grab as an integral part of their strategy, you can often grab opponents from a good distance away where they believe themselves safe from retaliation. For the most part, however, boost grabs are very rarely seen in the modern metagame as virtually every player opts for the greater speed and lessened lag time of jump-canceled grabs.

B. Improving Your Game

1. Introduction

There is more to Fox than blaster, blaster, blaster, up-smash, random shine, blaster. When playing as Fox, you absolutely must know that even though the vulpine is ranked first in the game, he is not invincible. On the contrary,

when played poorly, Fox quickly becomes one of the easiest opponents in the game. The unique properties and controls of his moves make him a challenge to control well. The equally unique executions of his moves (like how directing a Fire Fox into the ground when you are standing on the ground will jet you off to the right and probably off the edge) undoubtedly kill off numerous new players due to their own unfamiliarity with Fox's controls. The dire Master of Disaster "bonus" that comes with that unfamiliarity quickly becomes commonplace, and new players often shy away from the fast fox to more easily controlled characters such as his wingmate Falco, Sheik, or the like. To play effectively with Fox, you must realize that you cannot simply walk, run, or fox-trot up to an opponent and expect to slice through them with your amazing speed. A good Fox player is always thinking (a very, very key word) and devising ways to circumvent sturdy defenses and pull off a killer combo or lethal edge-guard. What follows are some suggestions pertaining to Fox's forms of play and some methods to counter established forms of play and common human tactics, as well as an abstract look at what quite possibly is the most critical aspect of high-level Smash play: the mental game.

a. Knowledge is Power

Now, this can apply to Fox on many levels. Knowledge includes (among other things) knowing your character's moveset and its corresponding controls, the start and lag time of your own moves, your character's innate physics (how high does he or she jump? How fast does he or she fall?), the properties of your recovery moves and when they are best used, and the knockback power of your own attacks. However, knowledge can also apply to things other than your own character. Indeed, perhaps the best knowledge you can have is that of other characters.

With Fox, knowledge truly is power. If you know how Fox will behave in his attacks and his movements, you can better devise a plan with which to attack your opponent. On the other hand, a good Fox player must also be familiar with his opponent's character. Familiarize yourself with the moveset of that character, his or her attacks and their respective properties (start and lag time, knockback, and so on), any verbal or visual cues that the character throws off, and his or her recovery moves. If you know absolutely nothing about what you are facing, you are unprepared. You will not know what to do, what they will do, or how to get around it, a skill essential to a high-level Fox (and any aspiring Melee player, for that matter). You won't know not to crouch-cancel that Peach's down-smash. You won't know not to fire your blaster into Ness's PSI Magnet. You won't know that the shine-spike eats Ness's recovery move for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. In short, you will always be caught by surprise and will rarely if ever be able to identify and capitalize on openings and opportunities, both of which can translate into a plethora of needlessly-lost stocks.

Knowledge with Fox is critical, and if you have the quick eye to go with it, so much the better. Do not let your concentration waver during the match. Keep your eyes glued to yourself and (perhaps more so) your opponent. You need to watch him to see what he is doing or going to do and whether he creates any lag or period of distraction of which you can take advantage. Likewise, you need to watch yourself to see where you are heading after that shuffled neutral-aerial, or how high you need to jump to land that follow-up back-aerial, or where you need to tilt the control stick to sweet-spot that Fire Fox. Simply put, you must always pay attention.

b. Going in with a Plan

You can hastily run at all the newbie players that you want. At higher levels of play, that will get you a short-hopped knee to the face. You will quickly

notice that if you expect to win with Fox by relying completely on your speed via a frontal assault, you will be sorely disappointed over and over again. It is tough to do, but you must try to incorporate as many tricks and mind games as possible into your repertoire. If you plan to run at the opponent, also plan to wavedash backwards and dash-grab if you've caught him by surprise, or wavedash back and come in with a forward-smash if he tries to oppose you.

Your Blaster is a big part of your plans in any game. It is your primary method of controlling your opponent (except Ness, Fox, Falco, and possibly Zelda; your shine will help you there). A barrage of lasers from long-range effectively says to your opponent, "Come and stop me from blaster spamming, or I'll finish you with a single smash attack." Remember that blaster spamming is not cheap. It is an established technique in the game, one that can be remedied by a simple hasty charge at Fox, which conveniently plays into your gloved paws. The blaster is your tool for toying with your opponent's mind, and it can be more useful than you might at first think.

While executing your combos, one of the best things that you can do is always to think where your foe will go if you hit him with your next attack and if you miss him with your next attack. This mindset allows you to compensate for either situation, your success or your mistake. Watch the enemy DI, also, because that tends to throw off your usual combo routine. Also, during aerial combos, you should fast-fall constantly so you can get to your opponent again before he or she can recover. In addition, you should have a specified plan for how you intend to finish off your opponent while executing your combos. Certain stages such as Corneria and Green Greens, with their obnoxiously low ceilings, call for vertical kills via plenty of up-throws, up-smashes, up-tilts, and the always-necessary up-aerial. If horizontal kills are more of what is in store for your foe, you should use horizontal throws to push them off of the stage, edgeguarding, edgehogging, and plenty of shine-spiking, as well as waveshines off of the stage's edge should you find yourself on such a stage. For characters with easily-predicted recovery moves, such as Captain Falcon and Ganondorf, you should know where they plan to direct themselves and ready an appropriate move for edgeguarding. The forward- and down-smash are particularly useful in this capacity. Again, the prevailing idea here is to know what you are going to do, what you usually do that consistently works, and how you can adjust your routines to take advantage of particular match-ups against certain characters, on certain stages, and against certain play styles. As is always the case, adaptation and consistency are the key words here.

c. Crush Your Enemy's Concentration

Playing as Fox is as much an exercise in button timing, speed, and coordination as it is a test of your own psychological warfare abilities. You as the quick Fox player need to have a coherent plan of attack for how you plan to break through your enemy's defenses and overwhelm him or her with your characteristic back-breaking combos. However, at the same time, you need to prevent your enemy from formulating his or her own plan of attack against you. You need to force him to pay attention to you rather than to his own character and strategies during the course of the entire match. Your goal in psychological warfare with Fox can be achieved using in no small part Fox's innate speed and ability to pressure and the unique properties of a few of his moves.

One of your goals during the course of your matches should be to disrupt your opponent's game plan and his focus on his own character and strategies. You have more than a few ways to achieve this. Your primary method is never to stagnate during a match. You must always be doing something that appears even remotely threatening, even at long distances. For example, if you plan to blaster spam, try Fox's SHL instead of a simple standing blaster. The SHL makes you more fluid in your movements and gives you far more options than the

standing blaster could ever hope to give you. It makes your opponent think about where you will go or what you will do after that next SHL. Will you continue with it and force him to come to you? How will he stop you? Can he afford to approach you directly when you can clearly see where he is going while he cannot see where you are going?

Don't stop moving during the course of the match. If you find yourself at a stage-length stand-off with your foe, don't stand still. That affords your opponent too much quiet time. Instead, start SHLing, or start dash-dancing, or fox-trot towards your opponent and play mind games with a dash-cancel or reverse wavedash. You don't want to give your opponent quiet time to think and compose his thoughts; you are Fox, and you are known in the SSBM community for your trademark pressuring abilities and faster-than-lightning speed. Use these traits to your advantage, but remember to take caution in your own actions and not simply charge headlong into any situation as a universal answer to everything. Smart pressuring combined with good decision-making should be your motto.

A lack of repetition in your moves will spread your foe's thoughts out over a large area and make you less predictable. A golden rule of practically every fighting game on the face of the earth is not to be repetitive. The human mind learns and adapts, obviously, and it will do that for your move set. For example, your foe may notice that you have trouble L-canceling fast-fallen aerials. The next time you try to hit him with a fast-fallen aerial, he will shield-grab you, and he will do this over and over again until you either correct your flaw or change your strategy to one more suited to your abilities. Another example is your opponent's noticing your dependence on the dash attack. He sees that you always run at him and use that particular move as an approach for a frontal attack, as if you had no other option. Now, he can predict your move as you come at him and yet again shield-grab you from your attack. In this case, you would need to adapt to his adaptation and try a new strategy. Hopefully, you will be broad-based enough in your abilities to be able to customize your strategies in response to your opponent's adaptation to your older ones.

Don't be afraid to show off randomly during the course of the match if you want to or can; it serves to do more than heighten your image. It also shows your opponent that you can do something, and that he should watch out for it. In addition, it occupies your opponent's mind with what else you may be capable of and how good you really are. For example, try to shine-spike at least once in your match, preferably at a significantly low percentage. After you shine-spike him, your foe will know that if you get him off the edge, he may die at a percentage too low for him to afford if he wants to keep up with you. This puts fear into his mind and forces him to spend some mental time thinking about how to prevent himself from losing another stock like that. Show off your shuffling skills during a small amount of idle time. SHL instead of standing still whenever you can. All of these things and more can intimidate your opponent, and intimidation is a form of mind games. You should not try to hold back your skills in a match for the purpose of "fooling" your foe. You will not be fooling anyone; you will simply be intentionally handicapping yourself against an opponent who may not be doing the same thing in a match where you will more than likely need those skills to survive.

d. Style: Aggressive

Fox and the aggressive style of play practically go hand-in-hand. Fox's unparalleled overall speed and the minimal lag on all of his moves make him perfect for hunting down and tearing apart unwary foes. Playing aggressively with Fox is walking a thin wire, though. On one hand, it is entirely possible to assume that you will simply overwhelm your opponent with your vicious speed and powerful finishing moves coupled with your enemy-spiking, priority-winning,

projectile-deflecting Reflector. On the other hand, if you go in with just the mind set of pure, unrefined aggression, you will put yourself in a tight spot in that you will not have thought of any possible obstacles in your way (like shield-grabbing) or formulated any plans on how best to maneuver past enemy defenses. Even simple answers like a reverse wavedash to space for a forward-smash or grab will break your pressure and possibly shift advantage to your opponent, with or without the loss of a stock.

If you really want to play straight aggro with Fox, at least do it in the smartest possible fashion. Master L-canceling, fast-falling, short-hopping, timing with the shine from an L-canceled aerial, jup-canceling grabs, wavedashing, dash-dancing, and waveshining. Granted, that list does cover a very large chunk of Fox's game, but it simply shows how difficult playing Fox well is. The above moves will greatly increase your speed, an absolute requirement for pure aggression, and allow you to flow from one back-breaking combo into another. In general, an aggro Fox must be very technically proficient in order to place the most pressure on anything from a confused opponent to a shield that appears in an attempt to slow your assault. Edgeguard aggressively and often, and always shine-spike whenever you get the chance, creating opportunities to do so with the aid of shines by the ledge and up-throws into shines. Rely on the up-aerial and up-smash for your fastest percentage kills if you cannot manage to shine spike. Use dash-dancing to keep your options open and wavedashing to fake out your opponent and open the way to a juggling combo. Most importantly, always keep on top of your enemy. Do not give him or her time to breathe or formulate a counter plan. Follow techs, follow wake-ups, follow jumps and air-dodges, whatever you must do to stay with them. You want your opponent's game to be a confused mess of chaos full of options that probably will not work against your all-out, technically-sound assault.

e. Style: Control

Fox can also play a relatively controlling game thanks to his shine and Blaster. The basics of the aggressive style, especially shuffling aerials and wavedashing, still apply to the control style of play, but with a greater emphasis on lasers and the Reflector. A common start to a controlling game is an immediate wavedash backwards followed by blaster shots until your foe works his way up to you. The blaster allows you to feel out your opponent. Judging by how he reacts to the blaster fire, you can formulate an estimate of his play style and how best to control it. If you are facing a character with a potent anti-projectile ability, you may have to switch to aggro with a mix of shines from L-canceled aerials in order to win priority quickly.

Controlling a game with Fox involves his speed, evasion, mind games, blaster, and shine. Dodge frequently to work your way up to your opponent, and start adding damage with your quick neutral "A" moves. Against more defense-oriented opponents, make them come to you with the blaster and stop any projectile ideas of their own with your shine. Use crouch-canceling and the CCC to lengthen your lifespan. Mind games are a must, complete with dash-canceling and reverse wavedashing into jump-canceled grabs. A shine from L-canceled aerials stops any notions of shield-grabbing thanks to its obscenely fast come-out time of 1 frame. Use intelligent shield-grabbing to play a strong defense and force your opponent to play to your whims, and stick to your fastest moves in close-range combat to tack on fast damage. In addition, don't be afraid to run or even Illusion away from a tight spot and begin firing your blaster from afar. You are playing a controlling game and want your foe to do what you want him to do.

f. Style: Aggro-Control

The aggro-control style is a balanced blend of the two styles of aggression and

control. It is best suited to the widest variety of situations that a Fox can encounter and allows you to be more flexible in your proceedings than a gun-ho aggro Fox or blaster-spamming control Fox. Keep in mind that this style may not necessarily work for you, and you should play your Fox however you feel is best for you. Oftentimes the best strategies are those you have concocted yourself.

Being an aggro-control Fox requires you to have a good amount of control over Fox's myriad of advanced techniques, especially the art of shuffling (which should be applied to every successful Fox's style anyway). Your goal is to adapt your game based on your opponent's game. For example, opponents that try to stay away from you should be cut down with blaster fire. In most cases, this will force them to come to you; now, you must switch into aggressive style and knock them off their feet with the fastest of your melee moves. Use your Jabs on the ground to tie up your foes, and be adept at instantly phasing into a grab if you see your opponent's protective bubble pop up. Remember that against defense-oriented opponents you have an equally solid defense. As mentioned before, your blaster aids you in controlling where your opponent is headed, and your shine serves double-duty in winning you close-range priority and batting away useless enemy projectiles. For weapons such as the Links' bombs and Peach's turnips, practice catching them instead of always reflecting them; this saves you the time when you are stuck after you reflect something (the slight pause in your Reflector) and allows you to use your opponent's weaponry against him or her.

An aggro-control Fox should make aggression his default stance against vastly slower characters such as Bowser, Mewtwo, and Ganondorf. These fighters have very few answers for your lightning melee moves (Ganondorf has the best shot at opposing you with his quick ground neutral A, and Bowser also has a pretty solid answer in his Fortress from shield, but that can be dealt with by proper shuffling through shields or by simply grabbing your shielding foe) and more often than not you can entangle them with Jabs and Straights that lead into stronger up-smashes or up-throws to up-aerials. If the situation warrants it, fall back on your blaster and allow them to meander over to you, in which case you can probably easily escape or start a quick combo. Against more aggressive opponents, make ample use of reverse wavedashes to space for down-tilts, up- and forward-smashes, and jump-canceled grabs.

Mix in close-range shines and aggressive style against faster opponents. Chances are that they will come to you more often and at a decent pace that can make blaster spamming and SHLing less effective. The close-range shines will allow you to dodge their shield-grabs, disable them long enough for a potentially lethal combo, and enable you to continue to put pressure on your foe. Faster opponents are generally lighter, so aim for vertical kills. Captain Falcon has a certain aversion for being killed in the air, as does Falco to a certain extent, but both have easily-exploited recoveries prone to being edge-guarded by ledge-hopped back-aerials, shine spikes from invincibility ledge frames, and even shines out of the Illusion, in Falco's case. Against aggressive opponents who fall over from the shine, make use of their falls to anticipate and follow techs and wake-ups and set up for juggling with an up-throw.

2. Mind Games

Mind games are difficult to put into concrete terms, but they are what will separate you from other players, win you games, and carry you further as a player. For a good thread on Smashboards concerning mind games, head to:

<http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=54186>

This thread, begun by g-regulate, is titled "DA MINDGRAINES: An Overview of

Mindgames" and is a solid start on the concept of mind games and their role in high-level Smash. Below I have outlined my own thoughts on the subject which may coincide with information also found in that same thread. I highly suggest taking some time to read through that thread if you wish to take your Smash game to the next level.

a. Know Yourself

As mind games are very much a part of anticipating, predicting, and following, knowing yourself, that is, how you play and what your habits are (both good and bad), can make a significant contribution to your success with both fighting off opposing mind games and creating some yourself. However, knowing your opponent is also a critical factor in the success of your own mind games as well as theirs. You will need to be aware enough to cultivate both aspects of the match.

Knowing yourself essentially boils down to being aware of how you fight: what your favored approaches are, how you edgeguard, how you combat edgeguarding, how you return from the ledge, how you tech and wake up, and ever more. Granted, when dealing with such an abstract concept as this, being able to define your own play from your own eyes can become quite difficult, if not impossible. This is where the ever-important human competition comes in; from another player's eyes, an outside player, one who anticipates, predicts, follows, and adjusts, the flaws in your play are made flagrantly obvious. Good human competition will do all of the above in their efforts to defeat you; they will take advantage of flaws in your innate game play, how you tech, how you wake up, predictable approaches and ledge returns, all this and more, and what's more is that they will punish you for your mistakes. They will take stocks off for your predictability and your failure to adapt; as such, if you want to continue to be competitive, if you want to take your game to the next level and defeat this and more higher-level opponents, you must play good human competition as often as possible. In this fashion, you have secured the best possible means of unearthing errors in your own game, and perhaps more importantly, you begin to see human tendencies, almost instinctual reflexes and thought patterns, all of which you can take advantage of and use to your own benefit. That topic, however, is for the next section; for now, the focus shall be on you as a player and how your play relates to your own potential for mind games as well as the possibility to have mind games used against you.

If the above paragraph has not brought home the sheer importance of good human competition in the evolution of a player's abilities, not much else will; the bottom line remains that humans will show you within the gameplay itself your own errors, what they are, how they capitalize on them, and what you should do differently in such situations. For example, maybe you are prone to teching in place virtually every time; perhaps you have a sort of urge to get back on your feet and back into the heat of battle, as if your opponent will not be there the next moment and you must be there before that moment comes. Eventually, the aware player will notice this tendency, and maybe they will follow you after they connect with that shuffled neutral-aerial, predict where you will land, wait for the in-place tech, and kill you with an up-smash, grab, or the like. Another scenario: perhaps when you are being pressured near the edge, you have an almost instinctual tendency to roll inward, away from the edge and away from the danger that being knocked off presents to your stock. Good players will follow you inward, either by running and canceling into a move as appropriate or wavedashing back with a lethal forward-smash (as is the case with Marth, Falco, and many others). Here is still another more involved scenario dealing with an often-critical issue that many players do not even realize they fall prey to. As Fox, you fall over when shined by another Fox, obviously; however, what many players insist on doing in the heat of battle (especially in as fast-paced a match as a Fox ditto) is to continue hitting buttons as they fly

through the air and subsequently land on their back; the end result of this is that that Fox player will always get up with a wake-up attack, something that in the Fox ditto almost certainly leads to death or very heavy damage. Once again, the aware player will wavedash out of the shine to follow you to where you will hit the ground, hold up his or her shield, and promptly shield-grab you, which will lead to either chain throwing to a lethal up-smash or a simple up-smash to damaging up-aerial juggling. Once again, your own habits have led to your downfall as your foes take advantage of your predictability and effortlessly follow your every move.

The same thing can occur even when you switch things up in an attempt to throw off your opponent. Say that the first time Link lands a hookshot on you, you tech roll to the left; now say that the Link calls you on that and you decide not to tech-roll in the same direction again (that would be being predictable, would it not?), instead opting to tech-roll to the right; however, you are again caught with another hookshot, and this time you decide not to tech-roll either of those ways again but instead to tech in place. A well-placed up+B then sends you flailing away. What this is an example of is that predictability can still exist even as you attempt to do something different in each instance of teching, waking up, or what have you. Indeed, such an occurrence is predictability in itself; your opponent knows that you will not attempt what you have just done and no longer needs to think about that possibility but rather only the few remaining ones. Such is a very common rule governing the behavior of many human opponents: they will not try something they have just done since in their eyes that would be being predictable. You as a player must notice when you are being punished for your attempts to change things; sometimes not changing is a good thing. Perhaps you have your opponent conditioned to your tendency to tech in a different direction each time and the next time a bout of tech chasing breaks out, you instead opt to tech in the same place two or perhaps even three times in a row if you can cut it, or perhaps you opt not to tech at all and instead simply crash to the floor. All are instances of how mind games are used against you and how you can subsequently turn the tables on said mind games and use them to your advantage.

Thus, knowing your own habits and fighting them as appropriate in a match can both foster more successful mind games on your part and foil them on your foe's part. Knowing yourself essentially allows you to "counter-read" your opponent and have a solid notion of what tendencies and habits he or she is reading for, enabling you to act contrary to their expectations and thus minimize their mental power over you. With a good deal of human competition, this knowledge of yourself will become ever clearer and will manifest itself more easily and more quickly in your game play.

b. Know Your Opponent

The next major phase concerning mind games is not only to know yourself but also to know your opponent. Many players talk of "reading" their foes; this is in essence knowing your enemy and making use of his or her own tendencies to make your mind games successful and punish mistakes, often with fatal results. In order to do this, you must know the basic tendencies of human players as well as of your opponent in particular. Read on for more information.

For many players, especially lower-level ones, there are certain reactions that are almost instinctual. For example, when being pressured near the edge with their back facing the empty air, they may instinctively jump or roll inward in an attempt to escape; both of these are common human reactions for players who do not think and fight their natural reactions to such situations. Another example: perhaps when your foe stands up as their wake-up, they tend to spot-dodge as soon as possible in anticipation of a grab right then and there; the aware player will simply wait for the dodge and punish afterward with a grab or

lethal smash. In another instance, perhaps if you apply pressure to a certain player's shield consistently, he or she will roll to either side in an attempt both to escape your pressure and to conserve his or her shield; you should notice this and be ready to follow in either direction with a jump-canceled grab or up-smash.

One of the most common places in which discovered habits are often lethal is in edge play, both in recovery and in getting back onto the stage itself. For example, many players will want to roll inward from the ledge, thinking that it will get them the farthest away from their opponent at the edge; or maybe he or she tends to stand up off of the edge and hold up the shield in anticipation of an attack that could send him or her back out. A reverse wavedash can punish the first instance very well, and a simple grab to forward- or back-throw (as appropriate) could lead to lethal edgeguarding in the second. One of the most common mistakes that many players make is attacking too hastily from the ledge; the moment they grab the ledge, they want to make use of those precious few invincibility frames and return with a protective attack, whether it is a ledge-hopped knee from Falcon, a ledge-hopped down-aerial from Fox, or other such returns. In all of these instances, it is your job to have an understanding of your opponent's habits and tendencies and how best you can apply these to your own mind games to remove stocks.

The common thread running between combating mind games and creating them is great awareness on your part. You must have the focus to understand your own habits, to make use of them and work against them as needed, and you must be aware enough to pick up on your opponent's habits and take advantage of the openings that they create to remove stocks.

3. The Power of Spacing and Stage Control

The analysis of options and their respective consequences is a fundamental aspect of most any human endeavor, Melee included. From real-time strategy games to card games and beyond, awareness of options and what they can do for an individual (as well as how they can work against that same individual) is an integral part of higher-level thinking. In card games, options can vary as a function of the cards which one is dealt or that are previously played. In real-time strategy games, options can vary as a function of unit composition, the results of myriad battles, positioning, or elapsed game time. In Melee, options vary largely as a function of spacing.

On the surface, spacing does not seem like all that powerful of a concept. Making the most of a move's range or keeping the space between combatants just so very often does not yield any overt results. Damage is not immediately dealt, stocks are not immediately removed, and opponents are not immediately sent off-stage as would occur if a well-timed Smash attack connected. However, what one must realize is that the power of spacing does not lie within any immediate (or even tangible) results. Rather, the beauty of spacing is that one can essentially control and manipulate the options of oneself and one's opponent through the use of range; this includes both the range of moves and the "range" of space between opposing characters.

This kind of manipulation comes only with time. It builds off of a foundation of knowledge of the game itself, and not only knowledge of each and every move's respective ranges but also knowledge of how both parties' situational options vary as a function of the space between them. A simple example of this deals with Marth and the power of his tippered forward-smash. Marth players are very well aware that a forward-smash possesses its greatest knockback at its tip; this is a very overt example of the potential rewards to be reaped from proper spacing in the form of greater knockback and a possible opposing stock removed via edge-guarding (an option further down the road that was opened via

proper spacing). Because of these (potential) great rewards, experienced Marth players will move and position themselves in such a way as to keep the tipper option (and its resulting edge-guarding options) open to them. On the flip side, opposing characters will move so as to remove or limit these options, whether this means staying a full stage length away with lasers or, if one is cornered near the ledge, intentionally moving towards the opposing Marth to alter the spacing between the characters and at the very least make a tipped forward-smash more difficult to land. In both cases, both parties are aware of the options that proper usage of range presents to them, and as such both move (space) themselves accordingly to manipulate these options for their own respective gain.

Let us take a look at another common situation in the Marth vs. Fox match-up that again illustrates the power of spacing (albeit perhaps in a less obvious fashion). The stage is Final Destination, and a slightly impatient Fox decides to make an approach on a dash-dancing and reverse-wavedashing Marth. To do so, the Fox decides to run up and shield at random intervals, knowing that a significant portion of Marth's game relies upon proper spacing and also knowing the disastrous consequences of Marth's mis-spacing on a Fox's shield. At this point, we reach a fork in the road. Assume first that the Fox properly spaces his run-in shield against the Marth's retaliatory forward-smash (meaning that the Marth has improperly spaced his forward-smash). Now, the Marth is caught in a double bind; not only is he now in lag time from the missed Smash, but he is also within range of the Fox (a key phrase here) such that the Fox has the options of shield-grabbing and up-smashing out of shield available to him, neither of which is particularly desirable to the Marth player. Assume that the Fox fully capitalizes on the situation and chooses to up-smash out of shield; this ends the stock of the higher-damage Marth. Note how proper use of spacing by the Fox amplified his options (and their respective return) while simultaneously severely limiting (and eventually entirely removing) his opponent's options. This is the power of proper spacing.

However, let us now consider the reverse scenario, one in which the Fox mis-spaces himself and the Marth spaces properly. The Fox runs in and shields, but is too far away from the Marth to grant himself any options. While the Marth does forward-smash the shield, it is properly spaced out as a tipper, and the interplay of range, timing, and options allows the Marth to escape unscathed while the Fox is now presented with the problem not only of safely escaping his shield but also of spacing himself away from the Marth, who as a projectile-less character was looking for an opportunity to initiate close-range combat. Again, note how this use of spacing amplifies Marth's options while at the same time restricting the Fox's, most notably by preventing laser camping.

Still another example arises in the case of a post-juggling scenario in which your opponent is attempting to reach solid ground again to regain his composure. The lesson here is quite apparent. Put simply, if your opponent steers himself too closely to you, he grants you the option of back-airing him and possibly sending him further off-stage to his death via edge-guarding. However, if your opponent anticipates this option and moves out of range (that is, spaces himself) of any back-aerial, he has granted himself the option of returning to the stage while removing your option of the back-aerial and its concurrent edge-guarding (and, potentially, the removal of an entire stock). Take note how a simple decision like moving out of range (proper spacing) can head off the problem of being edge-guarded and, thus, the problem of losing an entire stock to an easily-avoided attack. Therein lies the beauty and the power of proper spacing; the simultaneous removal of options from your opponent and the creation of your own allows you quite simply to do more and to escape punishment far more frequently.

Stage control is in the same league as spacing when it comes to option

variance. Put simply, control of the stage determines a myriad of occurrences within the game, from readying an opponent for edge-guarding to preventing that same edge-guarding to limiting an opponent's movement and escape options and more. The essence of stage control lies within an ongoing struggle for territory, which represents the entirety of the scene of battle. For most stages, this territory will be rather static and unchanging, as with Final Destination and Battlefield. For others, however, such as Rainbow Cruise and Poke Floats, the surroundings are anything but static, and it is in such circumstances that knowledge of the stage itself can facilitate one's quest for stage control and the rewards that it brings.

For the most part, stage control hinges on your opponent having his back to the edge or blast zone and you facing your opponent with the remainder of the stage behind you. This is a flagrant case of nigh-complete stage control; rarely will such a situation present itself, but it is this ideal for which you should aim. Note in this situation how your opponent's options are limited; he can grab the edge and attempt a slightly risky ledge-hop maneuver (such as a waveland on-stage with invincibility), he can try to jump over or roll behind you, or he can attempt to push in with an attack, all in an attempt to reclaim territory for the time being and give himself some breathing room. Note also how most of these options can be addressed simply by properly spacing oneself from the edge or from your opponent and reacting to your foe's movements. It is this interplay of spacing and stage control that sets the stage (quite literally) for edge-guarding and the removal of stocks.

With his combination of speed, power, priority, and a projectile, Fox is an absolute master at controlling the stage against most every character in the game save perhaps Falco. Your blaster is pivotal in dictating the opposition's movements, especially characters such as Marth who have little to no immediate answer to it. You must flaunt this control whenever it is advantageous to prepare for a low-percent gimp or a ledge trap that could cost your opponent a hefty amount of percent. This is done by luring your opponent to the edge with a combination of blaster fire and properly-spaced dash-dance weaves, and then having a plan for turning the tables on your opponent and trapping them at the edge (for example, an unexpected roll inwards or a neutral-aerial approach to set up for pressure meant to push your foe to the other end of the stage).

Just as Fox has options for dictating stage control, he likewise has options for gaining momentum and thwarting an opponent's plans when he or she holds the majority of the stage. A Fox who remains highly mobile via a combination of dash-dances, platform wavelands, proper spacing, and flawless technicals can very easily find a hole in an opponent's contain and break through, allowing the Fox to achieve stage control and push the opposition to the edge, where enemy options are limited and stocks are put on the line (for both parties, mind you). Similarly, Fox's high-powered offense of shuffled and full-jump neutral-aerials and lasers can very easily force an opponent into his or her shield, stealing mobility from them just long enough for you to regain stage control. Keep this in mind whenever you are feeling pressured; even a single connected aerial can turn the tide of battle instantly.

Stage control is especially critical for a fast-faller such as Fox, who can very easily fall pray to outlandish combos, chain-grabs, and the resulting edge-guarding. Ideally, you will always want to focus play on the center of the stage as this will minimize your opponent's opportunities for low-percent gimps. This is especially critical in tournament play, where the psychological blow that such gimps can deal is more than enough to get your enemy back into the game, regardless of how many stocks he or she is down). This when combined with the simple fact that a stock and its potential for damage and taking opposing stocks was cut short can very easily cost you the game. Do your utmost best to control center-stage at all times, but especially against characters

such as Marth and Jigglypuff, who have very potent off-stage and edge-guarding games more than capable of taking a stock of their own accord. Properly spaced blaster play, dash-dancing, and properly-spaced offensive approaches will ensure that you control the most territory.

Of course, stage control is not always as simple as commanding a static, flat slab of land such as Final Destination. Indeed, many tournament rulesets permit the inclusion of dynamic stages, such as Rainbow Cruise and Poke Floats. In these cases, controlling center stage is better defined as controlling center screen as you are no longer battling on a set piece of land. On stages such as these, it is absolutely paramount that you know what is coming up, where it is coming, and so on; this is further enforced by the fact that the scrolling nature of the stage itself forces movement at the very high cost of lost stocks for noncompliance. As well, speedy characters such as Fox wield a considerable amount of influence on such stages (indeed, both of the aforementioned moving stages are excellent counterpicks for Fox in general). The fact that Fox can simply outrun most any opponent allows his controller to set up and spring positioning traps on most any dynamic stage (this is assuming, of course, that said controller has adequate knowledge of the stage itself to apply to the laying of these traps).

A simple example of these positioning traps stems from Rainbow Cruise. After the pendulum portion, the stage begins a forced scroll to the right. The intelligent Fox player will aim to beat his opponent to that side of the screen and commandeer the platforms that appear shortly thereafter on that side of the stage. In doing so, the Fox player uses the mechanics of the stage itself to his advantage. The forced scroll forces the opponent to encroach upon the Fox's territory with a limited array of options, such as double-jumping or air-dodging. In this situation, the Fox should be prepared with a suitable read for his opponent's advance and punish accordingly, perhaps with a back-aerial or the like. Here, the power of stage control, when combined with the very nature of the stage itself and Fox's innate mobility and speed, allowed the Fox player to govern his opponent's movements and choices to his advantage while simultaneously crimping the opposition's options. Similar situations can be seen under Corneria's fin, on Brinstar when the lava obscures all platforms but the highest one, and still more. You should strive at all times to craft situations such as these. Again, the hallmarks of proper stage control (as with proper spacing) are a maximization of your options and pay-offs and a minimization of your foe's.

4. Prediction and the Problem-Solution Methodology

Many a time has the question "How do I predict my opponent?" been asked both on and off the forums. Try as I might, I struggled mightily at best to answer this query. Prediction (or reading) is a highly cerebral, highly abstract area of the game that cannot be actively learned so much as it is slowly but surely acquired through time and experience. What makes this situation all the more frustrating for up-and-coming players is that the ability to read opponents is absolutely essential to perform at higher levels; it is this necessity that quite frequently causes players to plateau for long periods of time until a personal epiphany of sorts finally dawns upon them and they at long last gain the power to manipulate the mental, psychological, and human aspects of the game for their own benefit. It is this, the mental game, that separates the run-of-the-mill, every-day players from the truly imposing and intimidating top-level players.

However, all of this still begs the question of "How do I predict my opponent?" I believe that part of the problem of "learning" how to predict lies within the fact that there exists no organizational structure or construct for understanding the details of prediction and reading; as such, players take a glance

at the concept of prediction and are simply overwhelmed in terms of how to approach such an abstract idea. In contrast, the task of learning technical feats is much less daunting as these movements exist within an organized, highly-defined construct. For example, most of the community is familiar with shuffling, what it does, its uses, and (more importantly, for the sake of this discussion) how to perform it. Its components can be broken down into readily-understandable steps which can be performed overtly before our eyes and observed many times over. With this sense of organization and encapsulation, learning these technical maneuvers becomes far less daunting a task, one that is quite accessible to most of the Melee-playing population. However, no such overt construct or hierarchy exists when dealing with the mental game; it is this fact that prevents many a player from breaking through this "wall" and ascending to the next plateau of skill, often for years on end.

The difficulty stems from grasping the nature of just what one is predicting. While one is in fact reading human decision-making, the method of doing so is so abstract that "learning" this concept becomes a chore in and of itself. What one must realize, however, is that the roots of prediction lie within what is essentially a problem-solution hierarchy. In a nutshell, throughout the course of any match, each player is presented with an ever-changing multitude of "problems"; these can range from being edge-guarded to being lasered by a far-off Fox or Falco to being trapped in one's shield and still more. Each of these situations is a microcosm of a problem (either one-time or extended) to which the player in question must find a solution. The solutions are chosen from the player's toolbox of options, such as any number of attacks, jumping, spot-dodging, rolling, and so on. It is through these solutions that a player seeks to alleviate the pressure of the situation and thus "solve" the problem. Following this line of thinking, the opposing player can construct in his or her mind a set of options, or "solutions," for a particular situation and choose from among those opposing solutions to form a basis for prediction. This choice can be made through any number of mechanisms, be it through completely random choice (not the ideal route, of course), anticipation of a switch-up, probability of choice based on previous actions, and so on. In effect, the opposing player's solution to his or her problem becomes your problem, to which you must now find a solution (that is, act on your prediction and punish accordingly).

While we have now imposed a sort of rough (at best) governing structure on prediction, this alone will not guarantee you a sudden increase in your reading abilities. Experience still plays an immeasurably huge role in this method, as it does with all instances of prediction. To be able to encapsulate a foe's possible options in one's mind quickly enough to decide and act upon a course of action is a skill that takes time to develop, not one that can be picked up by rote memorization or repetition of sequences of buttons. With that said, let us examine a few instances of the problem-solution methodology for prediction at work.

The scenario is as follows: a Fox ditto on Stadium with your opponent's back to the edge and shielding. You are facing your opponent and must decide upon an effective course of action. Putting yourself in your foe's shoes, you realize that he has a set of options available to him for escaping this situation, which is his "problem." For example, he can wavedash onto the ledge to steal invincibility frames and mount a comeback from there; wavedash forward out of shield into a jab, shine, or other quick move to steal close-range control from you and push inward; spot-dodge; roll inward; jump out of shield; continue shielding and wait for a faulty response on your end; and so on. Now, the possibility that he might escape your pressure and stage control with any one of these choices, his "solutions," presents itself as a problem to you. At this point, your enemy's possible solutions to his dilemma function as your basis of prediction. Assume that you choose to read for a jump at the ledge; this would

be your solution to the possibility that your foe would attempt to solve his problem and escape your pressure. You wavedash backwards to space out the arc of the neutral-aerial, or perhaps you time a forward-smash to catch him just as he jumps out (a riskier choice) or dash-dance away and then reverse wavedash back in to space for a back-aerial. Whatever your choice, assume that you succeed in predicting his solution to his problem and catch him out of his jump. Your correct read now puts you in a more favorable position for edge-guarding, giving you the opportunity to take his stock.

Now assume that the same situation occurs again later in the same match. Your foe remembers that you have once before predicted his hair-trigger jump at the ledge. His problem now becomes not being read again. While the problem has changed, the solutions remain largely the same as last time; however, the jump option initially presents itself as the weaker route as you succeeded in calling it out last time. As a result, your opponent chooses a different option and opts to roll inward. At the same time that this thought process is occurring in your foe's mind, a parallel process runs through yours. You realize that his problem lies within the fact that you previously predicted his jump; as a result, you bank on the fact that he will not choose the same option twice in a row for fear of the same punishment. This time, you count on him rolling inward to escape the pressure, and you wavedash backwards to space for the grab or up-smash, successfully catching him and removing the stock with your follow-up. You have again applied the problem-solution method, this time to catch your foe's mix-up. Of course, no player's prediction is perfect, and your opponent may very well have chosen a different option. If he chose instead to wavedash forward and jab or shine, you very well may have been caught off-guard, and the tides of battle would have very quickly reversed. Note, however, that at times your solutions may cover more than one of your opponent's solutions. For example, your wavedashing back would account for his rolling inward or pushing in with a short-range attack. Be especially wary of these situations as being able to cover multiple options at once very much aids your prediction and punishment games.

Remember also that the rock-paper-scissors nature of the game can also factor into this process. For example, most players are quite familiar with the speed of Peach's first neutral-A slap. Imagine that you are playing a rather aggressive float-canceling Peach who has repeatedly approached you with float-canceled forward-aerials, which you have repeatedly shielded. As you attempt to jump out of your shield to escape the pressure, however, you are tied up by a slap, which brings you back down into a damaging chain-grab to neutral-aerial finisher. As the match grinds on, you begin to hold your shield past the forward-aerial and subsequent slap, escaping with a quick shine after jumping out of your shield. Later on, you find that your opponent has begun forward-aerialing your shield and then proceeding immediately with a grab as a reaction to your held shield. You respond by spot-dodging out of your shield into a wave-shine to up-smash. Your opponent then switches to a delayed down-smash out of the forward-aerial and catches you crouch-canceling out of the spot-dodge. You switch things up to a light shield to cover both bases of the slap and down-smash. Later, your opponent begins grabbing out of the forward-aerial again, and so on. Just when these switch-ups occur will be up to you to decide and to read; indeed, calling the precise timing of opposing switch-ups is one of the greatest challenges of prediction.

Aspects of the stage itself may also play a role in influencing the problem-solution process. For example, the windmill transformation of Stadium may prompt your opponent to solve his recovery dilemma on the left side by Fire-foxing for the windmill. He may even be so crafty as to position himself at a 45-degree angle to the ledge so that you are forced to choose between his angling down at the ledge, directly at you, or up to the windmill.

State of mind is yet another consideration when applying the problem-solution method. For example, if you are down a stock or two in a match and have been on the receiving end of a barrage of hits from your opponent, you may opt to solve your problem of being hit by attacks by putting up your shield out of instinct. Your opponent, however, anticipates your solution and comes in with a grab, continuing his pressure unimpeded while simultaneously taking control of your positioning on the stage. Take care not to let fear or anxiety seize control of your decision-making during a match. Much like the habitual tech inwards at the ledge and stand-up to spot-dodge, these emotions can cause you to become more predictable than you would like and will poke innumerable holes in your game, any one of which can cost you the game.

The problem-solution method can also be applied to tech-chasing. For example, you notice that your opponent plays a particularly impatient style of Marth, one that always seems to want to get back into the fight at all costs. Your neutral-aerial approach knocks him to the ground, and the time comes for him to tech. Using what you know or "feel" about your foe to your advantage, you predict that he will tech in place as that option will give him the fastest solution to his dilemma of being knocked off his feet. You choose a jump-canceled up-smash as punishment, and it connects. Fast-forward now to the final stocks of the match, a time where nerves run high and decision-making very often suffers as a result. Your neutral-aerial approach again knocks your foe to the ground, but fear takes hold of him and he now wants to get away from you rather than jump back into the thick of things. His solution to the problem of being knocked to the ground near the end of the match is to tech away, towards the ledge. Sensing this fear, you predict his solution to his problem and give chase, again with a jump-canceled up-smash that gives you the final kill and thus the match win.

From player style and the nature of the stage to the emotional state of the match and the previous success of opposing reads, any number of factors can influence both you and your opponent's decision-making during the course of a game. The problem-solution method simply gives you a method of encapsulating the nature of prediction such that it can more easily be mentally grasped; by no means is it a sure-fire way to call out each and every one of your enemy's decisions. However, by imposing some semblance of organization on the highly-abstract nature of the mental game, I hope to provide a starting point for players seeking to incorporate this final frontier of the game into their repertoire.

C. The Shine

1. Introduction

The shine, the reflector, the hex, whatever you want to call it, Fox's down + B is easily his defining move for high-level play. This is so true that you can probably weed out higher-level Fox players from a crowd of them just by asking what the uses of his Reflector are. The most common answer will be "To reflect projectiles," but the higher-level players will know that it is much, much more than that. This section is devoted to the uses, properties, and abilities of Fox's shine and how to incorporate them into your game.

2. Properties of the Shine

Fox's shine is among the most interesting moves in the game. At first glance, it seems to serve only to reflect projectiles back from whence they came, but upon closer examination, you will see that it can do far more than just that. Proper use of the vulpine's shine will set you apart from other Fox players in your abilities, so learn the following sections well and practice frequently.

The shine (I will refer to Fox's down + B as the "shine" from now on) has a come-out time of exactly 1 frame, or 1/60 of a second, making it the fastest move in the entire game (among others). It can hit opponents right when it comes out, and thanks to its insane start time, you can effortlessly and instantly whip it out in close-range combat. When you use the shine, it will stop all of your horizontal movement in the air, an interesting trick that has a use or two. You can also turn around while in the shine, yet another trick with its own uses that will be discussed later in this section. In addition, the shine also has a set knockback (meaning that it will always send the opponent the same distance regardless of their percentage but dependant upon traction). Try shining Luigi and any other character and you will see the difference. Another property of the shine is that it will always knock the opponent away from you, never towards you.

You can also do many things to get out of the shine and into virtually anything else that Fox can do. You can jump out of the shine, a technique known as jump-canceling. This will instantly cut off the shine's animation and restore your movement (note that if you do not jump-cancel the shine, you will have to wait for it to disappear on its own, a process that takes 3 or 4 blinks, which is way too long for a Fox player). Since you can jump out of the reflector, you can also short-hop, wavedash, and jump-cancel grab and up-smash out of it. Practice all of these methods and try to incorporate them into your game whenever possible, especially wavedashing out of the shine ("waveshining") and, to a lesser extent, jump-cancel grabbing out of the shine.

Remember way back in this massive guide when it said that you could perform a jump-canceled grab by canceling your running jump with Z? Thanks to this ability, you can grab immediately out of the shine, although it is very difficult to shine someone and then grab them as they slip away quickly; as such, the primary use of grabbing out of the shine is against opponents who insist on holding up their shields for long periods of time to endure your pressuring assaults. You can also up-smash out of the shine, a fast, uncounterable finisher to any of Fox's various infinites.

3. Using the Shine

Below is an extensive look at the uses of Fox's shine, how to perform them, and how they figure into your game plan. Enjoy!

a. Reflecting Projectiles

For most new Fox players, this is the shine's only use. They are far from correct in assuming this, but it is nevertheless a very useful ability of the shine. For those of you who do not know how to reflect a projectile with the reflector, you simply activate the shine with down + B and wait for the offending missile to crash into you. It will be sent back from whence it came with no harm done to you. This causes you to reverse direction inside the shine, and also freezes you in the shine for a bit (during this time, you cannot jump-cancel the shine, making reflecting projectiles with the shine a bit of a hassle against faster characters that can also pressure you and capitalize on your down time in the shine).

For most opponents, your shine is a gigantic hamper to a great deal of their plans. It stops most if not all of their long-distance attacks, forcing them to come to you and your compliment of lightning-fast melee moves. Should they refuse to budge, you always have your trusty Blaster at your side, ready to come out with a tap of the B button. Should they shield, it is only a matter of time before the blaster bolts or your own attacks break their weakened shield and completely expose them to your onslaught. The shine is largely responsible for the nightmares that Fox gives such foes as Samus, Link, and Young Link, all

of whom are heavily dependant upon their projectiles to keep from being overwhelmed at close-range. Remember that you have defenses other than the shine against a select few other projectiles. For example, you can Jab or dash-attack a boomerang away, catch a bomb or a turnip, cancel Sheik's needles with blaster bolts, or stop the aerial movement of a thrown bomb with blaster bolts. Sometimes you should resort to these tactics to avoid the down time the shine has when it reflects a projectile, thus freeing you to continue to apply pressure.

b. Winning Close-Range Priority

The shine's one-frame start time lends it a fantastic ability to counter (or "clank") melee moves. Don't be afraid to use the shine in close quarters; that is in fact one of its most useful moments. The shine is so fast that it is possible to activate it in between the hits of a rapid attack, although Sheik's and Kirby's rapid attacks may be too fast for human hands to shine-counter. Use the shine during hand-to-hand combat to outpace your foe's vastly slower moves, either clanking them or hitting your enemy with the shine and effectively yanking the controls away from him for a split second. Once you have countered an attack, it opens the way for your own follow-up and disallows slower moves thanks to the pressure you are applying. Try a nice up-smash after clash-canceling your opponent's attack to really throw him for a loop (or kill him, whatever happens).

c. Gaining Close-Range Control

This somewhat ties in with "Winning Close-Range Priority." Again, thanks to the shine's incredible start time, you can pull it out at virtually any time in melee combat. Your aim in melee combat against an aggressive opponent is to gain control using the shine. An opponent who is shined at close proximity temporarily loses control of his fighter while he or she is in the "hurt" animation. This serves to take the pressure off of you and heap it onto your opponent, who with his controls now shortly severed is open to your wealth of fast combo options. Wavedash out of your shine and into whatever you please, preferably a move that will set them up for juggling or a fast Jab to throw them off their feet and into your combos.

d. Shine Spiking

A feared ability of Fox is his ability to spike at very low percentages with his shine. To do this, simply get your opponent off the stage, jump into them, shine, and jump-cancel back onto the stage (or grab onto the ledge, perhaps with the aid of a mid-shine turn-around). To shine spike effectively, you must hit your opponent with the lower-right portion of the shine's hexagonal shape; this will send them off in a 30-45 degree angle away from the stage. Remember that the back of Fox's shine has a bit more range, so try to jump off facing the ledge. A correctly performed shine spike will push your enemy in an obscene angle too far away from the stage to recover, and this spike cannot be meteor-canceled. It is best to grab onto the ledge after shine spiking to make it more difficult for your target to return, so you can either jump off facing the ledge as stated before or turn around in the shine after shine spiking to jump to the ledge. Shine spiking puts your opponent in a very tough spot and you in total control since you either kill them, edgehog them to their death, or make it back to the ledge before them and in time to edgeguard. Shine spiking devastates nearly every character save Yoshi, Mewtwo, Kirby, Jigglypuff, and at times Pichu and Pikachu, who may be able to Quick Attack far enough to reach the stage again. Shine spiking is absolutely essential for a high-level Fox; you didn't expect to KO everyone using the old-fashioned build-up-percentage-and-smack-away method, did you?

At higher levels of play, your opponents will attempt to maneuver around your shine spikes by, for example, going so far out after their last jump to do their recovery that you become reluctant to follow them out there. Do not fall for their ruse if you can help it; you would be surprised at how far your Fire Fox extends in whatever direction you so require. Do your best to follow and gain distance on them with your two jumps; you only need a single shine to connect to take off a stock, and your Fire Fox can save you from nearly anywhere off-stage (to a certain limit, of course), especially if you do not allow yourself to fall too far once your shine out of your second jump deactivates. In certain situations, you do not even need to go off-stage to land a shine-spike. For example, by listening to the "ping" of enemy Illusions and timing your shine accordingly, you can kill your space animal opponent out of his or her recovery in a single frame. Dropping down from the ledge to shine spike is also a very powerful technique, particularly when coupled with the invincibility frames granted by grabbing the ledge. This can foil all manner of once-difficult-to-shine-spike recoveries, ranging from Peach to Donkey Kong to Marth to Link to Samus. With good timing and anticipation as well as these invincibility frames, you can land lethal shine-spikes that you never thought were possible.

e. Setting Up For a Combo

The shine is a simply amazing tool for setting up your combos. Since you can jump-cancel it and therefore do anything else that involves jumping out of it (such as wavedashing or grabbing), it serves two roles at close-range: to lower your opponent's defenses and to stun them just long enough for you to wavedash into a combo. Note that you must wavedash out of the shine, not triangle-jump, if you hope to follow it with a combo; triangle jumping will not get you anywhere near close enough to your opponent.

With your opponent temporarily zapped by the shine, what can you possibly do to follow up? Oftentimes, it depends on the traction of the character. If you have just shined a Luigi, you will not be able to reach him in time to follow up adequately, no matter how fast at wavedashing you are. For lower-traction characters, think of the shine as a way to push them away from you and give yourself some time to breathe or whip out your Blaster for long-range abuse.

On the other hand, you can have all sorts of fun with the higher-traction characters. Toy around with short-hopping out of the shine and into forward aerials or even up-aerials. Triangle-jumping out of the shine is relatively useless since it does not carry you as far as wavedashing would, and that effectively defeats the purpose of comboing out of the shine. Once you have mastered wavedashing out of the shine, or waveshining, you will have opened up an entire new world of comboing opportunities with Fox. The shine and wavedash work extremely well together. The shine, with its one-frame come-out time, stuns the foe long enough for you to follow up with something. That something is jump-canceling the shine into a wavedash toward your opponent, making it look like you are gliding on top of your foe. It looks very cool, but looks are definitely not the reason for doing this. With the shine, you have disabled your foe for less than a second, enough time for you to execute an attack at the end of your wavedash. See the section on waveshining (12) in this section for effective, powerful follow-ups to the waveshine.

f. Countering Shield Grabbing

This is a gigantic plus for the shine. Shield-grabbing is an easy yet very effective technique, and every player can do it if they know of it. Again, due to the shine's crazy come-out, you can intercept an arm just as it appears from underneath its protective shield and zap the body to which it belongs, a very useful tactic to say the least. This has the advantage of not only stopping the

shield grab but also allowing you to waveshine into a combo. Try to follow most of your L-canceled aerial attacks with a jump-canceled shine in order to counteract shield grabbing. It makes life so much more difficult for your opponent and much easier for you. If you are adept at shining shield grabs, it will not surprise you that you will rarely if ever be grabbed within the course of a match (remember to rotate out if you are grabbed, though!).

Keep in mind, however, that smarter opponents will adjust to your shines from your aeriels, holding up their shields past your shines and waiting for the time afterwards to retaliate (this is especially true within the context of the modern metagame, where easy openings via shield-grabs are few and far between). You can respond to this in a number of ways. You can simply continue to wave-shine their shield (obviously with in-place waveshines) such that their steadily decreasing shield will force them to jump, wavedash, spot-dodge, or attack out, in which case you should be prepared to follow. Should you feel confident in your technical abilities, you can continue to pound on their shield with an assortment of aeriels, either shuffled out of the shine (a sort of "pillaring" of Fox's) or full-jumped into further repetitions, until they are again forced to retreat out, which you should also try to follow to the best of your abilities. You can also make use of a tactic rarely used by many Fox players and grab straight out of your shine. Since you can jump-cancel both grabs and the shine, logic serves that you can also jump-cancel the shine straight into a grab. Simply shine, jump with your choice of X, Y, or the control stick, and cancel that jump into a grab using Z. This trick is not very technically demanding and punishes very effectively for attempts to counter your shines from aeriels, essentially netting you a free grab to your choice of follow-up each time that you collide with a shield. Given the power of Fox's grab game, you will find that this mix-up is a very powerful asset to possess.

g. Edgeguarding

Fox's shine also has the ability to edgeguard in a capacity similar to shine spiking. Since it has no start-up time at all and can clash-cancel virtually any move, you can activate the shine as soon as Fox has a frame to spare. To edgeguard with the shine, simply position yourself on the very edge of the level and activate the shine whenever your opponent nears the ledge (you may need to jump and immediately cancel your jump with a mid-air shine in order to intercept your opponent's trajectory). Once you have shined your foe from the ledge, you have a few options on how to proceed. You can continue to edgeguard with the shine or any other applicable move until your foe falls, or you can short-hop fast-fall (or regular jump and fast-fall) off the edge and finish him or her off with a lethal shine spike. Characters with already horrendous vertical recovery moves, such as Donkey Kong, Mario, and Doctor Mario, are particularly weak to shine edgeguarding. As well, at lower percents, you can even crouch-cancel into a shine as a novel (and largely lethal) method of edge-guarding.

h. Stopping Horizontal and Upward Movement

When Fox activates his shine, it halts him in place and stops all horizontal and upward movement. Stopping your upward movement is useful for mind games to throw off your falling foe's retaliatory attack timing, and remember that you can quickly turn around in the shine to use your back-aerial instead of the forward-aerial (the back-aerial is far more powerful) as your response. If you are knocked through the air, activating the shine stops all of your horizontal movement. Oftentimes, this occurs faster than the time it takes for you to wiggle out of your stun and jump. Stopping in the air with the shine does not require you to waste a jump, a surprisingly important ability.

There are some circumstances when you are hit away from an enemy by a melee

attack that there is a small window of frames when you can activate the shine at a very close proximity to the one who hit you. If you find this moment of time and shine during it, you will stop Fox's movement through the air and can then jump-cancel out of the shine and dash away to a safer place where you can plan your next move. If you shine fast enough, you may catch the attacking opponent with the shine, pushing him or her away in addition to nullifying the attack's knockback.

4. Infinities

At long last, here they are, the epitome of Fox technical skill, his infinities. Essentially, one skilled enough in the ways of these infinities could keep them going on forever, but that is highly unlikely and impractical, so for most players they are only infinite to the point where the enemy is destroyed by an up-smash. There are multiple variations of the infinite, but all have the same goal in mind: to continue the infinite until your foe is at a high enough percentage where a timely up-smash will wipe a stock away. These infinities take for the most part very precise button timing and coordination and therefore much practice, but if you can pull them off, you will become a truly ferocious Fox. Remember that most of these require a corner or wall unless otherwise noted, and some may not work on characters with lower traction since they will probably slide too far away for you to wavedash close enough to them even with perfect wavedashing. Note especially that wall-less infinities can work on all characters with Marth's traction and above; any tractions below that, such as Luigi's and the Ice Climbers', do not allow for such infinities.

However, with all of that said, it is worth mentioning that most of these infinities have largely been rendered essentially obsolete by the modern safer Fox style. The bottom line is that while the pay-offs of properly-executed infinities are high, the technical precision required to achieve such a pay-off is not only difficult but also risky and largely impractical; this is especially true in the modern metagame, where the overall improvement in DI and super DI has made even the drill-based infinities a hefty gamble at best. In tournament settings, where nerves run high and DI is generally present as a considerable force throughout a match, most of the infinities become essentially useless, given the need for human input and the high likelihood for error. Virtually every Fox in the modern metagame will choose to waveshine a Peach into a simple grab or up-smash instead of attempting to piece together a convoluted string of high-speed inputs with little if any guarantee of success. This by all accounts is the correct course of action. The principle aim of rational decision-making within the context of a high-level tournament match is to maintain consistency, and this simply cannot be done by relying upon such mechanically-demanding routines as the infinities. Note, however, that it is largely the wall-less drill-based infinities that present such hazards to Fox players; this is largely due to the multiple hit inputs of the drill itself, which allow for a correspondingly large number of opportunities for opposing DI and super DI inputs, any of which can shift your foe out of the drill and break the "infinite" in the blink of an eye. In contrast, the wall-based infinities remain viable options in tournament play, although most players will settle for the simple down-waveshine infinite for the sake of consistency and ease of execution with respect to potential pay-off. While limited by the position of the enemy, such infinities represent the best possible compromise between mechanics, pay-off, and consistency.

a. Infinite Jump-canceled Shine (corner or wall required)

What it is: Shining your enemy against a wall, then jump-canceling that shine and immediately (and I mean immediately) shining again before the jump animation has ended. This will make it seem like Fox really has not left the ground, and you can keep shining and subsequently jump-canceling each one until

you deem necessary to wrap things up with a finisher or your fingers fail you.

How to do it: First, you must have a wall or corner. Now, you need to shine your opponent and jump-cancel that shine. Then, cancel that jump immediately with another shine, and repeat.

Breakdown: This is a very difficult infinite to do, and in virtually every case it will never be infinite because of the insane speed your fingers have to move (remember that even increments of a frame or two spent actually jumping will break the infinite and tell the game to activate your first or second jump). This is the most straightforward infinite to do in terms of controls, but paradoxically it is easily the most difficult of them all. If done correctly, this infinite is virtually impossible to escape since the shine sends each character at a set knockback regardless of percentage and you will be hitting your foe too fast for him to DI out of it. The key to sustaining this infinite for somewhat significant periods of time is to get the feel of the rhythm for jump-canceling the shine into another shine, and so on. All told, however, this routine should not find its way whatsoever into any aspiring tournament Fox's repertoire.

b. Infinite Down-wavedash Shine (corner or wall required)

What it is: Shining your enemy against a corner or a wall, then wavedashing down out of that shine and into another shine, which is then down-wavedashed out of, and so on.

How to do it: With your foe against a corner or a wall, you shine them, and then quickly wavedash straight down. This will cancel the previous shine and allow you to instantly phase into another one.

Breakdown: You do not really need to be proficient at wavedashing to do this infinite, but chances are that by now you are. If you use X or Y to waveshine, you will have an exceptionally easy time with this infinite due to the fact that you will not need to move the control stick at all; you simply hold it down as the right side of the controller receives most of the action. If you wavedash with the control stick, this infinite may become unreasonably difficult for you, which is a shame since it is easily (for X/Y wavedashers, at least) the least difficult and most practical infinite of all to perform. Remember your customary up-smash finisher, either jump-canceled out of the shine or after the downwards waveshine itself. Take care also during your infinite that you are not gradually pushed away from your opponent; this occurs partly because the victim's stun animation pushes Fox backwards. At times, you may find it necessary to execute a very short wavedash towards your opponent so that your next shine does not fail to connect with any part of your victim's body.

c. Drill Shine (flat stages only)

What it is: A very technically precise infinite that can bounce your foe from one end of the stage to the other when coupled with its inverse add-ons below.

How to do it: Shuffled (short-hop, fast-fall, L-canceled) down-aerial, shine, wavedash out of the shine towards your opponent, and repeat.

Breakdown: Possibly the most difficult infinite shine to perform, this one requires proper spacing in addition to all of the timing and button coordination. Remember that this combo will not work on certain characters with lower traction who will slide too far for you to continue the combo. I have heard that it is possible to fast-fall a regular jump during this if you mess up your

short-hop, which is entirely possible, but I have never seen it done. A good way to improve your consistency with this difficult infinite is to break it up into its respective pieces, the shuffled down-aerial and wavedash, and muscle-memory those to nigh-perfection, and then put them together (still thinking of them as separate entities, should you need to) into this infinite. Be careful not to allow your wavedash length to deteriorate into a length too small for you to reach your opponent with on your next repetition (controlling the spacing on this infinite during the shuffled drill kick opener and the wavedash link is oftentimes more difficult than the inputs themselves, particularly if your opponent is adept at varying his "shined" length through the use of crouch-canceling and toward and away DI). To compensate for this, be careful not to rush the transition period from the shine to the wavedash; in doing this, you will ensure that you have the time to position the control stick for the proper length wavedash. In addition, take note that you are always DI'ing yourself to the proper side of your opponent. For example, if you are executing a right-to-left drill shine, your DI'd drill kicks should always see that you land on your opponent's right side so that your shine pushes them to the left, not to the right. If you see that you will land on the opposite side of your opponent, you should make certain to invert your drill shine (a process described below) in order to continue your combo. Also make sure to fast-fall your drill kicks so as to minimize the effect of enemy DI on them; if enough hits fail to connect due to DI or your victim's constantly-changing hit animation, your infinite will be broken by a shield or opposing move. Characters who become "thin" during their getting-hit animations, such as Samus, are particularly likely to avoid down-aerial hits in such a manner.

To make the Drill Shine truly infinite, you must invert the process using one of the two methods listed below. Note, however, that characters who are light and have high tractions at the same time (Peach is a prime example) may need only a one-way drill shine series on the larger stages to reach a damage where an up-smash is lethal.

Again, I caution aspiring Fox players against making such routines the centerpiece of their game. While a high pay-off is certainly possible, the improvement of DI and the advent of super DI have made the drill-based infinities virtually entirely obsolete within the modern metagame.

d. Inverse Drill Shine, Method 1 (flat stages only)

What it is: An inversion of the Drill Shine meant to send the opponent in the opposite direction (since no stage extends forever), where you can continue the drill shine. The Inverse Drill Shine makes the Drill Shine truly "infinite."

How to do it: On the wavedash portion of the Drill Shine, instead of wavedashing to the opponent, you wavedash past the opponent to his or her other side. Now, your shine will push them in the opposite direction, where you can continue your drill shine.

Breakdown: Make sure to watch your spacing on this variant. You must make it all the way to the other side of your opponent in order for your shine to push them the other way.

e. Inverse Drill Shine, Method 2 (flat stages only)

What it is: Another inversion of the Drill Shine in which you DI to the other side of the opponent during the Drill Kick portion of the Drill Shine. Your shine when activated will send them in the other direction, ready to be drill shined again. This variant is easier to perform than the first method and also works on the two normally un-infinite characters in SSBM, Sheik and Ganondorf, who both slide 10 feet when shined instead of the usual 9-and-below feet.

This variant produces 11 feet of movement total (2 feet is added because of the additional aerial movement during the DI of the Drill Kick).

How to do it: On the Drill Kick portion of the Drill Shine, you must press the control stick to DI yourself during your Drill Kicks to the complete other side of your target.

Breakdown: Again, watch your DI trajectory on this one. Remember that you must have enough DI to make it to the complete other side of your target.

f. Wall Drill Infinite Shine (corner or wall required)

What it is: Trapping your foe in a corner or beside a wall with a series of shines jump-canceled into drill kicks, which are then L-canceled into a shine again, and so on. The jump-cancel out of the shine can be either a full jump or a short-hop. If you full jump the cancel, you must fast-fall the drill kick (you of course can also fast-fall the drill kick when short-hopping out of the shine for this).

How to do it: Obviously, a wall or corner is required. With your opponent in position, you shine and jump-cancel that with either a full jump or a short-hop, both of which lead into the drill kick down-aerial that pins your opponent in place for another shine to begin the next series. Either the drill kick or the shine can function as lead-ins to this infinite so long as your target is pinned against a suitable wall or corner.

Breakdown: You have to be quite quick at fast-falling and jump-canceling to perform this infinite, but it truly is not difficult at all either to perform or to lead into once its components are muscle-memoried properly. Make sure to have your fast-fall timing down and not to take too long to jump-cancel your shine or go into the shine once you L-cancel the drill kick. Short-hopping out of the shine with the control stick could help alleviate any technical problems that you experience with this infinite as well as take some pressure for speed off of your controller's right side. If you use the control stick to short-hop out of the shine, be careful to press it directly up; any noticeable deviation will cause the game to register it as a shine turn and break your infinite.

It should be noted that this is one of the more practical infinities; however, it is more technically demanding than the down-waveshine infinite and as such is largely dismissed in competition in favor of the aforementioned alternative.

g. Infinite Forward-Reverse Waveshine (Peach, Link, and Zelda only)

What it is: Shining one of these characters, then wavedashing to the other side of them, where you shine them again and wavedash to the other side, and so on.

How to do it: This infinite relies on a very quick forward and reverse waveshine, so be quick with that as it is the only way to perform this.

Breakdown: You must perform the dual waveshines extremely quickly in order to catch these characters before their traction pulls them too far away for you to continue any longer. Do your best to perform perfect wavedashes to give yourself the best chance at clearing your opponent. While this infinite does not require too many varying inputs, the demands on the Fox player's timing and wavedash length make this a far less desirable option than a simple waveshine or two to a grab or an up-smash (particularly on these characters).

III. Character Match-ups

A. Top Tier

1. Fox

Believe it or not, you will need to know how to fight your own character if you plan to go anywhere in tournament play; more than a few players keep a solid Fox at the ready for certain match-ups and for a mix-up on character choice. The Fox vs. Fox match-up (or "ditto," a term referring to a match played with two of the same character) ironically is largely based on Fox's grab game; your kills will largely stem from extended grab combos involving chain-grabbing, juggling, and some combination of up-tilts, -aerials, and -smashes. As such, you must know how to land some grabs on your own character. For the most part, your grabs will stem from dodged aerial attacks (by dash-dancing, wavedash spacing, or otherwise), following or predicting the opposing Fox, and botched L-cancels, shines, and spacing (especially on the back-aerial). With this in mind, you will also need to minimize such openings on your part while maximizing them on your opponent's. You will need to be especially careful about being predictable on-stage (as that will lead to deadly grab combos) as well as off-stage (as that will lead to lethal shine-spikes).

Note that in this match-up all advice given can obviously be applied to both yourself and your opponent. As such, if one tactic or technique is pointed out as particularly effective, it can likewise be helpful for your opponent, who obviously is the same character as you. Make sure to look at all suggestions given from these two perspectives.

The ground portion of the Fox ditto is all about following, predicting, and both landing and avoiding grab combos (among other things). As you are no doubt aware, Fox has all manner of advances and lead-ins at his disposal, any one of which can lead to heavy damage if you are careless. You will have to play a somewhat more "conservative" style, especially considering that Fox falls from the shine and thus cannot fall prey to lengthy, damaging shine combos (but do not discount the shine entirely from the ground game just yet). You have a few choices to make when considering your approach in the ditto. Various shuffles work quite well, as usual (but make certain that you can always shuffle into a shine through shields as a shield grab will set you up for a good chunk of percent, as you will see later). If you connect a shuffled neutral-aerial at low percents, you can oftentimes lead it into a quick jump-canceled grab or up-smash, which will open the way for chain-grabbing via jump-canceled grabs to up-throws (following DI as necessary) or juggling via more up-smashes, up-tilts, or up-aerials. Remember to do your best to trick the opposing Fox into using his second jump to make it easier to follow him during the juggling; his next response will probably be either to DI his fall away from you or air-dodge when near the ground, for which you should wait and punish accordingly. You can also do a jab or two after you land a neutral-aerial to tie up your foe long enough to secure a grab (a natural response to your jabs from aerials many times will be some combination of a shield and crouch-canceling, which may annul an up-smash after the jabs or leave you open to attacks from the shield; as such, a jump-canceled grab is your best bet). Note that if your opponent crouch-cancels your jabs, he may plan to jab or shine back; you may choose after your jab to dash-dance away and then back in for a better-spaced and -timed grab that will also allow you to circumvent your foe's chosen response. At higher percents, shuffled neutral-aerials can often allow you to follow the Fox through the air for a lethal jump-canceled up-smash.

Shuffled down-aerials are also quite powerful in the ditto match-up. They are particularly effective when done out of a shield after a shielded up- or forward-smash. You have a few options if you connect with a down-aerial. You can of course shine and attempt to follow your opponent's wake-up. You can also jab once or twice and try to open your enemy to a grab or up-smash. In

addition, you can oftentimes lead a down-aerial right into a grab; although the down-aerial to grab string does not combo in the true sense of the word, a human player's inability to respond consistently between the speedy drill kicks and the grab can often net you easy grab combo set-ups. Remember that a down-aerial that connects with a shield is also an opportunity for a grab; simply shine the shield and jump-cancel the shine into a grab (this is meant especially for players who attempt to counter your aerial shines by holding up their shield past your shine).

Full-jumping both the neutral- and down-aerials is also a viable option to lead in to your combos. For instance, a long full-jumped and fast-falled neutral-aerial can often catch your opponent unawares, and the weaker hit can very well lead into a shine to following or a jab to grab, or even a simple up-smash right then and there if your opponent is slow to react. In addition, full-jumped neutral-aerials also grant you a good deal of power and priority that can help you take control in the air should your opponent always seem to out-muscle you there. Full-jumped down-aerials are especially effective if an aerial and shine meet a shield; the multiple hitboxes of the drill kicks can keep your opponent pinned in his shield or catch him should he attempt to jump out, in which case you can follow him down through the air and continue with your follow-up. If you are slow on applying pressure to the shield, however, your opponent may find time to wavedash out of the shield and space your falling aerial out with a forward-smash, jump-canceled up-smash, or jump-canceled grab, so be wary of this response.

As mentioned above, being able to command a strong advance is integral to the Fox ditto. You must know both how to advance and how to counter an advance, usually done by spacing via wavedashing or dash-dancing. For example, an overly aggressive Fox can often fall prey to simple reverse wavedashing into jump-canceled grabs or up-smashes. Fox's quick shuffles are vulnerable to this response, but his full-jump approaches also are, perhaps to a greater degree than their short-hop counterparts. The amount of time that you spend in the air during a full jump allows for adjustments in spacing on the ground; since you will not hit the ground yourself and be able to follow up as quickly, you are prone to spaced forward-smashes and grabs, which in themselves can lead to the usual combos. Such approaches can be good tools in your dittos, but excessive use of them can also see that you are severely punished. Choose your advances wisely, and vary them accordingly. If you so desire, you can employ the down-tilt from your aerials as a sort of spacing fixer that can at the same time function as a launcher. A jab or two also works well to adjust your post-aerial spacing enough to reach out to your opponent and connect as you were planning.

At this point, it is important to mention the intricacies of responding to shines. If you connect with a shine, your thoughts should turn to following or predicting your opponent as best you can. Likewise, if you are shined, you must think about your wake-up so that your predictability does not give the other Fox easy openings for grabs or pre-juggling up-smashes. One of the most effective things that you can do to prevent predictability in your wake-ups from shines is simply to stop pressing buttons as you hit the ground; if you continue to hit buttons at this time, you will wake up virtually every time with an attack, for which many wary Foxes will watch seeing as how it is not difficult at all to wait until the attack frames are done with and then come in with a grab or up-smash. If your wake-up attack hits a shield, you again will either get shield-grabbed or up-smashed from shield. As such, you should watch for this easy opportunity to land grabs and start juggles on your foe's end while also taking care not to fall victim to the same trap yourself. Yet another common response to a connected shine is a reverse wavedash to space yourself better should your opponent decide to roll or tech inward. You can follow outward techs with jump-canceled grabs or jump-canceled up-smashes (which you at times can charge and stall for the incoming movement). In

addition, many Foxes opt to run after their opponents and simply stand a bit in front of them when the other Fox stands up in place. Most players have a natural fear of retaliation from the nearby opponent and will instantly spot-dodge, usually into a shine to make it more difficult to take advantage of their mistake. Smart players will wait for the dodge and punish accordingly, usually with a grab or safely-spaced forward-smash. You can somewhat counter this yourself by doing practically anything else except for spot-dodging since that is what most players will be looking for the moment you stand up. Be careful of opponents that shield as you stand up, however; they will try to time their response to occur after you hit their shield with a shine, jab, or whatever your response may be.

The preceding paragraph also hints at the importance of momentum in the Fox ditto, a concept that can likewise be extended to any match-up in the game. In the Fox ditto, the psychological edge granted by momentum can make all the difference in maintaining your unpredictability and optimizing your grab follow-ups. However, ensuring that momentum works in your favor is a difficult and abstract concept at best. While one can quite frequently "feel" when one is losing control of the pacing of the match, knowing how to regain this control is another matter entirely and can vary from player to player. For example, some players need to step back and regain their spacing before they can attempt to take control of the match back. Some need to switch from a defensive style to an aggressive one or vice-versa. Some need to clear their minds and weed out the single facet of their gameplay that is causing them to lose their grip on the situation, such as a predictable tech mix-up. Whatever one's style of maintaining momentum is, it is absolutely essential that you possess adequate knowledge of yourself as a player to be able to pinpoint what it is that is holding you back and then break through it in time to swing the match back in your favor. A common cause of lost momentum in the Fox ditto is continuously being hit by shines. While the shine itself does not do the greatest amount of damage or even guarantee a lead-in, it nevertheless puts your Fox on the ground, temporarily immobile, while the opposing vulpine for the time being has free reign over the stage and over you. The psychological impact of this loss of control and freedom of movement can very often lead one to make rash decisions (such as instantly rolling inwards when one could very well have rolled away from the opponent and escaped unharmed) that can quite quickly lead to the unnecessary loss of entire stocks. The bottom line is that you must know how to clear your mind and how to address parts of your in-match game that are causing you to forfeit control of the pace of the match; as in any other match-up in the game, it is this sense of control and confidence that can make all the difference in deciding the outcome of a set.

Overall, the main point of many commonplace maneuvers in the Fox ditto is to take advantage of predictability to open the door for kills. Remember to watch what you do and how you respond in certain situations, especially in terms of wake-ups, to prevent being followed and predicted for entire stocks at a time. Such is the key to Fox dittos. Since neither player can hope to win on brute force alone, especially given the absence of true shine combos, the elements of following and prediction are particularly important in Fox dittos. As is the case with every other match-up in the game, a strong mental game essential to your success.

Off-stage, the Fox ditto takes on an entirely new dimension thanks to the wonderful shine-spikes available on both sides of the match. Do not be surprised when you are on the receiving end of a shine-spike at something below 20%; such occurrences are common at high levels and more often than not greatly tilt the outcome of the match. As such, you will need to know how to land your opportunities for shine-spikes. Know the timing for shine-spiking, especially out of the Illusion as many players will resort to this move when recovering to give them a better chance at making it back to the stage; simply time your

shine in relation to the Illusion's distinctive "ping" and you can score many kills off simple shines. In addition, be ready to jump off-stage and shine-spike any attempt at a recovery Firefox; any off-stage Firefox should mean a lost stock, on both your part and your opponent's part. The charge-up time is simply too great not to take advantage of an opening to take a stock. If the opposing Fox tries to Firefox near the stage, simply wavedash onto the edge and drop down into a shine-spike, a classic maneuver that works wonders in more match-ups than simply the Fox ditto. Even grabs near the edge can lead to easy shine kills; a simple up-throw into a shine (positioned such that the shine knocks your foe off-stage and not back in onto the stage) can cause the fast-falling Fox to plummet far enough to force a Firefox activation, which is a lost stock, essentially. In addition, a back- or forward-throw off-stage can lead to shine-spikes should you be able to follow correctly. Many players will attempt to move far out away from the stage and make you wary of going out any further, but you should not feel this way if you know just how much range your recovery methods possess. Do your best to follow your foe off-stage, stalling in a shine after one of your jumps to wait for a response (preferably a Firefox), and then land your lethal shine-spike. Obviously, shine-spiking is a powerful ability to possess in many match-ups; being able to perform it consistently can net you many stocks and many victories. Landing them is a matter of prediction, of reading and anticipation. You should never haphazardly throw yourself off-stage and hope for the best when it comes to shine-spiking (or, indeed, in any other facet of the game); have a plan for responding to your opponent, and, above all else, move with purpose both on- and off-stage.

Of course, shine-spiking is not your only method of edge-guarding another Fox. You also have your back-aerial, which packs more than enough power to tear through both the Illusion and the Firefox (provided you aim it correctly), including more innovative shine-turned back-aerial kills. The down-smash is also a powerful edge-guarder and is difficult for many players to sweet-spot against due to the nature of its hitbox; Fox's fast-falling only magnifies its effects. A well-timed forward-smash can also punish players who insist on directing their recovery directly at you, but you may have to continue edge-guarding a bit more afterwards should the victim land his DI on the forward-smash. A shuffled or short-hopped, non-fast-fallen neutral-aerial can also do wonders when trying to punish quick above-the-stage recoveries. To avoid becoming the victim of such edge-guarding, you must know how to sweet-spot your recovery on each stage, especially the more difficult edges such as those on Pokemon Stadium and Battlefield. You should also know how to sweet-spot the Firefox from below the stage (by grating on the side at the proper angle) and from above the stage (by angling the Firefox properly and not holding down once at the ledge).

Stage choice for any ditto match is in many ways irrelevant; as identical characters, both you and your opponent can take advantage of the elements of stages in the exact same manner, and such elements affect both players to the same degree (assuming that both are equally familiar with the terrain, of course). If you feel that you are particularly experienced on a certain stage and your opponent is not, say Rainbow Cruise or Poke Floats, for instance, you should not hesitate to play to this personal strength. Continuing with this idea of the personal strength, you should also try to stick with stages with which you feel comfortable; seeing as how stages will affect both sides equally in dittos, you must instead play to a more individualized strength, which is your own familiarity with the terrain on which you choose to play. Perhaps you prefer to have more room to roam during a match; in this case, perhaps Stadium or Dreamland would suit your tastes. In contrast, perhaps you are comfortable with close-quarters combat and ascertain that your opponent does not share the same sentiments; here, smaller stages such as Fountain of Dreams and Battlefield may fit the bill. All told, stage choice in the Fox ditto depends greatly upon knowing yourself as well as your opponent; your aim is to cater to your

personal strengths and to downplay theirs.

All told, the modern Fox ditto focuses largely on efficiency. Flashy and risky maneuvers are greatly downplayed in favor of the consistency, safety, and options that such moves as the neutral- and back-aerials grant. Indeed, these two moves, perhaps more than any other save the shine, have become the main tools for controlling space as well as the flow of the match and the opposition's options and movement. Know their uses well, as well as how to use the shine, and you are well on the way to understanding the Fox ditto.

2. Marth

Many players will turn to Marth as their answer to a Fox in tournament play. In more than a few ways, this approach is entirely logical; Marth has range, chain throws, strong ways to punish predictability and improper DI, and a powerful edge game. However, such players oftentimes do not factor in Fox's own advantages in the match-up; these include aerial kills, numerous lead-ins for kill mechanisms, speed to penetrate Marth's range, and projectile baiting courtesy of the laser. When coupled with the correct change in style and proper DI, Fox can more often than not hold the advantage in this match-up.

As stated above, one of your most effective tools in this match-up is the correct change in style. For the Marth vs. Fox match-up, you should rely on a more defensive, patient style rather than on an offensive, aggressive style. The reasons for this rest mainly in Marth's numerous answers to your offensive game in the form of his range and ability to space out your advances easily via dash-dances and reverse wavedashes, both of which can lead to deadly forward-smashes and jump-canceled grabs (do not forget Marth's astonishing range on his grabs, as well). As such, you can effectively turn the tables on Marth's own game of waiting by waiting him out yourself. Rely on far-off blaster fire via SHLs (or DSHLs, if you are feeling particularly daring), dash-dancing, and wavedashes to control your spacing from Marth and force him to come to you lest he accumulate too much damage from your oncoming lasers. Remember that Marth has no easy answer to your projectiles as he does to most others in the game, especially given your own high mobility; be patient with your fire and continue blasting the swordsman until you see or create an opening punishable by a jump-canceled grab or up-smash, or even a properly-spaced dash-attack. You can facilitate your attempts to throw off Marth's aerial spacing by simply running towards him and shielding; such a maneuver oftentimes destroys the Marth player's timing as well as his ability to control his distance from you. Once an aerial connects with your shield from what you feel is a safe distance, you can answer in kind with a shield-grab or up-smash from shield followed by the requisite aerial juggling characteristic of this match-up. Be careful with trying to force this or any other opening as the sheer speed of Marth's aerials, particularly his forward-aerial, allows him to L-cancel through shields and into spot-dodges, buying him enough time during your lag to answer with a potentially-lethal grab.

Of course, the ground game in Marth vs. Fox is not as clear-cut as the above would indicate. Keep in mind that while he cannot readily respond to your projectiles as he can to most others, Marth is also not inhibited in terms of his own movements. Unlike Fox's wingmate Falco, your blaster does not stun Marth; as such, he still has the means to control his range from you thanks largely to his fluid dash-dancing and wavedashes. As you try to create an opening, you must also be thinking of the possible options that Marth has as the distance between you fluctuates. Make certain not to underestimate the range on a dash-canceled down-tilt or forward-smash, for example, or especially on a jump-canceled grab, as that will lead you into chain-grabs which may remove a stock if you are not careful. Many Marths will attempt to stay as close to you as possible by slight adjustments in the range of their dash-dance to

weave in and out of your range; they will try to bait you into spot-dodging, which they can readily punish by waiting and answering afterward with a grab or forward-smash. A shine after your dodge may make timing a bit more difficult for the Marth, but keep in mind how common such a response is as well as the sheer range on a forward-smash that very well may still catch you as you wave-dash back or jump out of your shine (often making the connected smash a devastating tipper). Your best answer is to control your own spacing well enough that you do not give Marth the opportunity to close in on your own space to such an extent that he has these options open to him. You must remain patient and wait for your chance to punish, just as the Marth player is doing; if you become too brash and hurry into an attack, you may find yourself on the receiving end of a chain-grab to a lethal tipper or edge-guarding. More than anything, this match-up is all about patience on both ends, as well as elaborate spacing and prediction. Do not rush foolishly into Marth's range and you will hold the upper hand for the majority of the match. As well, try to position yourself below and in back of Marth as often as possible; this limits the control that he can exert upon you with his extremely fast forward-aerial, which can very often come out quickly enough to swat you away as you attempt to continue a combo or advance upon him.

In terms of actually inflicting damage on Marth, you have more than a few options at your disposal. You can punish bad spacing by shield-grabs or up-smashes from your shield, as discussed earlier. You can also better space your own approaches to Marth by utilizing full-jumped neutral-aerials into jabs or shines to up-smashes or jump-canceled grabs and juggling (be cautious with jabs, however, as many Marths are prone to crouch-canceling into their own grabs or down-tilts). Marth has his own answer to the full-jump advance in a simple reverse wavedash to a jump-canceled grab, which in itself can lead to a good chunk of damage on your Fox. Be careful as always to vary your lead-ins and control the distance between the enemy Marth and yourself while baiting with plenty of blaster fire. You may not always be able to keep right on top of the Marth thanks to his excellent mobility, but should you be able to do so, you can often land a few shuffled neutral- or down-aerials into your jab or shine set-ups, or even a quick jump-canceled grab by itself. Your grabs should nearly always lead to up-throws and Fox's usual up-aerial juggling, which is often more than often to finish off the floaty Marth's stock. If you find your up-throws (or even up-aerials) being DI'd frequently, you can always attempt a tech chase every so often with a down-throw, especially near the edge or on platforms, where your opponent has fewer methods of making a safe escape. You can also wait for the Marth's second jump and position himself at his back to give yourself the greatest chance of landing an up- or back-aerial off of a grab.

Of course, Marth has his own ways of forcing an opening at your expense. He has the means to control his movement and spacing quite effectively with his dash-dance and wavedash; his range only serves to compound this problem. He can also corner you with a series of aerials, pinning you in your shield until a down- or neutral-aerial can sneak through and open you to him, usually by the resulting predicting and following. Grabs or forward-smashes out of your aerials are not all that uncommon, especially given the speed and range of Marth's moves and the bad angles that his spacing methods can produce. In addition, Marth's lightning-quick forward-aerial has the range and the speed to catch you long enough for a grab or forward-smash to reach you. The Marth can also choose to double-forward-aerial you for some time before finishing as he deems necessary, but this approach is vulnerable to improper spacing as well as your crouch-canceling into shines, jabs, up-smashes, or the like at low percents.

Being able to shine out of all your aerials as well as through shields is essential to claiming victory in the Fox vs. Marth match-up. You cannot afford to hand your opponent easy kills by simple shield-grab set-ups and bad DI on your

part. Keep in mind your powerful follow-ups to a connected shine, namely your jump-canceled grabs and up-smashes (be careful not to waste too much time on your follow-up or you will meet with yet another shield). Many Marth players will practice holding their shields past your shines from aerials for fear of your often-lethal up-aerial juggling, so try to integrate grabs from jump-canceled shines into your repertoire. A jab or two from an aerial can also prep your opponent for a lethal up-smash, but be careful to compensate for the Marth's DI and floatiness and follow as appropriate. Of course, you may at times botch a shuffle or L-cancel or perhaps underestimate Marth's range and get grabbed. In this case, you will probably be chain-throw for a good 30-40% followed by a series of up-tilts, usually to the seventies, into a forward-smash. If you have DI'd correctly (meaning not away from the offending Marth), the forward-smash will not be a tipper and you will escape damaged but still with your current stock (this is obviously assuming that you were not grabbed right next to the stage's edge). If you have DI'd incorrectly and end up in tipper range, you will probably be sent off-stage, and Marth's edge-guarding game will begin, making things a bit more difficult for you. If you are grabbed at very low percents (such as at the very beginning of your stock), you can escape Marth's chain-grab by DI'ing up in the early-to-mid 20's and shining (this may require a bit of button-mashing to ensure that you find an open frame). However, be aware that Marth has an answer to this in his up-tilt; he can very well land that tilt and follow up with another grab, depending on your DI.

If anything, the Fox vs. Marth match-up emphasizes the importance of not getting grabbed; if you can shine effectively and also avoid stand-alone grabs, you will likewise avoid Marth's characteristic low-percent kills and take control of the match with your powerful vertical killing ability. You must also be able to DI effectively to avoid other low-percent kills at the edge at the hands of the forward-smash. Remember that the most effective DI is (ideally) perpendicular to the angle of the attack which has connected with you. In more practical terms, you should DI Marth's forward-smash up and against the hit; for example, DI'ing a forward-smash on the right side of a stage would entail DI'ing with the control stick in the "north-west" position. The "upwards" and "against" portions of the DI detract from the forward-smash's horizontal knockback length by substituting longer, upwards movement for the otherwise-entirely-horizontal knockback "path" of the forward-smash.

The edge and off-stage games against Marth are particularly important to your success in this match-up. The Marth player will look for kills here since he has few truly effective methods of horizontal killing. You, on the other hand, must know how to avoid losing stocks at low percents to Marth's edge-guarding, one of his most significant aces against you. Make certain not to be predictable in your recoveries, alternating the angles of your Firefox and the lengths of your Illusions and switching the two methods as you deem necessary. Know how to sweet-spot your Illusion as well as your Firefox to avoid essentially handing your stock to the Marth. You can also practice teching stage-based attacks on the side of the stage. In addition, know that the Marth can quite often kill you out of your Firefox, as can most other characters, by following you out and hitting you with a forward- or down-aerial, or even a neutral-B (this is also oftentimes used in edge-guarding). The Marth can also answer your Firefoxes by hanging on the ledge and ledge-hopping into a down-aerial to spike you to your death. Furthermore, if you find yourself falling towards the stage while above it, many players will wait for your air-dodge onto the stage; you will most likely do this out of fear of the waiting Marth, thinking that he will forward-smash you unless you air-dodge when in reality he is simply waiting for your air-dodge to allow him to punish you. Be mindful of this mind-game and adjust accordingly. When you do regain the edge, be sure not to ledge-hop into an attack (usually your down-aerial) as soon as you can; Marth players often anticipate and punish this with a simple reverse wavedash to forward-

smash, which often leads to a lost stock on your part. You can compensate by varying the times when you get up from the edge (best done by performing one of Fox's various invincibility stalls) and how you get up from the ledge (take special care not always to return with a ledge-hopped attack). A ledge wave-dash, for instance, does wonders to vary your recovery and give the Marth player one more thing to answer.

However, the constant evolution of the metagame has unveiled yet another method of edge-guarding Fox, one that is quite consistent and not at all technically demanding. When a Marth sees that a Fox is forced to Firefox below the stage and graze the side of the stage as he returns, Marth will stand on the edge and use his Counter, which will catch Fox out of his recovery and throw him still further off-stage. This forces Fox to up-B in a less advantageous position and allows Marth to come off-stage and swat him with a forward-aerial (usually non-sweet-spotted so that Fox does not gain height off of it) or even a falling neutral-B. Besides this, Marth can also choose to run off-stage and hit you with a back-aerial, although this method is not preferred as it is easier to tech than the preceding Counter-based approach. As well, more experienced Marth players can also choose the bolder option of reverse up-B'ing you out of your own up-B, which sends you startlingly far and at a rather horrendous angle. In short, Marth's physics and moveset grant him a great deal of edge-guarding options, making it all the more important that you maintain your hold on the stage and know how to vary your recovery methods as appropriate.

You have more than a few options yourself when you are the one doing the edge-guarding. For example, you can time your grabbing the ledge (preferably via a reverse wavedash) so that your invincibility frames allow you to hold the ledge through Marth's recovery. The same effect can be achieved through the use of an infinite ledge-stall. If the Marth hesitates in using his up + B, you can essentially fall into him with a back-aerial by pressing away from the ledge and performing a back-aerial (make certain not to press down, however, as then you will fast-fall to your death while doing the back-aerial). If the Marth is recovering while above the stage, you can wait and punish with a ledge-dropped back-aerial. Remember that many players will try to air-dodge onto the stage out of fear of your ledge-dropped attack; as such, also remember to wait for this dodge when appropriate (or force it early on with the attack in question) and punish accordingly. Shine-spiking Marths is usually not too simple of a task thanks to the combination of their air time and forward-aerial, which can swat you out of the air as you approach for your spike attempt; this of course does not entirely rule out the possibility of shine-spikes in this match-up, but be more careful while attempting to land them here. A strong alternative to shine-spiking is the aforementioned shine-turned back-aerial; the speed, range, and angle of this maneuver are often difficult for an off-stage Marth to respond to with something as simple as a forward-aerial and more often than not can hand you a few horizontal kills.

With all of that said, the evolution of the metagame has also been kind to Fox in terms of this match-up's edge-guarding game. This relatively new and highly innovative edge-guarding strategy makes use of the fact that a character will move a certain distance if his or her light shield is hit with an attack. When combined with Fox's fast-falling properties and the nature of Marth's recovery, it forces what is essentially a lose-lose situation for the Marth and all but guarantees a successful edge-guard for the Fox. In a nutshell, this technique involves positioning oneself on the very tip of the edge (most easily done by repeatedly rolling towards the edge or by rolling towards the edge at a distance shorter than the length of Fox's roll) and full light-shielding while holding the light-shield away from the stage. The easiest way to perform the full light-shield is to hold Z during the rolling animation (that is, buffering the Z light-shield input) such that you come out of the roll with the light-shield at its full size. The end result of this is that a Marth coming from

below with an up-B return will hit the tip of your light-shield and push you onto the edge, which you will hold for the remainder of Marth's recovery, causing him to plummet to his death.

Essentially, the nature of this technique forces Marth into a dually disadvantageous position. If he attempts to sweet-spot the edge with his up-B, he will more than likely lose his stock. If he up-B's early in an attempt to knock you out of your light-shield, you will grab the edge and instantly escape the shield, allowing you to ledge-drop back-aerial or shine him for his stock. With that said, however, the light-shield edge-guard is not a flawless strategy. For example, if you so happen to be holding down when you are knocked out of the shield, you will fall past the edge and put yourself in a position to be edge-guarded. As well, Marth has the option of saving his jump until he nears the ledge and forward-aerialing your light shield as he moves on-stage; he can also simply jump or air-dodge on-stage as a mix-up. In addition, he can jump up with his neutral-aerial, the first hit of which will knock you out of the shield and the second hit of which will bat you away from the edge. In theory, Marth can also pixel-perfect sweet-spot the edge (a "true" sweet-spot, essentially, that accounts for the size and position of the up-B's hitbox), but such a maneuver is incredibly difficult to consciously perform and rarely occurs. Regardless, the fact that this technique so thoroughly encapsulates and limits your foe's options makes it an incredibly powerful edge-guarding choice, especially against an enemy as capable off-stage as Marth.

Stage choice for the Marth and Fox match-up is largely standard procedure; yet again, the Marth player wants to minimize your vertical kills and maximize his horizontal kills, especially via edge-guarding. Triple-platform stages are also especially useful to Marth thanks to their smaller size (which allows him to control the air space and ledges better) and the opportunities that such stages' structure gives for lethal tippers. As such, expect to be counter-picked to Fountain of Dreams, mainly for its structure and close blast-lines; Yoshi's Story, again due to its tri-platform structure, strange edges, and close blast-lines (make sure to take advantage of this stage's low ceiling if you are sent here, however); Battlefield, for its structure and ledges; Final Destination, for its flat ground that enables chain-grabs to subsequent edge-guarding; and Dream Land 64 for its obscenely-high ceilings that minimize your vertical kills. When battling on the tipper-height platform stages (or any platform-bearing stage, for that matter), buffering into a light-shield out of on-platform techs can allow you at times to get your shield up before Marth launches his follow-up attack, if he is a bit slow on the timing. It can also save you the headache of having your feet hit by an up-tilt or other attack below the platform. In addition, you could very well be hit out of your shield and off of the platform, allowing you an easy escape from the situation (or, for a crafty opponent, the chance to set a trap for you as you fall). All in all, you very often will want to use your stage ban in tournaments on one of the tipper-height platform stages or Final Destination. If the first game of the set takes you to a stage such as Yoshi's Story and you are forced onto one of the platforms, you can also crouch-cancel the incoming up-tilts or DI them into the platform and attempt to tech, anything to escape that highly disadvantageous position. Not only do those platforms allow for perfectly spaced tippers, they can also lead into off-stage down-aerial spikes if you incorrectly DI an up-tilt.

You can make use of all manner of stages for your counter-picks against a Marth. Princess Peach's Castle can be effective with its low ceiling, opportunities for wall-based infinites, and central tower that can inhibit horizontal kills. Yoshi's Island can work thanks to its low ceiling and lengthy structure, as can Green Greens and Corneria for the same reasons. Onett as always is your single most devastating counter-stage; killing a Fox there with Marth is quite a chore thanks in no small part to the houses on either side, which also

enable damaging wall-based infinites. Yet again, a low ceiling is your friend on Onett; your vertical killing ability there is greatly magnified. However, the vast majority of modern tournaments ban Peach's Castle, Yoshi's Island, and Onett; as such, your best bets for counterpicking Marth will most often lie with Corneria and (if permitted) Green Greens. On both stages, make certain to focus play on the center of the stage, never towards the edges, and be patient while looking for kill opportunities.

3. Sheik

Though Sheik usage is somewhat on the decline in the current metagame due in part to widespread adaptation to Sheik as a character and the increasing prevalence of the space animals, you must still consider her a potential threat in tournament play. As with every character, Sheik has her own ways of punishing sloppy play on your part and removing stocks because of your mistakes. However, you too have more than a few options against Sheik. Indeed, many consider Fox to have quite a strong match against Sheik, and even more consider Fox to have the advantage. With careful play and more than a few shine combos, Fox can consistently come out on top in this match-up.

Both Sheik and Fox have their own respective major tools in this match-up. Sheik has her requisite forward-aerial kill mechanism (the infamous "chop" which is further empowered by Fox's fast-falling); tilt combos (a bit of a chore to execute for extended periods of time on the fast-falling space animal); jabs to set up down-smashes or jump-canceled grabs to forward-aerial kills; needle set-ups, especially on platform stages such as Battlefield; down-smashes to combat your shuffle approaches; and off-stage options in her needles, down-smash, and forward-aerial. Fox has his powerful shuffled neutral- and down-aerial to shine approaches; shine-spikes; the usual up-throw to up-aerial or up-tilt (which also does an excellent job of warding off aerial assaults); vertical kills via up-aerials and up-smashes; and shine combos, among others. Your biggest ace in this match-up is your shine combos; with a strong technical game backed by equally strong shine combos, you can inflict heavy damage on Sheik from virtually any percent and any lead-in, granting yourself all manner of options and openings and removing them from Sheik.

With such options on both sides, it makes sense that ground combat between Fox and Sheik often becomes quite heated, a battle of spacing, following, and comboing. More defensive Sheiks may begin battle with a needle charge or perhaps a few needles thrown your way to get you on your toes. Granted, you could employ a defensive style yourself backed by plenty of blaster fire, but your most powerful options come from strong offensive gameplay when the time permits. Sheik will attempt to space out your approaches by reverse wavedashes into set-up jabs, grabs, and especially down-smashes, which can tear through your advances more often than you would think. If you sense excessive use of such tactics, you can likewise space yourself with full jumps leading into down-aerials, which should then flow into a shine to a jump-canceled grab or up-smash. You can also anticipate the Sheik's backward movement and answer with a jump-canceled grab, a jump-canceled up-smash, or a simple dash attack to set up for an up-aerial or -smash (be careful with this option if you see that the Sheik is prone to crouch-canceling, a common answer to sloppy approaches that nearly always leads into a down-smash). At lower percents, your best option out of grabs is repeated up-tilts to up-smash, which as usual functions as a launcher and readies Sheik for up-aerial juggling. At this point, many players will attempt to avoid your up-aerial follow-up by using their second jump, a common response in such instances. Your answer is to wait for this second jump (or lure it out early on by jumping up, faking an up-aerial) and follow the Sheik's falling angle appropriately with your up-aerials; without her jumps, Sheik is far more susceptible to such juggling, and your ability to kill her vertically only makes this all the more sweeter for you. If you choose to wait

until the Sheik nears the ground, you can set up another bout of juggling via careful timing of an up-tilt or up-smash, but you must be cautious of the ridiculous speed of her forward-aerial as well as a spaced neutral-aerial follow-up. A jump-canceled up-smash is especially effective since you can easily dash-dance away from the incoming Sheik and then back in with your up-smash. You can follow from there.

Take note that Sheik does not possess a true shuffle approach as you do. As such, you may notice a more defensive, counter-attacking style with many Sheik players consisting of repeated reverse wavedashes to space for grabs and down-smashes as well as reads for your full-jumps with forward-aerials. You should also be wary of Sheik's needle cancel set-ups. While you certainly command greater mobility and fluidity than Sheik, take care not to wander aimlessly into the 45-degree angle through which her needles fly as she jumps. Note when your foe has a great deal of needles charged, and be particularly careful when you see a jump as this can signal a desire to needle-cancel into a grab and the subsequent tech-chasing.

Of course, Sheik also has her own aerial maneuvers for your Fox. As a fast-faller, you are likewise susceptible to juggling; Sheik's up-aerial does not pack a punch as great as yours, but it can nevertheless kill you vertically or even set up for a lethal forward-aerial. You will also spend a good deal of time in the air, especially since a grab leads to the usual forward-aerial, as do Sheik's tilts, the down-tilt being particularly common with more defensive crouch-canceling Sheiks.

Shine combos are your single largest advantage in this match-up thanks in no small part to Sheik's traction. Each shine that you connect should lead into a damaging (or lethal) combo or infinite, if you can manage it (the drill shine infinite on Sheik is not particularly difficult, and even a one-way repetition of it can tack on chunks of damage or kill from middle percents; just be certain not to make landing it the sole focus of your game lest you turn a blind eye toward your weak points). Be quick and clean with your follow-up shine from aerials to combat crouch-cancels into down-tilts and -smashes. At low percents, your best option out of the shine is a jump-canceled grab and up-throw into up-tilts and a finishing up-smash, following as needed with up-aerials. A simple down-tilt can also prep the Sheik for juggling barring crouch-canceling. At middle and high percents, begin subbing in a simple up-smash for kills or juggling prep as needed. Drill shine infinities are also at your disposal; opposing DI should not be too much of a factor given Sheik's traction and your ability to adjust to perfect wavedashes (remember to keep in mind the angle of your control stick for your wavedash so that the wavedash does not deteriorate into a miniscule slide that gets you nowhere near your target). You can lead into shine combos at any percent with your down-aerial, but your neutral-aerial approach disallows shine combo lead-ins at higher percents and could very well get you grabbed or down-smashed out of your approach, interestingly enough. In such cases, should you connect with a neutral-aerial, simply follow Sheik through the air with a jump-canceled up-smash (at middle and higher percents, of course). As well, you can intentionally add in the neutral-aerial to shine approach should you see that your opponent tends to spam down-smash and grabs during it in order to get them to open themselves to you; after wavedashing away, coming back in with a timed grab or jump-canceled up-smash does wonders as punishment for this type of conditioning.

Shield play against Sheik is a bit tricky due to the inherent flow of her moves. Ideally, you would rather not get stuck in your shield against Sheik; should she connect with it, usually by a falling forward-aerial, she can follow quickly and effortlessly into an alternating sequence of jabs and down-tilts that can be difficult to break. If the Sheik is somewhat close to you, you can shine out of your shield (done by simply jumping out of your shield and then

executing a shine) to a down-aerial and lead into a shine combo. You can also spot-dodge out of your shield and shine afterwards; the small amount of time between the vulnerability frames of your dodge and the shine's hit frame makes this a consistently viable option. If the Sheik is somewhat slow on the follow-up on your shield, you can counter with an up-smash from shield and lead from there. Sheiks will also down-smash from a connected forward-aerial on your shield or otherwise. If your shield is strong enough, it will endure the down-smash, but otherwise the attack may sneak in underneath the bubble. If you have hard-shielded the down-smash, you are given an opportunity to wavedash out to a quick grab or up-smash or simply shuffle a down-aerial out of your shield and begin a shine combo. However, at times the Sheik may not opt to pound on your shield all at once. Two common follow-ups to a falling forward-aerial are a simple spot-dodge that could clear the Sheik for a down-smash (especially since you probably will want to shield-grab) and a quick jab that could catch you and prep you for a grab, tilt, or down-smash. You can adjust accordingly to such tactics (especially the spot-dodge) by waiting a bit after the aerial and answering with an up-smash. Of course, you can avoid getting stuck in your shield in the first place by not standing in one place as the Sheik falls and by anticipating fall angles with a combination of dash-dance spacing and jump-canceled grabs and up-smashes. You should also be wary of shield hits directly into grabs. Sheik's naturally flowing moveset allows her to condition in her opponents a tendency to rely on the shield to combat her efficient aggression, and she can use this conditioned shield as an easy lead-in to a safe grab after connecting with said shield. In this match-up, Sheik's down-throw combined with wavedash spacing, her dash-attack, and her down-smash grants her a plethora of surprisingly safe options for tech-chasing, any one of which can quickly put you into edge-guarding position with her equally effective down-tilt and -smash options. It is this sort of rock-paper-scissors play of which you must be aware in order to escape punishment. Know how to deal with the aforementioned scenarios, why they work, and how these sequences can be manipulated as both you and your opponent react to each others' choices.

Your shield play on Sheik largely consists of being able to shine through that shield from your shuffled aerial approach and leading that shine into your usual destructive shine combos and infinites. As is customary against all opponents, you cannot afford to give Sheik easy openings to you by something as simple as a shield-grab; you should indeed be able to punish quite effectively for reliance on this technique. However, if you are grabbed, follow the usual rule of thumb of not being predictable on your get-up. This, of course, is easier said than done; experienced Sheiks know all manner of methods to follow their opponents and punish accordingly. Many opt for a simple down-smash in place after waiting for your in-place tech (keep in mind that this also punishes you if you stay on the ground for some time after landing there). Sheik can also follow you with jump-canceled grabs, her quick dash-attack (an easy and effective set-up), or dash-canceled down-smashes, all of which are bad news for you. Again, do your best not to be predictable on the get-up and to punish likewise for predictability on the Sheik's part; in-place and jump-canceled up-smashes are especially effective as punishers in these instances.

Off-stage play with both characters is somewhat interesting. Both have their own tools and options to combat each other's returns. Sheik, for example, can make use of her needles to alter the angle of your return, forcing you to come from beneath the stage by grating the side, which she can punish by a down-smash should you be unable to sweet-spot or by a ledge-dropped, non-fast-fallen neutral-aerial. Illusioning at Sheik is also a gamble since she can also answer that with a down-smash or even a forward-tilt to a lethal forward-aerial. Even charging a Firefox is risky; Sheik can simply position herself for a lethal forward-aerial or even a ledge-dropped neutral- or back-aerial should you be close enough to the ledge. Overall, your best choice is the sweet-spotted Illusion for recovery; an off-stage Firefox simply gives the Sheik far too many

often-lethal options to use against you as well as more than enough reaction time to decide how to end your stock. If you do decide to Firefox, be sure that you can sweet-spot it from beneath the stage and position yourself such that Sheik cannot easily reach you with needles or her aeriels. All told, you should do your best to focus play on the center of the stage. With a character as mobile and versatile as Sheik, you simply cannot afford to take risks near the edge. Indeed, even something as simple as a back- or forward-throw off-stage can mean certain death as a proficient Sheik can time a wavedash ledge-grab as you attempt to jump to that same ledge, causing you to fall below the stage and setting you up perfectly for lethal off-the-ledge aeriels.

You also have your own options when Sheik is off the stage. Shine-spiking is an option open to you provided you can land an off-stage shine; Sheik's forward-aerial, like Marth's, is often used to combat shine-spikes, as is a rising up-aerial. You can also make use of a more innovative method involving shine-turning. To do this, either run or jump off-stage (as required by Sheik's distance), shine, turn toward the stage while in the shine using the control stick, and jump-cancel the shine into a back-aerial; the speed, power, range, and often-awkward angle of the shine-turned back-aerial allow you to circumvent common methods of fighting shine-spikes such as the above and can catch more than a few players off-guard. Should the back-aerial connect, you will have more than enough time to Firefox back to the stage; be careful about missing, however, as it may turn the tables on which of the characters is doing the edge-guarding. Still another method exists for edge-guarding Sheik, a method which is utilized by virtually every character. Simply grab the ledge to force the Sheik to vanish to the top of the stage, being careful of her recovery's damage frames, and stand up in place or roll from the ledge, following as needed with an up-smash and repeating as necessary. While doing this, however, be wary of Sheik players that conserve their jump near the stage. If you do not pay attention to when your ledge-grab invincibility frames end, such players can very easily jump up with a forward- or up-aerial and swat you off the ledge, sometimes resulting in a "stage spike" as you crash against the underside of the stage and subsequently fall to your doom. As well, pay particular attention to whether your opponent has used his or her second jump during the recovery process; if he or she does use it, take special care not to allow them to land on the stage as you react to the up-B as this will restore the second jump and prolong (or, in the end, entirely jeopardize) your edge-guarding.

Tournament-play stage choices for each character are relatively straightforward. The Sheik player wants to minimize your vertical killing ability and maximize his or her horizontal killing ability. You, on the other hand, wish to do the opposite, and if you are capable of any types of infinities, you should choose your stages so as to take advantage of your technical abilities. Sheik counterpick choices include Battlefield for its triple-platform structure that magnifies their needle set-ups from platforms and falling forward- and back-aeriels, as well as its small size which allows them to get you off the stage and edge-guard for stocks; Dream Land 64 for its very high ceiling, which minimizes your vertical killing prowess; and Kongo Jungle 64, again for its high ceiling. Fountain of Dreams is also a viable counterpick for its triple platforms and relatively close sides.

As Fox, however, you too have more than a few stages to which to counterpick. Princess Peach's Castle is quite viable for its central walls, which enable your powerful wall-based infinities and detract Sheik's horizontal killing power (do your best to fight facing the stage's edge in order not to fall prey to the stage's rather close blast edges), and its relatively low ceiling. Yoshi's Story could function well in terms of the low ceiling, but its structure, close blast edges, and small size may also magnify Sheik's set-ups and horizontal kills. Yoshi's Island and Green Greens are both appealing for their very low ceilings; simply steer clear of the respective edges of each to prevent easy

side kills by Sheik. Fox's own home stage of Corneria is also a strong choice; its length detracts from horizontal kills, and you can score astoundingly low-percent vertical kills should you catch Sheik atop the Great Fox's fin. Even flat Final Destination can somewhat serve your aims if you prefer the comfort of a "neutral" stage, plenty of room, and the opportunity for flatland drill shines and shine combos. However, your most powerful counterpick against Sheik (and many other opponents) is easily an unassuming stage by the name of Onett. The structure of this stage makes it the counterpick of choice for Fox for numerous reasons. The houses on either side reduce horizontal kill potential and provide places on which to tech should you be hit to either side. The low ceiling enhances your vertical kills. The space in the center is more than enough for shine combos, which you can perform until a timely car or van comes by and inflicts further damage, if your opponent is not killed outright. Finally, Onett's walls make it an infinite-capable Fox's dream; you can either finish the infinite yourself via a customary up-smash or keep your foe trapped until a passing vehicle does the job for you. For these reasons, you'll find yourself constantly keeping Onett in mind as a powerful counterpick for all manner of match-ups. Make certain not to forget about it as it will serve you well when you need it. However, also keep in mind that virtually every current tournament bans Peach's Castle, Onett, Yoshi's Island, and at times Green Greens. Be wary of the event's ruleset, and modify your stage choices as needed.

4. Falco

Falco along with Marth is among the most common answers to an opposing Fox in tournament play, and with good reason. Given competent abilities on both space animals' parts, the Fox vs. Falco match-up is quite possibly one of the most even battles in the game, and mistakes on both sides are punished brutally (and quite often fatally). As such, you absolutely must understand how to combat an opposing Falco if you expect to advance in a tournament, especially given the increasing use of Falco as a perceived soft-counter to Fox as opposed to Marth and the like. The match-up essentially boils down to chain-grabs, grab combos, tech-chasing, and shine-spiking on Fox's part and extended shine combos, SHL control, and potent edge-guarding on Falco's part.

An extremely disruptive obstacle for Fox in the Fox vs. Falco match-up is Falco's characteristic SHL approach. In theory, it seems a perfect counter to Fox's innate play style; it limits his movement and his options, and it allows the Falco to create numerous unfavorable (and damaging) openings for shine combos and edge-guarding. Indeed, until you truly understand how to combat this approach, you will find yourself believing that this match-up is all too easily in Falco's favor. Even describing the means of avoiding this approach is somewhat abstract. In a sense, it depends on the Falco's SHL "rhythm," so to speak, the speed and tempo at which he fires his lasers. It is critical that you pick up on this rhythm and be able to perceive at what times it is safe to attempt a jump to clear yourself of the laser barrage and give yourself a means to encroach on the Falco's space. You must know how to time your jumps and vary your approach angles from the air properly in order to avoid being trapped by an incoming laser or succumbing to bad spacing relative to the Falco upon your landing. Know from what distance and angle you can safely approach with full-jumped neutral-aerials, both fast-fallen and non-fast-fallen, and make certain of your timing on the L-cancel into your Jab or shine. Do not fall into the trap of relying on your shine to reflect Falco's SHL; granted, it will take some of the pressure off of you for a moment, but the minimal amount of stun time given to Falco and your corresponding reflection lag time can often open you to Falco anyway; if you are able to powershield Falco's lasers consistently, do so instead. In addition, do your best to perceive the nature of the Falco's approach; this is especially easy should he attempt a more linear approach and simply SHL constantly toward you, never bothering to vary his

spacing from you or his approach via reverse SHLs or reverse wavedashes, for instance. As well, do your best to avoid getting pinned in your shield; this is exactly what the Falco wants as hindering your movement and speed advantage likewise hinders your execution and ability to take advantage of your options. Furthermore, take care with resorting to jumping as your means of getting around lasers. The sheer amount of pressure that Falco can exert thanks to his powerful technical game and safe approach options can very quickly condition a jumping reflex in you that can be just as quickly punished with a full-jumped neutral-, back-, or down-aerial. Wavedashes out of your shield and away from your opponent are for the most part your safest means of escaping your shield.

You will quickly find that you may have to vary your traditional approaches in the Fox vs. Falco match-up. This is especially true if your opponent knows how to control his spacing; a simple laser is often enough to halt your incoming aerial and lead you into a lengthy, damaging shine combo. As such, put far less emphasis on approaching with your shuffled aerials, instead concentrating on full-jumping with your neutral-aerials (this is assuming a good distance between the players; a technical, aggressive Fox could also function well against a Falco). By full-jumping and varying your use of fast-falling, you will give yourself far more safe avenues of approach into the Falco's space, and should your aerial connect at all, either with a shield or with Falco himself, you will have more than a few powerful options at your disposal. As always, the Jab and shine are your follow-ups from aerials. A quick Jab or two is an excellent set-up for a jump-canceled grab, which you must know how to land and take full advantage of in this match-up. Jabs can also prep Falco for a lethal up-smash. However, be wary of Jabbing from aerials should you notice your opponent making use of Falco's crouch-cancel counter game; should he crouch-cancel one of your Jabs, he can follow with a down- or forward-smash, a down-tilt for a possible vertical kill, or a shine to initiate a shine combo, something you obviously do not want. This is not to say, of course, that the Jab should be entirely discarded in this match-up, only that you should use it more cautiously should you notice enemy crouch-canceling.

Your customary shines from aerials also play a role in this match-up, although this may not be readily apparent given the fact that Falco cannot be shine-comboed and that Falco does not make as extensive use of shield-grabs as most of your other opponents. If you opt to shine from your aerials, your tech-chasing abilities must be put to use, the single most important reason for shining on-stage in this match-up. Do your best to punish predictability in your opponent with jump-canceled grabs and up-smashes to chain-throws or juggling (best finished with a back-aerial to take advantage of Falco's recovery). In addition, always keep in mind the possibility that your opponent will more than once mistakenly get up with an attack should they continue pressing buttons as they hit the ground; these get-ups should always be punished, and punished harshly. Remember also the natural tendency to spot-dodge should you be standing right next to your opponent when they stand up; take advantage as needed, perhaps a forward- or down-smash when near the edge or an up-smash at lower percents to prep for juggling or a grab.

Of course, you must not forget about Falco's ever-present shine combos, a major advantage that Falco possesses over Fox. Falco can initiate his shine combos by all manner of methods; a crouch-canceled attack, close-range laser, up-throw, or connected down- or neutral-aerial are among such methods, all of which you will need to avoid to prevent handing your foe a significant advantage. Be proficient in L-canceling into shines from your full-jumped aerials to battle crouch-canceling, and do not allow the Falco to connect with a laser at point-blank range by being aware of your distance and spacing. If you see the Falco take to the air with a full-jump, be careful not to underestimate his range of horizontal movement or the size of his down-aerial's hitbox; should he land a down-aerial from here, you can bank on being shine-comboed for some

time. Watch also for attempts to fool you by delayed second jumps. Each and every time Falco full-jumps and lets up on the SHL barrage, you should pay special attention to your positioning and spacing relative to him; you want just enough space to avoid eating a down-aerial and subsequent shine, but you also want to be close enough to be able to rush in with a jump-canceled grab or up-smash at Falco's landing point, which you should do your best to anticipate.

Landing a grab on Falco may be tricky, especially given his SHL and shine, but it must be done if you hope to even the playing field. You can transition into grabs (preferably always jump-canceled for added speed) via Jabs, tech-chasing, taking advantage of Falco's descent, and so on. Once you do land a grab, do not hesitate to chain-grab Falco as long as you can with your up-throw (jump-canceled, of course); your chain-grabbing should conclude with an up-smash, which ideally will also allow you to follow with a back-aerial, given enemy DI (it is especially important here to emphasize that you should focus less on your up-aerial and more so on your back-aerial for horizontal kills so as to magnify Falco's disadvantage in recovery). If you choose the simple up-throw, up-smash route, take care only to up-smash again should your opponent miss his tech; if you up-smash and he techs in place, he will catch you with a shine. Chain-grabs and corresponding grab combos are easily your biggest ground-based asset in this match-up, so do not hesitate in the least to make use of them.

However, also keep in mind that attempting to force grabs in this match-up can very easily end your stock. The modern metagame is characterized by an overall increase in technicality, and as such even the most mindless Falco player is usually proficient in L-canceling into shines through shields. If you sense weakness in this area and can thus safely land shield-grabs, so much the better; however, you should not under any circumstances emphasize this route of landing grabs. Concentrate instead on landing them via successful tech-chases and wake-up reads as well as by out-spacing aerial approaches. Should an aerial connect with your shield, resist the urge to shield-grab and instead escape your shield with a shine or a well-timed wavedash after the shine (be aware of predictability in your shield escapes, however, as Falco can very easily and safely answer a variety of your options with his SHL and down-aerial). Of course, more proficient Falco players can also make use of his "pillaring" technique, which traps you in your shield with a barrage of repeated shines directly into shuffled down-aerials. A rather novel means of responding to this type of aggression involves your light-shield. Most Falco players have the pillaring timing for hard-shields and unshielded characters deeply ingrained in their minds; as such, they will unconsciously cater to this timing through their technicals. However, if you light-shield instead of hard-shield and tilt the shield up slightly, you change the correct timing of the pillar's down-aerial. This very often severely disrupts the Falco player's flow while simultaneously earning you an easy grab out of your shield. However, take note that you cannot grab out of a light shield as you would out of a hard shield, and you may not have the time to switch to a hard shield for the shield-grab. Remember, however, that all shields can be jump-canceled, and you can jump-cancel your grabs; as such, to shield-grab out of your light shield, simply jump-cancel your grab.

Off-stage play can get quite ugly on both sides of this match-up. Falco can set up Fox for lethal edge-guarding via a down-aerial or down-smash with a simple laser fired off-stage to control Fox's recovery angle. On the other hand, Fox also has his own down-smash and his devastating shine-spike, a major needed advantage in this match-up. If you are knocked off-stage, try not to panic when hit with a laser; do not try to Illusion too quickly, or the incoming laser may make you fall lower than the edge when your Illusion does activate, costing you a stock. At the same time, do not be too hasty with your

choice of recovery. Sweet-spotting the ledge against Falco's down-smash is often difficult at such times, and you may want to practice teching both it and his down-aerial on the side of the stage. If you use Firefox, you will most likely need to grate against the side of the stage in order to sweet-spot, a technique which you will need to master for this match-up. When you Firefox above Falco, DI your fall behind him to give yourself the best chance of surviving his follow-up down-smash. When you do regain the ledge, you should not be so hasty as to ledge-hop into a down-aerial the instant you see Falco near you; a simple reverse wavedash to forward-smash can and will send you out again, if not to your instantaneous death. Likewise, take special care not to get pinned in your shield near the edge. While Falco's grab game is not nearly as potent as yours, a simple forward- or back-throw still gets you off of the stage and into a position to be edge-guarded.

Edge-guarding Falco successfully depends on your timing and shine-spike prowess. Remember that a down-smash at the ledge can catch returning Illusions and Firebirds with lethal results (especially Illusions, with a bit of timing relative to their "ping" cues). Any off-stage Firebird should translate to a lost stock on the Falco's part; without a charge-up hitbox to the attack, it is all too easy to punish with a simple (and lethal) shine-spike, and you should take advantage of each and every opportunity given to you. You can also shine Falco out of his Illusion, again aided by timing your shine in relation to the "ping" cue. Still more edge-guarding options are your down-angled forward-tilt and neutral- and back-aerials. The neutral-aerial is especially handy after your opponent has used his or her second jump due to the fact that it is fast, easily timed, and knocks the bird just low enough to force a Firebird below the stage, which should always equate to a lost stock via shine-spike.

Should you allow Falco to regain the ledge, be wary of the options that he then has. He can, for instance, ledge-hop into a down-aerial, which may set you up for another aerial that will push you off-stage and effectively turn the tables. Also keep the possibility of ledge-hopped double lasers in mind. If you happen to be hit with a down-aerial near the ledge, many more experienced Falcos will move inward in an attempt to anticipate and punish your roll; stay one step ahead of them by varying your get-up as moving inward is for the most part a very common Falco mindgame near the edge.

The Falco vs. Fox match-up can very well be taken to any number of stages in the game, and you can adjust accordingly given your vertical and horizontal killing ability here; Falco still must focus largely on his horizontal kills, although vertical ones are possible by a back- or up-aerial from a shine or even a shine to another shine on stages such as Yoshi's Story. Fountain of Dreams may be a Falco's counter choice as the stage's strange structure makes your approach in the face of the SHL difficult, and its average blast lines allow for horizontal kills. The usual Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64 are also choices for their high ceilings, for which you can compensate by emphasizing horizontal kills yourself with back-aerials to finish grab combos. As for your counter-choices, Corneria is a solid stage for minimizing Falco's horizontal kills and magnifying your vertical kills; simply be aware of your positioning on the stage and watch your DI. Onett may work so far as interfering with side-kills, but Falco can still gain height off you with a preparatory shine and finish with a back-aerial, which could very well kill you vertically or horizontally (keep in mind as well that virtually every modern-day tournament bans Onett). If you are experienced in dealing with Falco's SHL approach and in DI'ing his combos, Final Destination may be a strong choice as you; your chain-grabs and grab combos are especially strong there.

B. High Tier

1. Peach

Peach is yet another common answer to Fox in tournament play. Her powerful down-smash (even more damaging when crouch-canceled) gives her a solid move on which to rely for kills and punishment; her priority and float-canceling grant her the tools she needs to compete somewhat with Fox's own speed and power; her turnips give her an excellent means of setting her opponents up for whatever she deems most effective at the time; and her ability to chain-throw Fox for significant percentages can brutally punish any Fox player who is not at the peak of his technical game. That said, at lower technical levels, this match-up can very well favor Peach; botched shines from aerials (a random finger slip on the "B" button, for instance), mistakes in spacing, and slow transitions into shines from aerials can all be punished severely by Peach by her down-smash or any number of set-ups. Her edge-guarding abilities, especially via float-canceling, also give her strong off-stage options to combat Fox. It is only at higher technical levels of play when Fox gains his own methods of harshly punishing Peach in the form of extended shine combos and infinites. Peach's traction makes her an ideal victim of wall-less infinites, and her tendency to die vertically only improves the effectiveness of Fox's shine combos. At this point, one could very well speculate that Fox holds the advantage in this match-up (however slight), but truly only at this technical level.

On-stage play in the Fox vs. Peach match-up can get quite heated. First off, you will need to pay special attention to your aerial spacing, especially when attempting to approach with a full-jump, fast-fallen neutral-aerial; Peach's wavedash and dash-dance may not be the longest in the game, but they nevertheless grant her the ability to fine-tune her positioning relative to you and set you up to be grabbed (usually into a series of up-throw chains) or dash-attacked and set up for a float-canceled aerial. In addition, many Peach players will make use of her crouch-cancel to punish sloppy L-cancels and shine transitions on your part; if you botch either of these, you may be hit with a down-smash, which you also may or may not accidentally crouch-cancel should you still be holding down after your fast-falling or attempt to shine. Again, watch your spacing on the ground, especially once you decide to advance with a shuffled neutral- or down-aerial. Depending on where Peach is in relation to your shuffle and at what point in your shuffle you hit her, your timing for the correct shuffle (the fast-fall, especially) may change slightly enough to allow Peach to pull off a down-smash; your botched fast-fall may also register as a technical crouch-cancel in this regard, which is not the best of things for your percentage, to say the least. Also be certain (as always) to have your shuffling through shields well in hand; do not forget that Peach has a significant chain-throw with her up-throw on you, and with her down-smash as potentially destructive as it is, you hardly need to give her yet another means of taking stock from you. If you are grabbed, be aware that Peach's chain-throw can extend for quite a long time. To escape, you must DI entirely left or right in the eighties and mash jump. As you can see, the chain throw is still quite damaging even with knowledge of how to escape it; however, DI'ing the finishing neutral-aerial is not too tall of an order and can usually get you back on-stage bruised and battered but still alive.

At lower percents, you can often lead your shuffled neutral-aerials into a damaging shine combo or wall-less infinite (even a partial one-way drill shine does wonders to even up the percentages or stocks in this match-up as Peach succumbs quite frequently to your vertical kills). Again, watch your spacing and timing on your approach, however, lest you be punished with a spaced grab or down-smash. At middle percents, you may be able to chain a few shuffled neutral-aerials on the Peach player, depending on his or her DI, a solid and simple means of tacking on damage. Somewhat higher percents combined with Peach's own physics allow you to follow a connected neutral-aerial with a jump-canceled up-smash, often for the stock. Later on, you may even be able to find

a use for Fox's often-neglected forward-aerial as a substitute for the neutral-aerial once its knockback and Peach's damage disallow any kind of real follow-up; simply shuffle the forward-aerial and connect with its very first hit, which will allow you to follow with your jump-canceled up-smash (obviously, you should avoid using the forward-aerial at all but the highest percents; it does not L-cancel nearly as well as any of Fox's other aeri-als, and you will be punished for using this rather situational aerial incorrectly). As well, should you connect with a neutral-aerial at a relatively low percent and your opponent does not crouch-cancel or it, you can follow with an up-tilt that sets up very nicely for a up-aerial or two. The same follow-up can be performed if you graze your opponent with a neutral-aerial at higher percents (that is, you connect with the "soft" hit instead of the "hard" sweet-spotted hit).

Your throws lose some of their effectiveness in this match-up thanks mainly to Peach's floatiness. At low and middle percents, should you land a grab (most likely from a missed down-smash or out of a shine combo), your usual up-throw to up-aerials routine may be able to net you a good chunk of damage. However, you will find that Fox will begin to throw Peach too high at the higher percents to allow any such follow-up; this of course does not discount the possibility of your following her through the air and eventually tricking her into receiving an up-aerial hit. Simply watch for or force her air-dodge and follow her descent either with an up-aerial or an up-smash as she nears the ground (with the up-smash, however, be sure to activate it when you are sure that your victim is in the effective area of the up-smash, that is, not on the outermost perimeter of the circle created by Fox as he up-smashes). Be aware, however, that Peach can also vary her descent with the aid of her float-canceling, and she can also neutral-aerial out of your throws at certain percents. At higher percents, begin to switch out the up-throw for a heavier emphasis on your waveshine openers to a quick and lethal up-smash, which is for the most part certain to earn you an opposing stock. You may also attempt a surprise down-throw to up-smash near the edge or on platforms or if you sense a certain element of predictability in your opponent's teching.

If you prefer, you can take a more defensive stance in this match-up, attempting to lure Peach in with blaster fire and looking for openings, usually most obvious once she misses a down-smash from a float-canceled aerial. As you would with any other opponent when taking the defensive route, make certain not to allow the Peach player to advance too far into your own "territory," so to speak; you will need to control the space around you so that Peach cannot create easy in-roads with a turnip set-up, dash-attack, or float-cancel while following your retreat. Punish shielded attacks with your up-smash from shield, or take the opportunity to start a shine combo or infinite with a shuffled down-aerial from shield. You will quickly find that in this match-up you will need to take advantage of each and every opening that Peach creates; she is not the slowest of opponents, especially with her float-canceling and neutral-A slaps factored in, and she does possess the tools to punish your mistakes, especially if you are prone to crouch-canceling. In fact, you just may want to train yourself to avoid intentional crouch-canceling entirely in this match-up; granted, it could earn you an up-smash or two at lower percents, but it may also allow the Peach player to rack up a good 50% or so on you with a simple down-smash, which could very well throw you off the stage and hand a stock to your opponent with the following edge-guarding. In light of the power of Peach's down-smash and its tendency to deplete your shield to the point that the attack snipes your feet, you may want to consider implementing light-shielding into your game; this will allow you to escape the down-smash's inherent shield pressure and reset the encounter without suffering a hit each and every time that Peach connects with your shield.

The aggressive Fox must be careful in this match-up and must have a very strong backing of technical ability. In a match-up where you can be chain-throw for

quite some time and finished with a neutral-aerial and where an incorrect shuffle or missed shine can often lead into a devastating down-smash, you must expect no less of yourself. If you do choose to go the aggressive route, make certain that you know how to apply pressure continuously to Peach and not allow her to escape from your onslaught; keep just enough space between you two such that Peach cannot begin her turnip set-up game. As always, be wary of her reverse wavedashes to space out your approach, and know that you must compensate your shuffle timing appropriately to avoid being punished. If the Peach goes on the offensive, watch for her common follow-ups from a float-canceled aerial, which include quick slap set-ups, simple stand-alone down-smashes, and spot-dodges into down-smashes. You should not underestimate the sheer speed of Peach's neutral-A slaps as they are indeed among the fastest moves in the game, and they do a wonderful job of disrupting your technical game or slowing you down just long enough for Peach to pull off a grab or down-smash. As well, be aware that more experienced Peach players will begin grabbing after float-canceling an aerial into your shield if you tend to hold your shield past the aerial in anticipation of the slap.

Your follow-ups to aerials in this match-up should be entirely shines into the usual waveshine and shine combo routine. Jab from aerials are viable options in virtually every other match-up save this one, in particular; Peach, despite her floatiness, does have a potent crouch-cancel counter game thanks in no small part to her down-smash (making attempts to shine after a Jab as a "safety" move especially dangerous) and her down-tilt, which could set you up for any number of things that the Peach has in mind. Be consistent in your follow-ups and do not run into her shield should you sense your technical game slipping in the least. Indeed, you should always be wary of connecting with Peach's shield at all; the sheer speed and priority of her neutral-aerial grants her a potent shield escape option that can simultaneously stuff any approach that you make from above her head, and she can also float-cancel both her neutral- and forward-aerials out of her shield for a startlingly fast counterattack. If you are grabbed, at least make sure that you DI Peach's finishing neutral-aerial correctly to give yourself a better chance at returning with your stock still somewhat intact.

As with all match-ups, be careful playing around the edge with Peach. Between her down-smash, down-tilt, turnips, and float-canceling ability, she has more than enough tools to send you to an early demise. Peaches are especially fond of float-canceling a falling forward-aerial right at the edge in order to hit just a bit below the stage and snipe you out of what you initially thought was a sweet-spotted recovery. If you choose the wrong position to charge a Firefox, Peach can simply float-cancel off-stage and finish you with a neutral-, back-, or forward-aerial. As well, more devious Peach players will float-cancel right below the edge and wait for you there with a neutral-aerial. On the flipside, you should not be nearly as ambitious or aggressive with your edge-guarding on Peach. Rather, you should be focusing play on the center of the stage with a healthy dose of blaster fire. Furthermore, edge-guarding is not your primary means of killing Peach; your vertical KO'ing prowess easily surpasses anything that you could hope to accomplish via edge-guarding. However, if you can force Peach to up-B just slightly above the level of the stage, you can quite often shine her from below or down-smash her and force her just low enough that she cannot grab the ledge. Keep in mind that her umbrella can grab the ledge as well; as such, when you edge-hog Peach, make sure that you roll up from the ledge so that you are still "grabbing" the edge while Peach is within distance of it. Other than that, however, edge-guarding Peach largely consists of timing and spacing back-aerials repeatedly. While this is certainly not the most efficient means of killing Peach, it nevertheless can net you a KO or two at higher percents or if your opponent misses his or her DI.

Stage choice in a Fox vs. Peach match-up is largely the standard thought proc-

ess of Peach attempting to minimize your vertical kills and you attempting to maximize them, with a few variations thrown in here and there. Expect to be counter-picked to Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64, both for their respective massive ceilings, as well as Corneria for more defense-oriented Peaches (be especially wary and cautious about dealing with camping under the Great Fox's fin; you will need to be able to tech on the side of the fin to prevent being down-smashed repeatedly there) and perhaps Final Destination, if the Peach player believes that chain-throwing is in order (remember that this also opens the way for your drill-shines, if you are capable of them). Mute City is also a perennial Peach favorite since she can better edge-guard you there and she can take advantage of the strange structure and sequences of the stage with her float-canceling. Even the unnerving Jungle Japes is a viable choice for a Peach counter-stage for its good-sized ceiling and dual platforms that enable her defensive play. Brinstar is still another option for Peach as she can float above the acid as it obstructs most of the stage, controlling a great deal of space at one time. She can also down-smash the central membranes to disconnect the stage quite quickly, which at times can cause the unwary Fox player to fall into the acid below and be juggled for a good deal of percent or die outright. On the flip side, Yoshi's Story is quite effective for Fox thanks to its low ceiling. Princess Peach's Castle can also work (ironically) if you have a solid plan of approach in case of the inevitable camping; try to keep your back to the center tower, and look for the usual vertical kill and wall-based infinite opportunities. However, this stage, like Onett (also another very powerful counterpick against Peach) is banned in the vast majority of modern-day tournaments. Fortunately, you also have Corneria as a viable choice, with its great horizontal span and low ceilings; you will have to be wary, however, of getting caught by the fin with repeated down-smashes.

2. Captain Falcon

There is no question in the vast majority of experienced players' minds that Fox is a very powerful counter to Falcon, and more than a little evidence exists to support this belief. As a fellow fast-faller, Falcon falls prey to a large assortment of aerial combos and juggling, both of which you have in spades. Furthermore, Falcon's recovery is among the most predictable and easily-punished in the game, shine-spike or otherwise. As if that were not enough, Falcon's traction is absolutely perfect for your plethora of destructive shine combos, anything from the classic waveshine to up-smash to an up-throw and juggling to drill-shine repetitions and infinites. Of course, this does not mean that you can declare this match-up a veritable auto-win; despite his short-comings, Falcon does have his plusses in his speed, lethal forward-aerial, comboing ability, and tech-chasing and -punishment game. Know, however, that you as Fox nevertheless possess a significant upper hand on Falcon (so long as you play well, of course).

Ground play in the Fox vs. Falcon match-up amounts to much that is characteristic of each character. Falcon will make use of his dash-dance to grant himself mobility and fluidity; he can utilize this to anticipate and punish your descents or techs or to fool you into spot-dodging and punish you accordingly, many times with a jump-canceled grab to his tech-following game. Falcon's wave-dash is not the most significant in the game, but Falcon players nevertheless sometimes make use of it to attempt to retreat from an incoming advance or to space after an aerial, for example. Be wary also of Falcon's rather lengthy advance; his short-hop covers a good deal of distance, and he can oftentimes charge in with a shuffled forward-aerial or neutral-aerial (his main form of approach) when you least expect it. You will need to watch your spacing from Falcon and try to anticipate when he will advance (assuming a rather defensive style on your part, of course). If he connects with a neutral-aerial, he can follow into a grab to lead into his tech-chasing game of jump-canceled grabs, down-aerials, and Raptor Boosts, or he can follow into further aerials leading

into a lethal forward-aerial, especially if you should miss your tech upon landing. Furthermore, thanks to his lightning-quick running speed, Falcon can very easily react to linear approaches (especially full-jumped neutral-aerials, fast-fallen or otherwise), run away to space himself for a grab or aerial, and then return fire with his attack of choice; you will find that this is one of Falcon's primary means of breaking your momentum and seizing control of the match. Fortunately, this can very easily be prevented. For the defensive-minded Fox, careful and precise spacing as well as more involved analysis of your angle of approach's hitbox positioning and Falcon's possible routes of escape will lessen these easy openings. More aggressive Foxes will want to weave towards and away from Falcon in relatively close proximity using controlled dash-dances with the aim of cutting off Falcon's stage control and as a result removing his escape options; this usually involves pushing Falcon nearly entirely to the edge of the stage, where he is more often than not forced to shield to contend with the pressure of your shuffled neutral-aerials. A simple grab to back-aerial will place Falcon in the perfect position to be edge-guarded for his stock. When making use of this stage control-oriented strategy, however, always be aware of opposing options that do not involve only running away. For example, some Falcons will cut their retreat short with a surprise back- or down-aerial, either of which can cause you to lose your footing and open you to the Captain's tech-chasing game. As well, something as simple as a neutral-aerial or a properly-timed shield can throw off your timing and again force you to forfeit control of the situation. All told, you simply cannot afford to give up your advantages in this match-up through something as easily prevented as getting grabbed from missed aerial approaches. Always remember that the seemingly insignificant amount of lag frames from your L-canceled aerial approaches is all that the speedy Falcon (or most any other character, for that matter) needs to poke a hole in your gameplay. You are not, never have been, and never will be completely safe during any of your approaches (even with the neutral-aerial), shuffling included.

A significant portion of maintaining your advantage in this match-up is not to fall prey to Falcon's tech-chasing game, which is quite potent in itself. It is thus especially important not to be predictable on the get-up and more so to cease hitting buttons as you fall; if you constantly get up with an attack, you will find yourself eating more than your fair share of Falcon's infamous knee. Vary the direction of your techs, and make sure to throw in some delayed get-ups and non-techs if you sense yourself becoming predictable. Remember that a predicted tech more often than not leads to Falcon's usual knee finisher either directly or with a preceding set-up move such as his down-aerial or Raptor Boost. If you stand up in place or if you see the Falcon dash-dancing right next to you, try to resist the impulse to spot-dodge immediately; spot-dodging in such instances represents predictability on your part and can be punished (often lethally). This of course should not stop you from spot-dodging entirely in this match-up; only know that many players attempt to make their opponents "flinch" with a spot-dodge via dash-dancing or standing next to a get-up. If you can effectively fight your own predictability and dampen Falcon's tech-punishment game, you have removed one of his most powerful ground-based tools. Do not take his tech-following lightly as it may very well decide who takes the game; you do have a decided advantage in this match-up, but not to the extent that you can play stupidly and still hope to triumph (always keep this in mind).

That said, you have more than a few lethal tools at your disposal to combat Falcon; most of them focus (as always) on a sound technical game. Yet again, you will need to be able to shine through shields here; shield-grabs open you to Falcon's tech-chasing, and the less opportunities you give him in this regard the better. Being able to punish shield-grabbing effectively also puts Falcon at the mercy of your shine combos, easily a major advantage you have over him. Indeed, your fast, high-priority shuffled neutral-aerial approach can

force Falcon into his shield at the blink of an eye, so you will most certainly need to be able to contend with shield game quite frequently. Your style in this match-up should thus be focused on precise, technical aggression, with a very heavy emphasis on properly-executed shine combos to edge-guarding. You should always be keeping pressure of some kind on Falcon lest you give him time to recuperate and buy time for an advance. As such, rely on your bread-and-butter shuffled neutral- and down-aerials as your approach (more so the neutral-aerial), both of which when landed lead directly into the coveted shine and your combo options. Indeed, the modern Fox's play style against Falcon consists of a majority of neutral-aerials with a slight splash of shines (largely in response to connecting with a shield rather than with the intent of starting lengthy waveshine combos) and very few (if any) down-aerials. The idea here is that the single hit-frame of your shine and the very slight amount of time spent wavedashing or jumping out of the shine are all that your opponent really needs to find an opening; as such, the constant pressure of properly-executed shuffled neutral-aerials, when combined with their priority over Falcon's move-set and your ability to run out of them immediately to space yourself for another volley, is your best choice for covering your enemy's options while also keeping yourself relatively safe from retribution. Should a neutral-aerial connect, you can follow up with anything from a grab to another neutral-aerial to an up-smash, depending upon opposing DI and percentage. The overarching idea here is not to force your approach with the idea that you are virtually invincible while advancing; on the contrary, you are anything but untouchable. Falcon's speed and shuffle game allow him a multitude of options out of his shield, ranging from the knee to a down-, neutral-, or back-aerial, any one of which can cause or very quickly lead to your demise. As such, do not be reckless when Falcon shields. Keep up your shield pressure, but also be able to pick up on and predict shield escape options such as rolls, jumps, and aerials. Likewise, do not insist upon repeatedly pounding a shield with aerials if a simple grab to back-, neutral-, or up-aerial will more than suffice.

Each of your connected shines can potentially lead into an up-smash, a jump-canceled grab, or a drill-shine if you are so bold as to begin a drill-shine series; however, remember the shine's limitations when you lead in with a neutral-aerial. Your up-smashes can lead further into juggling or a back-aerial (obviously the preferred follow-up when near the edge; you may be surprised at Falcon's resistance to vertical kills), or even another jump-canceled grab at lower percents. Grabs should as always lead into up-smashes and the usual follow-ups, but, again, use the back-aerial if you can when near an edge. If you have the technical prowess to perform repeated drill-shines, you may want to make this your favored choice from a shine; not only does this inflict significant damage on Falcon, it also drags him closer to the edge where a timely down-smash or throw can get him off-stage and put him at the mercy of your shine and ledge-dropped or shine-turned back-aerials. Take note as well that the down-smash should be your preferred attack out of a waveshine when near the ledge. The low angle of this attack forces your fast-falling foe to use his second jump and up-B to recover from below, a position from which he is far more easily edge-guarded. Indeed, Falcon prefers to be hit into the air thanks to his unusually pronounced resistance to vertical kills; an up-smash out of a waveshine near the ledge is thus not the optimal choice as it gives Falcon the added maneuverability of being able to save his second jump (or regain it with his down-B) and use it to return on-stage, a far safer course of action than recovering with the up-B below Fox.

Edge-guarding Falcon is not one of the most difficult endeavors, and it allows you to steal stocks quite easily from the unlucky racer. You have all manner of tools from which to choose for your edge game, ranging from your down- and forward-smashes to your shine and back-aerial (especially from the edge). A single shine connected off-stage translates to a lost stock for Falcon, but be aware that he can fend you off from above with his useful up-aerial. If Falcon

is approaching the stage from above, he may also attempt to keep you at bay with a knee, so take care not to jump absent-mindedly into it; you should wait for or bait it out and punish as you see fit. A Falcon who has grabbed the ledge will often come up with a ledge-hopped up-, neutral-, or forward-aerial, all of which possess startling speed and, for the forward-aerial, lethal power; if your opponent becomes predictable in terms of his ledge return, you can punish with a forward-smash after a reverse wavedash to space out his attack. Falcon of course has his own tools for edge-guarding you; a perennial favorite is his down-tilt, which can catch you out of your Illusion and set you up for a lethal knee, as well as his up-tilt, which is fast enough to punish sloppy recoveries with a horrendous knockback angle while still giving your opponent time to react to your next move. Falcon can also combo you off-stage and finish with an off-stage up-aerial, which could very well push you to your death even as you continue to survival DI (this is in fact what causes this sequence of events). When returning, take care not to jump hastily into an incoming aerial or tilt. Your opponent may also try to trick you during your get-up from the ledge by using a second jump to delay his descent long enough for a falling knee to crunch into you. This match-up, like all others, rewards you for maintaining your unpredictability while recovering as well as for being able to tech hits at the ledge.

When it comes time to choose counter-stages, the Falcon player may opt for one of the usual larger stages, such as Dream Land 64 or Kongo Jungle 64, to improve his chances at returning as well as somewhat decrease your vertical killing power, although your usual focus on horizontal edge-guard kills in this match-up should see you through the stage's supposed advantages. Final Destination and Stadium are also Falcon favorites thanks largely to the mobility that they provide. Mute City has also surfaced as a modern-day Falcon counter-pick choice as it essentially resembles a "mini FD," for lack of a better term. On the other side of the coin, you can counter to your usual Onett (easily a boon yet again for its low ceiling, infinite-enabling walls, and side-kill-preventing houses), should it be permitted. Fountain of Dreams is also a potent anti-Falcon stage (and the instantaneous ban of choice for Falcon players the world over in tournament play) as its strange, constantly-shifting platform structure and small size restrict your foe's movement options and his ability to stay out of his shield. Corneria is yet again a solid choice in this match-up, as with many others, again due to its low ceiling, lengthy span, and uneven ground that can at times interfere with Falcon's tech-read timings. Overall, however, you should be able to adjust to any stage to which the Falcon player takes you and earn kills by your customary shine combos and edge-guarding.

3. Jigglypuff

Jigglypuff may not be the most common of tournament characters (although modern tournament play is witnessing a marked increase in Puff usage), but she nevertheless packs her fair share of power when wielded correctly. With proper spacing and timing, her characteristic "wall of pain" and powerful, high-priority aerial game can allow her to hold some degree of control over the match. In addition, Jigglypuff can very easily take advantage of your recovery, dragging you down to your death with neutral-aerials or simply batting you away with a well-placed back-aerial. The smart Fox player also must not entirely discount Jigglypuff's arsenal of Rest combos, which severely punish you for any botched spacing, missed shuffles or L-cancels, predictable techs, or missed DI. These facts may seem to paint a grim picture of this match-up; indeed, many players persist in the notion that Jigglypuff is in some way a suitable counter to Fox. At low-level play, you may find yourself falling victim to Jigglypuff's simple up-throw-to-Rest "space animal slayer," as well as her aforementioned ability to cheap out recoveries; however, at higher levels (especially in terms of technical ability), you will find that you can make life very difficult for Jigglypuff with a more defensive, precise style and your customary shines from

aerials.

Ground play against Jigglypuff can become somewhat unnerving at times. You will need to exercise a bit of patience in this match-up; running head-long into her spaced back-aerial "wall of pain" is not the wisest of decisions and will allow your opponent to tack on easy damage that you otherwise could have avoided with some simple thought. Keep just enough distance between yourself and the enemy Jigglypuff so that you are out of range of her wall of pain and still have the proximity to run in and punish when appropriate. Admittedly, this is often not the easiest of tasks; the speed and range of properly-spaced back-aerials can make your advance tricky, and you very well may underestimate Jigglypuff's horizontal movement. Should a back-aerial connect with your shield, you should resist the temptation to shield-grab automatically; correct spacing will see that your hand grabs nothing but air as your opponent moves away, setting you up for another quick back-aerial. Of course, if you sense consistently bad spacing on your foe's part, take advantage with a grab or, preferably, an up-smash out of your shield, an extremely useful punisher in this match-up. If you do land a grab, rely on your usual up-throw to up-aerial at lower percents; at this time, you can catch the Jigglypuff with your aerial and perhaps land a lethal blow (watch for attempts to DI your up-aerial upward so that your more powerful kick misses). Grabs lose their effectiveness at higher percents here because of Jigglypuff's floatiness, although you can of course try a down-throw to tech-chase with an up-smash, if you so desire. At these percents, you can try to connect with a falling up-aerial or a neutral- or back-aerial to finish the job. However, it is important that you do not allow your opponent to reach the higher percents on a consistent basis; doing so makes it difficult to land your killing blow, especially if proper spacing and shield-play disallow use of your jump-canceled and from-shield up-smash.

Yet again, words alone can really only do so much for this portion of the match-up; you will need to be able to pick up on and take advantage of the timing and range of Jigglypuff's wall of pain, perhaps facilitating mistakes in spacing by running in and holding up your shield from time to time, which may very well allow you to score an up-smash from shield. If you happen to be caught in your shield, you can break out with a simple jump to an aerial of your choice (preferably a falling up-aerial or a down-aerial) to put the pressure back on Jigglypuff. Should you land a down-aerial or a low-percent neutral-aerial, Jab afterwards instead of shining on instinct and follow up with a jump-canceled up-smash; you will find this jab-to-up-smash sequence to be very useful in setting up your opponent for lethal blows. You can also take advantage of human reaction times and attempt a down-aerial into a grab from time to time.

Overall, your style for this match-up should be defensive. Lure your opponent in with blaster fire and focus on landing a lead-in Jab or shine to a tech-chasing up-smash at the middle percents. Both sides of this match-up thrive on low-percent kills, you with your vertical kill mechanisms and Jigglypuff with her various Rest lead-ins, and as such you should take care not to pour the blaster fire on too heavily lest you make your opponent exceedingly difficult to finish. If you choose to be aggressive, make certain that you are well-versed in your shuffling, fast-falling, L-canceling, and follow-up shines as a low-percent grab when coupled with missed DI could spell a lost stock for you. You can fight Jigglypuff's aerial game quite effectively with your back-aerial, but her greater aerial maneuverability could allow her to space out your aerial and retaliate as she sees fit. Unknown522 of SWF highlights another powerful option of Fox's in his up-tilt, which, he states, can combo during lower and middle percents into your up-aerial and can kill at around 90-100%.

If you happen to run into a shield in some manner (usually from a foiled jump-canceled up-smash), you should always remember to hold left or right to DI your

opponent's up-throw as soon as you can; you can hardly allow Jigglypuff to land easy kills with something solved by simple DI. If you miss this DI, you can of course always DI the Rest itself with upwards-against DI to minimize the horizontal knockback length of the move. Take care not to DI up too much, however, as you may find yourself being killed vertically instead of actually surviving the Rest. If you can survive this Rest, your stock should be largely secure for some time provided that edge-play with Jigglypuff does not lead to a cheaped-out recovery; also be wary of running head-on into your opponent's methodical wall of pain (remember that patience is your friend in this match-up as well as many others). You will need to be able to "feel" when Jigglypuff is vulnerable in the air and during her wall of pain as the spacing between the characters influences each of their viable options. Similarly, you cannot become impatient at middle percentages and run in constantly with mistimed jump-canceled up-smashes as you probe desperately for a kill; doing so will cause you to hit far too many shields and lose all of your momentum (or even your entire stock) to a grab or Rest out of shield. Following this same line of thought, if you are forced to hit a shield, do your best to do so from the back; this will remove your foe's shield grab option and will help maintain the integrity of your momentum.

Other than Jigglypuff's wall of pain, her aforementioned Rest also factors in as an integral part of her game plan against you as a fast-falling space animal. Note that her up-throw is far from her only method of setting up a Rest. She can also lead in with an up-tilt from an aerial (should you miss your DI on the up-tilt) or from ground-based spacing via wavedashes; a properly L-canceled down-aerial; a neutral-aerial; a falling up-aerial; a crouch-cancel (all the more reason to remove dash attacks and forward-smashes from your move-set here); a crouched grab; and from platform-based tech-following, among others. This last method is of particular interest as far as stages are concerned. You must take care on platform stages not to be predictable on your get-up should you land on a platform; it is no great task for your opponent to float to your level and land a Rest off your tech-roll or in-place tech on a platform, in which case you should do your best to DI the Rest itself as appropriate.

On that note, be aware that upwards-against DI is in fact not always the ideal choice when it comes to being hit with a Rest. As previously mentioned, an excessive up component on your DI could cause you to die upwards from a Rest that you could have survived and recovered from with slightly more horizontal DI. RaynEX of SWF provides the following effective solution to this situation: by initially Smash DI'ing the Rest upwards and against and then sliding the control stick past the left vertex and down to the corresponding downwards and against direction, you can prevent vertical Rest kills. As well, keep in mind just how vulnerable Jigglypuff is after using her Rest; she is rendered completely immobile as she gradually wakes up. If you constantly DI Rests with a strong upward component, your "star KO" animation will easily last the entire length of your opponent's wake-up animation, allowing Puff to escape completely unpunished. As such, from around the high forties and onward, take care not to impulsively DI Rests upwards; should the Rest connect, you are virtually guaranteed to die regardless of your DI, and if you tend to DI such Rests upwards and against (technically the "correct" DI), you will forfeit the opening that your foe presents to you as you return with your next stock. Of course, proper execution of this line of thought depends upon your knowing just when a Rest set-up has been performed and when the Rest itself is coming; keep in mind that while horizontal DI is appropriate in the circumstances described above, it is anything but correct when you are hit with a forward-smash, back-aerial, or the like. Should you make it back to the stage in some fashion while Puff is still asleep, Miggz of SWF recommends a barrage of standing lasers followed by a charged up-smash released just as Puff awakens.

Also be wary of attempting to take on Jigglypuff around edges. Her innate floatiness allows her to reach out from the ledge with a neutral-aerial and then weave back to grab the ledge again, safely out of your range and further protected by a few invincibility frames. She can also Sing-cancel from the ledge by cutting off her Sing animation with a ledge grab, sending you to sleep close enough to land an easy Rest at the stage's edge. You can hardly afford to make such careless mistakes in this match-up and still expect to triumph. As such, take care not to be lured into edge-play with the opposing Jigglypuff; rather, always force your enemy to you with blaster fire and more than a little patience, remembering to focus the action of the fight largely in the center of the stage, especially at low percents where Rests can still easily claim stocks (you will need that extra space on either side to capitalize on your DI). If your opponent is prone to Pounding from the ledge, see if you can punish him or her with an up-smash from your shield (note that many players also attempt to Pound out of their aerial "tumbling" animation in an effort to catch you off-guard; they should meet the same fate for their predictability).

Jigglypuff's floatiness, aerial maneuverability, and corresponding options from the ledge make edge-guarding her a chore. An opponent who knows how to DI will not die horizontally very often with Jigglypuff, so your primary focus should again be vertical kills via up-throw, tech-follows, or Jab set-ups, among others. The shine-spike is largely impractical in this match-up, although it is entirely possible to land enough off-stage shines (returning to the stage each time) so as to exhaust Jigglypuff's jumps; however, keep in mind that her rising Pound enables her to gain height. Jigglypuff, on the other hand, can edge-guard you quite well if she chooses to remain on-stage; her down- and forward-smashes are particularly effective in this regard, and even her dash attack is a viable option as it possesses a long-standing hitbox and startlingly high knockback. However, experienced players will largely forego this method of edge-guarding and instead go right off-stage and exploit your recovery as much as possible. Your Illusion and Firefox start-ups will meet with back-aerials or a series of descending neutral-aerials to drag you too far down to recover. Again, remember the vulnerability of your recovery to Jigglypuff's aerial play and take care not to hand over stocks with thoughtless attempts to fight her on the edge; you simply have far less to gain and far more to lose than she does.

Stage selection for Fox vs. Jigglypuff follows the usual thought process; she does not want to die vertically while you want to kill vertically. As such, expect to be taken to such locales as Jungle Japes, Dream Land 64, and Kongo Jungle 64, all infamous for their ceilings. Mute City is also a favorite Jigglypuff counter-stage as the City's unique structure allows her to make the most of her aerial options and maneuverability. Brinstar is yet another potential counterpick choice for your balloon-like foe as Puff can snag Rests off of the acid, which can trap you for a good deal of percent thanks to your fast-falling nature. Your counter-choices should include Yoshi's Story, Corneria, Onett, and Yoshi's Island; Rests on these last two choices should be DI'ed more horizontally and less vertically to avoid falling victim yourself to low ceilings. Again, however, keep in mind that few modern-day tournaments permit Onett and Yoshi's Island.

4. Ice Climbers

Once considered only above-average characters, the Ice Climbers have seen a significant revolution in their level of play and in their metagame. With an innovative double shield defense, powerful and efficient smashes and aerials, good longevity (for the most part), a speedy means of getting around, and lethal grab combos, the ICs have become one of the most powerful characters in the game, especially when in the right hands. Be wary in this match-up as the advantage is oftentimes conditional, to say the least. Both Fox and the ICs

can do horrendous things to each other, and the match hinges largely on which player can successfully pull off the most "cheap" moves. For you, this involves heavy use of shine spikes; for your opponent, this involves extended grab combos.

Successfully taking on an experienced ICs player requires some preparation ahead of time on your part. You absolutely must be acquainted with shuffling through double shields and into your follow-ups each and every time. Some time spent in Training Mode practicing on a Starman-toting ICs computer will save you much aggravation later on and will prevent you from giving your opponent far too many easy openings by such easy means as a shield grab, which in this match-up can very well mean the loss of a stock at higher levels. Take time to practice shuffling through unshielded ICs as well as the double connected hits of your neutral-aerial in particular will alter the timing of the shuffle itself. Another means of coping with the Climbers' double shield defense involves delaying your lead-in aerial so that it hits the center part (or lower) of the shield; indeed, if you hit any shield too high, you risk losing the attack's shield stun time, which opens you to shield grabs. Once you get your shuffles into follow-ups well under your fingers, you can begin to focus on the more detail-oriented aspects of the match.

A battle with a well-versed ICs player can involve more effort than you may at first think. Chances are that your opponent will adopt a rather defensive stance, making use of wavedashes out of the ICs' double shield to maneuver about the arena and to throw off your aerial- and ground-based spacing. This is precisely why you must have shuffling through double shields well under your fingers; it is, as always, essential to your approach and is virtually the only means of safely opening the ICs to you. Keep in mind that grabbing the ICs, though very much possible, is not exactly the wisest course of action; you may for example grab Nana instead of the lead Popo, inadvertently opening yourself to your opponent, or you may succeed in grabbing the lead IC and eat a smash from the remaining one (remember that your opponent can still switch control to the other IC if he or she reacts in time), which will be all the more painful if you are caught unawares and without any DI. As such, you will need to maneuver yourself in such a manner as to cut off the ICs' route of escape. Try to pin them against an edge and to connect a shine or follow-up there to take control of the match. If you are having trouble getting the correct spacing relative to the ICs due to their wavedashing, simply force them to you with your blaster fire; as you do so, however, be wary of a deceptively-quick wavedash approach into a smash (usually a jab followed by the versatile down-smash) that could catch you off-guard. If you are certain of your spacing, you can also utilize full-jump neutral-aerials as a means of getting on top of the ICs; this may also alleviate any difficulties that you are having in following your aerials with a shine. If you choose to continue to apply shield pressure from this position, do so at the back of the Climbers' shields as this will disallow their landing shield-grabs should you make a technical error.

Your approach in this match-up must be more cautious than normal. Remember that the ICs' lengthy wavedash grants them a deceptively high rate of speed on the ground. This virtually lag-free means of transportation also allows your opponent to react easily to your spacing relative to him, a particularly important attribute when you are attempting to close in while searching for an opening. It is for this reason that you should make each and every one of your aerials' L-cancels as crisp and clean as possible; a flubbed L-cancel, especially on more easily-anticipated aerials as your back-aerial, will give the ICs just enough time to wavedash in and connect with a down-smash or a grab, either of which could lead to your early demise. Use your falling back-aerials sparingly as a mistake in their L-canceling after a miss will almost certainly open you to your foe. If your opponent insists on changing his spacing constantly as you are in the air, shine-turn as needed so that you are always facing his

front; this will allow you to descend with the more-quickly-L-canceled neutral-aerial and will reduce any openings that you create from your return to the ground. You should also DI your fall in relation to your opponent so as not to fall prey to a spaced down-smash on the ground below you; wavelanding is also quite useful in this regard. As always, try to anticipate when you are in danger of being smashed and adjust your DI accordingly; a down-smash near the edge that is left without DI can lead to your very early death when combined with the ICs' edge-guarding.

Your goal during your approach is to get the ICs off of their wavedashing feet and into your control. You will achieve this most effectively through your shine. Note here for future reference that use of the jab as a follow-up, though entirely possible, should be minimized against dual ICs; their crouch-cancel counter game is quite powerful given their down-smash, and the jab does not give you such lethal killing opportunities as does the shine, as will be shown here. As stated above, the shine is your key to victory in this match-up. You must know how to connect your shine and how best to follow it up, preferably in such a manner as to remove the partner IC or to kill the lead one all at once, a feat not all that uncommon for a smart and well-versed Fox. You can, for example, land with shines, whether or not you did an aerial, and jump-cancel that shine into another, which preferably should strike the ICs in some form, shielding or not, and then jump-cancel that one into your second jump to escape or to reset the situation. Pressuring your opponent in this manner may allow you to connect an easy shine without the need of an aerial attack approach; if this was done near an edge, so much the better. If you close on your foe using this shine-jump method, you can continue to pressure him or her by following with a down-aerial out of your second jump into yet another shine; note however that the ICs' up-aerial is quite effective at combating your drill kicks, so you may have to change things up as needed.

Making use of platforms is yet another way that you can control the flow of the match quite convincingly. While the Climbers command a great deal of speed and mobility on long, flat surfaces, these attributes are significantly hampered on small platforms. As such, playing patiently around platforms, including properly spacing yourself so as to cut down on the ICs' aerial options, and luring your opponent into jumping up to attack you can have a tremendous impact on the match. Your overall superior speed allows you to position yourself below your foe, where you can pelt him with up- and back-aerials while safely out of range of his grabs. Overall, the message here is that you should always remember to take advantage of a stage's architecture for your gain and your opponent's loss.

Once you have connected enough shines (either through shielded or unshielded aerials, the "shine-jump" technique, etc.) such that the low-traction ICs have been knocked off-stage, you can then proceed to take control of the match. It is common knowledge that the ICs are most powerful when both are in action; their moves' strength is effectively doubled, and they also have access to their repertoire of lethal grab combos, a few of which can go from 0% to death if you are not smart about dealing with them. As such, your principle goal against the ICs is to score a very low-percent kill; note that this does not necessarily have to be scored on the lead Climber as the loss of the partner will nullify their single greatest tool against you: their infinite and extended grab combos. If your shine has knocked both Climbers off the stage, you can try for a single shine spike to take out one or both of the Climbers at once, or you can simply resort to your old-fashioned edge-guarding coupled with plenty of ledge-dropped back-aerials. If you sense that your hold on the edge is beginning to falter, aim a shine at the secondary Climber to remove a significant source of worry when the lead one returns to the stage. If, on the other hand, your shine has hit the ICs such that the lead one grabs the edge while the computer-controlled one stalls off-stage with a jump, you can end

the secondary's "stock" immediately with a quick, simple shine on the easily-predicted AI. This is your single greatest advantage against the ICs and should be the centerpiece of your game plan against them; although the remaining IC can put up somewhat of a fight (largely via down-throws to tech-chase down-smashes and the reliable up-throw to dash-attack to re-grab or down-smash), it is far less than what the dual ICs can do with their powerful grab combos.

Of course, you will not always be so lucky as never to get grabbed against the ICs; when you do, you must instantly shift gears and focus on escaping the grab itself before too much damage can be done. At lower percents, the simplest way to do this is to mash buttons or rotate the control stick in some combination as quickly as you can; your controller will not appreciate it, and it makes for some rather hilarious occurrences, but your stock for that match will thank you. At higher percents, you will need to be more subtle, so to speak. You must be able to DI out of the ICs' short-hop down-aerial infinite grab, the most frequently used variant in tournament play, and you must also be able to DI the standard forward-smash finisher combo (note that most ICs players will only use the up-smash finisher grab combo on you at higher percents so as to ensure the kill, at which point DI will probably not save you from your vertical death). To escape the "infinite" short-hop down-aerial combo, you must DI away from the ICs and shine; the added distance from your DI and the quick come-out time of the shine combine to beat out the ICs' follow-up. Naturally, however, you must also be on the look-out that your opponent is going to continue the grab combo with the down-aerial variant when you are DI'ing away; if you DI away when your foe switches to the forward-smash finisher, you will greatly magnify the smash's knockback and essentially kill yourself. Experienced ICs players will know this and will alternate their grab combos as they see fit; you likewise must adjust however possible. Fortunately, coping with the forward-smash finisher itself is relatively easy; simply remember the basic idea that DI'ing upwards and against the hit will increase the hit's vertical knockback (from the upwards component of your DI) while decreasing its horizontal knockback distance (from the upwards and against components of your DI), which you are most concerned with in this case. From there, simply be careful not to mess up on your recovery (that is, being predictable or failing to sweetspot) and then switch gears again, focusing now on taking control of the match via shines and shine-spikes.

Still another grab "infinite" involves alternating grab hits from the lead IC with down-tilts from the secondary until a suitable percentage has been reached, at which point the infinite is ended with a Smash attack of the ICs player's choosing. Deemed "Wobbling" after the player who popularized its use, this highly controversial technique has been the focus of a great deal of debate throughout the Smash community, so much so that it is frequently banned in tournament play (although the interpretation of what actually constitutes Wobbling is left to the tournament organizer's discretion, as is the severity of the punishment and when to apply it). While this technique is unescapable beyond the 40-50 percent range if done correctly, it nevertheless has a few limitations on its use. For one, the opponent must possess enough percentage to continue with the alternating hits; it is entirely possible to rotate and button mash out of the lead-in grab below the aforementioned range. As well, both Climbers must be alive and within range of each other at the time that the grab is landed. Beyond those stipulations, Wobbling can be performed on any stage and in any position so long as no outside influences (such as Brinstar's acid) interfere. This technique makes it all the more clear that avoiding grabs in this as well as any other match-up is of paramount importance in deciding the game's victor.

Since two ICs occupy the battlefield with you, your fight is not quite over once you have removed the secondary. Granted, the remaining IC is severely lacking in power in comparison to when the two were together; its solo smashes

are essentially half as powerful, and it has lost the benefits of the dual shield and of grab combos. However, despite all of these losses, the lone IC still has some semblance of a game plan against you, especially if you play sloppily and over-confidently. With its grab game removed, the lone IC will switch gears to tech-following and prediction; it will attempt to land grabs to set up for punishment via down- and forward-smashes, and it will attempt to space out your approach with wavedashes and counter with dash-attacks into down-smashes, all of which can be surprisingly effective. As such, you must continue to pay attention to your techs and get-ups (as always), being careful not to fall into simple, easily-avoided traps involving reverse-wavedash fake-outs or charged-smash stalls as you recover your fighting stance. Being predictable at this stage of the match can still get you killed even though you may sense that victory is within your grasp; as such, play intelligently, switching up your get-ups and techs as stated above. Force the IC to you with blaster fire if you are having trouble finding an easy opening, or switch to an aggressive stance free of the hassle of botching shuffles on the double shield and double hits on the two ICs. Follow connected drills with a jab into an up-smash or into a grab and up-aerials at lower percents where the IC down-aerial cannot beat you to the punch. Connected neutral-aerials can also lead into jump-canceled up-smashes. Overall, avoid instantly shining from aerials as your follow-up at this point in order to give yourself more options to kill out of the jab (this is provided that your opponent does not have a tendency to crouch-cancel and counter with a down-smash, of which you should be wary). If a shine will send the lone IC off-stage, however, by all means shine from your lead-in aerial and edge-guard or shine-spike from there.

Due to the unique nature of the ICs characters, you may wish to add a select few stages to your counter list for this particular match-up. For example, you can take advantage of the secondary IC's AI by taking your opponent to such stages as Rainbow Cruise and Poke Floats; both are moving stages which can lead to the secondary IC's quick death by suicide (be certain that you are comfortable with these rather strange stages yourself before opting to take your opponent to either one, of course). Other viable stages in this match-up include Yoshi's Story and Fountain of Dreams, both small stages in which a single shine can push the ICs off-stage and set up for a crippling shine-spike quite easily (watch your DI, however). Corneria is yet another option; its low ceilings facilitate your vertical kills (as well as the ICs'), its lengthy span detracts from quick edge-guard cheap-outs by the ICs (and also from your shine-spiking game), and the Arwings' laser fire can interrupt extended grab combos. Onett is also an option for its vertical kills and easy opportunities for extended wall-based infinites; the cars also provide a means of ending grab combos prematurely. Recall, however, that only a select few modern-day tournaments permit Onett. As for your opponent's stage choices, expect to be taken to Final Destination (for the ICs' mobility and inability to be pushed off-stage easily), Dream Land 64, and perhaps Stadium.

C. Middle Tier

1. Samus

Samus, although perhaps not as common a match-up in tournament play as Falco, Marth, or another Fox, is nevertheless quite a formidable character when used correctly. Her wavedashing allows for excellent spacing, especially with respect to your approach when combined with her down- and forward-smash. Her recovery is simply obscene, and her innate physics and powerful neutral-aerial diminish the effectiveness of your classic up-throw-to-up-aerial routine. Samus can obviously play a potent projectile set-up game, either baiting you with a flurry of missiles, using them as a means of advancing on you, or controlling your positioning while you are off-stage. Furthermore, Samus possesses a very potent crouch-cancel counter game in her down-tilt and down-smash (especially

her down-smash) which when coupled with technical mistakes on your part and edge-guarding on hers can often end more than a few of your stocks. However, being the veritable toolbox character that he is, Fox has his own answers to Samus's game which can tilt the match-up in his favor to a certain extent.

First off, it is especially critical in this match-up that you perform as perfect shuffles into shines as you possibly can; any missed L-cancels or fast-falls will almost certainly see you hit with a down-smash out of a crouch-cancel and possibly sent off-stage. You will quickly realize that crouch-canceling is an integral part of a well-played Samus's game, and as such you must do everything in your technical power to diminish or entirely remove this advantage as it will be all too prevalent in any Fox vs. Samus match-up. You can also take a page out of the Ice Climbers match-up and delay your aerials so that they connect when you are only slightly above the ground; this gives you more stun during which to escape should you notice that your opponent is favoring his crouch-cancels, and it also minimizes the chances that an up-B out of shield will catch you with its start-up frames should you connect with a guarded Samus.

Next, you must make certain that you are able to follow effectively out of your connected shines. You should not always go unthinkingly for the jump-canceled grab from your waveshine in this match-up as, truth be told, your usual up-throw is not nearly as potent a set-up in this match-up as in others. Samus will at higher percents simply float upwards far out of your reach, or her speedy and powerful neutral-aerial will simply swat you out of the sky before your up-aerial connects; she can even lay a bomb in the air and catch you out of a mistimed jump approach. As such, focus on your simple waveshine to up-smash as a finisher, and be wary of using your neutral-aerial as a lead-in for this; since the neutral-aerial lifts Samus slightly off the ground (assuming that she is not crouch-canceling, of course), your shine will hit her while she is airborne, which will push her into the ground and cut the shine's stun time short, thus allowing Samus to sneak out a down-smash despite your speed. If you watch your spacing, shuffled down-aerials can function as nigh-guaranteed lead-ins to that needed lethal up-smash; note, however, that both Smash DI and your opponent's naturally "thin" stun animation could allow Samus to escape your drill and counterattack. As with other floatier characters, you can oftentimes follow Samus from a connected neutral-aerial into a jump-canceled up-smash right then and there; you may also want to begin utilizing your forward-aerial at the higher percents if you are not too worried about opposing crouch-canceling. If you still are troubled by Samus's crouching, you have another viable answer in falling up-aerials, an innovative (and effective) means of both countering crouch-canceling and of finishing off your foe. Keep in mind also that drill shine repetitions are as effective as ever on Samus, but you may need to perform perfect wavedashes in order to reach her in time; enemy DI may also off-set your drill shines as will the aforementioned "thin" stun animation, so adjust accordingly and remove drill shines from your routine if you sense their effectiveness decreasing.

Spacing and angles of approach are also of critical importance in this match-up; Samus's projectile game, wavedash, and crouch-canceling all can make successful approaches via head-on shuffle assaults difficult, and you must thus adjust accordingly. If you are having trouble breaking in on a defensive Samus, try full-jumping and fast-falling your neutral-aerials when you feel that the angle of your fall will allow you to connect with Samus (note that you absolutely must fast-fall your aerial to reduce your chances of being crouch-cancel countered; Samus's crouch-cancel and physics also reduce the viability of your Jabs as a follow-up to your aerials, so it is safest to maintain shining from aerials instead). Be careful about accidentally steering yourself into a recently-fired missile, and be especially mindful if your opponent is prone to wavedashing backward in response to your advances. A wavedash of

proper length can allow the Samus both to dodge your approaching aerial and to retaliate with her characteristic down- and forward-smashes. You may have to throw some variations into the time prior to your approach, for example, double-jumping and delaying the transition into your second jump by stalling in the shine, in order to throw off your opponent as to your method of approach. When you do connect with your aerial, punish as best as you can. Be especially mindful of your more technical follow-ups, such as your shuffles into Samus's shield; her up-B out of shield is surprisingly quick and functions as a very reliable escape move as well as a means of taking advantage of any flaws in your technical game. It is also difficult at best to follow due to its lengthy stun time and the distance that it carries Samus. However, you have a few solutions to this up-B out of shield problem. For one, you can hit her shield as low as possible with your aerials (although repeatedly launching an offensive on Samus' shield is not at all recommended). You can also buffer into a shield from your L-cancel so that you more often than not shield the up-B's start-up frames and thus are cleared to pursue with an up-smash. You can even try to DI the initial hit frames into the ground and immediately tech, although this is not nearly as consistent a solution as buffering into a shield. If you do choose the buffered shield route, be wary of more observant players who will switch in shield-grabs instead of out-of-shield up-B's.

Do not be so quick as to rush after Samus if you believe you have her cornered. For instance, if Samus forward-tilts your shield, you should not try to wavedash out immediately and attempt to punish; not only does her forward-tilt carry little post-move lag, but also her retreating wavedash will allow her to space out your approach quite easily with her choice of a down- or forward-smash, with any further spacing problems solved by another reverse wavedash. Remember also to be wary of attempting to follow Samus's descent. Her bombs grant her an excellent means of changing her aerial path and tangling you up in the air, allowing her an easy avenue of escape. You can attempt to follow her with up-aerials and the like, but her added aerial movement and aerial attacks, especially the neutral-aerial, will make this difficult; it is best to wait until your opponent nears the ground, at which point Samus has a few less options, or wait until she uses her second jump and then take it from there. However, she can still missile-cancel near the ground, which may catch you by surprise if you are not careful; whenever attempting to predict Samus in the air, always keep in mind the possibility of a missile-cancel and whether your position relative to her will put you in the path of that missile.

Edge-guarding Samus is tricky at times; she has a very versatile recovery between her up-B, grappling beam, and bombs, and her physics allow her to survive for quite some time. Obviously, you should not attempt to jump far out and pursue a bomb-jumping Samus. Wait for her to near the stage, where you have more options yourself. You can stall on the edge and see if you can force your opponent to recover above you after he or she grapples onto the side of the stage, in which case a ledge-wavedash to up-smash (or ledge-dropped up-aerial, if Samus lands near enough) may be in order. You can also time a fall into a shine-spike as Samus grapples the stage; though not the easiest of kill methods, it is nevertheless quite effective. If she regains the ledge, watch for a ledge-dropped forward-aerial into a down-smash, a classic Samus return that will probably toss you off-stage and enable the Samus player's edge-guarding. You can, however, shield through the forward-aerial and the down-smash into an up-smash out of shield, but do not forget about the down-smash follow-up or you will be the one being edge-guarded; if you are hit with a down-smash at any time, remember to DI it upwards to minimize the chance that it could send you off-stage. In addition, many players will opt to use that charge shot that they have been holding from the ledge as a sort of surprise for you; keep this possibility in mind when guarding the ledge as it is a very common procedure for a ledge-hanging Samus. Still another option (and also a sign of the game's increasingly technical nature) is a startlingly fast wave-

land from the edge into a down- or forward-smash; this response is especially common if you space yourself a respectable distance away from the edge.

Samus has many options at her own disposal to edge-guard you. She can, for example, down-tilt or -smash you out of your recovery, or she can spike you with a well-positioned down-aerial, which you should be able to meteor-cancel. A well-timed forward-smash can also catch you in your vulnerable frames as you climb up from the ledge, so be wary of your predictability in that regard. Her up-tilt is yet another viable means of edge-guarding Fox and is particularly difficult to tech. She can also simply run off-stage and fall into you with a neutral-aerial, a relatively safe and consistent edge-guard that has a very high chance of ending your stock prematurely. What all of this should tell you is that, as with most match-ups, repeatedly playing around the edge with Samus could cause your stocks to melt away; instead, use heavy blaster fire and your superior speed and maneuverability to concentrate play in the center of the stage, from which low-percentage gimps are far less likely to occur.

Stage choice for the Fox vs. Samus match-up yet again follows the standard procedure. The Samus player will counterpick to a large level to minimize your vertical kills, usually the customary Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64. You, as always, want to maximize your vertical kills, especially on an opponent such as Samus. Solid counter-choices include Yoshi's Story and Onett. You can also make use of Corneria and Peach's Castle for their respective low ceilings and the Castle for its infinite-enabling walls if you feel confident in dealing with Samus's defensive gameplay (remember, however, that you few modern events permit Onett and Peach's Castle).

2. Dr. Mario

Dr. Mario is an interesting match-up, to say the least. As Fox, you hold the advantage for the most part. However, as usual, you must be careful not to become too careless against Doc; like every other character, he has a few tools of his own to punish sloppy play on your part, including his Cape, chain-throws, and the infamous back-aerial drag-down that is perfectly suited for taking advantage of your recovery. You will need to perfect your shines from aerials, especially out of your bread-and-butter shuffles, in order not to fall prey to Doc's rather potent crouch-cancel counter game. Furthermore, you can count on having to maneuver through a barrage of Doc's patented pills, courtesy of his characteristic "pill rush." If you can avoid handing your opponent easy stocks with sloppy edge-play and spacing, you can ride your shine combos and powerful approaches to victory over the deadly doctor.

Ground play in this match-up sees you holding most of the cards. Doc's traction leaves him open to your destructive shine combos, and properly-timed shines from your aerial approaches will out-pace any attempts to counter out of crouch-cancels, making following up from your connected hits all too easy. Be wary of jabbing from your aerials as this will play directly into Doc's potent crouch-cancel; you will almost assuredly be hit with a high-powered down-smash if your jab is crouched. As such, stick to your tried-and-true shine follow-ups. As with other opponents who favor crouch-canceling, do your best not to delay your follow-up shine in the slightest and not to hit either the opposing character or his shield too high. At low and middle percents, your usual jump-canceled grab into up-throw to up-aerials should suffice for a good deal of damage, but note that at higher percents Doc can combat your up-aerial with his neutral-aerial. With this in mind, make your default follow-up from connected shines at higher percents a quick jump-canceled up-smash to end Doc's stock right then and there. Remember always to adjust your shine follow-ups as percentage dictates; each and every shine that you land should give you options to tack on a hefty amount of damage or end the stock immediately, and you should not lose opportunities to kill for the simple fact that you have muscle-

memoried a jump-canceled grab follow-up instead of adjusting as necessary. As well, back-aerials can serve you well not only in combatting Doc's aerial game but also in following up on DI'd up-throws at higher percents.

While you are attempting to approach Doc, keep in mind that he has two options with which to combat your advance: his wavedash and his characteristic "pill rush" game. Although not the longest in the game, Doc's wavedash nevertheless serves as a means to bolster his defensive game with reverse wavedashes into grabs and down- or forward-smashes, especially in response to over-aggressiveness on your part. Note that Doc players normally will not take an offensive stance toward your Fox; as such, you should always keep in mind the possible need to advance just a bit further before you begin a shuffled aerial approach in order to compensate for any wavedash repositioning on Doc's part. As with Falcon, you would do well to push your foe to the edge as you approach, cutting off his routes of escape and restricting his options. As for the pill rush, the last thing that you want to do is to resort to your shine to reflect the pills; indeed, doing this will play directly into your opponent's hands as you will be temporarily frozen in your shine due to reflection stun while Doc is descending upon you with his choice of a follow-up. You will need to weave among Doc's pills (or even simply plow through them with your aerials) and to judge to the best of your abilities any possible angles of entry, particularly as Doc is descending. Your best solution to the pill rush is simply not to allow it with a strong aggressive game backed by nigh-perfect shines from aerials. If you are keeping pressure on Doc, keep in mind any avenues of escape that he may have. For example, if you are pressuring his shield with a series of rhythmic jabs, watch for a roll to either side; you should anticipate and punish accordingly with a jump-canceled grab or up-smash or the like. This same principle can also be applied to every other character in the game. Simply make sure not to go blank during your offensive game and resort only to high-powered technical play; there has to be a brain somewhere in your gameplay to punish your opponent as need be.

As with most other match-ups, you do not want to get grabbed against Doc. Keep in mind that his up- and down-throws can both be chained on the fast-falling Fox. Although not as potentially devastating as Marth's up-throw chain to up-tilts to forward-smash, possibly tippered, Doc's chain throws nevertheless give him an easy option to tack on damage, something that you certainly cannot allow. If the Doc flubs a chain-throw or decides to end it, make sure not to be predictable on your get-up lest you be on the receiving end of a tech-following wavedash into a down- or forward-smash.

Your shield game can give you some very powerful options against Doc. Botched spacing on his part, for example, should almost always be punished with an up-smash from your shield. If you find your shield being pressured, a quick full-jump or short-hop out into a down-aerial can very quickly shift control of the situation to you, especially if you connect with a shine. You can also try shining out of your shield (easily done with a jump out of the shield and into a shine, which is then jump-canceled) as a means to break out or even to get your opponent off-stage should you be near the edge.

The edge game against Doc is often where many Fox players go terribly wrong. Horror stories of the Fox-slaying power of Doc's Cape and his innovative falling back-aerial drag-down are not uncommon among many players. Obviously, it is essential that you are well-acquainted with sweet-spotting both of your recovery options, especially the Firefox from below the level; knowing the correct angle to use to grate against the side of a stage can often decide a stock. Likewise, do not hand Doc easy stocks by Firefoxing in a straight line; it is all too easy for him to finish you with a flick of his "sheet" in this manner, and many players will try to anticipate a straight Firefox out of pure guess work, much like many Marth players will forward-smash as your Firefox ac-

tivates just in case you decide to shoot off towards them. A good way to vary your recovery is to Firefox up at a steep angle such that your opponent cannot reach you with the Cape and then to DI either back onto the stage or curve your descent away from the stage and then back toward it to grab onto the ledge; if you do regain the ledge, take care not to mindlessly ledge-hop into a down-aerial before watching for your opponent's response as you will be punished by a reverse wavedash to space for a down- or forward-smash. Again, being unpredictable in your recovery, as always, is key to maintaining your stocks in good standing. In addition, be careful of falling prey to low-percent kills via Doc's falling back-aerial drag-down; in this off-stage maneuver, Doc makes use of his slower falling rate and your fast-falling to hit you multiple times with a series of back-aerials, following you as you gradually descend lower and lower until you can no longer return while Doc sweetspots with an up-B. If you activate a Firefox too near the level, you will leave yourself blatantly open to this maneuver and will probably lose a stock to it. This technique can also begin on-stage provided that the two of you are very near an edge, in which case Doc can begin with a single short-hopped back-aerial and flow off-stage to follow you downwards. For this reason and still more, you must be cautious around edges with Doc just as much as you are with predictability in your returns. Do not let your opponent dictate the focus of the battle at the edges of the stage; apply pressure, utilize blaster fire, and make use of your platform maneuvers to keep the battle concentrated at the center of the stage.

Your strongest method of punishing an off-stage Doc is your shine spike, made all the more apparent by the doctor's mediocre recovery. You more often than not will need to outpace Doc's quick up-B instead of attempting to shine through it; though entirely possible, the timing for this maneuver is quite difficult, especially without a pre-move audio cue as with the space animals' respective illusions. A far safer option is to steal invincibility frames from the edge and then go for the shine-spike. Take note that many Doc players will up-B early or use an up-aerial as defensive mechanisms out of utter fear of the shine; use these tendencies to your advantage and wait for your foe to open himself to you. As an alternative, you can also wait for his down-B and send him back out with a back-aerial (shine-turned, if necessary) or a shine. As still another option, you can stall on the ledge using your Firefox to force Doc above you, where a quick wavedash from the ledge will enable you to punish accordingly, preferably with an up-smash for the clean kill right then and there. Usually, however, a couple of back-aerials at most or a single shine-spike will be enough to end Doc's stock.

When facing a Doc in tournament-play counterpicks, expect to be taken to the usual gauntlet of "anti-Fox" stages, especially Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64, both with extremely high ceilings. If the Doc wants to make your recovery still more of a burden, he may very well take you to Stadium or Battlefield, each with strange edges that could frustrate your attempts at a consistent return. Mushroom Kingdom II is also an option for more defensive Docs who will attempt to lure you to them with pill spam. For your counter-stage, look toward Corneria, for its overall low ceilings and length that inhibits easy edge-guard kills; Onett, again for its very low ceilings and walls to enable infinites; and Yoshi's Island for low ceilings and the possibility of off-screen shine kills on the right-hand side. Keep in mind, however, that few if any modern tournaments allow Onett and Yoshi's Island; make sure that you are comfortable with a wide array of counterpick stages should your foe snipe your other mainstay counterpick choice with his stage ban.

3. Ganondorf

Though less of a force in tournament play than in earlier days, Ganondorfs still surface every now and then as an answer to Peaches and Marths. He is by no means, however, a reliable answer to Fox. Much like Falcon, Ganondorf

suffers from a subpar recovery, and he lacks the outright speed and flow of Falcon that grants the racer the ability to keep up with Fox, to a certain extent. In addition, Ganondorf is far more of a target than Falcon, and his traction leaves him vulnerable to shine combos and links to lethal shine-spikes. Of course, though Fox may hold the advantage in this match-up, you cannot afford to rest easy. Like Falcon, Ganondorf also has a potent tech-following game with an effective forward-aerial finisher, and his neutral-A "slap," among the fastest moves in the game, gives him a solid follow-up to shuffled aerials, should he choose to advance. Bad DI on your part also can lead to your death at surprisingly low percentages, as can sloppy play around edges. Take your advantages in stride, but not to the extent that you become so careless as to lose a strong match-up on your part.

Your default stance against Ganondorf should be of outright aggression. Pursue your slower opponent mercilessly with shuffled neutral- and down-aerials, with each and every shine linking into a jump-canceled grab to up-aerials, a jump-canceled up-smash, or even a series of drill shines, if you feel so inclined. If you begin to pressure Ganondorf's shield, watch for and anticipate a roll, jump, or wavedash out and follow as appropriate. If you keep on top of your foe with your aerials and shines, you can and will shut out a vast portion of his options, particularly if you do not flub L-cancels or shuffles through shields. Even your full-jump neutral-aerials do a wonderful job of interrupting Ganondorf's attempts to take to the air with a shuffled forward-aerial (although his up-aerial has the power to swat you out of the air with its combination of speed and range). You can very easily force Dorf into his shield, so take advantage of this fact and grab him into an up-throw into up-aerials whenever possible; after some time, your enemy can quite readily jump out of your up-throw, so be prepared to wait for his second jump and punish with an up- or back-aerial. Again, be constantly aggressive with your follow-ups. If you get Ganondorf into the air, for example, try to bait out a second jump or air dodge and then juggle from there, preferably such that he ends up off-stage. Your foe's crouch-cancel counter game can at times be effective with his down-tilt, down-B, and neutral-A "slap," but for the most part you should not worry about such heavy emphasis on this area. As such, you should be able to make use of jabs from aerials to set up for jump-canceled grabs or up-smashes. Again, a Ganondorf who is being pressured may often opt to spot-dodge or roll (usually roll as it is the "safer" option), especially after your jab in anticipation of a grab or up-smash, so take care to predict and punish as you see fit.

You should not allow the Ganondorf so much time as to allow him to "set up," so to speak. That is, at no point in the match should there be a large expanse of space between the two of you. If this happens, you have allowed your opponent to create a defensive position that, when combined with reverse wavedashes for spacing and reverse short-hops into aerials (especially his back- and up-aerials, both of which pack enough power and speed to grant Dorf some breathing room), may be difficult to break safely. Furthermore, a far-off Ganondorf has one more option with which to play mind-games: his down-B, a seemingly innocent, high-lag move that nevertheless carries with it a certain "surprise" factor; indeed, you will be surprised at how often this will connect in heated play, often with amazing strength (especially since you may be caught with your guard down and thus without suitable DI). However, the down-B issue can be solved quite easily simply by watching for its distinctive start-up animation. Indeed, if you feel that you are playing a rather impatient opponent, you can even space yourself from Dorf on purpose in order to bait this high-lag attack. Dorf's down-B can also allow him to cross platforms on such stages as Battlefield, so know that it also functions as a sort of escape tactic when he is under pressure from below. If you do allow space between the two of you, first try to pressure your opponent into coming to you with a dose of SHL fire, steadily trying to work your way in with the help of alternating shuffles and full-jump aerials. Once you have gotten a hold of your opponent again, do not

let go until you have either removed a stock or inflicted a good deal of damage. A timid Fox in this match-up will give the powerful Gerudo King the time and positioning that he needs to create a plan of attack, which can be more effective than you may at first think.

Like Falcon, Ganondorf thrives on a strong tech-following and prediction game. If you are predictable in your get-ups, rest assured that you will be punished by some combination of down-, forward-, and back-aerials and down- and forward-B's, each of which is perfectly capable of leading to your often-early demise (especially with incorrect DI; remember that your DI for the most part should be upwards and against the connecting hit, such as Dorf's forward-aerial). Work on your predictability, mixing in attack get-ups with empty stand-ups and the like, and pay particular attention to your shuffles through shields; Ganondorf can also set up a tech-following bout out of grabs via his down-throw, and the less opportunities that you hand him the better. If you do find yourself being followed and predicted, try to anticipate the eventual forward-aerial finisher and DI it correctly; as in most other instances, bad DI on your part can open the door to Ganondorf's low-percentage kills, on which he relies to keep pace with you. As mentioned before, maintain your strong offensive game at all costs and do not allow your foe to space you out; furthermore, do not hesitate on your approach for a great deal of time as this will allow Ganondorf to turn the situation around to a certain extent and possibly put you on the defensive with shuffled aerial approaches into his characteristic slaps. If you find your shield being pressured by these lightning-quick jabs, time a jump or wavedash out of shield to put some space between your opponent and yourself and to reset the confrontation, giving you a position from which to recommence your offensive play. Note that more experienced Ganondorf players will attempt to predict the moment at which you escape your shield and follow you to their choice of a punishment, usually aided by a short-hop to space correctly. Your foe can also bait you out of your shield with repeated jabs followed by a shuffled up-aerial to intercept your escape. If you see that your opponent has misspaced himself on your shield, you can hold your shield past the initial jab and counter with a grab or up-smash; note, however, that Dorf can switch in a grab out of his aerial if he senses that you favor holding your shield through the jab (although this is not the safest overall option). If you, on the other hand, are pressuring Ganondorf's shield, take care not to become too predictable with full-jump follow-ups to your attacks as his up-aerial from shield does an excellent job of stunting your offense with its sheer range and power.

Edge play in this match-up very often decides stocks on both ends, something that you as Fox should be especially wary of should you lack the ability to DI correctly and consistently. As always, you should sweet-spot whenever possible, taking care not to run haphazardly into a flurry of fade-away forward-aerials while making your return to the stage's center; the possibility of weak DI at this time further demands your caution. Keep in mind that Ganondorf has more than a few methods of punishing you while you are off the stage. He can, for example, punish your Firefox charge-up with a well-aimed up- or forward-aerial, or he can spike your attempt at a below-stage Firefox with his down-aerial (which you should be able to meteor-cancel). The reverse up-aerial is also quite potent against your recovery; it can plow through with stunning speed and range when you least expect it, sending you gradually to your doom. Note also that Ganondorf can down-tilt and jab you out of your Illusions with a bit of timing, giving him more time and more options to edge-guard you. As always, switch up your recovery as the situation dictates, and watch your DI at all times lest you lose a stock at surprisingly low percents. You should also be wary of charging your Firefox too close to the stage as this permits Dorf to jump off-stage with his potent back-aerial. The message here, as with virtually all previously covered match-ups, is not to magnify your weakness off-stage by constantly playing around the edge. You are the only character with a projec-

tile in this fight; use this and your far superior speed and pressure game to your advantage and focus the fight on the center of the stage, particularly at lower percents where Dorf needs to gimp your recovery to stay even with you.

Of course, you have more than your fair share of tools to edge-guard the unfortunate Ganondorf and his lackluster recovery. A ledge-dropped or shine-turned back-aerial does wonders, especially at higher percents when DI is less effective. A simple shine-spike, especially with invincibility frames from the ledge (an excellent method of shine-spiking a nearby Ganondorf), ends your foe's stock right then and there and is usually the preferred method to finish Ganondorf since proper DI is far less of a factor than with the ledge-dropped back-aerial; you should take care, however, to anticipate a rising up-aerial from your enemy in an attempt to knock you away long enough for him to regain the stage. Note that the shine-spike finisher is especially effective given the means by which you can follow into it, that is, a simple drill shine or two near the edge to carry your hapless foe off-stage and end his life with a shine turned toward the stage and jump-canceled to the edge. The down- and forward-smashes at the edge also punish Ganondorf's recovery quite well, allowing you to cover regions both above and below the ledge (although DI and wall-teching can both be utilized to combat these). As with Falcon, a waveshine near the edge into a down-smash can put your foe below the stage and in edge-guarding position; keep in mind that Dorf prefers to be hit above the stage, where he can use his down-B to regain jumps and his various falling aerials to secure a safe landing zone. For the most part, it is usually only a matter of time before an off-stage Ganondorf, like Falcon, succumbs to his subpar recovery and loses a stock; the most variation that your opponent can put into his recovery is manipulating the angles of approach of Ganondorf's recovery with a bit of control stick work while in the air and perhaps changing its timing when combined with aerial down-B's. Watch your own timing and positioning and punish accordingly. As well, should Dorf grab the ledge, be aware of his two most viable options, jumping from the edge and wavelanding on-stage. His waveland in particular is surprisingly quick, and he can very easily transition into a grab or down-B out of it. Once again, keep your eyes open and always be aware of your opponent's movements.

Ganondorf's counter-stages against Fox yet again follow the same general trend of other counter-picks. Expect to be taken to Battlefield (difficult edges and more effective edge-guarding), Dream Land 64, and Kongo Jungle 64, both for their large sizes that especially benefit Ganondorfs with strong DI. Yoshi's Story may also be a consideration for certain opponents who look for kills off the sides; Story's awkward edges and structure likewise benefit Ganondorf's edge and platform games, although your opponent must also be wary of vertical kills on your part. As the holder of a decided advantage in this match-up, you have all manner of counter-stages at your disposal. Corneria as always is a powerful choice (a relatively low ceiling and structure that inhibits horizontal kills); Onett (a lack of true edges, low ceiling, and walls for effective infinites); and Final Destination (a simple structure that facilitates your aggressive playstyle and that allows for strong drill shine lead-ins to edge-guarding). Remember, however, that few if any modern events permit Onett in tournament play.

4. Luigi

The quirky Italian plumber, however strange he may seem, does have some semblance of a game plan against the top-tier Fox. Due to the unique interplay of Fox's and Luigi's respective falling speeds as well as the properties of Luigi's moves, Luigi can catch Fox in some rather lengthy and damaging juggles, which he is more than capable of finishing with a powerful down- or forward-aerial. His high priority and good maneuverability via wavedashing also lend him additional weapons with which to combat Fox. However, with a bit of smart

play and more than a little shining, you can take advantage of Luigi's shortcomings, namely his floatiness and recovery, to tilt the match-up in your favor.

The ground game with Luigi can be somewhat strange at times. His quick wavedashing grants him a good deal of maneuverability and also enables him to pursue your techs and get-ups as he sees fit, and his low traction disallows easy shine lead-ins. As such, you may need to change your usual style in this match-up. If you are having trouble advancing on Luigi due to his wavedash spacing into down-smash set-ups and the like, lure him to you with your blaster and work out your game plan from there. At the same time, however, be aware of the range and speed of Luigi's makeshift wavedash into forward-tilt approach. Utilize your neutral-aerial approach, chaining them when you can, and follow connected hits as necessary with a jump-canceled up-smash. Follow up your aerials with jabs to lead into lethal up-smashes when you are not near an edge, but avoid the instinct to rely on your up-throw to up-aerial routine; Luigi's floatiness and high-priority aerials, especially his neutral- and down-aerials, can and will beat out your incoming aerial quite frequently. You can of course wait for or lure out Luigi's aerial and then proceed from there if your timing is on par. When you can connect a shine near the edge, do so and take advantage of Luigi's subpar recovery with either a quick shine-spike or the requisite edge-guarding via plenty of back-aerials (you may want to watch out for random misfires, though, which can come at the most inconvenient times). In addition, be wary of Luigi's slow falling speed, which may allow him to stall near the edge with a jump and bat you off with a forward-aerial if you mistime your ledge grab. In this instance, you can make use of the Firefox ledge stall to regain your invincibility frames and punish the Luigi as he descends with a sweet-spotted back-aerial. All told, your back-aerial plays a pivotal role in this match-up; its speed and range match up very nicely against Luigi's high-priority repertoire, and it also puts the plumber into position to be edge-guarded. This aerial and the shine together constitute the backbone of your game plan against Luigi. Be sure to make use of your neutral-aerial as well, which can potentially link into an up-aerial or up-smash depending upon your opponent's DI and percentage. Your up-tilt also packs enough priority to contend with Luigi's aerial arsenal and can likewise set up for lethal up-aerials.

As with virtually all other match-ups, take care not to play excessively around edges. With your vertical killing prowess and your shine-spike, you wield the more consistent methods of finishing your opponent's stocks early; as such, your foe will be looking for low-percentage gimp kills via off-stage back- and down-aerials. Focus play at the center of the stage to deny him these opportunities. As well, be aware that many Luigi players will panic when sent off-stage due to the poor nature of their vertical return. As such, they will attempt to anticipate your shine-spikes with early up-B's and up- or forward-aerials, for which you should be prepared and for which you should wait and punish accordingly.

Luigi's unique physics grant him a few innovative tools for use against Fox. For example, he has the ability to use two aerials in a single short-hop; as such, you should be wary of attempting to shield-grab Luigi after the first aerial connects with your shield as you very well may be hit with the second, which could set you up for further punishment (especially if it is a neutral-aerial). Wait for both aerials and the subsequent L-cancel into spot-dodge (the most common choice) and punish as you see fit. As well, Luigi can chain-grab Fox with the aid of his wavedash via up-throws, and he can potentially finish this with a powerful sweet-spotted up-B. Once again, not getting grabbed is in your best interest in this match-up; properly spacing your back-aerials and not flailing about in a desperate bid to land an aerial approach will aid in this regard.

Beneficial stages for you in this match-up would include Yoshi's Story and Onett for their low ceilings (although Onett rarely sees the light of day in the modern tournament ruleset). Mushroom Kingdom II can also be a surprise pick to take advantage of your horizontal shine kills thanks to Luigi's traction, and Corneria is as powerful as ever when it comes to magnifying your vertical kills. Your opponent may opt for the usual repertoire of larger stages, namely Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64, to lessen your vertical killing prowess. Focus on shine-spike kills in such instances.

5. Donkey Kong

DK is yet another example of a lower-tiered character who still manages to have a good plan for potential Fox opponents. Virtually all of DK's game against you revolves around his grab combos, which involve chain-throwing, up-aerials, and finishing aerial neutral-B's that can oftentimes take you from 0% to death if you are not careful. Thankfully, DK's sheer bulk and traction as well as his subpar shield leave him quite vulnerable to your own shine set-ups and combos, and with proper shuffling and shining through shields, you can largely annul DK's grab combos and tilt the match-up in your favor.

Like the match-up against the ICs, the integrity of your stocks in this match-up rests on your ability not to be grabbed. Granted, DK may have only one truly effective route of removing your stocks, but that route can be surprisingly potent should you give him too many opportunities to utilize it. As such, sharpen your shines through shields and your aerial lead-ins to shines; while you are at it, refine your shine combos as well as you are certain to have multiple chances to use them in your offensive game against DK. Remember to minimize your waveshine advance after neutral-aerial lead-ins as the cancelled shine stun time could allow DK to grab you.

Unlike the ICs, however, DK suffers from a lack of efficient transportation, i.e., a wavedash on par with the Climbers'. As such, DK's primary means of grabbing you consist of simple shield-grabs (which you are to prevent), spacing out your approach via reverse wavedashes and dash-dances, and predicting your get-ups and techs. Your ground game against DK can very well take either an offensive or a defensive route; DK lacks reliable answers to both your projectile lures and your technical offensive game. As always, blaster luring will allow you to force an advance out of an opponent on whom you yourself cannot seem to advance safely. Pound DK at will with your shuffled approaches, leading as always into a jab or shine as you deem fit (preferably a shine out of a down-aerial approach or as a response to frequent crouch-canceling) and linking shine combos as necessary, all the while avoiding his shield grab set-ups with the aid of your shine.

Be careful as well not to fall too often for DK's highly effective back-aerial, a strong, high-speed attack that could keep you at bay for some time if you cannot find an answer to it; if you are having trouble moving in on DK due to his back-aerial, fall back and force DK to switch gears with a dose of blaster fire, or space full-jumped back-aerials. Due to the sheer speed of DK's back-aerial, you should focus on approaching him from the front when juggling him. If you are grabbed, do your best either to rotate out of the grab, DI the chain-throws to throw off your opponent, or DI the up-aerials or concluding Giant Punch; remember that the up-aerials should be DI'd fully to either side while the Giant Punch should be DI'd upwards and against. Again, your primary aim in this match-up is to prevent any of these grab combos from occurring at all; always keep in mind that they are DK's primary and most effective route to victory against you.

Edge-guarding DK should involve a good deal of properly-spaced back-aerials from the ledge to combat his up-B return (be careful with its relatively high

priority). If you plan to shine-spike DK, chances are that you will need to use invincibility frames from the ledge and drop down onto DK as he approaches you. Of course, vertical kills on DK are also very much a possibility; make good use of your shine and jabs as openers, watching for crouch-canceling and reducing your use of jabs as appropriate. DK may choose to edge-guard you with such options as his back-aerial, down-tilt, and even his up-B, with a bit of creativity (keep in mind its start-up, super-powered invincibility frames). These unique attributes of the up-B also grant DK a tool with which to punish your overhead approaches. If you focus excessively on attacking DK from above, he can time his up-B to swat you out of the air just as you connect with him. The same situation can arise if you insist upon attacking the monkey's shield, at which times he can up-B out of shield to grant himself some breathing room (or perhaps even take one of your stocks). As well, be wary of DK's startlingly fast below-100 edge attack; if you are positioned near the edge just so, you may find yourself sent off-stage and put into a rather precarious position.

Counter-staging in this match-up is somewhat strange as both combatants possess the means to kill vertically; DK's grab combos concluded with an aerial Giant Punch also grant him an efficient means of killing horizontally. As such, you may choose to go with a "personal" counterpick, that is, one on which you feel particularly comfortable or on which you believe that your opponent is weak. Starting points as always include Onett and any platform stage to interfere somewhat with grab combos. Your opponent may choose to take you to such locales as Onett as well, however (if permitted by the ruleset, of course); remember that DK likewise shares a penchant for vertical kills. Brinstar has also seen play as a DK counter-pick as the ape can control the platforms quite well with his back- and up-aerials and can also land up-aerials and charged Giant Punches off of the acid, which can trap the fast-falling Fox for quite some time. Final Destination is also a solid choice for DK as the lack of platforms enables him to optimize the damage from his up-aerial combos. Essentially, you should play to your strengths (speed, shine combos, and vertical kills) and neutralize DK's (grab combos, which flow into his own vertical kills).

6. Mario

Though considered by many to be a "run-of-the-mill" character, Mario in fact has a rather interesting match-up with Fox. He has two chain throws on Fox (technically, however, Mario only has one "true" chain-throw; that is, he must switch at a certain percentage from the up-throw to the down-throw in order to continue the chain), rather low traction which when combined with DI on your shine can allow him to escape your follow-ups, a neutral-aerial which gives him an out to your up-throw to up-aerials, good edge-guard options in the Cape, back-aerial, and down-smash, and physics that can allow him to live for some time with proper DI. You may need some time to become comfortable with this match-up; despite Mario's generally-accepted "average" status, he has more tools with which to combat the top-tier Fox than many would at first believe.

You can very well choose either an offensive or a defensive style against Mario. If you choose the offensive route, make use of your usual methods of approach of the neutral- and down-aerials into shines or jabs to your follow-ups (if your opponent is adept at DI'ing your shine away, you may opt to jab out of your aerials for easier set-ups into jump-canceled grabs or up-smashes, keeping in mind the possibility of crouch-cancel counters at lower percents). Be careful to compensate for Mario's reverse wavedash responses to your incoming attacks; a mistake in spacing here may set you up for a grab or a down-smash. If you are grabbed, prepare to be chain-thrown for some percents and remember to DI Mario's concluding hit to give yourself a shot at returning. If you land a grab on Mario by following his descent or from a shine, jab, or the like, you should be able to fit in an up-aerial or two before his double-jump or neutral-aerial gives him an escape route. Remember that you can very well

lure out or wait for the neutral-aerial and recommence your juggling when it has finished, just as you can attempt to follow Mario's double-jump (this is often difficult, however, due to the strange angles of approach that Mario's jump creates for you).

A defensive route in this match-up should see you pelting Mario with plenty of mobile SHL fire, waiting for and punishing his approach or approaching yourself once you maneuver yourself to within striking distance of your foe (you should be careful here not to underestimate the length of your own shuffle approach so as to give yourself the most opportunities in this regard as possible). Mario's slower falling speed enables you to shield-grab easily any improperly-spaced aerals; an up-smash out of shield is also a powerful answer here. Your opponent should be well aware of this weakness and may attempt to DI his or her aerals to the back of your shield; you can anticipate this and shuffle a back- or down-aerial out of your shield to your choice of a follow-up. If you constantly space yourself away from your opponent, you may find that he or she will begin using Fireballs in combination with Mario's aerial maneuverability to pressure you into adopting a more offensive style, much like Doc's pill rushing. Your superior speed and aerial firepower should see you through this technique, however; simply take care not to space yourself such that a falling Fireball sets you up for a grab or down-smash.

Whichever route that you take, remember as always not to play sloppily around edges. In fact, you may very well choose to restrict the fight to the middle of the arena, luring Mario in with blaster fire, if you do not trust your own edge-play. Sweet-spot each and every one of your returns to avoid succumbing to easy Cape and down-smash kills, but keep in mind also that Mario can follow and anticipate your recovery angles with a simple double-jump. As such, simple sweet-spotting often is not enough; as with other match-ups, you will need to vary your return as needed. When you are the one doing the edge-guarding, try to land a shine-spike when the opportunity presents itself; although Mario's physics can grant him a lengthy lifespan when combined with good DI and teching, he too falls to the power of your shine. In this regard, you may choose to Firefox stall on the edge until Mario nears you and then utilize those invincibility frames to shine through his up-B, a difficult task to perform otherwise; indeed, many players will opt for an early returning up-B or an up-aerial to defend themselves from your incoming shine. Ledge-hopped back-aerals are also a powerful means of knocking Mario back out over the abyss. An additional note concerning Mario's up-B is relevant on stages such as Yoshi's Story that have a solid wall running underneath the stage; Mario can in fact execute a glitch near the end of his up-B whereby he is temporarily knocked out of the immobile animation frames of the jump, which allows him to use another up-B to reach the stage. To combat this trick, always shine Mario away from the stage as opposed to into it.

Counter-stages in the Fox vs. Mario match-up are largely standard fare on both sides. Dreamland 64 and Kongo Jungle 64 will nullify your vertical killing prowess; focus more on shine spikes in these locales. Final Destination may also be used against you if your opponent chooses to make use of chain-grabs. As for your choices, you have Corneria, for a lack of easy edge-guarding and the opportunity for good vertical kills, and Onett, for the same reasons as Corneria but with the added bonus of easy wall infinites, among others (should you be permitted to counterpick this stage, of course).

D. Low Tier

1. Link

Hyrule's famed hero truly does not have the greatest of match-ups against Fox. Poor Link's high traction makes him absolutely perfect for all manner of shine

combos, including repetitive waveshines and the drill shine inversions, and his defensive projectile game succumbs to Fox's innate mobility and speed as well as Fox's own defensive game play. Of course, all of this does not guarantee an easy match-up against the Hylian hero. Link's unique moveset, namely his ranged grab thanks to his Hookshot and his ever-popular up-B, grant him a powerful tech- and get-up-punishment game, and his neutral-aerial and up-B can net him a good deal of off-stage kills on your unfortunate recovery. Nevertheless, if you play to your own strengths in this match-up (especially your aggressive options), you will find that you hold a decided upper hand here.

Although this match is not entirely one-sided as some would at first believe, Fox nevertheless does hold a significant advantage in this match-up. Part of the reasoning for this lies in the fact that Link does not have solid answers to a change-up in Fox's play-style; that is, a Fox could very well utilize a defensive or offensive style against Link and still expect admirable results. Choosing the defensive route obviously entails heavy use of your blaster to lure Link to you, as usual; you should keep at a good enough distance that the Link cannot easily surprise you with an approach, but at the same time, you should be close enough that you can take advantage of any mistake of your foe's with pure speed (that is, your shuffled down- and neutral-aerial lead-ins). Combat Link's own projectile game, which is sure to make an appearance as an attempt to answer your defensive style, by batting bombs from the air with blaster fire (or simply catching them) and knocking boomerangs away with dash-attacks and forward-tilts (keep in mind that connecting with an incoming boomerang cancels the respective animations of each of these moves and allows you more than enough time to respond). Take advantage of mistakes with your usual neutral- or down-aerial lead-ins, all of which should lead into shines; from there, you can proceed to any number of things. Waveshine Link off the stage, perform some drill-shine reps or an infinite drill-shine inversion, or stick to a simple wave- or drill-shine to grab and up-aerials. Regardless of your route, watch for DI on your shine and be prepared to adjust your wave-dash's length or the DI on your down-aerial to catch your opponent again. Note that you may need to perform perfect wavedashes at times to catch Link depending on how he DI's your shine; get used to adjusting your positioning in the middle of your shine combos to compensate for enemy DI and you will greatly magnify your ability to follow your opponent during your combos and be able to link together some rather destructive moves.

An aggressive route in this match-up has its own merits as well, although a few more items need to be taken into consideration. As the aggressor here, you are bound to run into more than a few shields from the opposing Link. You should thus perfect your shuffles and L-cancels to remove Link's grabs from the picture entirely as they are his easiest route to his tech-following game, which can be surprisingly potent given his moveset; expect to see down-smashes, pseudo-chain-throwing (that is, following your techs with further grabs), and up-B's as finishers, especially near edges where your get-up options are more limited. Given all of this, you must as always be cautious about your predictability; too many mistakes in this regard will give Link opportunities to punish you for easily-remedied mistakes, and he does have the tools with which to accomplish this. All of that aside, your aggressive style should likewise put great strain on your opponent and allow you to take advantage of his shortcomings in the worst ways possible. Shuffle through shields and into shines, punishing with your usual repertoire of drill-shines, grabs, up-smashes, and waveshine chains. If your opponent holds his shield past your from-aerial shine, continue to waveshine his shield or simply wavedash away and come back in with a grab or a delayed up-smash to catch him as he lowers his shield; you can also attempt the novel trick of jump-canceling your shine right into a grab. If you find your own shield under attack, break out with a shine or an up-smash from shield if Link has spaced or L-canceled poorly. A shuffled down-aerial out of your shield also does wonders to turn the tables on an

offensive Link as it provides an inroad to your shine lead-ins, truly the key to your advantage in this match-up. You may want to be careful with full-jumping and fast-falling your down-aerials out of your shield after it has been hit, however, as an L-cancel into Link's up-tilt may beat out your incoming aerial and set you up for more than you may at first think. If you happen to end up behind Link's shield from one of your aerials (most likely a down-aerial DI'd to his back), L-cancel into a high-priority up-tilt to beat out any attempted attack from Link's shield (usually a back-aerial to attempt to set you up for a reverse grab); doing so will effectively turn the tables on your opponent and set him up for some damaging aerial juggling. Your neutral-aerial is perhaps still more key to your offense. Its sheer speed and priority permit you to place immense pressure upon Link (even by canceling into a run rather than the usual shine, depending on your opponent's usual responses to pressure). However, keep in mind that Link possesses a neutral-aerial of his own, and it wields a considerable amount of speed and priority as well. He will make use of this to keep you out of his space and to knock you out of your full-jump approaches. Be prepared for this, and switch up your lead-ins to lower-altitude options as you see fit.

Off-stage play in this match-up can get ugly at times for you. Link's plethora of projectiles when fired from the stage can manipulate your recovery options in Link's favor, forcing you to come from undesirable or easily-punished angles, for instance. You must be able to sweet-spot in this match-up (especially from below the stage with your Firefox, as your fast-falling when combined with a projectile from Link will often put you there) in order to avoid losing stocks at surprisingly low percentages to a "spike" from Link's up-B. Be cautious about where you choose to recover from as well; remember that Link's physics allow him to fall off the stage or ledge-hop into a neutral-aerial aimed at your recovery, which could either kill you outright or (again) force you to return at an undesirable angle, and still return to the stage with his admirable recovery options. This is all the more reason (once again) to focus play in the center of the stage, usually with the aid of your trusty Blaster.

On your end, edge-guarding Link is not as simple as you would like it to be. Off-stage and ledge-hopped projectiles can interrupt or stall your attempts to hold the edge and give Link just enough time to sweet-spot the edge with a Hookshot and an up-B. Likewise, the up-B's hitbox does a good job of batting away incoming attacks from above, making Link's sweet-spot troublesome for you. You can of course stall through Link's lengthy recovery with the Firefox stall and force him to come above you, where he is far more easily punished. In addition, you can properly time your Firefox stall to gain invincibility frames with which to shine Link out of his up-B, or you can simply shine Link as his Hookshot latches onto the stage. None of these routes is particularly easy when compared to your answers to other characters' recoveries, so you should focus on killing Link vertically (which should be your primary focus throughout this match) with your shine, jab, and grab lead-ins to the up-smash and up-aerial. Should you send your opponent a great distance off-stage, do not become complacent so quickly and hop off of the edge in anticipation of your kill. Skilled Link players can essentially "bomb-jump" by throwing a bomb upwards while off-stage and up-B'ing into it, riding the explosion and their restored up-B back to the stage. Be wary of this tactic, and never be so arrogant as to assume that you have gotten the kill before you see a stock disappear from the screen.

Counter-stages in this match-up are largely standard fare. Link will opt to minimize your vertical kills via Dream Land 64, Kongo Jungle 64, and the like. You, meanwhile, should aim to get as much out of that advantage as possible with such picks as Corneria, which provides powerful answers to Link's easy off-stage kills on you.

2. Pikachu

Your match-up against the infamous pocket monster is quite solid in many respects. Armed with your grabs to up-aerials, up-smash, and jab set-ups from your aerials, you can do a good amount of damage to the poor Pikachu. Of course, Pikachu likewise has his methods of battling Fox; look for his up-smash, up-tilt, and tail spike, as well as his shuffled neutral-aerials DI'd behind you.

Your game against Pikachu rests largely on your grabs. Dash in with quick jump-canceled grabs and catch Pikachu as he lands from an aerial or after you space his advance out with reverse wavedashes or dash-dances; as always, follow up with your classic up-throw to up-aerial routine, following his DI as the situation dictates. You can also land grabs from your aerials; a down-aerial or low-to-mid-percent neutral-aerial can be followed with a jab and then with a jump-canceled grab to snatch Pikachu out of the air and put him back into your control. If you choose to shine from aerials, whether as a result of crouch-canceling, personal preference, or what have you, do your best to read your opponent's get-ups or techs, waiting for spot-dodges afterwards if necessary. All told, you should aim to kill Pikachu vertically as his innate physics and recovery grant him a significant degree of longevity, horizontally speaking.

As for your opponent, look for his approach to consist of shuffled neutral-aerials (usually DI'd behind your shield in order to escape out-of-shield responses that attempt to take advantage of Pikachu's aerial down time) as well as jump-canceled grabs and up-smashes; keep in mind that Pikachu's up-smash easily rivals yours (and in fact is more powerful), and he does possess a fair amount of damaging combos on you involving his up-throw, up-tilt, and up-smash. Pikachu is also quite mobile in his own right, so do not hesitate to force him to you with some blaster fire if you are having trouble spotting an opening. As well, do your best to sweet-spot your Illusion when knocked off-stage; Pikachu's forward-smash does an excellent job of edge-guarding, and a charging Firefox is asking for disruption via a neutral-B Thunder Jolt fired from on-stage or a properly-aimed "tail spike," a name for the obscene (and deadly) angle at which Pikachu's up-aerial can send your helpless, fast-falling Fox. As a result of these techniques, you simply cannot afford to hand Pikachu early stocks due to sloppy play by the edge; if he insists on camping the edge, pile on the blaster fire to force him to center-stage and go for safe jump-canceled grabs into follow-ups. On the other hand, you too possess strong options in edge-guarding Pikachu. You can, for instance, force him to land on-stage by stalling on the edge (a Firefox stall is usually not necessary if you time your ledge drops and grabs such that you have invincibility as Pikachu activates his up-B) and punishing with a grab or up-smash. Hitting Pikachu out of his recovery with a back-aerial or the like is also very much an option, but keep in mind that your most efficient kills here will be done vertically.

As a fellow vertical-killer, Pikachu can be somewhat awkward to counter-stage. Low-ceiling stages can be used to both of your advantages, including such locales as Corneria and Green Greens. You could very well go with your "personal" counter-pick stage or even Final Destination, which will afford you a bit more room to formulate your strategy and still allow you free reign to pressure your opponent as you see fit. Be prepared when battling on Corneria, however, as many Pikachu players habitually adopt a highly defensive game plan there focused on controlling your positioning with neutral-B Jolts and forcing fights around the fin area, where Pikachu's more powerful up-smash can claim stocks at lower-than-usual percentages.

3. Young Link

Link's youthful counterpart is in many ways far more of an annoyance to Fox than his adult form. For example, while Link is easily shine-comboed, Young Link falls when shined, necessitating tech- and get-up-chasing and prediction. As well, Young Link's greater speed and smaller size facilitate his highly-mobile projectile game, which does an excellent job of setting up any number of characters for Young Link's chosen follow-up. Vertical kills, pressure, and prediction will see you through this match-up. On the other hand, being predictable yourself and being too hasty in your advance could set you up for a fall to Young Link.

You should aim for a generally aggressive style against Young Link. Doing so first requires that you navigate through his barrage of projectiles (preferably without the use of your shine to reflect the incoming objects, in which case you would inadvertently give him the opening and the time that he needs to put you into position). As with the older Link, try to grab bombs and to knock boomerangs away with dash-attacks and forward-tilts (be wary of spacing for the angled boomerang, however). Go for grabs as your opponent lands, waiting for a spot-dodge, if needed, and follow with juggling up-aerials. Your connected aerials should follow into jabs and then into grabs and up-smashes, as percentage dictates; shines should not be emphasized so much as they will not afford you the opening that jabs will, assuming that your opponent is not predictable in his get-up and is not favoring crouch-cancel down-smash counters, which is entirely possible. Drill kicks are also effective openers on Young Link, flowing well into a jab or a grab, if your foe does not react in time. Again, however, all of this requires that you first make it through Young Link's projectiles. Watch your own angles of entry as well as his, noting when you sight an exploitable opening upon which you can apply pressure. Predictability on your part will likewise cost you the match; Young Link's down-smash is an especially potent means of punishing you for this. Try crouch-canceling to combat its knockback. At lower percents, you may find that it is safer to shine out of your aerials rather than Jab due to the possibility of a down-smash counter out of a crouch-cancel; if you choose to go this route, read your foe's response and follow with jump-canceled grabs to up- and back-aerials. This is especially useful if your opponent insists upon mashing buttons in an attempt to eke out an attack out of the crouch-cancel as this will cause him or her to wake up with an attack more often than not.

Edge-guarding Young Link is in some ways akin to edge-guarding his older counterpart; both can live for some time with proper DI, both have respectable recoveries between their up-B's and Hookshots, and both have potent off-stage disruption options in their projectiles. Expect to be pelted with bombs and boomerangs as the Young Link returns depending on his angle of entry. Again, as with the adult version, you can force Young Link above you with a Firefox ledge-stall, punishing long hang-time on the Hookshot with a quick drop-down shine-spike or non-sweet-spotted up-B's with a down-smash. Remember also that with invincibility frames from the edge you can readily shine through your opponent's up-B, often a useful option to possess. Of course, Young Link has his own options with which to edge-guard you. Projectiles hurled from the stage can influence the angle of your return, especially when combined with Fox's fast-falling, and a simple down-tilt can lead to death should you miss your meteor cancel. Work on your sweet-spotting, especially from below by grating the Firefox on the side of the stage, and anticipate down-tilt spikes whenever possible.

As for counter-stages, rely on your mainstay low ceilings (such as Corneria, Yoshi's Story, and so on). Rest assured that your foe may opt for one of the larger stages (such as Dreamland 64 or Kongo Jungle 64) or perhaps a platform stage such as Battlefield to take advantage of edge-guarding opportunities as well as the speed-stunting structure of such maps.

4. Roy

Marth's compatriot swordsman can pack more of a punch against Fox than you may at first think. Although inferior in many respects to Marth, Roy nevertheless possesses good maneuverability in his dash-dance, a relatively powerful "sweet-spot" to his sword, a versatile and quick down-tilt that preps you for all manner of follow-ups, and chain-grabs via his up-throw that can follow into some damaging (and potentially lethal) combos courtesy of his down-tilt, up-aerial, and forward-smash. Since you cannot rely as much on your shine lead-ins in this match-up as you can with Marth, you may need to play a bit of "classic" Fox to garner the lead here.

Although Roy is considered a "clone" of Marth, you must adjust your style in some respects while playing him. For instance, unlike Marth, Roy falls from the shine; as such, you lose your easy shine lead-ins against him as well as your true shine combos. As a result, you should take up tech-chasing and prediction whenever you land a shine on Roy, anticipating his in-place get-ups and spot-dodges with a grab, from-shield up-smash, or the like, and following his rolls and techs on your shine with jump-canceled grabs and jump-canceled up-smashes. Being able to predict and to follow your opponent from your shine will compensate to a certain extent for the loss of your shine combos in this match-up, which, although unnerving, certainly is not the end of the world. Should you land a grab, rely on your classic up-throw to up-aerial routine to tack on damage and to prep for a kill; note that at lower percents a grab may require you to lead into some up-tilts or an up-smash due to Roy's innate physics and that at higher percents you will need to wait for your foe's double-jump escape and follow him through the air as appropriate. As with Marth, force your opponent to you with blaster fire if you cannot see an opening past his dash-dance and wavedash spacing (remember that Roy will try to space out your aerial approach with both of these in order to land a spaced down-tilt or a jump-canceled grab, both of which can prep you for some rather painful follow-ups; as a result, you should be careful with your higher-lag falling back-aerials in order to minimize your openings as you land, for example). Follow attempts to retreat with your quick jump-canceled grabs and jump-canceled up-smashes, and be careful not to fall into any aerials from Roy's fast-fallen jumps meant to space out your approach. Be especially careful with the spacing of your back-aerial, which if misspaced on a shield will result in a shield-grab and the usual grab combo.

If you are grabbed in this match-up, expect to be chain-thrown for some time and then taken into a combo involving shuffled up-aerials into a finisher forward-smash, which you should be prepared to DI correctly. Similarly, a down-tilt will set you up for grabs or forward-aerials, which in turn can then set you up for the aforementioned grab combo. In either case, refine your DI against the concluding forward-smash, and try to mix up your DI on the chain grab itself to attempt to throw off your opponent and escape right then and there.

For off-stage play, go for shine-spikes timed to coincide with the "empty" portions of Roy's return (that is, the times when his forward-B is not being activated); alternatively, you could Firefox ledge stall through his up-B, either forcing him to land above you and punishing from there with ledge-hopped attacks or simply causing his death outright as his controller fails to adjust. A non-fast-fallen ("non-fast-fallen" being the key term here) back-aerial from the ledge (press away from the ledge and then go into your back-aerial) could also catch Roy out of his recovery and bat him far away enough to kill him. If you are the one doing the recovering, make certain as always to sweet-spot so as not to fall victim to timed forward-smashes from the stage. You may also want to be careful with aiming your Illusion return directly at Roy; a crouch-cancel on your low-power attack could allow him to take advantage of your

landing lag with a grab, forward-smash, down-tilt, and so on. Roy's Counter, like Marth's, is also seeing play as a reliable means of edge-guarding; the comparatively immense timing window and surprising knockback combine to provide him with a consistent means of ending your stock off-stage.

Roy's counter-stages for this match-up are mainly limited to Final Destination itself. Roy truly thrives on his chain-grabs against you to set up for his kills, and he needs flat space in which to do this; FD's lack of platforms and outside obstacles make this his ideal stage against you. Of course, the usual larger stages (Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64) may be in order if you so cunningly decide to ban Final Destination from the set, but the platforms and the large sides of these stages both can work to your advantage, especially given proper DI on your part. With this knowledge, your counter-stages should focus on minimizing the horizontal component of Roy's kill game; take your opponent to Corneria, for starters, perhaps making use of the two aforementioned larger stages yourself if the set so requires.

5. Zelda

Unfortunate Zelda has the bad luck of having high traction, a glaring disadvantage in the face of your shine combos. Furthermore, Zelda herself is quite floaty; this fact when combined with your shine combos and various lead-ins to grabs and up-smashes further disadvantages Zelda in this match-up. As always, though, Zelda, despite her negatives in this match-up, does have more than a few strong combos on you as well as her characteristic "lightning kick" forward- and back-aerials, both of which can end your stock surprisingly early, especially when combined with poor DI.

Your approach on Zelda is standard fare, for the most part. Lacking an efficient projectile weapon as well as a degree of speed high enough to compete with your own, Zelda is ripe for your technical offensive. Lead in with your characteristic down- and neutral-aerial advances into shines and jabs. Shines are your ideal follow-ups to your approach, however, given Zelda's traction; each connected shine should lead either to a grab and up-aerials, an up-smash, or a series of drill shines to tack on damage, again made all too easy thanks to the princess's traction. Take care to end Zelda's stock as early as you can to cut down on her chances of landing a successful forward- or back-aerial, both of which pack a punch as well as some range, which when coupled with Zelda's floatiness can enable her to sneak in kicks should you underestimate their range or misjudge the distance between you two. Too many "empty" jumps from your opponent should prompt a jump-canceled up-smash from you to punish his or her descent, which very well may end the stock immediately. Again, remember to focus your attacks on your vertical kills; up-smash from your shine and jab lead-ins, and try not to forget your from-shield up-smash as a punishment for badly-spaced aerials (you can facilitate this error by running in close to a descending Zelda and holding up your shield, but be wary of adjustments to this maneuver in the form of empty lands and wavelands).

This match-up is especially typical in terms of its counter-stages. Yet again, Zelda will look to the larger stages (Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64) to minimize your vertical kills while you should turn to the low-ceiling stages (Green Greens and Corneria) in order to accentuate this advantage.

6. Mr. Game & Watch

The strange low-tier Mr. Game & Watch despite his tier position has a good deal of tools up his sleeve with which to combat the top-tier Fox. These include a solid crouch-cancel game courtesy of his down-tilt (which likewise provides an excellent set-up on Fox for Game & Watch's next move), numerous combos (some of which can go to death or to quite high damages if not DI'd properly) thanks

in no small part to Fox's innate physics, and the inability to be caught in shine combos (that is, he falls down when shined and thus breaks any "true" shine combos). Indeed, if you are not careful, you may find your top-tier succumbing to the surprisingly effective low-tier Game & Watch. Fortunately, you as always have more than a few tools and tricks of your own to hand you victory in the end.

First off, note that the exceedingly light and floaty Game & Watch is, obviously, extremely vulnerable to your plethora of vertical kill options. As such, focus the vast majority of your play around landing a lethal up-smash or prepping your foe for deadly up-aerials. You can, for instance, catch G&W after an aerial of his with a quick jump-canceled grab or up-smash, either of which can become lethal at quite low percents. You can also kill off of botched spacing thanks to your up-smash out of shield; simply running within range of G&W's forward-aerial approach and holding up your shield could throw off his spacing and give you the time to land that up-smash, which if it does not kill your opponent immediately will still prep him for up-aerial follow-ups. Of course, these early kills are most often easier said than done. G&W can choose to play a rather restrained and defensive style, which you can answer with a dose of blaster fire. You should be cautious not to run headlong into too many badly-planned approaches on G&W; his wavedash is lengthy enough to afford him an efficient means of spacing out your aerials, and his ever-present down-tilt can very easily set you up for any number of follow-ups, especially out of grabs. As such, pay particular attention to the effective range of your neutral- and down-aerials, spacing yourself via dash-dances and reverse wavedashes on your approach and always keeping in the back of your mind the possibility of a retreating wavedash from G&W as a response. Especially at low percents, phase out your jabs from aerials in favor of the shine; although G&W does fall from the shine, you cannot afford to hand him too many easy openings on you by something as simple as a crouch-cancel counter with a down-tilt. Yet again, good following and prediction abilities on your part can turn this supposed "advantage" of G&W's into a boon for your game as you land a good number of damaging grab and up-aerial combos off of shines; remember that you only need so many openings on the paper-thin Game and Watch to score a vertical kill, your principle goal in this match-up. As always, however, be wary of low-percentage crouch-cancel counters throughout the match; adjust with shine follow-ups and delayed neutral-aerial lead-ins as appropriate.

As always, your shines from aerials and through shields should be spot on in this match-up to remove any easy openings on your part for Game and Watch to exploit. A grab from him can lead into quite an effective combo including still more grabs, down-tilts, and neutral-aerials, which in themselves pack a good deal of power. If your opponent likes to hold up his or her shield past your shine, L-cancel your aerial straight into a run and quickly turn around with a jump-canceled grab; you can also jump-cancel the shine directly into a grab. A waveshine to the back of your foe's shield and a turn-around jump-canceled grab likewise produce the same results: efficient, low-percent vertical kills, your key objective against G&W. Similarly, a shine into shuffled down- and up-aerials can apply excellent pressure to G&W's subpar shield and allow you a strong opening to punish, often with lethal results. Your up-tilt is especially adept at breaking down shields, should you make it to the backside of the offending shield. As well, it is highly possible to "shield poke" G&W's head with a full-jump falling up-aerial, a maneuver which could end his stock at a surprisingly low percentage (more aware players, however, will substitute the larger light shield instead of Game and Watch's infinitesimal hard shield).

Off-stage play in this match-up is the usual standard fare. Vary your recovery with shortened Illusions, angled Firefoxes to the ledge, and Firefoxes up the side of the stage for your return; this last item is especially critical and difficult against G&W given his handy down-tilt, which also functions as an

effective means of edge-guarding you. You will need to sharpen your sweet-spotting and ledge-teching skills to minimize any easy off-stage kills from G&W. On your end, it may take a bit of time to become acclimated to G&W's rather lengthy recovery. An effective answer to his low sweetspot position and great height on his up-B is a simple Firefox stall on the ledge, timed to coincide with the start of his third jump. You will either hold the ledge through your unwitting foe's recovery or force him or her to land on-stage, in which case a simple wavedash up from the ledge into a grab or jump-canceled up-smash can finish the stock right then and there.

Game and Watch's innate physics should point directly to your opponent's choice of counter-stages. Expect to be taken to the usual high-ceiling levels of Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64. Your counter-stages also consist of your usual low-ceiling levels of Corneria, Green Greens, and Yoshi's Story, a stage which is particularly devastating to G&W's attempts to sweetspot his recovery due to its lack of depth on its lower blast lines.

E. Bottom Tier

1. Ness

The obscure kid from "Earthbound" has more up his sleeve than some would believe. Armed with double-jump canceling and a high-priority, high-speed forward-aerial, among other assets (including the strange "yo-yo glitch"), Ness has a bevy of high-speed combo options open to him against the fast-falling Fox. Yet again, Fox's shine serves as his ace in this match-up; capable of setting up painful grabs as well as punishing Ness's recovery, you will yet again rely on it to carry you to victory.

Although he may not appear as such, Ness actually wields quite a bit of speed between his aerials and his double-jump canceling (from here on abbreviated "DJC"). Indeed, it is this ability of Ness's that grants him a certain degree of comboing ability on you; look out for DJC'ed up-aerials out of grabs, for instance, or DJC'ed forward-aerials as a quick means of approach or a safe means of retreating (do not underestimate the range or priority of Ness's forward-aerial). DJC'ed aerials out of Ness's shield also serve as a means of punishment for shielded up-smashes and the like; an out-of-shield DJC'ed down- or back-aerial is especially painful. Naturally, you aim to prevent Ness's shield-grabbing and thus deny him a chunk of his lead-in game; as always, have your shines and jabs from aerials well under your fingers (with an emphasis on shines at lower percents due to the possibility of crouch-cancel counters), and be careful with spacing your approach as even Ness's subpar wavedash will enable him to avoid your lead-in and counter as he sees fit, usually with a grab for a set-up, a DJC'ed aerial, or a forward-smash.

If you land a shine or a jab, forego attempting an extended shine combo (unless you see that your opponent cannot or does not DI your shine) and instead go right into a simple jump-canceled grab to an up-throw and up-aerials; your grab game is as potent as ever in this match-up, and you'll find that you can take more than a few stocks simply by waiting for easy grab openings, such as poorly-spaced falling aerials or botched L-cancels. A back-aerial out of this set-up may be in order if you are near the edge; from there, you can exploit Ness's recovery with your shine-spikes (or even simply by intentionally getting hit by the PK Thunder itself). Even here, however, normally a position of total control for you, you must be cautious; keep in mind that Ness can in fact maneuver his PK Thunder such that it will form a sort of "net" around him and effectively cancel your shine's aerial knockback. Although it is not the easiest of maneuvers to pull off, simply be aware that Ness does indeed have some method, however obscure, of combating your shine-spike. Of course, you can always use your ledge-dropped back-aerials, forcing Ness to land above you via

your Firefox ledge-stall and punishing from there. A vertical kill with an up-smash may be in order at higher percents when your grabs lose effectiveness as set-ups or your opponent's DI is allowing him to survive too long horizontally.

In terms of counter-stages, you should, as usual, focus on the low-ceiling stages, such as Yoshi's Story and Corneria. If you choose to counter to Corneria, however, be aware that Ness has the ability to stall the game out by fleeing to the Great Fox's forward laser cannons and using his down-B to absorb the laser blasts, putting him in an easily-defendable position and you between a rock and a hard place. Fortunately, virtually any tournament that possesses any credibility or competitive merit whatsoever prohibits the use of this maneuver; as such, it should not be a concern to you in true competitive play. Your opponent, on the other hand, may choose such stages as Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64, two perennial choices for players wishing to alleviate the pain of vertical kills (although shine-spikes and PK Thunder steals still hurt as much as ever).

2. Yoshi

Although Yoshi is not the most common character to run into in tournament play (especially at the higher levels), you should have some semblance of a game plan for the occasional enterprising player who decides to throw his or her Yoshi your way. In particular, look for Yoshi's potent crouch-cancel counter game with his down-smash and -tilt, both of which can send your fast-falling Fox off-stage at hideous angles which can make recovering a chore. As well, be aware that Yoshi does possess a powerful aerial arsenal when combined with his startlingly-fast DJC. You would do well to lengthen your aerials and land at your foe's rear, L-canceling into an up-tilt to set Yoshi up for your up-aerial or up-smash follow-up. At lower percents, be wary of trying to combat Yoshi's aerial approaches with your own; Yoshi's unique physics will allow him to shrug off your own aerials, and trading blows with any opponent is never a good idea with Fox, no matter your DI. In particular, be careful not to run into Yoshi's potent neutral-aerial as well as his up-aerial, which when DJC'd can do wonders for your opponent's juggling game against you.

Do not forget that Yoshi is one of the higher-traction characters; as such, you would do well to utilize your shine combos as much as possible. Your bread-and-butter aerial lead-in to waveshine and up-smash finisher is still as effective as ever (be careful for crouch-canceling at lower percents, however). A couple drill shine repetitions can also help even up the percentages or bring Yoshi in range for a vertical kill via up-smash. Of course, given the probability of your enemy making use of his or her crouch-cancel counter game, you should make sure that your shine combo lead-ins consist primarily of down-aerials (note here that a neutral-aerial lead-in lifts your opponent slightly off the ground when it connects; since the shine's stun time is cut short should your foe hit the ground, you may find that your follow-ups to your shine in this case can often be interrupted by an attack). You may need to refine your fast-falls into L-cancels to grant yourself a solid approach against Yoshi as well; a crouching Yoshi, for example, can change the timing on each of these items, a change which may catch you unawares and open you to punishment.

As always, do your best not to be predictable; a tech-following down-smash can quickly and easily shift control of the match to your opponent as you are tossed off-stage in a nasty angle (DI the down-smash upwards to minimize its knockback length and ease the harsh angle). Remember that Yoshi's wavedash, although not the longest in the game, nevertheless allows him to fine-tune his positioning as he sees fit, whether in anticipation of your approach or in some form of a mind game, and give him an opening to counter. Overall, you could very well take either an aggressive or a defensive stance in this match-up, usually depending on the whims of your opponent's style. Small stages

especially demand aggression of you in order to secure the win. As usual, be careful around edges as you are just as vulnerable to Yoshi's gimps as you are to any other character's; again, your Blaster and superior speed will enable you to focus the fight at the center of the stage, where your vertical kills can come into play. As a final note, your normally-lethal shine-spike loses its potency in this match-up due to Yoshi's unique double-jump properties; as such, focus on ledge-hopped, sweet-spotted back-aerials for edge-guarding (although not so much at the lower percents as you could very well be hit immediately with a neutral-aerial counter). To facilitate your edge-guarding, tack on damage with your Blaster as your foe returns to the stage.

Counter-stage Yoshi on your usual low-ceiling stages, such as Corneria and Green Greens. Expect your opponent to take you to one of the larger stages, such as Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64, to offset your vertical kills.

3. Bowser

As a character who occupies one of the lowest positions in the tier list and who is seriously lacking in both speed and a truly effective, efficient approach, Bowser at first may not elicit much of a response from you, a player of the top-tier Fox. However, what this one match-up may teach you is that while having confidence in your character is one key to your battlefield success, being overly confident to the point of arrogance can often lead to your defeat in an otherwise excellent match-up for you. Granted, Bowser does lack in speed, evasion, and combo options, but he does have more than a few select tools against Fox, especially an extremely powerful out-of-shield and counter game courtesy of his up-B Fortress and a very potent edge-guarding game thanks to his down- and forward-tilts (and even a well-timed forward-smash); both of these are the staples of Bowser's entire game plan and indeed his only truly effective options against you. As such, you should adjust your style, wavering between aggression and defensive blaster-luring and punishing, according to your opponent's style, which unless he is provoked should consist mainly of defensive play with more aggression near the edge for edge-guarding purposes. Most of all, however, do not allow yourself to become overly confident and simply chalk this match up to an auto-win for your top-tier; you will quickly find as you grow in experience that an attitude such as this will lead to sloppy play on your part and many losses in match-ups which you truly should have won. Confidence is a strong asset, but arrogance is far less so.

The ground game against Bowser can be trickier than you may at first be willing to believe. Thanks to his out-of-shield up-B and the unique properties of the Fortress itself (most notably invincibility on frames 1-4), Bowser is perhaps the only character who truly has an answer to your approach; indeed, with good timing on your opponent's part, you may find that a good portion of your aerial lead-ins to shines on Bowser's shield are outpaced by the out-of-shield Fortress (keep in mind that your shine only grants you invincibility on its first frame; here again, the Fortress outclasses you). As a result, even "perfect" shuffles into shines on your part can lead to counters on your approach by simple out-of-shield Fortresses. If you find that you cannot take control via your signature approaches, switch gears to a more defensive, blaster-luring style; although Bowser has a potent answer to your aggressive strategies, he has little if anything to offer as a counter to your own defensive projectile luring and countering other than a flimsy advance on his part consisting of shuffled forward-aerials. You should examine your opponent over time and see if you can predict or read his approach in response to your blaster fire, that is, whether he runs up and stops with a shield to lure out an aerial, whether he comes straight in with a forward-aerial attempt each time, and so on. Adjust your spacing with reverse wavedashes and dash-dancing, returning fire with your shuffled aerials and jump-canceled grabs; your classic up-throw to up-aerials routine is still effective here (especially given your opponent's size and his

reliance on shields), although Bowser can double-jump or DI to prevent being hit by too many up-aerials. Regardless, it is still an easy and efficient way of building damage on Bowser as well as a good means of prepping for a vertical kill.

Successful mindgames are also key to Bowser's success over you. Watch for delayed aerials from Bowser's descents as well as his innovative Koopa Klaw aerial grab, an especially potent and disorienting tool of Bowser's against inexperienced Foxes. You should not stay in one place shielding in anticipation of a simple aerial from Bowser due to this; a throw from the Klaw can function as either a set-up or as a kill mechanism in and of itself when combined with poor DI. Even shielding on platforms above Bowser is risky; unless you can foresee the Klaw (which you should), you will be grabbed from your perch and put into Bowser's control. As well, take a moment to think if you find yourself pressed against the edge; one of Bowser's most potent means of putting you in a disadvantageous position is reading one of your jumps with a full-jump forward-aerial, so be particularly cautious when choosing your method of escape.

In addition, seasoned Bowser players will make use of a rather surprising mind-game involving his down-throw; because many players will assume from the rather sluggish animation of the throw that they can tech away and escape any tech reads in time, more crafty opponents will anticipate this thought process and immediately run towards that position, ready with another grab or a dash attack. Still another trick involves waiting for your second jump and punishing with a well-timed up-aerial. Finally, Bowser possesses a unique ability of his very own called flame-canceling. Although not possible in all versions of Melee, flame-canceling allows the dragon turtle to start his neutral-B fire breath without the usual lengthy start-up animation; he can use this to defend himself as he nears the ground, to gain a foothold on the stage out of a ledge hop, and so on. Keep your wits about you at all times, and be ready for this and other tricks.

Thankfully, your shine combos work quite well on Bowser thanks to his traction. However, you should be aware that the shine's stun time on an aerial opponent is less than on a grounded opponent; as such, down-aerials and not neutral-aerials should be your lead-ins for shine combos against Bowser, who can and will Fortress out of your "combos" if he is hit with an aerial shine from a neutral-aerial. Link a few drill shine reps to tack on a good deal of damage and to prep for a lethal up-smash or up-aerials via a grab, adjusting your wavedash length as needed. If you can connect with a shine or jab and outpace the Fortress' activation, up-smashes and grabs should be your top priority, not necessarily extended shine combos (unless you can lead into grabs and up-smashes from them, of course). Simple and effective is the name of the game against Bowser, who likewise possesses a simple and effective answer to your approach in his up-B. Of course, take care not to forget entirely about your neutral-aerial; indeed, if your enemy insists upon survival DI'ing this aerial, you can often chain it into itself or an up-aerial, as percentage dictates.

The edge game with Bowser is where you need to be especially careful; indeed, other than forward- and up-aerial follow-ups from a Fortress launcher, the vast majority of Bowser's kills on Fox will come at the edge, often stemming from some degree of prediction on your opponent's part (and thus predictability on yours). For example, if Bowser grabs and down-throws you, he will expect you to tech away (for the most part) and follow in that direction for another grab; if this next grab gets you off-stage, you have just handed control of the match entirely to your opponent until you can regain the stage. As always, vary your recovery as needed among your suite of options, including angled Firefoxes (care should be taken with these due to the range on Bowser's forward- and down-tilts; watch your entry angles in relation to Bowser and compensate), shortened Illusions, and the occasional head-on Illusion or Firefoxe to throw off your foe. If you are simply thrown off-stage at lower percents, take care

not to use your recovery choice at the same time or at the same position consistently; a good Bowser will follow you off-stage and punish your moment of immobility with a well-placed forward-aerial and then Fortress back to the ledge, leading either to your immediate death or your imminent death via edge-guarding. Be wary as well of Bowser's below-100 edge attack, which packs a surprising amount of speed and could very well knock you off your feet long enough for your opponent to gain a foothold on-stage (or even knock you off-stage, should you be positioned just so). The last thing that you want to do is to hand your opponent easy low-percent kills. Bowser does have the ability to go blow-for-blow with you, especially horizontally speaking with good DI, so a war of attrition is not a good route against the bottom-tier turtle. As a result, you cannot permit low-percent deaths on your part; focus on finishing Bowser as early as you can with vertical kills, and focus play at the center of the stage as much as you can.

Of course, you have your own options should you get Bowser off-stage in search of a horizontal kill. Ledge-dropped back-aerials are good choices to combat Bowser's recovery, but you must be careful with your spacing as the Fortress possesses a good deal of priority, even in the face of your back-aerials. Botched attempts to sweet-spot can be punished with a down-, forward-, or even an up-smash. If you wish to shine-spike Bowser for the quick one-hit kill, do so with invincibility frames from the ledge as you will rarely if ever be able to shine through the high-priority Fortress and its large hitbox when completely off-stage. Steal the required invincibility frames from the ledge with a Firefox stall and then shine through your opponent's recovery as he nears the edge. Simply stalling completely through the recovery is also an option should you note a tendency to go for the edge out of mindless instinct.

Due to Bowser's need for consistent off-stage kills in this match-up, his controller may opt to take you to a smaller stage, such as Yoshi's Story (despite its low ceiling) or Fountain of Dreams, or he may also choose from the usual contingent of high-ceiling stages, Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64. Yoshi's Story is a particularly interesting pick for Bowser as the platforms are placed just so as to allow Bowser to jump from the edge and onto one of the platforms and fall through with a startlingly quick forward-aerial. The close edges also allow the turtle to navigate around the landscape with his Fortress in a rather fluid fashion; for example, after an out-of-shield Fortress against your approach, Bowser can retreat towards a ledge, grab onto it out of the up-B, and (if below 100%) come up with his fast ledge attack. As always, you should aim for quick vertical kills, thus making your lead counter-stage Corneria, the structure of which is particularly devastating to Bowser's off-stage-oriented gameplay. Larger fields such as Final Destination and Pokemon Stadium can also work to your advantage (again by diminishing Bowser's pivotal edge game).

4. Mewtwo

The bottom-tier Mewtwo has quite a difficult time against Fox. Other than his DJC combos (which are at their best only if you do not DI in the slightest) and neutral-aerial, you have very little to fear from Mewtwo, all told. Aim for vertical kills against the light and floaty Mewtwo with set-ups from jabs and jab resets from connected shines. Predict Mewtwo's lengthy roll if your opponent resorts to it to escape shield pressure and follow with a jump-canceled grab to up-aerials or a jump-canceled up-smash for quick kills. You should be able to maintain a good pressure game on Mewtwo given his lack of mobility via wavedashes or dash-dances, making use of down-aerials for general set-ups at all percents and neutral-aerials for higher-percent set-ups for up-smashes. Be wary of Mewtwo players' generally defensive style; more often than not, they will lure out and wait for a hasty approach with plenty of reverse wavedashes, for which you should be compensating by overshooting your advance as needed. A potential obstacle to your approach on Mewtwo is his neutral-aerial, which

packs a sizable hitbox as well as good priority. You may find your opponent using this to move in on you when he can; space yourself out when you can and land grabs as Mewtwo lands from his aerial. Also be aware that Mewtwo does have his own combos thanks to his ability to DJC; look especially for DJC'ed neutral- and forward-aerials on Mewtwo's approach, and keep in mind that flawed DI on your part can keep you in these combos for a good deal of damage. In addition, be wary of your opponent when he has a charged Shadow Ball, Mewtwo's projectile. Like Samus's Charge Shot, an instance of predictability in your tech or wake-up could allow Mewtwo to land a hit with this and get you off-stage, especially with poor DI; he can also catch you out of your charging Firefox with it should you misplace yourself. When your foe feels that he has built up enough percentage, he may aim to take your stock out of a grab with an up-throw preceded by multiple grab-hits; DI the throw itself entirely to the side to minimize its killing potential. Overall, focus on your vertical kills and your lead-ins for them (especially jump-canceled grabs), and do not play sloppily or predictably (especially near the edge) lest you fall into a DJC combo or have your recovery down- or forward-smashed.

An interesting note in this match-up is Mewtwo's pull-through glitch on Battlefield. From the edge, if Mewtwo lands a forward-B Confusion, his victim may be pulled straight through Battlefield's lower platform and end up beneath the stage, which means almost certain death given the stage's structure. Although this is not the most common of occurrences, knowing this in the first place will prevent your losing stocks in the most ridiculous of fashions to a move which you did not even understand. Your opponent may opt to counterpick you to this stage as a result of this rather obscure maneuver. Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64 are also viable options for Mewtwo given their high ceilings. On your end, the ever-present Corneria is, as always, a strong counterpick, as is Stadium.

5. Kirby

A rarity in high-level tournament play, Kirby is nevertheless a quirky character who may throw you off at the onset. Look for vertical kills here, usually set up by a neutral- or down-aerial to a jab and a jump-canceled up-smash (note that since Kirby falls from the shine, you should make more use of the jab as a set-up than you normally would; if you do shine from an aerial, switch into a tech- and wake-up-following mindset and try to land a jump-canceled grab into your ever-effective up-aerials). You should not underestimate Kirby's aerials, especially his deceptively-lengthy forward-aerial and effective back-aerial, which he can use in his own version of the "wall of pain." If you can space out Kirby's approach with a reverse wavedash, timed dash-dancing, or the like, you should make landing a jump-canceled grab into up-aerials your highest priority as that is the easiest and most effective means of finishing your foe. At higher percents, naturally, make landing a jab as a set-up your goal as DI and high damage will put Kirby very much out of your reach. If you are having trouble getting through your opponent's aerials, especially the wall of pain, rely on your own back-aerials to gain control yet again; positioning for this can be aided by aerial shine-turns as needed. If you misspace one of these aerials or make another sort of error that results in you getting grabbed, teching away is usually the preferred course of action as this prohibits the sluggish Kirby from properly tech-chasing you. Overall, land your grabs when you can, kill at the lowest percents that you can, and be wary of your recovery; Kirby, like every other character in the game, has his own options of interfering with your return, including especially his off-stage aerials that are made still more potent by his multiple jumps.

An interesting note in this match-up stems from Kirby's characteristic "vacuum" ability. While it is well known that Kirby can copy one of his opponent's special abilities (in your case, your stun-free blaster) using this move,

certain more innovative Kirby players will use this for a more surprising purpose: suicide kills. Simply put, should your opponent be up a stock, wish to end the game quickly, or the like, he will attempt to suck you in from the ledge by ledge-hopping into the vacuum. The attempts at this maneuver can easily be seen through with a bit of foresight, but if you do happen to be sucked in, you should not attempt to rotate out to escape (unless you are at a very low percentage, of course); doing so will still cause your death (especially given your fast-falling nature) and will allow Kirby to return on-stage with his multiple jumps and up-B. He can also make use of his forward- and back-throws for suicide kills. As is the case with every other match-up in the game, you can rob Kirby of his sorely-needed low-percentage gimps by forcing the fight to center-stage with a bit of patience and a good deal of blaster fire.

As usual, your counter-stages against the light and floaty Kirby should have low-ceilings; this includes such stages as Corneria, Green Greens, and Rainbow Cruise (at certain positionings). Your opponent will probably opt to take you to the larger stages of Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64 to alleviate the pain caused by your low-percentage vertical kills (shine-spikes are less effective against Kirby due to his multiple jumps, but they can eventually lead to his demise if you land enough of them).

6. Pichu

Strangely enough, Pichu has a better match-up against Fox than many may at first believe, relatively speaking. Granted, his self-damaging moves do exaggerate his tendency to be killed vertically, and he lacks greatly in range, but his up-smash, up-tilt, forward-smash, and throws all grant him combo and kill options against the fast-falling Fox. His neutral-aerial approach is relatively solid when DI'd behind his opponent and can even buffer into a roll to facilitate his escape, and he is not exactly lacking in the speed department to boot. Expect up-smashes and jump-canceled grabs to punish you for predictability, both of which can lead into Pichu's combos. Since Pichu falls from your shine, base your game largely on grab and up-smash set-ups from jabs and tech- and wake-up-following (if you choose to shine from an aerial). As for the edge game, look for Pichu's forward-smash to make an appearance against your recovery as well as off-stage neutral-aerials steered into your charging Fire-fox. As always, sweet-spot your recovery and DI whatever comes from your opponent on-stage; of special note is the process of DI'ing Pichu's forward-smash, which you should in fact DI towards the pocket monster rather than away in order to escape the far more powerful tip of the move (indeed, DI'ing inward can very well push you out of the move's hitbox entirely, freeing you for retaliation). For your edge-guarding purposes, try out your down-smash to punish missed sweet-spots, or stall through Pichu's recovery with your Firefox, either causing him to fall to his death by mistake or forcing him to land on-stage, where you can proceed as you see fit. Your ledge-hopped back-aerials are also potent tools when it comes to edge-guarding the rodent.

Yet again, you should be thinking of low-percentage vertical kills when it comes time to counterpick (meaning stages such as Corneria and Yoshi's Story). On the other hand, your opponent will look towards stages that negate your numerous advantages, such as Dream Land 64 and Kongo Jungle 64.

IV. The Casual Fox

1. Fox's Hidden Taunt

Fox's hidden taunt can only be done on Corneria and Venom, his respective signature stages. The taunt can be done on any section of either level, but you must make sure that you are in a secure location while executing it. If you are

hit while Fox is in the starting animation for the taunt, you will not be able to do it. You can only do the hidden taunt once per match.

Once you have found a secure location, you must simply press down on the control pad for a single frame, which is 1/60 of a second. The popular method of pressing left, right, and down repeatedly and in quick succession is in fact incorrect; it simply became the widespread method of doing the hidden taunt due to the fact that in the middle of all of that pressing, the pad would slip very slightly up or down, eventually getting down to register in a single frame and setting off the taunt.

If you succeed, Fox will kneel down, each hand in a fist, his left fist shaking. He will then stand up and salute with his left hand, and Falco, Peppy, and Slippy will appear as if there is communication going on between the Star Fox team members. Each member's face will appear at the bottom of the screen along with his written dialogue, just as they did in the Star Fox games. The advice that they give is mostly useless. Peppy will spout off random "advice" related to Arwing control at times, or he will inform you among other things that you can jump by pressing X, Y, or up on the control stick.

V. References

Below is a list of helpful resources to further your game in SSBM or otherwise aid you in becoming more involved in its wonderful community. Feel free to PM or e-mail me with any other reference sources that you think deserve a spot here.

1. "DC++ Setup," by W.J: <http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=56223>

DC++ is a file-sharing program which the Smash community uses to distribute its various videos of matches, glitches, techniques, etc. If a video has been released, chances are that the hub will at one point have it (and have first news of its release). In addition, the hub is a wonderful place to acclimate yourself with the Smash community at large and get to know its various players by a simple chat interface. Moreover, word of results from major tournaments often hits the hub before the boards, yet another incentive to download and set up DC++. DC++ is highly recommended for any player interested in seeing the Smash community at large, its players, its matches, and its assorted other footage.

2. "SSBM Compendium of Knowledge: Expanded," by AlphaZealot and other contributors: <http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=42749>

A highly-suggested first read for any up-and-coming player, this explains the terminology of upper-level SSBM and even includes a link to an interesting thread on the history of the game.

3. "Fox Advice/Questions Topic," by Silent Wolf and other contributors: <http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=98202>

This thread, updated virtually every day, contains a plethora of questions posed by aspiring Fox players and answered by the more experienced members of the community. If you have a question about Fox that needs to be answered, this is the place to post it.

4. "Ultimate Fox Thread! (Guides on Fox)," by Silent Wolf and other contributors: <http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=111305>

A compilation thread housed in the Fox forum, this includes links to a wide variety of informative posts, such as SCOTU's shield pressure research.

5. "How to Improve - A Compilation," by Binx and other contributors:
<http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=106060>

As this thread's title states, this is a large compendium of upper-level posts and essays concerning how to improve as a player; the topics of these writings analyze the game as it plays out not only technically but mentally as well.

6. "Advanced Techniques," by Dalal:
<http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=60908>

A good stop for new players interested in furthering their knowledge of SSBM's advanced gameplay, especially if other sources have left them stumped.

7. "A Guide to DI, Smash DI, C-stick DI, Teching, and Crouch Cancelling," by Doraki: <http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=60218>

A very informative, neat, and organized thread on the more specific aspects of DI, a critical part of high-level SSBM play. Truly a must-read for every serious player.

8. "DA MINDGRAINES: An Overview of Mindgames," by g-regulate:
<http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=54186>

A solid start on the concept of mind games and their role in high-level play.

9. "The Fox SHINE GUIDE," by foxandfalco (NJzFinest):
<http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=67333>

A good stop for quick, condensed information on Fox's pivotal shine, this also includes a section on shine-spiking.

10. "Omni's Guide to Mastering Fox," by InfernoOmni:
<http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=60570>

Concise and to-the-point, this guide presents a very solid outline of the developing Fox player and how best to further one's game.

11. "Seanson's Hitbox System," by Seanson:
<http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=95150>

A very ambitious project that sought to provide a means of visualizing any hit-box of any character. Although every character is not completed, the creator did complete Fox's move set.

12. On Edge-Teching: <http://www.smashboards.com/showthread.php?t=69061>

A thread on the technique called "edge-teching," an extremely useful tool against such opponents as Marth, Falco, and still more. Recommended for all Fox players as a means to answer easy edge-guarding deaths at the hands of many tournament-level characters.

VI. Final Words

And that finally concludes this huge guide. During its steady compilation, I have found numerous people who were instrumental to the creation of this guide, and I wish to give proper thanks to them.

Goosefactor, KSO, 'Fro, ac_burito, Anubis Ocelot, NJzFinest, kirkq, Mr H, iamthemicrowave, Iggy, Rin10-10, DracoFox, BunBun, jason_voorhese329, ShineDEX, Faithkeeper, ParanoidPuma, WarHippy, Lavos, DeezNutZ, CNN, Maus, and all the

members of the Purdue Smash community for providing a strong, friendly, and supportive community and for keeping this magnificent game alive.

Unknown522, RaynEX, and Miggz for their contributions to the Jigglypuff match-up.

Trail, tink, BIGC, GOTS, pen^2, Eddie, Zjiin, and all of my regular Smash sparring partners, without whose help I would never have reached my current level of play.

Mew2King and all those who helped him for finding, recording, and organizing that obscene amount of data for the benefit of the Smash community. The entire "The Physics of Fox" section couldn't exist without you guys! Thanks a lot!

SuperDoodleMan for his extensive data on Fox's frames.

FoxsAxis/311 for being the sole inspiration for this guide. Without you and your great interest in Smash and for playing as Fox, I would've had no reason to spill out all of this knowledge that has accrued between me and Smashboards.

stilettrap/dizzy for his additions to the Jab/Straight/Rapid Kick sections, the forward-tilt, forward-smash (including an alternate way to adjust wave-dash length), neutral-aerial, forward-aerial, combos, crouch-canceling (especially on this topic), fox-trotting, and clarifications on the drill shine infinites.

the_suicide_fox for his additions of the infinite stall trick using the Fire Fox and the boost grab, along with various technical data regarding the boost grab.

Shmooguy for having the first Fox guide that I have seen on Smashboards. Good job!

UmbreonMow for providing specific help in clarifying issues with the Jab, forward-tilt, and inverse drill shine methods one and two, as well as input on the Fox vs. Falco match-up regarding the role of wavedashing backward for positioning while under SHL fire.

Barogrei for his observation that the shine cannot be jump-canceled while reversing direction mid-shine and for informing me of the ledge-tech wall jump, which allows a wall jump while still conserving the second jump (more research is required to discover the physics behind this; it is a sort of anomaly at the moment).

DDRKirby(ISQ) for providing much-needed clarification regarding the Fox trot.

Eclipsing Binary for clarifying that the hidden taunt is done by pressing down on the control pad for one frame.

TheCape and noob-lube69 for their respective additions of the "ShineStall" and "Infinite Lube Stall," both referring to invincibility stalling on the edge by dropping into a shine and jump-canceling it into a Firefox to grab the ledge again, allowing for further repetitions.

All the members of Smashboards for being so informative in even the tiniest details of the game, and for putting up with me randomly browsing through the forums and threads with my zero posts. You guys were instrumental in clarifying the tiny details about Fox's game of which I was unsure.

The players themselves, especially those whom I have had the honor of going up against in tournament play. I thank you once again for any contributions you may have made and for allowing me to improve (greatly, I must add) as a Fox player.

And, obviously, Nintendo and HAL Laboratory for making such a deep, great game that still has us all riveted after all these years.

And so concludes this guide on SSBM's Fox McCloud. Feel free to respond and comment on this guide. Rest assured that I would love to see any comments or critiques whatsoever since so much work has gone into it. Thanks, everyone, and if you've actually read everything up to this point, take a much-needed break!

"This guide is so incredible
I owe my Fox to this guide
Thank you, I love you."

-JFox

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