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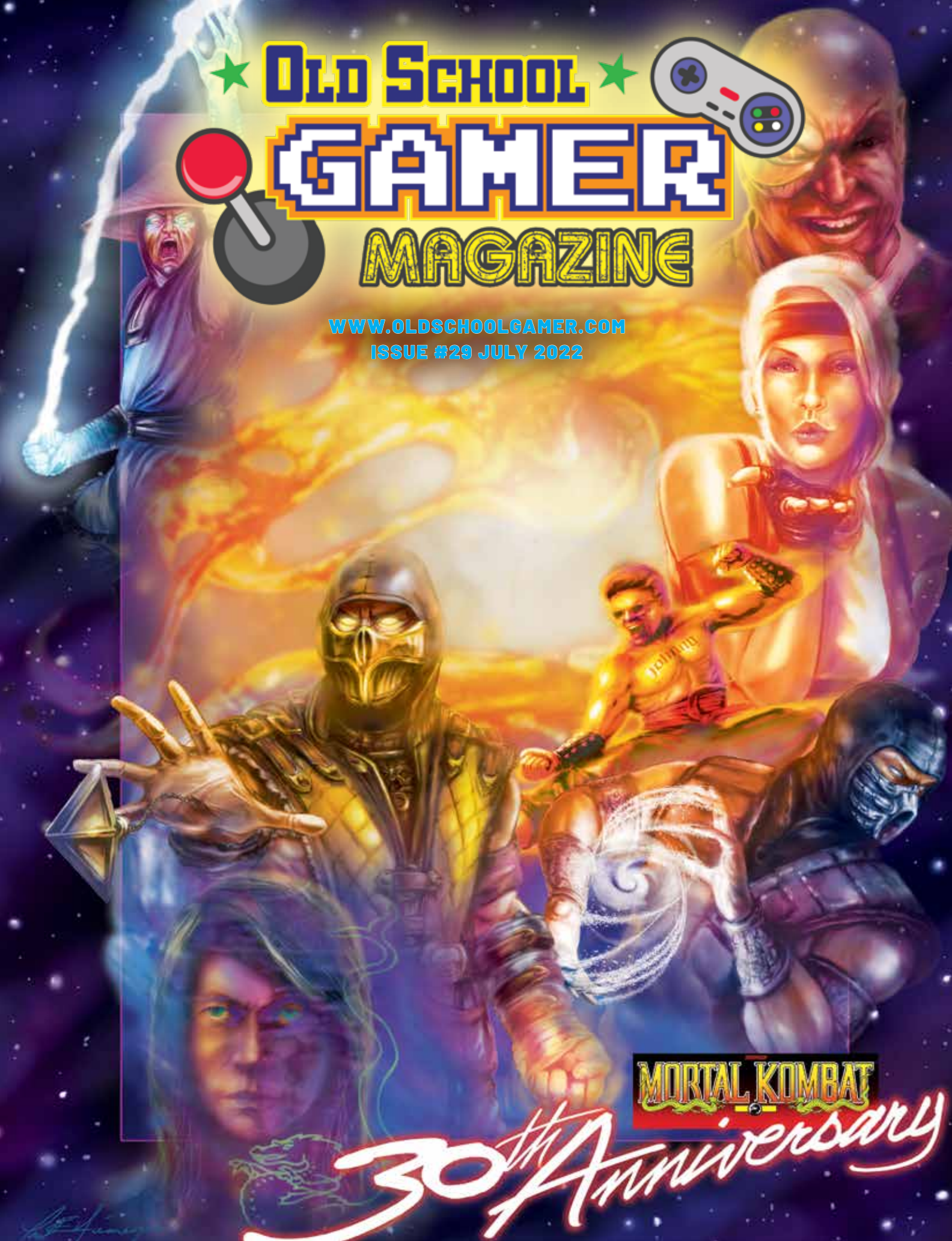


# GAMER

## MAGAZINE

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ISSUE #29 JULY 2022



**MORTAL KOMBAT**

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**KNOWS A LOT ABOUT THE LATEST**  
**VIDEO GAME CONVENTIONS.**  
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**RIGHT HERE!**

## **COIN UP!**

You know when a magazine devotes an entire issue (or at least a big chunk of it) to one game, that game has to be very important... life-changing... frenzy-inducing... an "I'll die if I don't get it!" type of game. In this case, the game is *Mortal Kombat* and millions of gamers have proven it to be a very important game. Personally, I don't like it, but then, I don't like fighting games unless they involve jet fighters, tanks, all types of firearms, battle axes... well you get the idea. However, I did play *Mortal Kombat*... once... It was Christmas Day. I was sipping an Irish Coffe (with Bushmills, of course), and my nephew, Nick, had just gotten the game. He'd studied up on it and learned a bunch of the Combos and Fatalities. He assured me that I would die a bloody, horrific death. Since I was bored, I said I'd play. I set my Irish Coffee down. He set up the game and handed me a controller. The game started and I started pushing as many buttons as I could, as fast as I could. Thirty seconds later, the game was over. I'd won. Nick threw his controller at me (he missed) and loudly proclaimed that I had cheated. It was a bad ending. That's why I don't like fighting games. They take up too much valuable drinking time.



# FEATURED SCRIBE



David L. Craddock writes fiction, nonfiction, and grocery lists. He is the bestselling author of the *Stay Awhile* and *Listen* trilogy exploring the history of Blizzard Entertainment and *Diablo* and *Diablo II* developer Blizzard North, and the upcoming *Long Live Mortal Kombat* series. Additionally, David is the director of *FPS: First Person Shooter*, a genre chronicling the history of FPS games. Follow him @davidlcraddock on Twitter.

## THE EDITOR



Bill Donohue did a 13-year stint as Managing Editor for *Game Players*, *UGP* and *PSM* magazines. He created *Gazuga* and *The Cleansing*. He once hit the Publisher of *Game Players* in the face with a whipped cream pie. He prefers Gibson guitars, Marshall amps, EMG pickups and Benelli M4 combat shotguns. He composed the ultimate *Super Bomberman 2* anthem - (He Ain't Got) "No Boot". Crazy? Hey, it's a life choice...

## THE SCRIBES



Kevin Butler was bitten by the video game bug in 1973. From that point on, he played many arcade and console games. He even learned to program the Apple II+ in the early 80s. Kevin continued to do FAQs for GameFAQs. He currently lives in Neosho, MO with his wife and one son who is also a video game hobbyist.



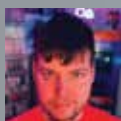
Brad Feingold's love for retro gaming goes all the way back to *Space Invaders* and *Asteroids*. Even though he plays the newer games, he always goes back to the classics. Thanks to the Nintendo Switch and its ability to play retro and retro-looking games, his retro cravings will be complete.



Todd Friedman currently writes for *Old School Gamer Magazine*, *Retro Gaming Times*, and the *Walter Day Trading Card Collection*. He has co-promoted the Video Game Summit in Chicago, IL for the last 13 years and is the Chairman of the Nomination Committee and a board member for the International Video Game Hall of Fame.



Patrick Hickey Jr. is the author of *The Minds Behind the Games* book series. The first book in the series was released in April 2018. The sequel, *The Minds Behind Adventure Games*, was released in Dec. 2019. Three more editions of the series are forthcoming through 2021.



Mike Mertes knew the moment he touched an Intellivision controller that he had experienced something incredible that would shape him for the rest of his life. As a writer for [www.gamerlogic.net](http://www.gamerlogic.net) and other media outlets, Mike enjoys articulating why games from the 8- and 16-bit console generations are some of the best of all time.



Michael Thomasson is one of the most respected videogame historians in the field today. He teaches college level videogame history, design, and graphics courses. He authored *Downright Bizarre Games* and has contributed to nearly a dozen textbooks. Michael's columns have been distributed worldwide.



Brett Weiss, Video game historian and national columnist, is the author of 10 books, including the *Classic Home Video Games* series, *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977-1987*, and *The SNES Omnibus* volumes 1 and 2. Find Weiss online at [www.brettweisswords.com](http://www.brettweisswords.com), and check out his YouTube show, *Tales from a Retro Gamer*.



# itRCADE REPORT

## By Brad Feingold

**Y**es, iiRcade has created a couple different model designs and released them, gave away some hats, shirts, sweat-shirts, and other swag. That should be enough for us; we are ready for the next product... Actually, not quite. With some companies, a product is released and then they move on, but not iiRcade. While they are currently working on the release of the Gold edition machines, they are also working on adding little touches to the original classic that was released a year and a half ago. Coming soon to not only the iiRcade Gold, but the iiRcade classic, will be the ability to add extra arcade control accessories.

The new initiative will allow the use of off-the-shelf gaming accessories that are compatible with iiRcade devices using two USB controller attachment ports underneath the front of the control deck area on the new Gold Editions and Bluetooth connectivity for the Classic and Gold Editions of iiRcade. At launch, trackballs, and spinners compatible with the system will be the

first set of accessories supported.

All new games capable of taking advantage of the accessories are still being targeted to work with the standard joystick controllers on both the Classic and Gold editions of iiRcade, enabling every owner of iiRcade to enjoy the new games without the need for the accessories.

iiRcade is not planning on manufacturing its own gaming accessories, but instead, is opening up the system for manufacturers of accessories to create or make their accessories compatible, if not already compatible with the system.

One collaboration will be with Glen Planamento, the genius who is known from Facebook at Glen's Retro Show "Game Guru's page. He created his own version of the *Tron* controllers for the Arcade One Ups as well as for home arcade systems and other devices.





These are some of the latest creations from Glenn. He created a more controllable spinner and trackball for the Arcade OneUps as well as a more durable controller for *Star Wars* and *Tron*.

"We're very excited to announce this open initiative to expand the gaming experience on iiRcade by allowing iiRcade gamers to use off-the-shelf accessories that are compatible with iiRcade system," said Jong Shin, founder & CEO of iiRcade. "It's a request from our iiRcade community that we've had for some time now and we're glad to be able to implement our community's request to give our users more options to play their favorite arcade games. This is another proof that we are listening to our community".

## I CHALLENGE YOU

There is nothing more fun than being able to sit next to a friend in front of a TV and play a two-player game on the TV with a console system or even playing together on the iiRcade. Wait, let me change that. There is nothing more fun than being able to play a game with your friend no matter WHERE you are. That is what makes technology so amazing these days. Back in the 80s, it was playing a dogfight game or *Doom* over the baud modem. Today, it's playing Fortnite or Call of Duty over high-speed internet. So why can't we do that on the iiRcade?

As a matter of fact, iiRcade's newest online gaming technology enables all users to play classic arcade games, as well as modern games, online together or against each other; whether it's head-to-head in a fighting or racing games, or in a beat 'em up co-op mode.

"This is a feature we're really excited about that our community has been asking for since day one," said Jong Shin, founder & CEO of iiRcade. "We'll launch the system first as beta with a handful of games then expand to all arcade games and later add modern games."

The new feature, starting with classic retro games, was launched in the first quarter of 2022. It will now be clear to see how much I really stink at certain games from 500+ miles away. Still trying to decide if I am looking forward to this. LOL. The truth is, I am! At the time of press, here a list of the games that are currently available for online play:

*Riptide GP Renegade*, *64th Street*, *Strikers 1945*, *Goal Goal Goal*, *Shadow Force*, *Hoops 96*, *Batsugun GP*, *Outzone*, *Stadium Heroes*, *Windjammers*, *Magical Drop III*, *Dragon Master*, *Heavy Smash*, *Bogyuun*, *Knuckle Bash*, *Breakers Bash*, *Street Hoops*, *Cybattler*, *Warrior Blade – Rastan Saga Episode III*, *Squash*, *The Astyanax*, *In the Hunt*, *Fancy World*, *US Championship VBall*, *Truxton II*, *Block Out*, *Double Dragon*, *Rage of the Dragon*, *Tengai* and *Night Slashers*. Stay tuned for more games to be added soon.

## THUNDER HOOP STRIKES BACK

"What can you say about this game? It has a lot of great action features that remind you of *Contra*, *Aliens*, and the *Guilty Gear* series. "In this sequel, you control a powerful ESP Rambo-like character, throwing sonic rays from his hands and destroying mutated enemies." – KLOV



The music is really cool to listen to and brings back memories of playing games of the 80s. It starts with rock guitar riffs and then goes into orchestra related tunes. While you're progressing through the ship, the music gets more intense as you're shooting aliens, tanks ships and other obstacles including men and women. Let's talk about that for a second. When you shoot these objects, they don't just die, they explode. However, when they explode, they inflate and then they explode which is quite comical. Not just on the side for watching the men and the aliens but women explode as well. It's just downright weird, gross, and most importantly... HILARIOUS! I will admit it is a good game for one that I have never seen in the arcades before so, it's one I do recommend that you give a chance. Strange and unusual games do arrive on the iiRcade, and this is one of them.

## TWIN BRATS

So, we're going to go back to the classics... way back to the classics with this this is *Pac-Man*-esque game where you're a little baby trying to go through a maze collecting dots and hearts and letters. While doing this you need to avoid running into skulls, moving monsters, mushrooms, and other creatures. What makes this different from something like *Pac-Man* is that, throughout the maze, there are doors that you can switch to cut off the monsters. Also, monsters can actually run into the skulls and die. The music can be a little redundant and



some of the sound effects and phrases don't make sense.

I have also noticed that some of the loading screens were a little slow between rounds. All in all, it's an OK game. It is just another flashback to remind me of how old I really am.



# MORTAL KOMBAT

## BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS

By Todd Friedman

**W**hen I was a senior in high school in 1992, I worked in the local bowling alley which had an arcade in the back of the building. Each month or so, the gaming distributor would bring in some new arcade and pinball games that had just come out. There were a lot of memorable ones I can envision, like *The Addams Family Pinball*, *Golden Axe: The Revenge* and *Virtua Racing* to name a few. There was also a game that would change the way we would play arcade games forever.

This game would make people run to the arcade in between bowling shots just to get their quarter on the machine to be next. This game was *Mortal Kombat*. No other game up to that point where dozens of people waited in line to play like this one did. There were other fighting games to that point like *Street Fighter*, *Fatal Fury*, and *Pit Fighter*, and those games drew a small crowd, but for a very short time. *Mortal Kombat*, on the other hand, was in the arcade longer than any other game





# MORTAL MONDAY

## SEPTEMBER 13



before or after in the bowling alley. It was a huge money maker and a big draw to bowlers to stay longer and play the game for hours on end. The art of the cabinet, the music, the animation, the voice saying "FIGHT"; everything was a perfect storm of the ultimate fighting game. Of course, the one item that was the biggest success of the game and perhaps the biggest controversy of all time was the "Fatalities". This caused a worldwide argument of violence in games and would help create the now known rating system we know today. That didn't stop the franchise from continuing to make dozens of games year after year and still do to this day. The story of *Mortal Kombat* has

been written many times, but this article is going to walk you through some of the basics of *Mortal Kombat*, hopefully filling you with tons of things you didn't know and may have questions on. We recommend you investigate buying "Long Live *Mortal Kombat*" by David L. Craddock and other resources if you are interested in more about the history of *Mortal Kombat*.

The arcade cabinet was released on October 8th, 1992, but development was started in 1991 by Programmer Ed Boone and John Tobias, sound design by Dan Forden, Graphics by John Vogel, and Art by Paul Niemeyer. The game was originally called "Dragon Attack" by creator John Tobias and was later crossed out and changed to "Mortal Kombat" by Paul Niemeyer. That story can be read at [www.thewalterdaycollection.com](http://www.thewalterdaycollection.com) with Paul Niemeyer's Trading Card Spotlight.



The first *Mortal Kombat* game takes place in Earthrealm (Earth) where seven different warriors have their own reasons for entering the tournament with the prize being the continued freedom of their realm under threat of a takeover by Outworld. Creator John Tobias said that his inspirations for the game's story and characters came from Chinese mythology and some of the stories and rumored events about the Shaolin monks.



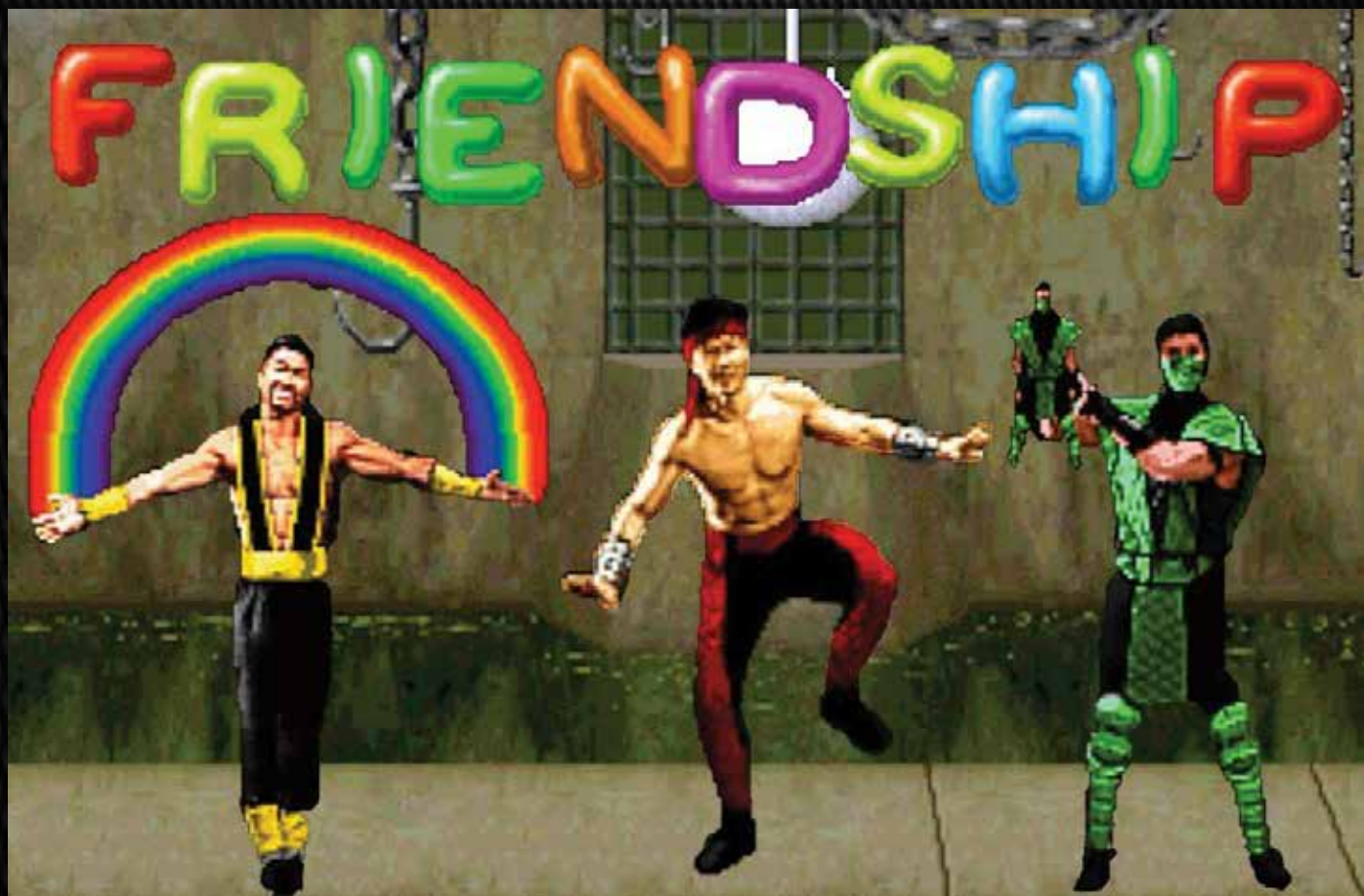
*Mortal Kombat* is at first glance the typical side scrolling fighting style you would see in arcade games. You battle in a one-on-one fight with the best 2 out of 3 winning the match. Each round has a timer, and if the time runs out the one with the most health remaining wins that round. You have a health bar that determines when you lose. The original game used the eight directional joystick and five buttons. Depending on where you move the joystick and what combination of buttons you press, will create unique moves for that character. Each character has special fighting abilities. *Mortal Kombat* was the first fighting game to introduce the concept of "juggling", knocking an opponent into the air and following up with a combination of attacks while the enemy is still airborne and defenseless.

So how did the developers of the game make the fighters look so real? They used a digital scan of the actors. Motion Capture is a state-of-the-art technique used to record actors, who are also known as mocaps. The direct purpose is for the actors to provide their movements for video game characters. By giving the game this realism, it captured the real feel of a fight because the characters move as a human would. The same motion capture actors who played these iconic characters can be seen at local video game conferences. They take pictures with fans and sign autographs as well. Their images will be forever engrained into the video game universe.

With all the success in the arcade industry, Acclaim Entertainment began to bring *Mortal Kombat* to various home consoles. Both Sega and Nintendo created the game for their consoles, the Genesis, and the Super Nintendo. Both companies

recognized the issue with the level of gore in the game but took very different approaches. Sega, wanting to capture as much of the gaming market, went with trying to keep as much of the visual gore from the arcade game in place. While the Sega game eliminated the blood and fatalities, they could be activated via the use of a well-published cheat code. With the game being shipped without the blood and gore, Sega labelled it with their MA-13 VRC label. On the other hand, Nintendo wanted to keep games on their system appropriate for families and children and required Acclaim to change the red blood to grey sweat, edit the fatalities, and change other parts of the game's artwork to remove elements like severed heads on spikes. Sega's version of *Mortal Kombat* outsold Nintendo's by a factor of five. This furthered the existing rivalry between the two companies. The launch of *Mortal Kombat* for home consoles was one of the largest video game launches of that era. A flood of TV commercials heralded the simultaneous release of four home versions of the game: Super Nintendo, Genesis, Game Boy and Game Gear, and on September 13, 1993, the date was dubbed "Mortal Monday". To date, *Mortal Kombat* console games have sold more than 30 million copies worldwide.

But nothing stood out more for *Mortal Kombat* than the brilliant invention of the Fatality, a finishing move executed against a defeated opponent to kill them in a gruesome fashion. If you won the the match, the large words "FINISH HIM" appeared on the screen. This gave the fighter a few seconds to do a special joystick, button combination that would violently kill the opponent and send the blood and body parts flying. This finishing move would be the beginning of a worldwide battle of violence in video games. There were other violent games in





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MORTAL KOMBAT

# MORTAL KOMBAT

## BLOOD & THUNDER





the 1990's like *Night Trap* and *Doom*, but it was *Mortal Kombat* that made the United States Senate Committee raise eyebrows. The hearings, led by Senators Joe Lieberman and Herb Kohl, put the video game companies to task for the realistic depiction of violence in video games, and threatened that Congress would take action to regulate the industry if they did not take steps themselves. As a result, the American video game industry created the Interactive Digital Software Association (now known as the Entertainment Software Association) in July 1994 to serve as an advocacy group for the industry, and subsequently formed the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) to provide content ratings on video games sold at retail stores in North America.

Even the new ESRB ratings and the fatalities getting more graphic did not stop the developers from adding more each game. The concept of the fatality has been told by different people, but the consensus was to originally use them as a finishing move for final boss Shang Tsung, who was going to pull out his sword and behead his opponent. Then the developers thought, 'What if all the players could do that to their opponent?'. The first fatality they did was of Johnny Cage punching off an opponent's head, which was created by Johnny cage motion actor, Daniel Pesina and implemented by Ed Boon. Fatalities were eventually developed for all the characters, and it has been part of every *Mortal Kombat* game that followed.

Because of the violent nature of the game, other countries have banned the game. In Germany, every *Mortal Kombat* game was banned for ten years from its release until 2015. *Mortal Kombat* has been banned in Brazil and South Korea since 2011 and was banned in Australia until February 2013. *Mortal Kombat 11* is banned in Indonesia, Japan, China, and Ukraine.

The developers of the game also wanted to put in some secret finishing moves that could be considered an alternate fatality. These included Animalities which allowed the player to morph into an animal and maul or eat their opponent alive; Brutalities allowed players to perform a combo which would end in a uppercut, causing the opponent to explode; Mutalities, found in *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks*, are Fatalities performed on multiple enemies at one time. This was the only *Mortal Kombat* game to ever use this finisher. Babalities caused defeated characters to turn into a baby, sitting on the floor and wearing a miniature version of their adult clothing and accessories and/or a diaper while crying. Friendship, instead of injuring or killing the loser, makes a peace offering, such as Sub-Zero using his powers to make a snowman, Scorpion startlinging his opponent with a skull in a Jack-in-the-Box, Liu Kang dancing while a disco ball appeared in the stage, or Johnny Cage offering a signed photo of himself. Fergality, a finisher performed by Raiden in *MKII* for the Genesis/Mega Drive, turns defeated characters into Probe Ltd. employee Fergus McGovern, who worked on that port of the game. Quitality, was a new type of "finisher" introduced in *MKX* and only occurred online. Should either player quit during the middle of the match, then that combatant's head will suddenly explode, punishing the quitter and glorifying the winner. Faction Kill was a new type of finisher introduced in *MKX*, and a variant of the classic Fatality. Instead of the victor killing the opponent, he/she will allow for someone (off-screen) from within their respective faction to perform the kill for them.

Not every video game has transitioned to the big screen, but *Mortal Kombat* seemed like the perfect one to do so. The first film, *Mortal Kombat*, was released in 1995 and its sequel, *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, was released in 1997. The last and most recent film was released in theatres on April 23, 2021.





Some would say the original *Mortal Kombat* film was true to the game with a great storyline. It typically comes up in conversation as one of the best video game movies of all time. The most recent movie did not disappoint, with the amount of action and blood depicting the *Mortal Kombat* games of this generation.

In 1995 after the success of the movie, the *Mortal Kombat: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* was released. The soundtrack went Platinum in less than a year reaching No. 10 on the Billboard 200 and was included in the 2011 Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition as the "most successful video game spin-off soundtrack album". *Mortal Kombat* also got involved in the comic book genre. The comic book series included the official *Mortal Kombat* comics by Midway and a licensed adaptation series by Malibu Comics that was published in 1994-1995. The *Mortal Kombat: Live Tour* was a martial art theatrical stage show featuring *Mortal Kombat* characters, sound, and laser light effects on stage. The show debuted at Radio City Music Hall in New York City on September 14, 1995, followed by a 200-city road trip into 1996.

Fighting games have historically been a fan favorite for Esports competition. Evo, the largest fighting game championship in the world, has *Mortal Kombat* as one of their fighting games. Gamers have traveled all over the country to compete in this highly competitive tournament. The prize money for these is overwhelming. A few gamers have made a great living playing *Mortal Kombat* and winning events and tournaments. With streaming sites and social media, gamers can watch their favorite gamer fight against others in these tournaments. Apps such as Twitch hold a yearly competition live for *Mortal Kombat* and other fighting games.

There are a few titles in video game history that have changed the way we play video games. *Mortal Kombat* is for sure on top



# THE GAMES

1992	MORTAL KOMBAT
1993	MORTAL KOMBAT II
1995	MORTAL KOMBAT 3 ULTIMATE MORTAL KOMBAT 3
1996	MORTAL KOMBAT TRILOGY
1997	MORTAL KOMBAT MYTHOLOGIES: SUB-ZERO MORTAL KOMBAT 4
1999	MORTAL KOMBAT GOLD
2000	MORTAL KOMBAT: SPECIAL FORGES
2001	MORTAL KOMBAT ADVANCE
2002	MORTAL KOMBAT: DEADLY ALLIANCE
2003	MORTAL KOMBAT: TOURNAMENT EDITION
2004	MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION
2005	MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS
2006	MORTAL KOMBAT: ARMAGEDDON MORTAL KOMBAT: UNCHAINED
2007	ULTIMATE MORTAL KOMBAT
2008	MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE
2011	MORTAL KOMBAT MORTAL KOMBAT ARCADE KOLLECTION
2012	MORTAL KOMBAT: COMPLETE EDITION
2015	MORTAL KOMBAT X MORTAL KOMBAT MOBILE
2016	MORTAL KOMBAT XL
2019	MORTAL KOMBAT 11
2020	MORTAL KOMBAT 11 AFTERMATH KOLLECTION
2021	MORTAL KOMBAT 11: ULTIMATE



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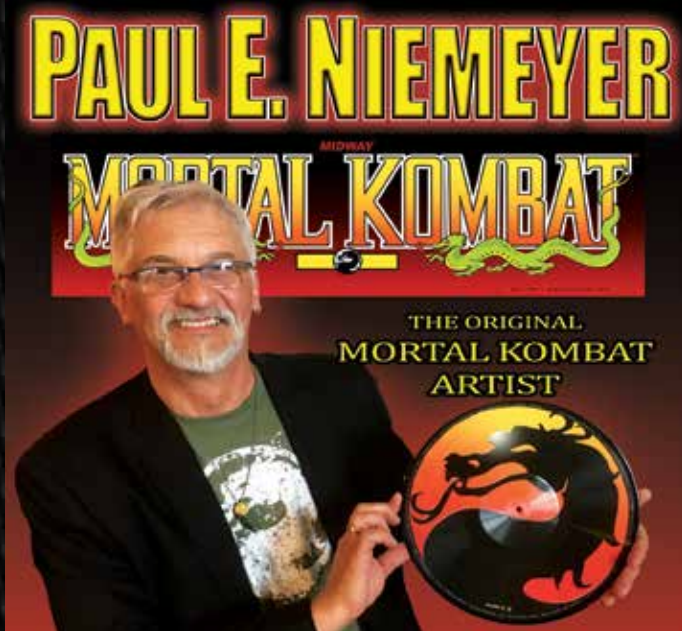
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of that list. The fan base for this games franchise is one of the largest for fighting games young and old. Even today, 30 years later, you can hear someone yell out "Get over here!"

Paul Niemeyer started his career in video game art by illustrating for industry legend Paul Farris in the art department at Bally/Midway from 1982-1984. At Bally/Midway, Paul did art on games like Tapper, PacMan Plus, TRON, Spy Hunter, Time Killers, and an endless, anonymous list of prototype games. In 1992, Paul did the final illustrations of the Mortal Kombat logo and the artwork on the cabinet, control panels, and the header for the arcade game.

Be sure to read Mike Mertes's great interview with Paul later in this issue! 

## GET IN HERE!



### IMPLEMENTS OF DESTRUCTION

This place is where quarters are stacked high on the decks while warriors wait for their shot at glory.

This is the arena where jaws meet fists, skin meets blade and heads? Well, heads meet the wooden spikes... Muahahahaha!





# MORTAL KOMBAT: MAKING A PERFECT PORT

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JEFF PETERS

By Patrick Hickey, Jr.

**M**idway's *Mortal Kombat* franchise is a classic for a variety of reasons. Its lore, gameplay, blood, visuals, the entire package - has made it one of the leaders in the genre for over four decades. But way back during the days of the Sega Genesis, being able to deliver a home version of an arcade game was far from simple. Luckily, Jeff Peters and his team at Sculptured Software had a ton of practice. By the time *Mortal Kombat 3* became a reality on the console, he and his team had been perfecting their development techniques for years. As a result, *Mortal Kombat 3* is easily one of the most commercially and critically successful fighting games in the history of the Sega Genesis.

The director of the first two games on the Super Nintendo and then both the SNES and Genesis for *MK3*, Peters had the clear objective to make it the most faithful console port of an arcade fighting game that had ever been released up until that point. That mentality wasn't a newfound one for Peters, however. In addition to being one of the co-founders of the Utah Digital Entertainment Network, Peters had over 30 years of experience in the industry under his belt with companies such as Viacom, Disney, The Void, Amblin, Warner Bros., DC and Hasbro and on game franchises the likes of *Mortal Kombat*, *NBA Jam*, *Madden*, *Tetris*, *Monopoly*, *Metro 2033* and *Tiger Woods*. If that wasn't enough, Peters was, once upon a time, a founding member of the US National Video Game team, where he held numerous world records in *Pole Position II*, *Domino Man* and *Time Pilot*. He was also a co-founder of Electronic Gaming Monthly magazine.



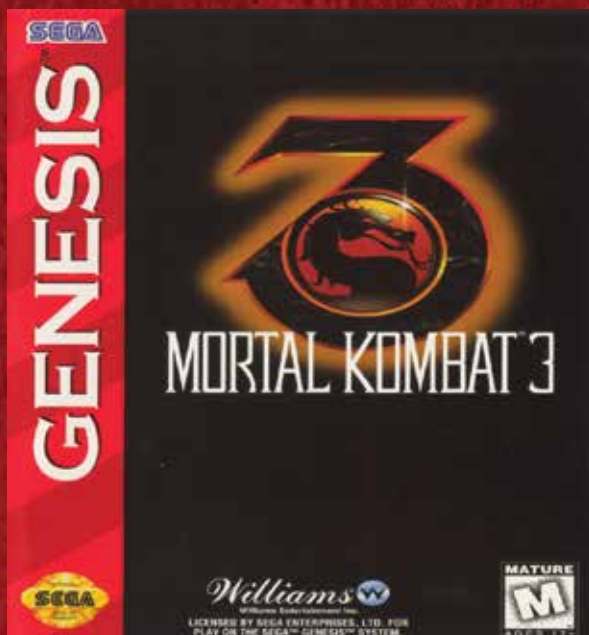
With such an unbridled passion for the industry, you'd think a career in gaming was what he always wanted. Although he now owns over 50 classic arcade and pinball machines and continues to be a voice in the industry, that wasn't always the case.

"Well, originally I was going to be a lawyer," Peters said. "I was one of those speech and debate brats and used to go to all the debate competitions and I was looking at law colleges. So that's in high school. That's where I was convinced my career was going and then this video game phenomenon kind of took hold and took root. It sounded more fun, so I literally had a complete career change at that point in time. Of course, at that time, it was more competitive gaming competitions, getting good at this type, leading to the US National Video Game Team, international competitions, Guinness Book of World Records and all that stuff. So, from the US National Video Game Team, we were a bunch of kids that, when I teach business lessons now, I look back at what we did and go, well, we were too young and naive to know that we shouldn't be doing all that we did."

Young and naive? Sure. But the talent for Peters to be a force in the industry, in one way or another, was always there. After his competitive gaming days were winding down, Peters tackled the flooded space of video game magazine publishing. It was there too he was a dominant player. "Starting EGM, if you look at all the business indicators back in the '80s, we absolutely should not have started another magazine for the video game industry because mathematically, it should have failed," Peters said. "But our passion drove us through that and generated something that really succeeded."

At the same time, being so close to the industry lit a completely different fire within Peters. "This concept of passion, overcoming all hurdles, I would say from, playing games competitively to then writing about games in the industry, that kind of unlocked this, this thing too- well, I want to design and want to develop," Peters said. "I wanted to be on the other side and so leaving magazine publishing, that's kind of where the transition happened. Alright. I want to get into the industry and actually make things, instead of writing it. And when you're writing countless reviews and interviewing people, you know that that's kind of an itch to scratch. When you're reviewing games, you get that desire - 'I want to create something,' versus just talking about what other people do. You see it now with a lot of game reviewers as well. You see this trend of, 'Well didn't they know they shouldn't have done this?' and 'Didn't they know this feature was horrible?' I feel like most game reviewers are frustrated game designers - people that want to design games if you look at it that way. So that got me, you know, transitioning in the industry. I worked on various arcade games. I lived in





Japan and worked with SNK for a number of years. I helped launch the NeoGeo system for example. I was an executive with Electronic Arts for almost 10 years. I've started a bunch of companies, worked with independent companies, kind of the whole gamut. So, I've had this, this breadth of a career, which in looking back now has been kind of fun."

But way before he was the celebrated mind in gaming he is today, Peters, who just helped SNK bring the NeoGeo home console to market, headed back stateside for another adventure - one that would add another layer to his tales in the industry. "I worked with a company called Sculptured Software. I'm here in Utah and that was in 1991," Peters said. "I got a call from (Sculptured Software co-founder) George Metos, who I knew from the magazine, said, 'Hey, why don't you come work with us? We're a small startup and we have all these grand visions and whatnot. I went to work with George and Sculptured Software. There were only about 20 some people at the time. We grew that company to be one of the top game developers in the world. Just about everything that we did was the top 10 or top five or the Number One game in the world at the time, all out of Utah, which nobody really knew. We grew that company to about 200 people and then ended up selling it to Acclaim."

"The reason that that journey is important is Acclaim is the reason that we started working with *Mortal Kombat*. Acclaim was mostly a marketing company, brands and licenses and they did this deal with Midway, going back to the original *Mortal Kombat*. When the first *Mortal Kombat* was about ready to release (in arcades), no one really knew what to make of it, cause at the time, everybody was copying *Street Fighter*. *Street Fighter II* was the thing. Everybody played *Street Fighter II*. I was a competitive *Street Fighter II* gamer myself and went to arcades to kick everybody's butt and you know, that was a thing. And here's this, this *Mortal Kombat*, which was one of a number of fighting games all trying to dethrone *Street Fighter II*, most of them failed. So *Mortal Kombat* comes on the scene and it's unclear what to make of it. So, Acclaim brings this project to us and asks, 'What do you guys think?' and initially it was like, 'Well, it's interesting - it's unique. There might be something here.' While we're talking about it, that's when it just started

- its rise in the arcades of getting to be popular. So long story short, Acclaim wanted to divide the development to find the best developer in the world to do the Genesis and the best to do the Super Nintendo. We, at the time, were considered the best on Super Nintendo and Probe in the UK was considered the best Genesis developer in the world."

Now tasked with bringing the series to home consoles via the Super Nintendo, Peters had to deal with restrictions the Genesis team at Probe did not. That was just one wrinkle in the experience. "Nintendo did not want blood or violence on Super Nintendo," Peters said. "So, the two productions had to separate in some way, shape or form. We knew Fergus McGovern, the guy that ran Probe. We had a good sister company relationship with them, so we compared some notes and development, and we went our different paths and developed the first *Mortal Kombat* independently. That led up to *Mortal Monday* (the name of the release date of the home versions of the original *Mortal Kombat*, September 13, 1993), which at the time, was the biggest launch in video game history of any game. Technically, we did a better job on the Super Nintendo, with the voice, the graphics, and the controls and all that sort of stuff, but the Genesis version had the blood, so it outsold the Super Nintendo."

In spite of selling fewer copies than Probe's Genesis version, Sculptured Software knew they were on the right path to creating an authentic arcade experience at home. Luckily for them, Nintendo began to smell what was cooking in the kitchen with the SNES *MK* team. "Nintendo learned its lesson and then in *Mortal Kombat II*, said, 'All right, well, we'll allow the blood and guts,'" Peters said. "That unleashed us to basically do everything. I look at *Mortal Kombat II* as one of the best productions that we've done on the Super Nintendo, both technically and aesthetically."

By the time *Mortal Kombat 3* was in arcades, the home console market began to shift, however. With their success on the SNES versions of *MKII*, Sculptured Software was ready to take their work to another level entirely. "Midway and Acclaim had a falling out. It was like, 'Well, you guys know this thing and you've done the best at it. Well, why don't you do all three versions?' Wow," Peters said, in regard to his talks with Midway at the time. "So, at that point in time, it was a Sculptured Software production. We did the PC, Genesis and Super Nintendo versions, which allowed us to have a lot of synergies in development - break the art apart and the characters and do pallet manipulation and all the technical. It allowed us to do some very cool things."

"An interesting anecdote on *Mortal Kombat 3* for PC: we were one of the first live, LAN-networking games on PC," Peters said. "We have all these notes from companies and whatnot, saying that we brought many networks to its knees, with *Mortal Kombat* and people playing across their machines. It was kind of funny - we literally brought companies down with *Mortal Kombat 3*."

With virtually no limitations on the PC, development was a lot different than it was on the Genesis. There, Peters and the team faced serious challenges in order to get the console to do what it needed to in order to recreate the arcade experience on Sega's 16-bit console. "The palettes and colors that you had in the Genesis were vastly different than how the palette chip





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worked on the Super Nintendo. On the Genesis, you had very limited colors,” Peters said. “From a Genesis point of view, the darker colors were an issue; you didn’t have this clean ramp of saturation and lightness and darkness on the Genesis ports. You went from, all right, it’s bright, it’s brightn- oh, it’s dark. It was almost like this cliff that you went off, which is why when you look at a lot of Genesis games, they tend to look darker than others. It’s just in the way the colors work. So, it became an interesting challenge to figure how we get the bright, bright, vibrant colors of all of the characters in the fighters using the limitations of the palette system on the Genesis specifically.”

Getting the game’s lighting and aesthetics perfect was an issue but creating the characters on-screen was an equally-sized challenge, too. Peters and the team though were prepared. “Usually a fighting game, or a game that has characters on the Genesis, you’ve got the palette of colors and that would be used for all of your sprites for that character,” Peters said. “But because of the way they work, they all get broken up into eight by eight-pixel sprites. So, we would take these high-resolution characters and we developed tools that allowed us to break them up into little characters. Also, because of how we broke them up (the fighters into individual 8x8 pixel characters), we could actually have each character assigned to different palettes to give more variety of color, instead of just having the entire fighter use only one set of colors. So that allowed us to get a little bit better color depth and a little bit better range.

“It was a technical challenge of deconstructing these big digital images, breaking them up under the little bitty sprites and characters and then assigning them to the multiple palettes to give us as much color and vibrancy as possible. If you’re working with the Genesis, there’s a whole technical exercise of we’ve only got so many palettes of eight and 16 colors and that has to be broken up into so many sprites and backgrounds and foregrounds. So how do you manage all that in order to put the right amount of color to where it mattered? A lot of successful Genesis games, if they were being built for the Genesis, from the ground up, would design around those limitations. In this case, it was taking the highest resolution graphics and characters and backgrounds and all this great voice and looking at it as a technical challenge to basically, how close can we make it look and play like the arcade version of the console? The Genesis just had so many limitations to it, but at the time, every console had these extreme technical limitations. You just embraced them and worked around them.”

The way they worked around them wasn’t by complaining. It was by creating innovative technology that brought the arcade creations to life in a brand-new way. Contrary to what many think, it required just as much effort as the arcade game, possibly even more. Because of that, *Mortal Kombat 3* was anything but a straight port. It was tailor-made for the Sega Genesis. “The tools that we used - each fighter had a frame of art and we had to break up this frame of art, both mapping it to the limited number of colors and palettes as well as putting these little bitty characters together. We have a tool that was made internally called Chop,” Peters said. “And what this thing would do is take all the frames of animation and chop them up into little bitty characters based on a set of rules. There was a lot of logic and intelligence deciding, well how does it chop it up? To do one character, it would take about 24 hours to run this tool through it. We would literally put Lu Kang through one of



our versions of Chop and usually, we’d have three or four characters running each night. It’s like, ‘Hey, time to go home.’ Okay, let’s take these five computers, get this character going on this one, this one on that one, this one, etc. We’d come in the next morning and look at the results. If we didn’t like the results, if it looked too blocky or the color didn’t look right, we’d make a few tweaks, go home that night, do the same thing, rinse, and repeat. Over the course of weeks and months, we’d fine-tune the process and the logic to try and get us the best result that required the minimum amount of artist’s touch up after it was all said and done.

“That process most people don’t know about but it was integral to us. Those computers helped us figure out how to break all this up technically in order to minimize the space. One of the goals we were looking for is when you have a character that has, let’s say, its 200 frames of full-screen animation, we’ll end up with a character set of eight-by-eight blocks (characters), or sprites. That’ll be in the thousands. What we’re looking for is how many of these are actually sharing the same data? Many of the pixel formations in various characters would look the same, so that we could intersperse them to all the characters and basically have one eight by eight-pixel spite that is used in all of these different frames of animation. That way, we can actually now compress this thing on a sprite-by-sprite basis, in order to get the amount of visual clarity. Those were the lengths we went to try and keep the art intact as much as possible so that it fits in these limited cartridges.”

With the look of the game down thanks to the team’s ingenuity and efforts, Peters and the team now had to find a way to get the game to play the way gamers expected it to. Thanks to their experience with the Super Nintendo versions, the team had an upper hand, but it was far from a simple endeavor as well. “The art was one technical challenge; the other was the code,” Peters said. “We actually came up with a way to convert the arcade game’s code to the Genesis through a daunting task of converting one assembly language to another assembly language. At the time, you were going from processors that are operating at 33 Mhz or so. The Genesis I think was operating at 7.6 Mhz or something like that. We found a way to get the code to run the same way with the speed, despite the fact that you lost all this processing power. That was a pain in the butt, but we had some great engineers and a great strategy, and we proved that technique would work through *Mortal Kombat I* and *MKII*, which then allowed us to do the same thing with *MK3*. We look at *Mortal Kombat 3* as a continuation of the technologies that we developed. Our goal was the perfect port - that when you



played, if you learned strategies at the arcade and you knew the timing and you knew the collision boxes and you knew when there was an opening - all of the same things worked when you got at home.

"I can say, especially for *Mortal Kombat II* and *MK3*, I think that's a true statement. Everything that you learned in the arcade all worked exactly the same way on the home console. *Mortal Kombat* had a few hiccups in different areas because we were still learning to perfect that process. But I think *MKII* and *MK3* did a really good job, and you know, the sales and the reviews definitely reflected that."

Peters also believes the issues between Acclaim and Midway before the start of the *Mortal Kombat* development cycle on the Genesis were actually a benefit to the process as well. "Acclaim was a middleman, so like on *Mortal Kombat I* and *MK II*, we would work with Ed Boon and John Tobias and Ken Fedesna and a whole bunch of people at Midway, but we'd have to go through Acclaim to continue that relationship," Peters said. "With Acclaim out of the way, we just got a straight line of contact. So that made things a lot easier in that regard and we were able to collaborate more. Midway has always been, at least up until that time, a development company. They made arcade games and pinball machines, whereas Acclaim was a marketing machine. And so you would have completely different conversations with the two different groups because Acclaim was always focused on the marketing side of it. All the producers were pretty much conditioned to focus on the marketing, rather than the development. Most of the producers at Acclaim actually weren't that in-tune with development or understood the development process. They were like, 'but here's how we're going to market it and here's how there's the thing, here's the point of purchase displays' and all that."

With better communication between Midway and Sculptured Software and a team getting better at their craft every day, Peters sees the development cycle of *Mortal Kombat 3* as a special one that helped define his career. "We had a great crew of people, engineers, and artists. We had a lot of fun. One of the things that I believe even to this day still doing development is if your team has fun making the game, usually you make a fun game," Peters said. "Miserable teams don't make good games. And having that camaraderie - we had *Mortal Kombat* machines in the office; we were all competitive at it. We would play each other constantly, King of the Hill battles, all sorts of fun, competitive spirit. Because everybody became a fan of the game, they wanted to do the best with them as well. I think that helped push it."


The fun in the Sculptured Software office transcended *Mortal Kombat* as well. "One of our artists created our entire office plan as a custom level for *Doom*," Peters said. "We would do development during the day and at night we would play our *Doom* level as a team, beating each other up. And it was, you know, perfect. All of the offices were in the right place and the whatnot and little hidden things were in each room and based on people's personalities - this guy would have health and this guy would have demons in his room. We played that all night. The creepy thing was you'd do like a three-hour session of this, and people would pop out of their office and look around the corner waiting for fireballs coming through because you hadn't

quite dissociated yourself from the virtual version. It was kind of funny."

That level of passion and dedication led *Mortal Kombat 3* on the Genesis to be a special game, but according to Peters, the game still has secrets gamers haven't found yet, further proof of their labor of love. "The thing that I found about game development is you never finish your game," Peters said. "I tell people I shipped a lot of games, but I've never finished one. Every game has lists of things like that. Granted, the general public never knows what made it past the cutting room floor, but there's always more you wanted to do to it, put in another level, put in another mode."

"There are still hidden secrets in *MK*, *MKII* and *MK3* console versions that people have not discovered. It's fun to see forums and sub-reddits and things like that, talking about it, you know, some people just making up and other people actually trying to search things out. I did a lot of interviews for the 25th anniversary of Mortal Monday with some other folks and it's fun for many of them asking about some of this hidden things, like is this true? Is this true? But yeah, so there still are some hidden things in those games that are really deep, that are still yet to be discovered, which is kind of fun."

Selling nearly three million units combined on the Super Nintendo and the Genesis in North America alone, *Mortal Kombat 3* is regarded as one of the finest fighting games on the 16-bit Sega machine, a testament to the effort Peters and the team put into making sure they got it right. In terms of the game's legacy, the renaissance man knows exactly how he'll remember his time on it. "I think it goes back to the team," Peters said. "We had a great team. We were trying to take on the world and do a bunch of what hadn't been done before. On the Genesis, it was a lot of technical challenges from pallet and audio and memory management and processor speed and code conversion, writing tools to manage all that. A whole bunch of really unique things there."

How it's remembered by the masses is not up to Peters, but he reverts back to his original intention. "I'd like it to be remembered as it played and felt just like the arcade game," Peters said. "I look at games and there are always problems; there are always things you want to look better; you want to play better. But if the general populace that plays it goes, 'Wow, this plays and feels like the arcade game,' I think that's the best compliment that it could have because that was the goal." 





# SHINY LEATHER CHICKENS

## PAUL NIEMEYER TELLS HIS STORY

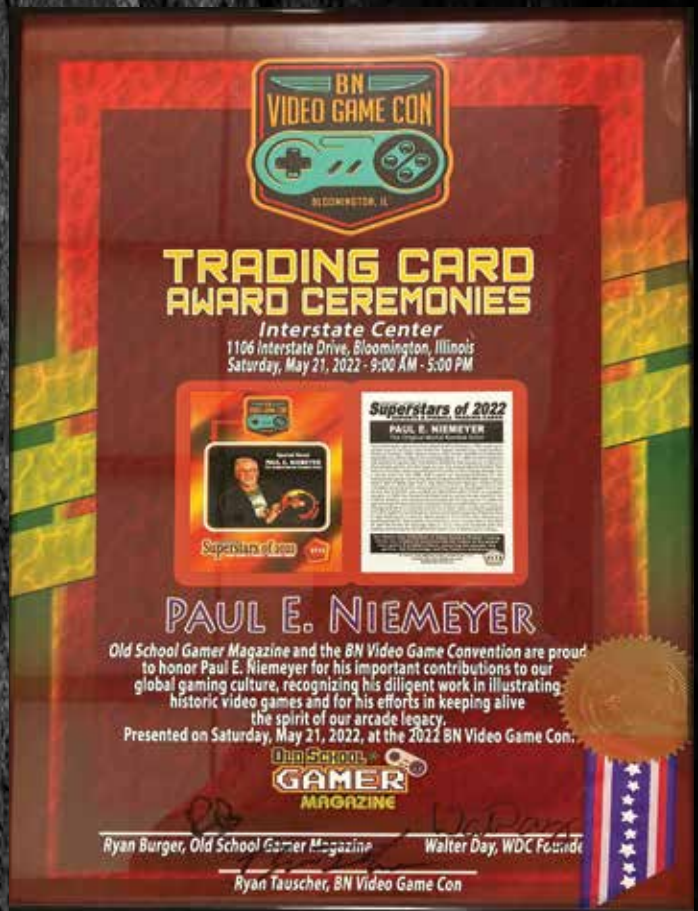
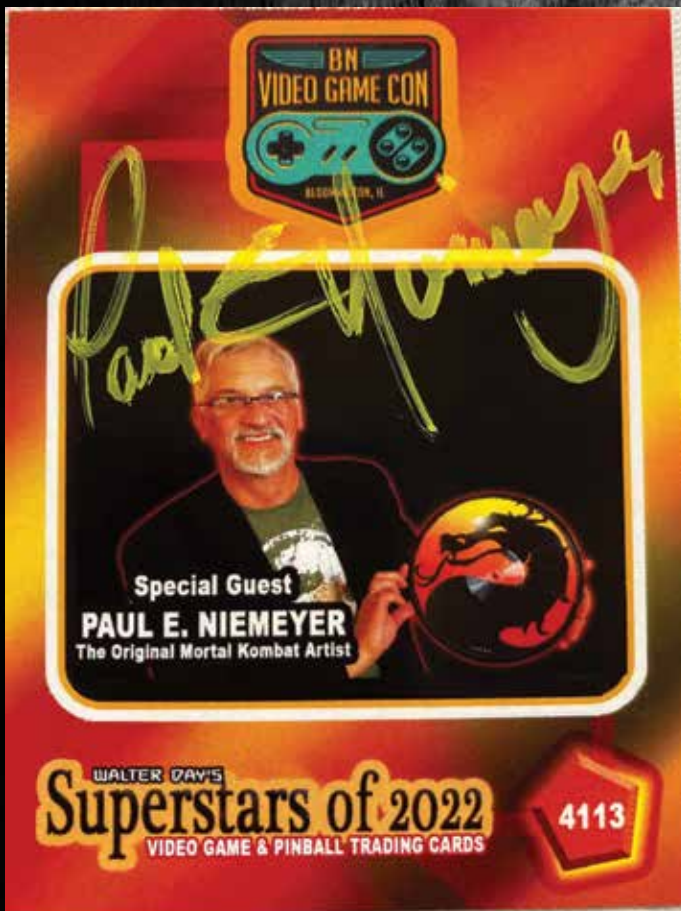
By Michael Mertes

**M**ay 21st, 2022 - It's been a rainy morning on the day of the B.N. Video Game Con, but Paul E. Niemeyer emerges from the car with a smile, and soon after, a hearty laugh as he cracks a joke with *NBA Jam* announcer Tim Kitzrow as they make their way into the convention center. Paul and Tim split up as they walk to their designated booth spaces. Within moments, Paul is setting up his booth featuring some pieces of his fantastic artwork. This is certainly not the first convention that Paul, the original *Mortal Kombat* artist, and illustrator, has been at, but the B.N. Video Game Con will soon be a special one for him. Before the doors to the event even open, Paul is excitedly greeted by other show attendees, and with a big smile, he greets them all energetically. With his booth setup, he's ready to start the day, and shortly after, the convention opens up to eager retro gamers.

A few hours into the convention, just a few rows away from Paul's booth, is the main stage where Walter Day makes some

important announcements. Today will be a special day for several folks at the convention as Walter is ready to present awards to a few lucky people for their achievements in the video game industry. "When *Mortal Kombat* came out, it was one of the biggest games in history, and the man who added some zing and brilliant artwork to it is standing here now: Paul Niemeyer!" Walter calls Paul to the stage, where he receives a giant-sized trading card award. Paul is thanked for his contributions, including his work helping to illustrate and stylize one of the most iconic images in video games, the *Mortal Kombat* dragon icon. It's incredible to see Paul recognized for his hard work. How did Paul become an artist, and how did he land the opportunity to work on art for video games, and eventually the art for *Mortal Kombat*?

I recently gave Paul a phone call to get all of the details behind his storied career. The story begins, coincidentally, in Illinois, a few hours away from where the B.N. Video Game Convention took place.



Continued on page 24





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**Paul on stage receiving his Walter Day Award in recognition to his work in the game industry.**

#### **DAIRY FARMS, LASSIE, AND PINBALL**

As a young child, there was no question as to what Paul wanted to be when he grew up: an artist. Paul recalled a story that his mother told about a very early point in his life when he was in Kindergarten. "I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, and rather than responding with the typical "I want to be an airline pilot, policeman, astronaut, or fireman", I responded with total candor and confidence that I wanted to be an artist." Paul grew up on a dairy farm in a tiny little town that was mostly populated with people of German heritage. The populace primarily practiced the Lutheran religion, stayed faithful to the Lutheran teaching principles, and was ultra-conservative. Working on a dairy farm meant no shortage of hard work for both himself and Paul's parents. Paul gives a great visualization of his life by comparing his childhood to a famous television show. "I had a Timmy and Lassie upbringing; I even had a collie.", referring to the 1954 T.V. show Lassie that depicted the adventures of a young boy and his dog, a collie breed that somehow finds adventure in their small rural farm town.

Paul admits that in the era and place that he grew up in, wanting to be an artist was something that was frowned upon by most people. Showing emotion and drawing wasn't considered the norm and wanting to work outside the realm of regular hard labor meant that there was something wrong with you, not that you had an incredible, unique talent. Thankfully, Paul's parents were not one to reject his skills and instead worked hard to help bolster them. "I had loving parents who saw the talent in me. They always made sure I got into art classes and were supportive. I wouldn't be here without their support and backing. Paul's



**Paul Niemeyer and Tim Kitzrow on stage recalling fond memories of Bally Midway.**

parents would get him into any art class they could, so Paul could continue to focus on his passion. During these art classes, Paul would encounter teachers that would also recognize his talent and also helped support and encourage him, not just with his artist skills but in life lessons as well. "I recently saw my old high school English teacher at my mother's church for its 150th anniversary and told her that she was responsible for me being here today. I told her, 'When I messed up speech contests, you just smiled and told me, 'Don't worry, there's always next year.' That was one of the most inspiring things that had ever been said to me. I thought the whole world was going to collapse on me, and I let you down, and you were just like, 'Who cares?'" It was through life lessons like these that Paul learned to put in the hard work but never be afraid of failing.

#### **IT STARTED WITH A SILVER BALL**

Paul's exposure to games didn't start with video games but rather pinball in the mid-sixties. "My family used to go to this resort in Wisconsin, and they had a couple of pinball machines in their game room. I remember I couldn't pop enough damn quarters into the thing. My parents were shocked that I finally had found something I liked." Flash forward to college, and Paul's love for pinball would be amplified by some of the fantastic games available in the student recreation area. It was here that Paul would decide that he wanted to be a pinball artist. Paul would continue to perfect his craft in his artwork while playing the pinball games that he loved so much. After his college days were over, Paul found himself working in a sign shop on the southwest side of Chicago. One day at the shop, his life would change forever when a friend called him. "I saw an ad in the paper, and it's describing you to a tee, man. It's at Midway, and they are looking for an artist! You have to go down there and do this." his friend explained. More than an hour later, the sign shop phone rang again, this time from another of Paul's friends. "Dude, I just saw this ad in the paper, and it's describing you, and it's at Midway." Realizing the universe was telling him that his destiny resided at Midway, Paul proceeded to initiate the steps to get an interview.

#### **MIDWAY JOURNEY**

Midway Games was a video gaming powerhouse, not just in its sprawling Chicago city area and suburbs but all across the United States. Starting as Midway Manufacturing, the company was formed in 1958 and focused on designing and manufacturing mechanical amusement games. In 1969, the company was



## INITIALS IN ARTWORK

Having your initials or signature featured in the arcade artwork was most often not allowed at many companies. Still, Paul found ways of sneaking in his initials of "PEN" in several games he contributed his artwork to. Can you find his initials on *Satan's Hollow* and *Pac-Man Plus*?



purchased by Bally, another Chicago-based company known for its slot machines. As the companies merged, Midway was seemingly defined as the portion of the business that would focus on the emerging "video game" side of the amusement business. Their initial focus wasn't on releasing new and original games but on licensing games from Japan. In 1978, Taito, a Japan-based company, released *Space Invaders* to an unsuspecting Japanese populace and found massive success with it. *Invader* mania had struck the hearts of the people of Japan and Midway wanted to see if that *Invader* charm would work in North America. Working with Taito, Midway licensed the game and achieved a high measure of success releasing it in the United States. Focusing on licensing games, Midway would bring in artists to re-create new cabinet art for these Japanese imported games.

Paul's initial interview with Midway Games did not go as he thought it would. "It was like 5 minutes long, and they barely looked at my book. I thought: This is not going well." Paul felt defeated as his interview with Midway Games concluded. "I never had my tail so far between my legs in all my life. I thought my big chance just went down the toilet. I had a chance at getting my 5 seconds of fame, and I blew it." Paul would crucify himself for the next two days after the interview, trying to figure out what went wrong. As it turned out, this wasn't just the experience for Paul but for all of the artist candidates. "They were filtering out candidates. I found out later they had a laundry list of people they were looking at and the initial interview process was to throw your (portfolio) book down in front of them, they would page through it and hopefully, get back to you." Paul would get a phone call back for a second interview which instantly boosted his spirits again.

Paul would go through three more interviews during the entire process, and with each interview, the room kept getting bigger with more and more high-level staff in them. During these interviews, he saw vital staff members like George Gomez and Paul Farris. Paul Farris was a legendary illustrator and art director at Bally, but he didn't give that artist vibe off during the interviews with Paul Niemeyer. "I thought Paul Farris was so disengaged and that he was just one of the office guys. I thought he looked like he could be doing anything else right now, like cutting his toenails

during the interview. With the multiple interviews, Paul felt the excitement that he was getting further but also felt like he may have been getting led onto a job he would ultimately not get. While taking all of these interviews at Midway Games, he certainly had to keep his day job going but had to do anything he could to get the spot at the game company. His boss asked him, "You are having quite a rash of dental problems; what is happening with you?" as Paul suddenly needed to request off of work to go to the dentist quite frequently. Paul wasn't suffering from TMJ but INMDJ (I Need My Dream Job!) The DMD on his brain wasn't of a Doctor of Dental Medicine, but a DMD in the form of a Dot Matrix Display entombed on a future pinball machine that would hopefully feature his artwork around it.

After his fourth and final interview, Paul received an offer from Midway games. His thought of Paul Farris not being interested in his work turned out to be incorrect. "Paul Farris later told me that when he was looking at my work that he was already starting to think about what he could do with me at Midway." Paul had achieved his goal of getting his dream job, but it wasn't quite all roses yet, as he was essentially past the part of having his foot in the door but not quite in the elevator that would take him to the level of the art gods. Paul's immediate tasks were to focus on the more common artwork. "It was a lot of boring production artwork.", Paul recalled. This wasn't the kind of work he had in mind at his dream job, but he remained undeterred. "if I'm going to rock the boat, I need to be in the boat. So, let's paddle away until I can find a place to shine, and we'll go from there." The artist desk accommodations for Paul left a lot for improvement as his desk was stationed in the same area where the engineers tested all of their games. Triggers, buttons, and seemingly anything else that could generate a million loud noises at once could be heard throughout the day. Thinking about how to solve the problem so he could concentrate on a job that required talent and precision, he brought his stereo in with his headphones to drown out the loud noise. It didn't take long for management to discover Paul wearing the headphones, and he was quickly disciplined for it, for reasons Paul could never figure out. "You go in that room for 5 minutes and see if you aren't insane after that." was his reply to management. Management didn't care and soon, Paul found himself back at his desk, experiencing a form of industrial music that would be very different from the ones that groups like Nine



Inch Nails and KMFDm would bring in a few years.

Thankfully, the noise torture he would endure would end when Bally Midway opened its brand-new building, funded by the massive amount of profits that licensing the *Pac-Man* game from Namco for a domestic U.S. release had netted them. Paul would move to the new building's art department. Along with finally having a space that didn't have engineering testing, he was also excited to learn that the Bally and Midway art teams would be working together in the same spot with the new space. Paul found himself out of the elevator and on the floor where art gods illustrated the fantastic art that he loved so much. "Holy sh\*t! I'm going to get work with the art gods at Bally! There's Doug Watson! I used to play his game in college, and now I'm totally working with him!" he thought to himself. A few seconds later, however, his astonishment turned to fear when he realized the scope of his new digs and the merger. "Oh shit... They are gods, and I'm just some newbie from the Midway team doing production artwork. None of this works well with my scenario of becoming a well-renowned commercial artist." Paul quickly hatched together a plan that would allow him to be more than just another production artwork guy. "What can I do to make myself indispensable in the art department?"

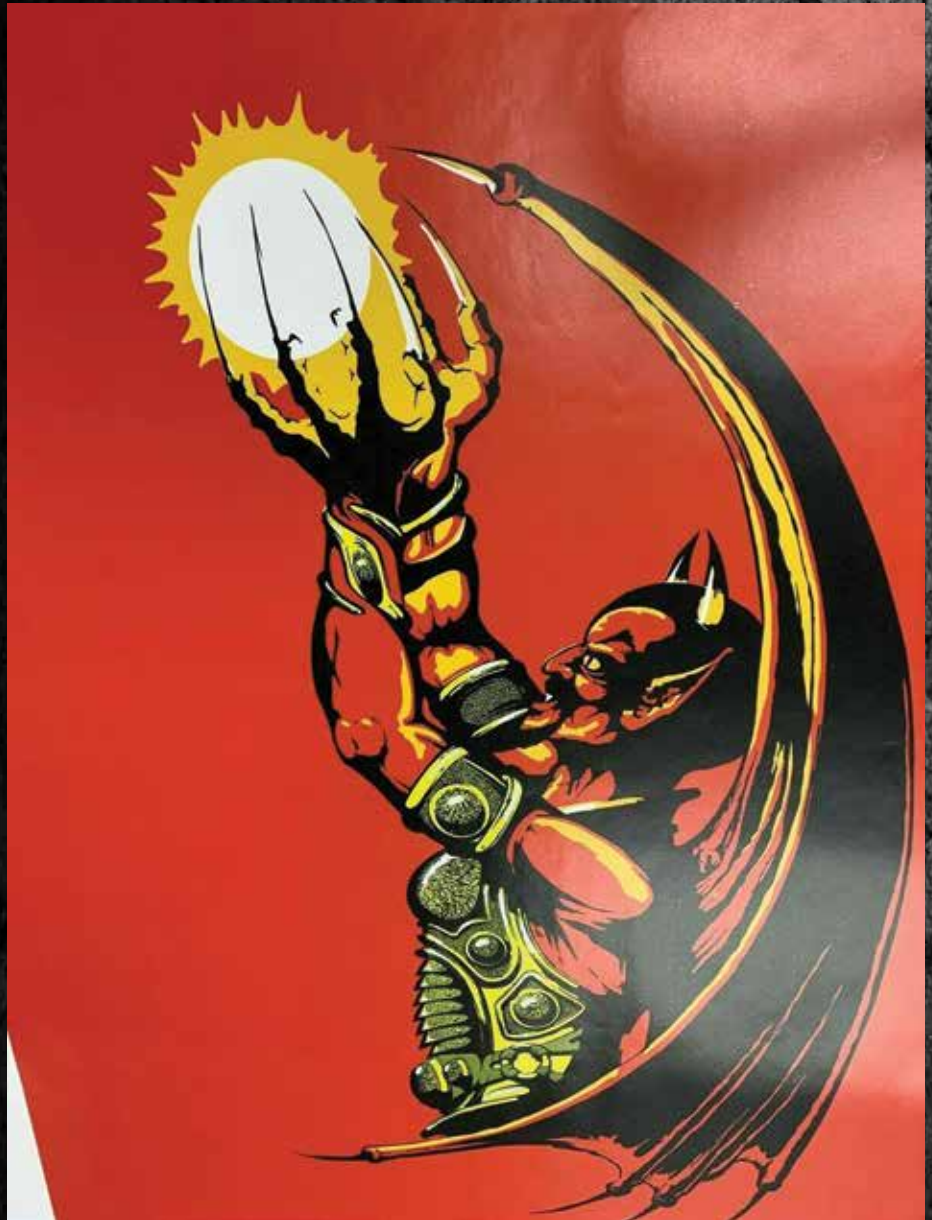
Paying close attention to the management at Midway, he saw that the higher-ups in the company were more interested in licensing games like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man*. Midway would go with an established property instead of giving a video game programmer and artist the chance to potentially blow their money on some brand-new title that no one would play. Paul realized that he could take advantage of the fact that while Midway licensed the Japanese games, they would often come over lacking art, and something would need to be created for play test demos. "I made it a point to be the guy with all of the one-off graphics. When these games came in, they would send them to Aladdin's Castle for play tests, and they needed some graphics. These playtest games would essentially be thrown into a generic box with no cabinet whatsoever, and they would want header art for it. When something came by, I would already have something in my art designs to utilize for the playtest games." Paul had cut a niche at Bally Midway as the fastest wrist in town. Even the long-established and legendary Bally artists were complimenting him on his ability to quickly churn out quality one-offs and marker renderings for the arcade game projects coming in. One day, Paul Niemeyer was working at his desk when Paul Farris appeared in front of him, slamming a ton of blueprints on his desk. "How would you like to do a game?" Paul Farris said to Niemeyer. Paul's chance to truly shine had come. "Who am I working

with?" Paul Niemeyer asked.

"You are working with you!" Paul Farris answered with the biggest sh\*t-eating grin on his face.

### SATAN'S HOLLOW

"What's the name of the game?" asked Niemeyer. "*Satan's Hollow*," responded Farris. While Paul was excited to start working on the game, he quickly realized he wouldn't be able to tell his very Lutheran parents and over half the people he knew from the dairy farm community he grew up in that he was working on a game that specifically featured the devil front and center on the arcade machine. Much of the game was already completed, and the gameplay could quickly get intense for a player. Rather than focus on the multiple elements of the game, Paul's approach to the cabinet artwork was particular. "There was so much going on in *Satan's Hollow* that I had to walk away from it and push the art direction in a way that wasn't completely literal of what was



Satan making a three-point shot on the side art of the *Satan's Hollow* cabinet



on screen. I didn't want the artwork to come off as tedious and clunky. So, I approached it as a design concept. The best part of it was that there were so many restrictions. I only had three colors I could use on the side art and the control panel art. Honestly; I loved the restriction because it forced the creativity out of me." At the time, Paul was very influenced by the artwork of Japanese artist Hajime Sorayama, whose artwork featured a combination of humanoid figures and animals with copious amounts of chrome integrated with them. Combine Sorayama's art with the fact that Niemeyer was re-reading the Lord of the Rings at the time, and you can start to connect the art design mindset when Paul began making the *Satan's Hollow* cabinet art. "The amulets on the sides of the monitor were inspired by the Eye of Sauron from the Lord of the Rings." Paul also has a love for gargoyles, so he took the opportunity to create some on the front lip of the arcade cabinet.

With the game and artwork finished, Paul had not only created his own original artwork with his creative direction but even received praise from the Bally art gods. "They referred to my gargoyles on the cabinet as "nice, shiny leather chickens." Paul said with a laugh. In their own weird way, this was how they paid him a compliment and acknowledged that he belonged among the art gods. He had stepped up from being just a production artist to genuinely being an illustrator that could design and illustrate his own incredible art concepts. At only 24 years old, Paul was on top of the world, and his opportunities were only getting bigger.

#### ALL THIS OVER A DESK AND A DRAGON

After working in the arcade game business for ten years, the opportunity finally came for Paul to work on a game that would have notoriety for years: *Mortal Kombat*. Could you believe the chance to work in this game came from a mishap with an artist desk? Due to the disbanding of the art department, Bally had a

bunch of extra artist equipment like desks sitting around. Greg Freres, Paul's boss, called all of the Bally people to see if they wanted items like an artist desk but forgot to call Paul because he was one of the Midway guys, which was a common occurrence. In an odd coincidence, Paul would receive a phone call from another artist at Bally asking if he would like to take his desk since he was moving to Italy. When Paul said yes, the moving



The amulets of *Satan's Hollow*, inspired by Lord of the Rings and Hajime Sorayama.



Paul contributed his illustration skills to help stylize the *Mortal Kombat* cabinet art.

artist asked if he had the room since Greg Freres had given all the Bally Midway team desks to take. Paul had no idea what he was talking about and indicated that he most likely got missed in the process. Many years later, Greg Freres would call Paul and ask him if he was interested in working on a fighting game called *Dragon Attack*. Meeting with Greg Freres, John Tobias, Ed Boon, Jack Haeger that would comprise the *Mortal Kombat* team, Paul would help with stylizing illustrations and other artwork in the game. After the meeting was over and Paul was packing up things, he walked up to Greg Freres to thank him for the opportunity to work on the game. "I hope this makes up for the desk." Greg Freres responded, indicating that he eventually got clued into the fact he had missed sending Paul an artist desk. *Dragon Attack* would eventually become *Mortal Kombat*, and Paul would help illustrate the *Mortal Kombat* dragon icon based on the original concept artwork that John Tobias gave him.

#### FASCINATING PAUL NIEMEYER FACTS:

If you ever run into Paul Niemeyer at a gaming convention, you will most certainly end up with two experiences: A memorable story and a good laugh. These are just a few of the great stories that Paul has told me.

#### WHO SNIPED WHO?

Due to a member of the artist team having to take a sudden leave, Paul had the opportunity to work on the translite art for the pinball machine of the mega-blockbuster *Demolition Man* featuring Sylvester Stallone and Wesley Snipes. When Paul





It's a shame that Paul's version of the *Demolition Man* translite did make the final cut.

finished the artwork, Wesley Snipes rejected it, saying that the artwork depicted Wesley's character as looking too crazy.


In disbelief at Wesley's comments, Paul responded, "Has he seen the movie?" Wesley Snipes plays an insane mass murderer who gets unfrozen from cryogenic sleep and goes on a killing spree in a post-apocalyptic metropolis. Unfortunately, before Paul would get a chance at redrawing the translite art, the original artist returned to the project, and Paul's artwork was ultimately not used. When I asked Paul if he somehow took his revenge on Snipes by giving the IRS a call, he replied, "Oh, I'd never do that." This was followed by a sinister laugh, a flash of lightning, and the loudest crack of thunder you had ever heard.

Who's crazy now, Mr. Snipes?

#### MORE THAN JUST GAMES

Paul's work transcends the video game industry, as he held high-profile accounts and created the artwork for several big brands like Mars, Jack Daniels, and Kellogg's Cereal. If you've had a Frosted Flakes or Special K cereal in the 80s and 90s, you most likely saw some of Paul's work featured.

#### HUNGRY? HAVE A SNICKERS ACCOUNT!

Have a bad day? Hungry? Not going anywhere for a while? These are typical phrases that we can associate with the Snickers ad campaign over the last two decades. As common as these commercials are now with their special effects and computer graphics, we take for granted the work that was put in for that famous chocolate bar. Chances are, if you saw a Snickers advertisement in the 80s and 90s, that the oh-so-gooey Snickers bar featured was actually hand-painted by Paul. Paul would perform the painstaking work of airbrushing those chocolate bars for ads for over 20 years. Curiously, I asked Paul when he looks at a Snickers commercial if he thinks of it as candy he can eat or artwork, and he responded: "All I think about is that I wish I still had that Snickers account! Someone's making a lot of money and it ain't me!" with a laugh. 



Paul's take on the beautiful Sonya Blade



Paul helped illustrate a





The master of ice, Sub-Zero, drawn by Paul



and stylize the MK logo

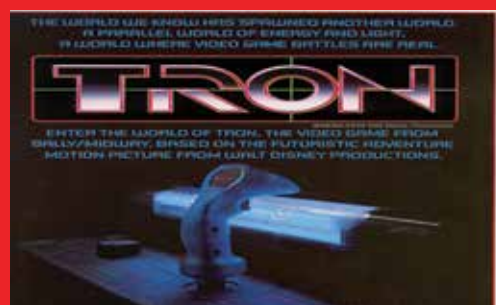
## GAME DATA

PAUL HAS CONTRIBUTED HIS TALENTS TO MANY INCREDIBLE GAMES. HERE ARE SOME OF THE ARCADE GAMES HE HAS WORKED ON OVER THE YEARS.

MORTAL KOMBAT  
PACMAN PLUS  
PROFESSOR PAC MAN  
SATAN'S HOLLOW  
SPY HUNTER  
TAPPER  
TRON  
TIME KILLERS  
WAGKO



Paul designed the control panel artwork for *Spy Hunter*.



The *Tron* arcade cabinet was where Paul learned the process of color separation.



# LONG LIVE MORTAL KOMBAT

## A BOOK PREVIEW

By David Craddock

**W**ritten by David L. Craddock, *Long Live Mortal Kombat* goes behind the scenes to reveal untold stories from the making of *Mortal Kombat 1* through *4* and explores how the franchise impacted popular culture, and is due for publication this fall. In this excerpt from the book, two of *MK*'s arcade legends meet for the first time and learn a new technique that propels them to the top of the food chain in their local arcades.

Nitin Bhutani was bored. It was the fall of 1992, and he was hanging out with friends between classes where he attended college in Long Island, New York. The group had two hours to

kill. Bhutani proposed they go to the student rec center and play some of the pinball and arcade games there. Brown-skinned with dark, slicked-back hair, he looked for any excuse to get away from classrooms and play games. Truth be told, though, he was lukewarm toward his own suggestion. He and his boys had played the rec center's handful of coin-operated amusements to death. But it was either hit buttons or hit the books, so they moseyed over to the rec center.

To Bhutani's surprise, a new cabinet stood among the ranks of games he had conquered. He watched the attract mode. When

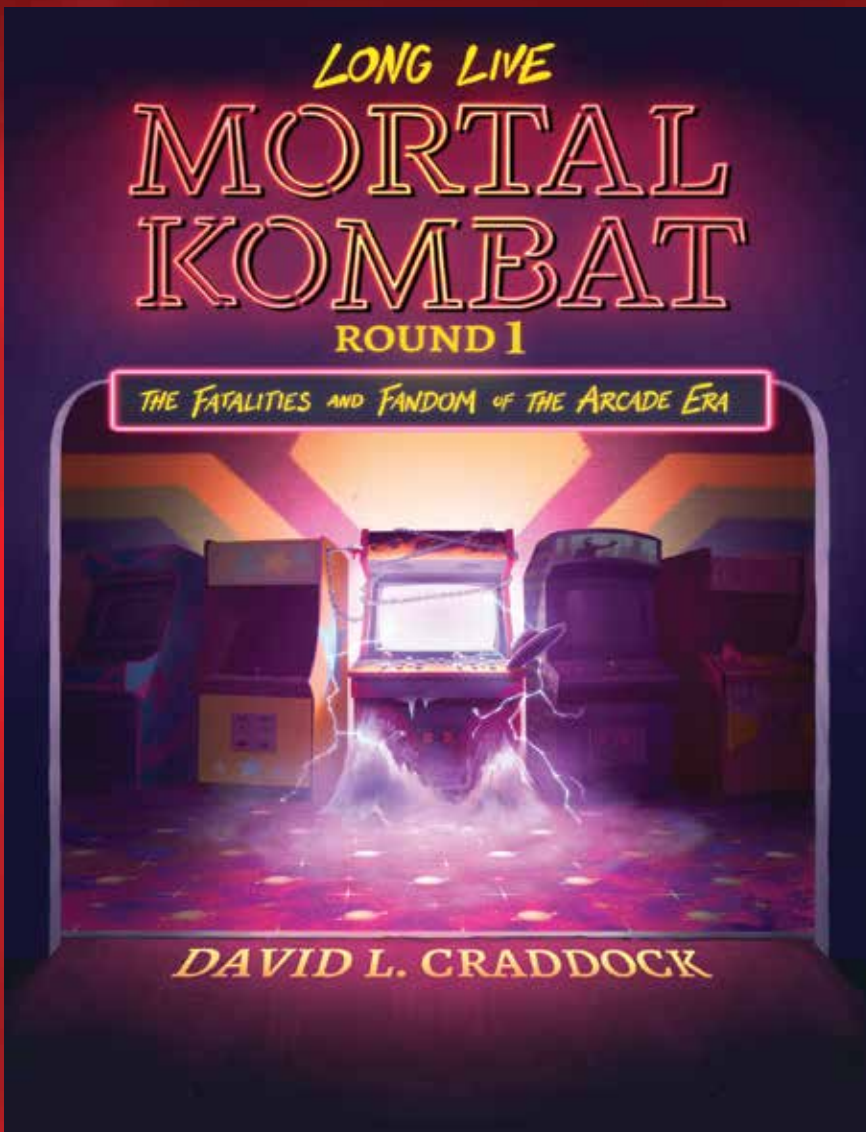
the game's title flashed across the screen, something about it - the intentional misspelling, the golden lettering set against a red backdrop - caught his eye. A few other guys stepped up to play. One of them finished the match by firing a bolt of lightning at the other character that blasted his head apart in a spray of blood. Holy shit, he thought. "It just showed up one day. I see this game where people are chopping heads off and am like, 'Oh my god. I gotta play this,'" he recalls.

Bhutani no longer needed to hunt for distractions between classes. In fact, classes had become the distraction. He was spending five to six hours a day playing *Mortal Kombat*, bouncing between the cabinet at the rec center and his local arcade. Facing off against computer-controlled opponents grew tiresome. He needed challengers who'd force him to get even better. "I try to tell people, when you were young and went to an arcade, it was always one on one," he says.

His friends liked the game and played against him. Soon enough, however, Bhutani outranked them. They were wasting their money, and he was wasting his time fighting guys who weren't pushing him to grow as a player.

That was when the rumors started. "When you play at certain arcades, you hear, 'Hey, there's a couple guys in such-and-such arcade who are good.' You drive over there and see what's going on," explains Bhutani.

Factoring driving time and gasoline into his *Mortal Kombat* schedule, Bhutani made a





habit of piling into his car with friends and seeking competitors. He'd usually beat them, and one of three outcomes would occur: they would swear up a storm and stomp out of the arcade; or try to fight him; or show him deference and ask to run with his crew. No matter how things went down, Bhutani planted his flag in the soil of every game room he conquered.

As he expanded his territory, he kept an ear open for rumors of better players. Then he'd travel to their area and beat them, too. "That's how it was back then," he says of how word-of-mouth made him aware of fresh meat. "There's no computers, nothing like that. There's beepers. What the hell are you gonna do? Beep somebody?"

While playing one day, Bhutani learned from a fellow *MK* addict that one of the best players in the scene took on all comers at an arcade in Westbury. Bhutani smirked. He'd heard that before. The other player was adamant: This wasn't some mark. This guy was one of the developers who made the game, and he was unstoppable... Godlike.

"The guy who made the game?" Bhutani remembers saying. "Okay. Let's go get a piece of him."

James Fink - Jimmy to his friends - was irritated, bordering on pissed. He was working in the basement of Acclaim's offices in Oyster Bay, New York, with other game testers when a new arcade cabinet arrived from Midway. The delivery was expected, although the exact game was a mystery. Acclaim didn't make games in-house. It secured the licenses to hot properties like *The Simpsons* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, and contracted outside studios to port those games to home systems while Acclaim drove big-budget marketing campaigns. Part of Acclaim's deal with Midway was that Acclaim got first dibs on converting their new coin-op video games.

The newest arrival, the one responsible for Fink's sour mood, was some *Street Fighter II* knockoff called *Mortal Kombat*, and it was plugged in right behind his desk. Employees from sales and marketing, and many of the testers in Fink's cave, crowded the machine day and night. The volume was obnoxiously loud, so battle cries like "FIGHT!" and "FINISH HIM!" and the repetitive "Hi-yah! Hi-yah! Hi-yah!" from characters as they unleashed flurries of punches made him want to flip his desk.

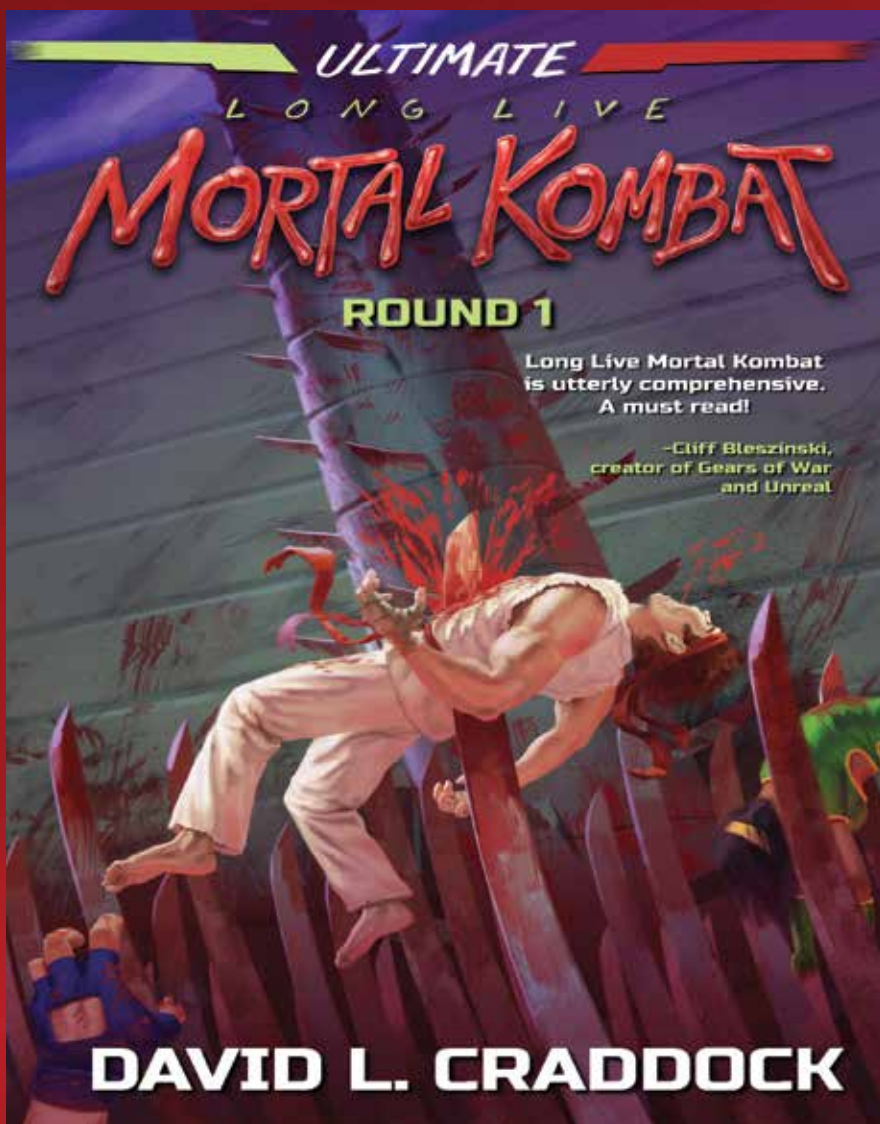
Fink waited until the crowd around *Mortal Kombat* thinned, then got up to check it out. As one of Acclaim's senior testers, he was in charge of evaluating coin-op titles for conversion to game consoles. Today, his job description was secondary. What he really wanted was to reclaim his workspace. "I said, 'I'm going to get so good at this goddamn game,

nobody's going to want to come downstairs and play,'" he says.

After one match, Fink was sold. "When we first got the cabinet, we didn't have any idea of fatalities yet, or any of that. It was a pre-1.0 version," he explains. "It had all the characters, but we didn't know what all was in there."

A few weeks later, Fink tore open a package containing an EPROM, a chip that held game data and was attached to circuit boards in arcade cabinets. This EPROM contained *Mortal Kombat* version 1.0, and the update packed in more blood and fatalities for all seven characters. "I just fell in love with it. From that point on, even when I finished work, I would stay there and play," he says.

On a few occasions, Fink played *Mortal Kombat* for 22 hours straight. By that time, Acclaim had contracted Sculptured Software, a studio based in Salt Lake City, and Probe, located across the pond in the UK, to bring the game to Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis, respectively. That gave Fink more excuses to play. When he wasn't at the cabinet pummeling coworkers from marketing and sales until they fled back upstairs to their departments, he was putting builds - industry jargon for a work-





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A flier for Mortal Kombat's coin-op.

in-progress version of a game - of MK on Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis, Game Gear, and Game Boy through their paces.

Tired of getting beaten, some of the other guys at Acclaim went to Fink with a suggestion. There was a Nathan's just down the street. Why not head over there and test his might against local





### Scorpion and Sub-Zero's rivalry began 30 years ago on October 8, 1992.

competition? Fink took the challenge seriously. The Nathan's in Westbury was more than a combination restaurant-and-game-room. It was an institution. Players from around New York and New Jersey converged to play the latest coin-ops. Fink agreed, and a group of developers headed to Nathan's. A few hours later, Fink had proven the old Sinatra song true: He could make it in New York, so he could make it anywhere. "I'm not going to be arrogant about it, but I blew them up. I made them look silly," Fink says.

With each visit to Nathan's, Fink's reputation grew. He was tall, broad-shouldered, with a thick Brooklyn accent and a cigarette hanging from between the seam of his lips. Players came from near and far to challenge him. They might win a round here and there, maybe a match if they were lucky. They were soldiers crowing over battles, but Fink was a general, and he always won the wars.

Soon, Nathan's owner made accommodations for him, though ones not entirely born out of respect. "I used to take my cigarettes and put them on top of the freaking buttons and burn the cabinets, and he hated it," Fink says. "So, he gave me my own personal ashtray." The owner went so far as screwing the ashtray to his favorite *Mortal Kombat* cabinet. It was a small sacrifice to make for the business Fink brought in. *Mortal Kombat* was popular, but Fink's arrival drew crowds six rows deep. He grew so confident that he accepted dares to play one-handed, and still won. "I can play every character with one hand. I could do every special move," he boasts. "I thought it was cool back then. Now I'm like, 'Damn, I was a dick.'"

One of his challengers was some Indian college student who bragged to Fink that he was the top *MK* player at his arcade.

Fink had heard that before. Three matches later, the kid, properly humbled, reintroduced himself. "I got whooped by him," recalls Nitin Bhutani. "I was like, 'Whoa. There are people out there who can really play this game.'"

Fink was a gracious winner. Instead of telling Bhutani to get lost, he invited him to hang out. Bhutani agreed eagerly. "He became one of the original disciples," Fink says.

As they played, Fink's disciples expanded. One of the most devout was Rich D'Angelo, who called himself RDA. That always confused Bhutani and Fink. Rich's middle name was John, so why not punch in RJD? D'Angelo said RDA sounded cooler. Whatever he wanted to call himself, Fink welcomed him to the group. "He kind of became my Darth Vader, while Nitin became my Obi-Wan, my good Padawan."

The guys made Nathan's their home territory. It wasn't always easy ground to defend. "That's the arcade parents were hesitant to drop their kids off at because it was a fucking war zone," Bhutani says.

Tempers flared. Fights broke out over lost matches. Kids smoked. To Fink and the disciples, it was all white noise. They tuned it out and dumped quarters into *Mortal Kombat*. One day, they made a breakthrough. "What happened was, we got really good," Bhutani explains. "Then we learned the anti-air high punch."

The anti-air high punch separated great players from arcade gods. It was the most important move in the game because of the precision it required and how swiftly it could turn the tides of a match. Bhutani saw the anti-air high punch while he and





Fink were standing around watching *Mortal Kombat*'s attract mode. During one match, an opponent jumped toward the other character, who was standing on the ground. The grounded character threw a high punch that stopped the attacker's momentum and popped him back into the air.

Bhutani was amazed and confused. "Why the hell would they do that?" he asked Fink. "You kick the guy, sweep the guy, or uppercut him. But punch? What is that?"

"That's some high-level stuff," Fink answered. Then he put in quarters and learned alongside his Padawan.

When an opponent jumps at you, *Mortal Kombat* opens a window of opportunity for you to press high punch to knock them out of the air - the anti-air high punch. The trick is to hit them before they get close enough for their jumping attack to connect with you. Time it right, and the opponent will pop up before falling down and away. The pop-up isn't much, but it's just enough for you to follow up with another move or two before they hit the ground.

Fink had known about the anti-air high punch, but the caliber of opponents he had faced before Bhutani had lacked the skill to give him reason to perfect it. They trained hour by hour, day by day. "We'd practice punching depending on which character







jump-kicked you and when. We didn't know frame data," Bhutani adds, referring to the number of animation frames for each movement and attack. Players of modern fighting games spend hours in training modes learning the ins and outs of every character's frames. Back in 1992, there was no training mode, and if you asked someone about "frame data," they'd give you a funny look. "We had no idea about any of that shit. We were just punk kids playing a game," Bhutani says.

The two pioneers were so ahead of their time that the technique didn't have a formal name. "We used to call it 'punch you out of the air,'" Bhutani says. "We were like, 'Yeah, we'll punch you out of the air, then we'll jump kick.' We dedicated our lives to that freaking move. I'm not even kidding."

"It sounds arrogant, but we pioneered the anti-air punch combos," Fink says. "Before we started doing it, nobody knew that you could do it."

Attacks chained together were called combos. There was a formula for follow-up attacks to the anti-air high punch, Fink and Bhutani realized. Most combos open with the anti-air high punch and require you to follow up fast with a jumping kick. From there, you can end the combo for an easy one-two attack, or keep going. Playing as Raiden, you can tap an attacker out of the air with high punch, jump in with a kick for a second hit, and follow up with the Superman special move to drive your opponent across the screen. As Johnny Cage, an anti-air high punch followed by a jumping attack and a shadow kick as soon as you land lands three hits for massive damage.

Everyone who played *Mortal Kombat* thought they knew the game's arsenal. Punches, kicks, jumping attacks, special moves. That was it, or so most players thought. Fink's and Bhutani's competition didn't know what to make of the anti-air high punch, and they certainly had no counter for the dizzying combos that drained between a quarter and half of their life

bar. "What the fuck was that?" they would exclaim, able to do little more than watch as their characters were juggled in the air like hacky sacks.

"It was like a freaking freight train had just hit them," says Bhutani, recalling their dazed expressions. "We were evolving this primitive game and creating names for ourselves."

Fink was proud that while *Mortal Kombat* was made in Chicago, Acclaim's "Mortal Monday" marketing campaign that heralded the release of home versions in September 1993 played a part in establishing a scene for high-level players in New York. "Our marketing department, with the guys that put out that *Mortal Kombat* commercial with the kids screaming on Wall Street, made people go, 'Hey, there's something to this.' In my heart of hearts, it began in New York at that Westbury Nathan's," Fink says.

More than seeking out skilled fighters, Fink took pride in the bonds formed between his disciples. Every day they'd meet up after work or class and roam New York looking to dominate. "We had a group of friends I've hung out with to this day. Some of my best friends in the whole world, I met playing *Mortal Kombat*," Bhutani says. "That's how big *MK* was for us."

Soon, they grew confident enough to put money on the line. At Nathan's or elsewhere, they'd draw up signs proclaiming *MK* Tournament - \$25 — 8:00 p.m. Saturday. Their status as god-tier players occasionally backfired.

"Guys would walk in, see us, and they'd walk right out," Bhutani remembers. "A guy would come with his group and say, 'Maybe those guys ain't here.' We were there. We were everywhere."





# THE 100 GREATEST CONSOLE VIDEO GAMES: 1988-1998

## A NEW BOOK EXCERPT

By Brett Weiss (intro) and  
Alex Thompson (*Mortal Kombat II* essay)

**W**hen I'm a guest author (and now YouTuber) at various video game conventions around the country, the question I get more than any other is, "What is your favorite game of all time?" The answer is always Universal's *Mr. Do!* If you haven't played this classic maze title, you should definitely check it out.

The next most frequently asked question I get from fans is if I'm going to write a sequel to *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977-1987*, which was published in 2014. That book has helped me connect with fans like nothing else I've ever written. To this day, I get a steady diet of feedback from readers on what for me was a pure labor of love. Many people tell me it's their favorite book of mine and one of their favorite video game books all of time.

I'm truly humbled and honored by all the attention the book has gotten, and I had a blast researching for and writing it. In fact, it's the most fun I've ever had writing a book, thanks in part to the fact that all the games in it are, by definition, great. And I LOVE that era of gaming.

As some of you likely know, I've written a second volume, and that book will release late this year. It covers the next decade

(11 years, to be exact) of awesomeness, meaning it contains chapters on games for such consoles as the PlayStation, Nintendo 64, Super Nintendo, and Sega Genesis, among others. Unlike the first book, I enlisted a team of contributing writers for *The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1988-1998*, including Alex Thompson, a talented content creator and pop culture enthusiast who I met through his work on the PopNerdTV YouTube channel.

Alex was kind enough to do a deep dive for the book on the amazing Super Nintendo port of *Mortal Kombat II*, one of the greatest fighting games of all time. Without further ado, here's Alex's awesome essay, months ahead of the book's release:

*MORTAL KOMBAT II*

SUPER NINTENDO

GENRE: FIGHTING

PUBLISHER: ACCLAIM ENTERTAINMENT

DEVELOPER: SCULPTURED SOFTWARE

1 OR 2 PLAYERS (SIMULTANEOUS)

1994

**MORTAL KOMBAT!**





Two words that are synonymous with the arcade culture of the 1990s. A franchise that sparked controversy, debate, legal action, court hearings, and the introduction of the Entertainment Software Rating Board. (Other titles had a role in the formation of the ESRB as well, but *Mortal Kombat* was definitely a major player.)

During the fall of 1992, when the original arcade version of *Mortal Kombat* was released in North America, eager onlookers surrounded the game in arcades all over the U.S., watching players beat one another to bloody pulp on the screen. Kids and adults alike would pump tons of quarters into the game, hoping to uncover a new fatality, cool fighting move, or secret character.

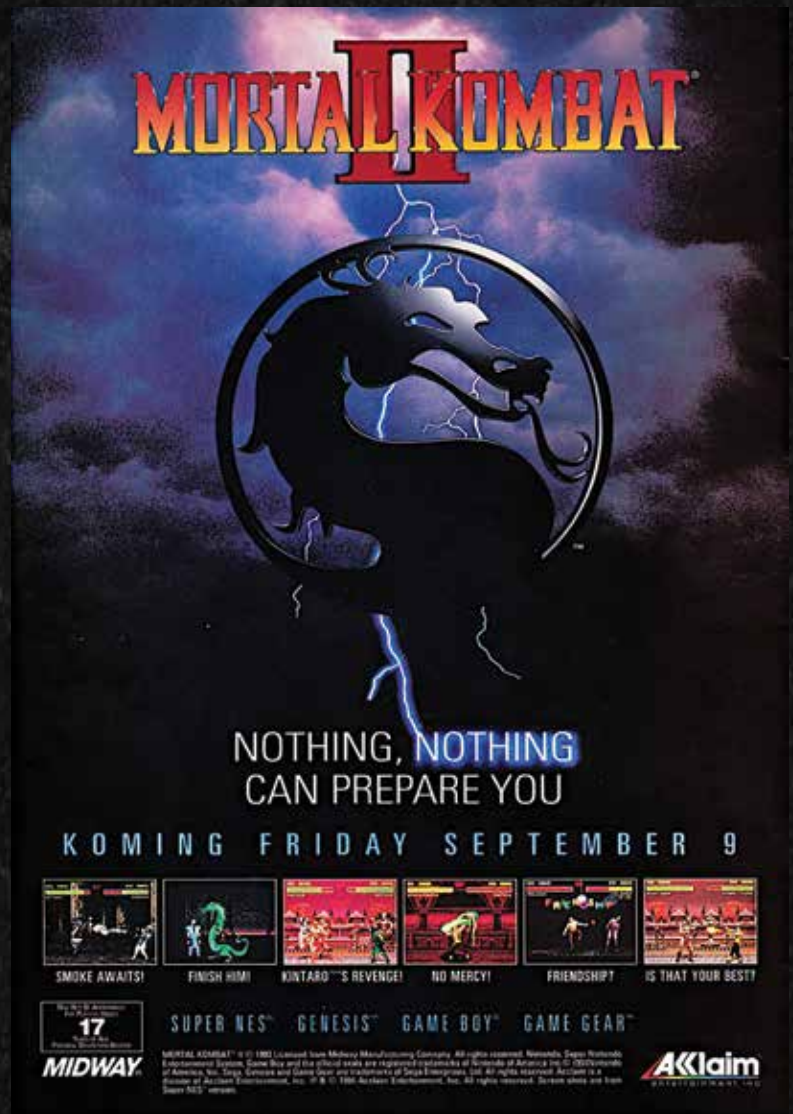
When consumers got the chance to own a home console version of the popular fighter, gamers were stoked to try to discover the secrets of the game without having to spend a fortune in quarters. *Mortal Kombat* for the Genesis and Super Nintendo were released Sept. 13, 1993, a day famously known as "Mortal Monday."

Thanks to Nintendo's strict policies, the SNES cartridge was watered down to be more family friendly. Genesis users could input a code (ABACABB, which was in reference to Abacab, the album by the Phil Collins-led rock band Genesis), to allow blood and uncensored fatalities, such as ripping out your opponent's spine or cutting them in half, but in the Super Nintendo game the blood is gray (to resemble sweat), and most of the fatalities were replaced with less violent finishing moves. Nintendo's actions pleased many parents, but upset countless *Mortal Kombat* fans, and the Genesis cartridge sold far better and was considered much cooler.

Lucky for Super Nintendo owners, money talks, and Nintendo placed no such restrictions on *Mortal Kombat II*, and the result was a bloody, gory, overtly violent port that was about as accurate in terms of graphics and gameplay as you could hope for on a 16-bit console.

*Mortal Kombat II* was released on the SNES, Genesis, Game Gear, and Game Boy on Friday, September 9th, 1994, a day heavily hyped by magazine ads. A 45-second TV spot was also released that many *Mortal Kombat* fans still talk about today. Midway and Acclaim did a great job with their advertising campaign as more than 2.5 million copies of the game were sold within the first few weeks of launch.

Many consider the SNES version of *Mortal Kombat II* to be one of the greatest arcade ports of all time. The Genesis port is no slouch, but the Super Nintendo game has smoother gameplay, and, thanks to a more advanced sound chip, better and more accurate music, and sound effects. The SNES controller was also the popular choice for the home version with its four-button layout.

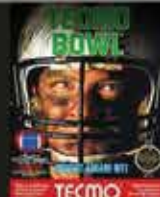
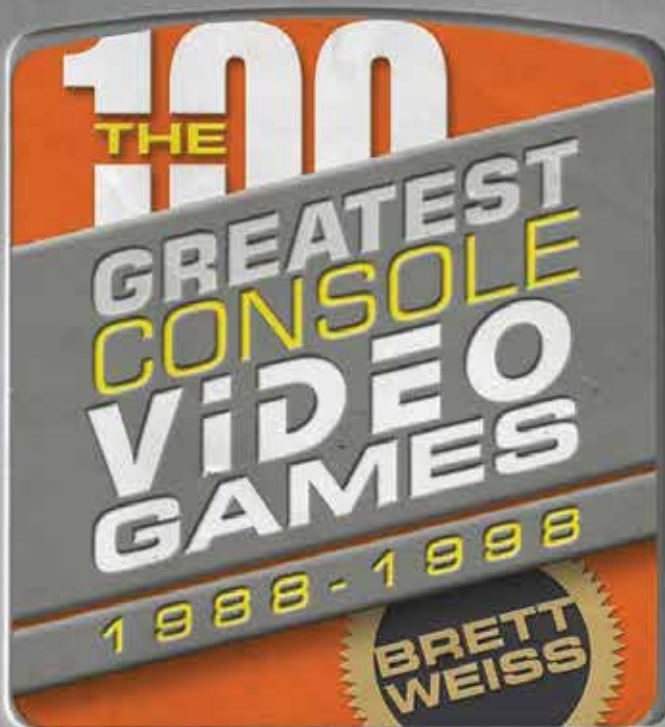


In an interview in the August 1994 issue of GamePro, John Tobias, a co-creator of the *Mortal Kombat* franchise, told the magazine, "I would go so far as to say that the Super NES version [of *Mortal Kombat II*] is one of the best arcade-to-home conversions I've seen."

I first became aware of *Mortal Kombat* in 1995, around the time *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* hit arcades. My friends and I would get together at school to talk about the crazy things we saw in the game, and we'd dream of discovering how to pull off specific fatalities. When it came to bringing the fight home, *Mortal Kombat II* was a regular rental for sleepovers. We'd battle all night, trying to ascend the ladder of fighters and discover how to unlock a secret character.

I would write down hints from battles that would pop up when I made it to certain parts of the game. I would even go as far as printing off multiple sheets of moves and fatalities from my grandparent's computer using Windows 95 and America Online. When I brought this list over to friend's houses, we were guaranteed to be playing way well into the next morning. The game's many secrets meant it was constantly teasing at more things to be discovered. It had excellent replay value, and my friends and I fought countless rounds.







Mortal Kombat II featured 12 playable fighters, up from seven in the first game. Kano and Sonya were the only two playable fighters that did not return for MKII. One of the new playable characters was the boss Shang Tsung from the first Mortal Kombat. According to Mortal Kombat mythos, Shang Tsung was given his youth back to him so he could compete at a higher level in this tournament.

The sub-boss of the game is Kintaro, a tiger striped Shokan and the successor of *Mortal Kombat*'s first sub-boss, Goro. *Mortal Kombat II* was also the first appearance of Shao Kahn. He took his throne as the King of Outworld and the boss of *MKII*. Several secret characters were available to fight in the game, as well. With the popularity of the secret green ninja, Reptile, in the first *Mortal Kombat*, the development team decided to add three characters that you could fight if you met certain conditions during the arcade ladder or two-player combat. The three characters introduced were Noob Saibot, Smoke, and Jade. All three would go on to be staples of series.

The bread and butter of *Mortal Kombat II* was the addition of multiple types of fatalities. New ways to finish your opponent, such as friendships, babalities, and new stage fatalities, were introduced in this game. All playable characters featured two signature fatalities, a friendship, a babality, and the ability to do a stage fatality. Johnny Cage could also extend his decapitation fatality to where he would uppercut three heads off. Pulling one of these off on an unexpected friend was the peak of playing the game. Fatalities were what set *Mortal Kombat* apart from games like *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury*. The ability to end your opponent in a violent way was very satisfying and shocking. It could also be darkly hilarious, with limbs and body parts left all over the battlefield, and pretty much everything was retained for the SNES port.


While the graphics and sound can't quite match up with the arcade, the tradeoff is that there's a secret "team battle" mode. In this mode, two players pick four characters and fight it out, with a new character appearing whenever one loses all their

health, sort of like King of Fighters.

Upon release, *Mortal Kombat II* received overwhelmingly positive reviews for both 16-bit versions of the game, but most preferred the Super Nintendo port, including the reviewer for the September 1994 issue of Game Players magazine, who wrote, "You might note the SNES version has a slight, if definite edge over the Genesis version... Although you'd probably expect the SNES version to look better, it plays better too. But we're splitting hairs. Whatever system you own, this is a must have this season."

In issue #63 of Electronic Gaming Monthly, the reviewer of the Genesis port wrote, "You have to face some of the limitations of the Genesis. If you do, you'll have to admit that *MK II* is a great translation. If you compare it to the Super NES, sure it isn't quite as detailed or colorful, but it is good, nonetheless. Play control is a bit lighter on this platform but it controls well enough to get some heated battles going."

**FUN FACT:** Noob Saibot's name is a combination of the two *Mortal Kombat* co-creators John Tobias and Ed Boon's last names but backwards. When flipped, it reads "Tobias Boon." This character would later be revealed as the original Sub-Zero that died at the hands of Scorpion in the first *Mortal Kombat*.

**WHY IT MADE THE LIST:** While some gamers consider *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* and *Mortal Kombat Trilogy* to be the pinnacle of the *Mortal Kombat* franchise, *Mortal Kombat II* created the momentum to allow the series to continue for many decades to come. It set the standard for what we would expect out of a *Mortal Kombat* game and showed developers that video games can be marketed toward older age groups. It pushed the limits of what is considered "okay" in video games when it comes to violence and put parents on edge throughout the world. 

\*\*\*For information on pre-ordering The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1988-1998, go to [www.brettweisswords.com](http://www.brettweisswords.com)





# THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD TO MORTAL KOMBAT

By Kevin Butler

**M***ortal Kombat* is an Action-Adventure, “Beat-em-Up” type of game, created by Midway in 1992, where you get to play as several characters in a Kung-Fu style of fighting. Each of these characters has certain signature moves and the biggest draw is each character’s type of “fatality” they can perform. A fatality is the character’s finishing move where they totally finish off an opponent. Fatalities with such names as “Scorpion’s Toasty”, “Soul Stealing”, “Hat Slice” and the “Spine Rip” were what led to the creation of the ESRB system. This system was more or less the icing on the cake as full Congressional hearings took place citing that video and arcade games had become too violent and that the companies themselves were incapable of policing what they had.

This article, though, isn’t here to discuss *Mortal Kombat* in detail. Instead, this article is intended to show the timeline for when fighting games first appeared on the scene in arcades. In the early days of the arcades, most games had to do with space aliens attacking, players driving tanks across wire-frame 3D landscapes, and even guiding a cute yellow critter around a maze eating dots and monsters.

Let’s set the “Wayback Machine” to 1976. Sega of Japan decided to try to introduce a fighting game for the arcades. The result of Sega’s work was *Heavyweight Fighter*. *Heavyweight Fighter* was simplistic in how it worked. Each player would insert their hand into a controller that sort of resembled a boxing glove. They would then move the controller into one of three positions (up, middle, or down) and push the controller in to execute a punch. The players could see their characters fighting on a black and white screen (via large monochrome sprites) with their respective scores above their boxer’s heads.



In 1984, Data East released a one-on-one fighting game that involved martial arts moves. This game would be the “source-point” that other martial arts type of games would be based on such as *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat*. The game was *Karate Champ* and John Tobias, the person who created the story for *Mortal Kombat*, would cite this game as being one of his inspirations. *Karate Champ* brought many unique features not previously brought to fighting games. It used a two-joystick system with which you could perform 17 different Kung-Fu moves and four maneuvering moves. One could play either one or two player. The rules were simple, each Kung Fu move gave you one or two points. The first player to reach two points is the winner.



Also in 1984 (November to be exact), a one-player game came out called *Kung-Fu Master* that was released by Irem. The game was heavily inspired by Bruce Lee’s “Game of Death” and Jackie Chan’s “Wheels on Meals”. You played as a character named Thomas. You are tasked with rescuing your girlfriend Sylvia who has been kidnapped by some thugs. Later, you get a letter from Mr. X at the Devil’s Temple. If Thomas wants to rescue his girlfriend, he must go the Devil’s Temple and confront the five sons



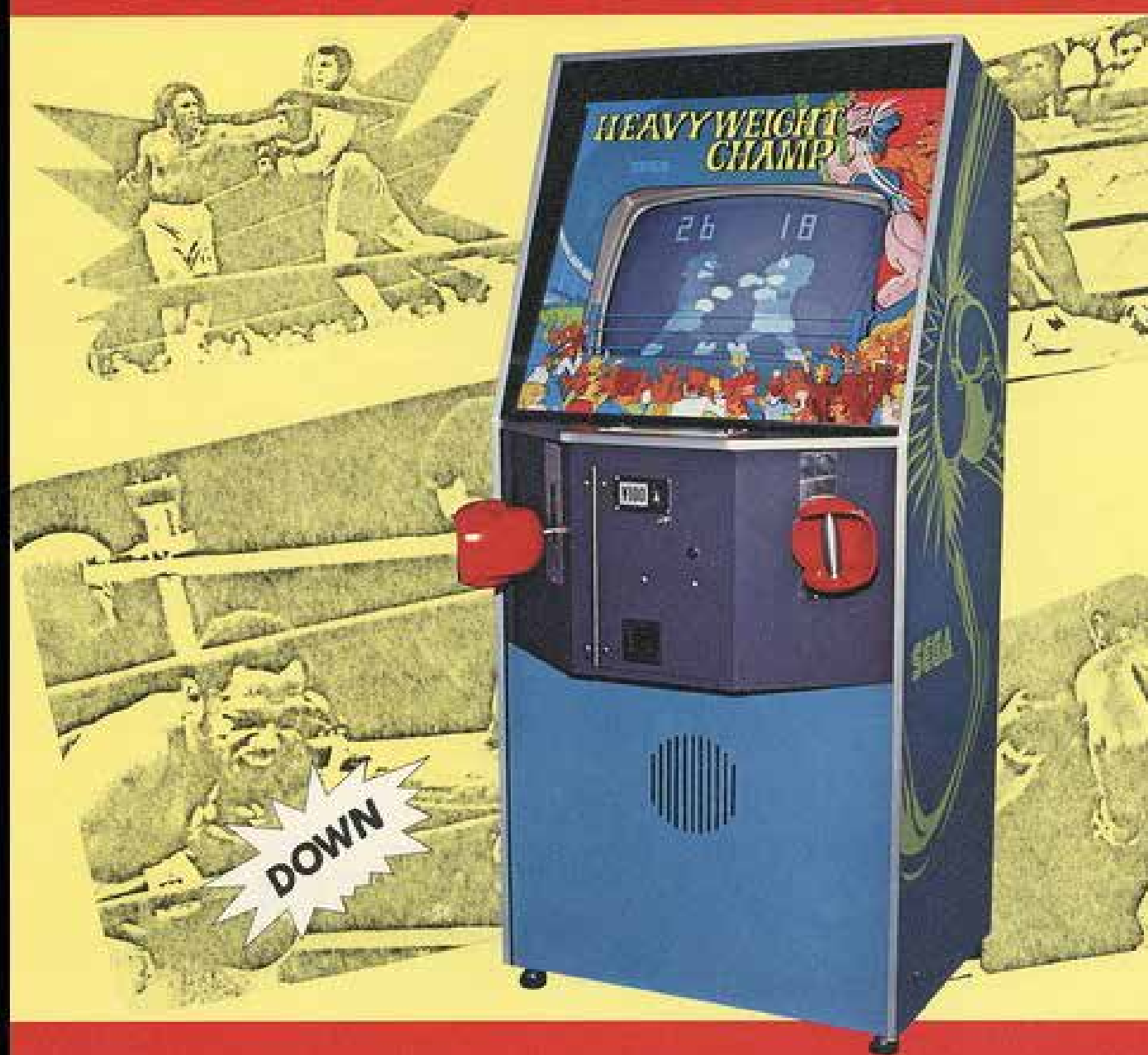
強烈なパンチ 一発ボデーに命中……ダウン!

SEGA

# HEAVY WEIGHT CHAMP

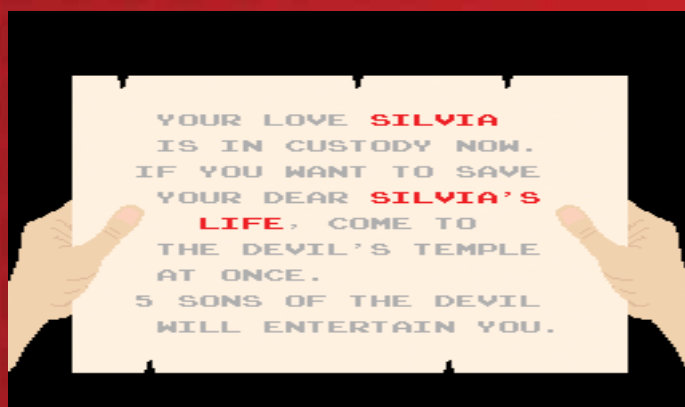
セガ・ヘビー・ウェイト・チャンプ

ボクシングのKOシーンを  
コミカルに再現  
一人でも二人でも遊べます





of the Devil who are ironically located as the final boss of each floor of the temple. If you make it through all five floors, you get to fight Mr. X himself. *Kung-Fu Master* is regarded as the first side-scrolling action-adventure game. This game would serve as the inspiration for the boss battles of *Street Fighter*.



Konami joined the arcade fray in 1985 by releasing *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*. *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* would be the first martial-arts game that would introduce a health bar instead of using a point scoring system to determine who the winner was. Also, *Yie Ar Kung Fu* introduced a system of a fighter fighting different opponents with varying skills and moves. Using various Kung Fu techniques along with different weapons such as shurikens, chains, and swords (to name a few), your character's survival will depend on being able to quickly bring your skills to bear to be able to overcome these various opponents. The first five fights are in front of a picturesque waterfall while the last six fights have you battling in front of a pagoda. There is no time limit to defeat your opponent, but you do have a finite amount of health per stage. If you lose all your health, you lose that match.

1986 saw Technos create a game that was a combination of earlier games with an improvement on those systems. *Renegade* introduced both a side-scrolling component combined with the ability to move up and down as well. In addition, this game would be influential in the creations of *Double Dragon* and even *Mortal Kombat*. *Renegade* was also the first game to introduce the idea of combinations. Enemies in *Renegade* were much tougher than previous beat-em-up games. This would require the player to use various combos to bring enemies down

quickly. In addition, you have to go through several "low-level" minions before you actually fought the boss.




Capcom blew the market wide open in 1987 with the release of *Street Fighter*. Combining the best of previous fighting games, Capcom released a game where, by using various joystick and button combos, the player not only was able to do a character's regular moves, but also do their special moves. In addition, the game introduced not only an eight-way joystick, but it also introduced six buttons (three different punch types and three different kick types) where one could do the various moves plus their signature moves. Each round was 40 seconds long and the player either won by knocking out their opponent or having more health at the end of the match. If a tie occurred in either of or both of the first two rounds, the third round would be sudden death. In other words, if you tied on that round, you would lose the game. You fought in five countries (United States, Japan, England, China, and Thailand) and you got to choose





which country to start in with the exception of Thailand. You would fight two opponents from each country. If you managed to beat all opponents, you would go to Thailand and fight the final boss. Beating him would make you the "King of the Hill". *Street Fighter* was a commercial success and has spawned a successful line of "successors" with the latest iteration being released in 2018 for the PS4, Switch, and released on Steam.



As you can see, the road to *Mortal Kombat* was a relatively straight-forward evolution. It seems that *Street Fighter* gets compared to *Mortal Kombat* in relation to the one-versus-one play. Yoshinori Ori sums it up best when people compare the two games. In comparing his series to *Mortal Kombat*, *Street Fighter IV* producer Yoshinori Ono has claimed that the two fighting games represent fundamental differences between Eastern and Western game design, with *Mortal Kombat* exemplifying Western "result oriented" gameplay. Yoshinori states, "I think it represents the difference in philosophy. I find Japanese games tend to find the 'process' of playing the game as the activity and the result may not matter. So, in *Street Fighter* when you're playing, it's the moment to moment gameplay that should be the best, whether you win or lose doesn't really matter. Whereas in *Mortal Kombat* the fighting and playing is just a pathway to get to the result - it's the Fatality you want to see and you almost want to skip the fighting bit and get to the Fatality because that is the result." 





# NEGLECTED KOMBAT

## THE MK PINBALL THAT NEARLY HAPPENED

By Michael Thomasson

**B**ally Manufacturing, founded in 1932, manufactured amusement machines such as slot machines and pinball, and became a big player through the electromechanical and solid-state eras. In 1943, Bally acquired fellow slot machine maker Midway, and began making pinball machines. Shortly thereafter the company began designing video arcade machines.



Meanwhile, Williams Electronics was at the forefront of pinball manufacturing. They were famous for pioneering many staples of modern-day pinball, including releasing the first pinball machine with inward facing flippers (*Lucky Inning*, 1950), the first pinball game with speech (*Gorgar*, 1979), the first pinball machine featuring multi-ball play (*Firepower*, 1980), and the first dot matrix display (DMD) with fully animated graphics and interactive video mode (*Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, 1991).



In 1988, Williams Electronics absorbed both Bally and Midway, becoming WMS Industries. The merger of these three companies, all with long individual histories, formed an unmatched conglomerate ultimately responsible for the revival of pinball. During the early nineties, viewed by many as the "golden age" of pinball, WMS released hit after hit including *Funhouse* (1990), *The Getaway: High Speed II* (1992), *The Twilight Zone* (1992), and the biggest selling pin of all-time: *The Addams Family* (1992). Ed Boon worked on many Bally



and Williams pinball machines including *Millionaire* (1987), *F-14 Tomcat* (1987), *Space Station: Pinball Rendezvous* (1987), *Banzai Run* (1988), *Taxi* (1988), *Black Knight 2000* (1989), and *FunHouse* (1990), in which Boon even voiced the heckling ventriloquist dummy named Rudy that stars in the pin.

Boon also worked on many Midway coin-op arcade games, including *High Impact Football* (1990), *Super High Impact* (1991), and *Total Carnage* (1992). He was the designer and programmer for *Mortal Kombat* (1992) in which he also voiced the characters of Scorpion, Reptile, and Shang Tsung. *Mortal Kombat* ultimately became the king of the arcades in the early '90s.

Ed Boon wasn't the only employee who worked on both the company's video arcade and pinball machines. The voice of Shao Khan, Steve Ritchie, designed over twenty-four pinball machines starting with *Airborne Avenger* in 1977. He also recorded all the narration and "Finish Him" callouts for *Mortal Kombat II* (1993), *Mortal Kombat 3* (1995), and *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* (1995). Dan Forden, the sound engineer for the entire *Mortal Kombat* series, also did the audio for *The Shadow* (1994), *No Fear* (1995), and the *Attack from Mars* (1995) pins.

With such talent, and all three companies being housed under the same roof, it seemed like a "no-brainer" that a *Mortal Kombat* pinball machine would be developed, especially since the license was already owned internally. Instead, it seems Williams missed a golden opportunity.

In fact, *Mortal Kombat* was expected to receive a pinball treatment in mid-May of 1995, following the release of *Dirty Harry* (1995) and before *Indianapolis* (1995), but its spot was replaced with *No Fear: Dangerous Sports* (1995) instead. *Mortal Kombat* designer and programmer Ed Boon is still "hoping it will happen someday – and it's come close a few times."

While *Mortal Kombat* never received a full pinball treatment, it did make a few cameos in other pinball machines. Raiden, a popular *Mortal Kombat* character, appears on the dot matrix display (DMD) screen during the "Where's Striker" mode of *World Cup Soccer* (1994). Famous *Mortal Kombat* catch-phrases can be heard while playing *Medieval Madness* (1997): shoot the right ramp two times in a row for "Toasty!" or three times to hear "Fatality." *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) and *No Fear: Dangerous Sports* (1995) even displayed *Mortal Kombat 3* codes on their DMDs! 🎮



# I CAN SEE IT NOW!

Visual Pinball is a freeware computer program that includes a table editor as well as a simulator. While many users create faithful recreations of real-world tables, some create original tables, as was the case of the *Mortal Kombat* table created by fans in 2020.



Photo by Steve Grunberger

# KIDDY KOMBAT?

The only licensed and sanctioned physical *Mortal Kombat* pinball machine was, sadly, just a toy released by Scientific Toys, Ltd.



# KNOCKOUT PUNCH

While *Mortal Kombat* never received a real pinball treatment, the arcade title that it was intended to compete against did. Gottlieb & Co. licensed and released a pin in 1993 based on Capcom's enormously popular *Street Fighter II* video arcade machine.





# TOY STORY 4 PINBALL REVEAL

GOLLY BOB HOWDY  
JERSEY JACK ISN'T  
TOYING AROUND!

By Michael Thomasson



Jersey Jack Pinball has been responsible for many industry firsts, including LCD screens, LED lighting, camera integration, online connectivity, and other innovative technologies. Their previous releases, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Hobbit*, *Dialed In!*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*, and *Guns N' Roses: Not in this Lifetime* were all deluxe machines and really shined. The new *Toy Story 4* is no exception.

It should be good, because it was designed by Pat Lawlor, a veteran pinball designer responsible for *Earthshaker*, *FunHouse*, *Twilight Zone*, and the best-selling pin of all time, *The Addams Family*. Rumor has it that Lawlor is retiring, so *Toy Story 4* may just be his swan song.

Lawlor has made our favorite toys come to life. Play pinball with Woody, Jesse, Bo Peep, and other *Toy Story* favorites, as Tim Allen narrates the game-callouts while reprising his role as Buzz Lightyear. An exclusive performance of Randy Newman's popular tune, "You've Got a Friend in Me" is also featured in the game.

Players can send the silver-ball flying off the Duke Caboom jump ramp - just don't let the Bensons block your shot! Blast into the jet bumpers to collect a super jackpot in Buzz Multiball, and aim for the stand-up targets to light Rescue Forky. Hurry up and bash Gabby Gabby into a pinball frenzy on the way to scoring Grand Champion. Take a chance on the spinning wheel to earn different awards like Extra Ball, Tiki Party, Super Loops and more! Start interactive carnival games like Star Adventurer, Dragon Zone, Squirrel Derby, and Flipball on the 10-inch playfield frame display.



All Photos by Charles Acosta

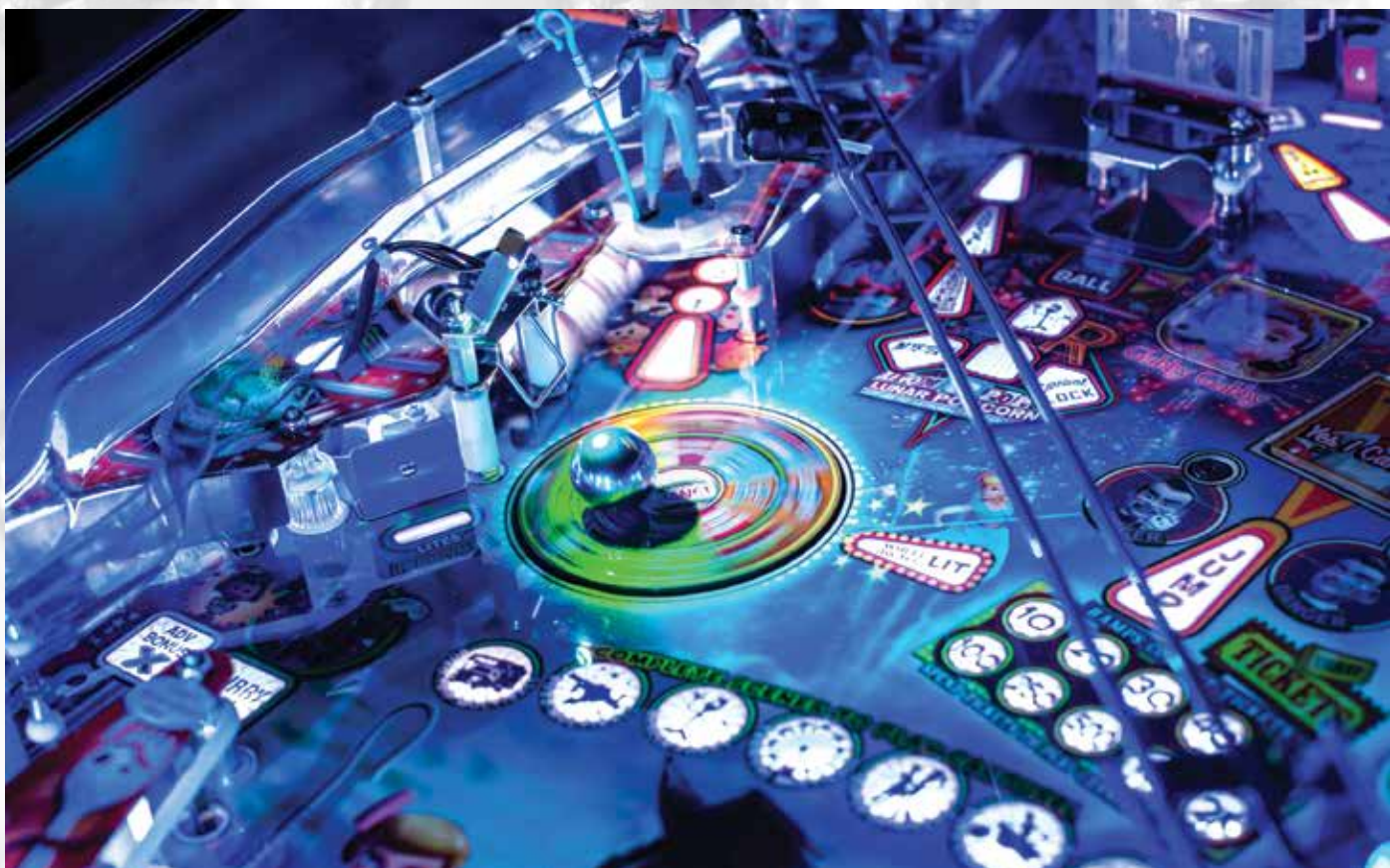












"Toy Story is beloved and treasured by families all over the world. We're thrilled to bring this excitement to pinball with an amazing game for all generations," - Jersey Jack Pinball founder Jack Guarnieri





# END OF DAYS

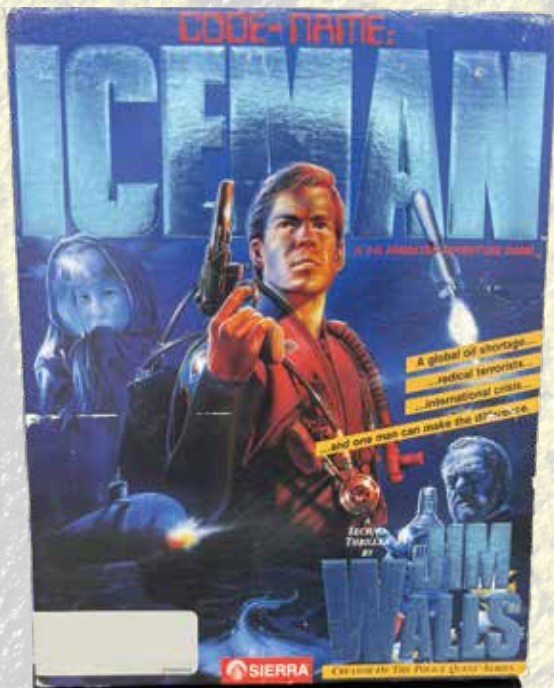
## CODE-NAME: ICEMAN AND THE ATARI 520ST

By Michael Mertes

**W**e have indeed reached the End of Days, as this will be the last installment of the series. Over the past few years, we have explored some fantastic hardware and games, though not all of them were great to play and research. For our final installment of End of Days, we will be looking at *Code-Name: ICEMAN* and the Atari ST Computer. While *Code-Name: ICEMAN* wasn't really the last game released for the ST, it was one of the last few adventure games released on the platform from Sierra before they would exclusively start developing their games for IBM PC hardware. Enjoy this look into the first few moments of *Code-Name: ICEMAN* and some history on the Atari ST.

### CODE-NAME: ICEMAN

After an intense classified mission that ran for over two years, I felt that a well-deserved vacation, somewhere far away from my boss and everyone else back in Washington, was in order. I settled on Tahiti; after all, I spent many months in a cold submarine as I went about my missions and needed to make up for the sunshine I missed. Tahiti had all the sun, booze, and women I could muster for a month-long vacation, so it was well worth the 14-hour flight. It didn't take long for me to get my bearings after arriving at the resort I booked, and I soon found myself relaxing on the beach. My dream vacation had truly begun.



Sitting on my beach chair, I swore I felt like I had dozed off for a minute, but I shrugged it off and read the magazine on the table next to me. Flipping through the news pages, I quickly glanced through an article that unrivaled details about the country of Tunisia having a political advantage due to an overabundance of crude oil. Of course, the United States and Russia were quick to try to negotiate with the country due to the entire world experiencing a worldwide oil shortage. "More political crap during this cold war with Russia", I thought as I threw the magazine down. I took a vacation to escape all the political stuff, yet it seemingly followed me in print form. After a couple of hours of frying on the beach sands, I decided to jump into the water to cool off. Oddly, no one seemed to be on the beach. The nearby volleyball court was empty, and anyone left on the beach was seemingly passed out.



Drying off from my ocean swim, I popped my shirt on and decided to see if the hotel bar was livelier. Walking through the front door, I was silently greeted by the hotel clerk as I walked past her towards the hotel bar. Upon opening the door, I was instantly hit with the sound of tropical music, and stepping inside, I saw plenty of lively people and, even better, tons of beautiful women. I walked up to the open seat at the bar and flagged the bartender down for a drink. "I'll be right over." he said.





I felt someone's hand touch my left arm and quickly looked to my left to see who's face I needed to punch in. "Woah!" I thought to myself as I looked over. I locked eyes with a tall, beautiful blonde, and after introducing myself as slick as possible, she asked, "How about having a Mai Tai with me?" Of course, I obliged, but after the 5th Mai Tai, it was apparent that this blonde was more interested in what was in my wallet than someone to keep her company. Figuring it was time to see if she was wasting my time, I asked her if she wanted to dance. "Sure, baby!" she said. The Mai Tai had undoubtedly taken its toll on the young woman as she fell flat on her face as she tried to get off the bar stool. The hotel staff was quick to come whisk her off to her room, and I was left footing the bill for all the drinks. Typical.



Undaunted, I decided to try my luck with some of the other female patrons in the bar. "Hey, sweetheart, can I buy you a drink?" I asked yet another blonde. "Hey, you! Get away from her!" was the first response I heard. The woman flashed her ring finger before I spun around to respond to a furious, deep-toned voice. "Whoops! Sorry, I didn't see the ring on her finger." I told the angry, very buff man who was getting ready to floor me with a John Wayne-style punch. My weak excuse to calm the guy didn't work, and he floored me with just one punch. As the world started to spin, I heard the familiar sound of the ocean and the fiery beams of the sun on my body. With a jolt, I fell out of my beach chair and was again on the warm sandy beach. It was all just a dream.



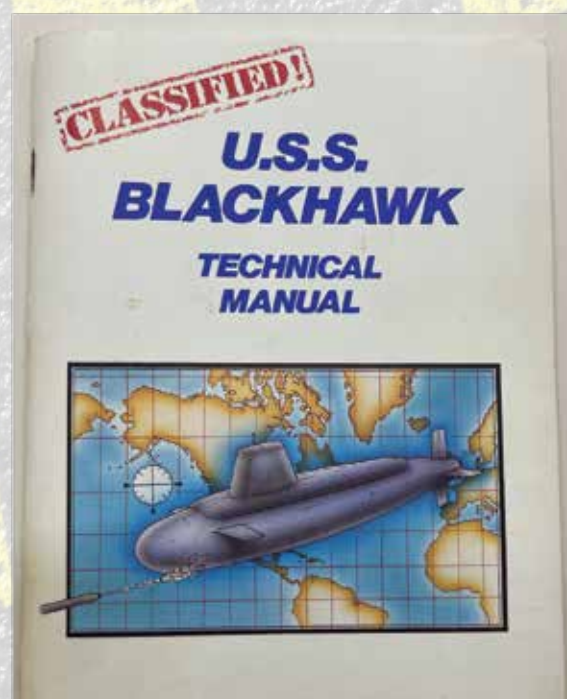
Concluding that it was time to get up before I got heat stroke, I plunged into the ocean water to cool off a bit. Throughout the next hour, things would get even crazier than my dream. I'd save a girl from almost drowning in the ocean by giving her CPR, pick up a woman who ended up being an undercover secret agent at the hotel bar and eventually get called back to the United States by my commanding officer. The Cold War was about to

start heating up big time, and the world needed the ICEMAN to ensure it stayed cool.

Sorry Tahiti, I've got a world to save. - ICEMAN



Released by Sierra and conceived by the *Police Quest* series creator, Jim Walles, *Code-Name: ICEMAN* trades the badge and police procedures for a top-secret spy mission that even James Bond would be jealous over. The game was released for the PC, Amiga, and Atari ST in 1989. Players taking the role of the ICEMAN would get a chance to have a quick vacation before jumping aboard a submarine. While the *Police Quest* games had their fair share of complaints about certain cheap deaths and having to do things exactly by the book, *Code-Name: ICEMAN* raised that difficulty even more. Players would board a submarine and have to pilot almost every significant aspect of the naval vessel. A USS Blackhawk Technical Manual and a submarine navigation chart of the Western Hemisphere are included in the game box. Using both of these manuals as a guide, players will set the course, speed, and even fire the sub's weapons. While all of these aspects sound amazing, it seems to be the common sticking point among adventure game players that the submarine portion of the game is prolonged and not enjoyable.





My complaint with the games is that it's pretty obtuse, and the command line parser for entering actions doesn't leave a lot of margin for error. This is compounded by the fact that depending on where you stand; the parser may respond differently and get you into trouble. My game suddenly ended because I typed, "Buy girl drink." Because I was standing close enough to another woman in the bar, I got my lights punched out by her off-screen husband, even though I was looking and interacting with another woman just to my right. *ICEMAN* is also the appropriate name for the main character as his legs could very well be frozen. He moves at a snail's pace, which is pretty alarming for someone who is tasked with saving the world. The same could be said with the loading. On the Atari ST, the game would take over a minute to load the next area or up to 30 seconds to display certain cut scenes. The writing for the game is fantastic, but some of the play mechanics make this a text parser adventure that requires way too much patience to complete.

### THE ATARI 520ST

Releasing to mass audiences in 1985, Atari launched the Atari 520ST in two different packages. For \$799.99, customers could pick up the Atari 520ST with a high-resolution monochrome monitor. The more expensive \$999.99 package came with a color monitor. The Atari ST was an aesthetic step up from the original 8-bit Atari Computers that came before it. Housed in a sleek slopped case, the Atari ST came equipped with plenty of onboard ports for those wanting to expand its use in the household with additional accessories. The back of the unit contains commonly found input/output plugs, like two joystick ports, a monitor out, and a power plug for its external power supply. The unit also came equipped with ports to utilize a printer, modem, and hard disk. On top of that, the Atari ST featured MIDI In and MIDI Out ports that would instantly become a massive draw for anyone looking to utilize the relatively new format for music production.



The most common add-on for an Atari ST owner was a floppy disk drive; a few different models of which Atari provided. The first was the Atari SF354, which only allowed users to use a single-sided floppy disk. With only 360 kilobytes available to utilize, the SF354 was quickly replaced by the SF314 disk drive, which could offer 720 kilobytes of data. Those who wanted the ultimate data storage experience could pick up a hard drive that ranged anywhere from 10 MB to 20 MB. Having a hard drive meant that games and applications could now easily be stored on the hard drive, decreasing load times, and using the floppy drive for other needs, like save disks for game data.



The Atari SC1244 is a beautiful color monitor that matches nicely with the overall design scheme of the Atari ST. The monitor was tailor-made for the Atari ST, which is evident because its only input port takes a custom cable that was made to work for the computer. Plugging different sources into this 15K monitor is possible but would require a custom-made 13-pin DIN connector cable to work with the monitor. The SC1244 was the perfect monitor in the home environment for those looking to use their Atari ST for more entertainment purposes. For those looking to use more production apps, like Cubase, one would lean towards using the high-resolution monochrome monitor for a cleaner presentation of their production application.



### WHAT ABOUT THE GAMES?

While both Atari and Commodore waged war with each other for who had the best computer, neither company could fend off the almost cult-like influence of Apple's Macintosh line of computers, which often outsold both the ST and Amiga models. Commodore's Amiga line was seemingly more focused on video games, though they would eventually strike gold with video producers with Newtek's Video Toaster. The Atari ST was more concentrated on the productivity side of things and would find itself the computer of choice for music producers as opposed to Amiga. Despite the productivity software focus, the Atari ST still had plenty of games on the hardware, though the Amiga versions were often superior in sound and graphics.







Leisure Suit Larry



Manhunter 2



Police Quest 2



The Uninvited

## MIDI MAKES THE MACHINE

The MIDI or Musical Instrument Digital Interface protocol was a revolutionary recording tool for music producers and performers when it was first introduced in 1982/1983. Featured first on the Prophet-600 synthesizer, musicians and music producers could use MIDI for many tasks.



Utilizing a simple 5-pin cable, devices that utilized the technology could essentially control or be controlled by the master MIDI device in the chain. For example, if you owned a synthesizer capable of playing both a lead synth sound and a bassline, but you also wanted to add an orchestrated string sound and synth pad to your performance from another synthesizer. Before MIDI, this would be impossible to do by yourself, so you would need to multi-track the sounds to a recording separately or bring in another keyboard player.

MIDI would allow one person to control both synthesizers at the same time. Pressing the keys on the main synthesizer would transfer that key data over the cable to the MIDI IN port on the second synthesizer and trigger the string and synth pads simultaneously.

## It All Ends With IBM

So what contributed to the end of the Atari ST line and its future computers? Atari was already on shaky ground with consumers due to its historical involvement with the video game crash and constant turnover of both parent companies and key staff within the company. The focus was also eventually pushed over to the Atari Jaguar, a 64-bit console that would do no favors for the company during its development and subsequent launch. The true killer of the Atari ST, though, comes down to the rapid growth and compatibility of the IBM PC. With operating systems like Microsoft Windows appearing and the DOS standard firmly established, the need and interest for developing computer software like the Atari ST and even the Amiga came to a close.





# Retro Gaming Events in June

By Ryan Burger

**S**ummer so far has been quieter than some of the past years, as we have taken more time at home working on the magazine and other things all our readers will be finding out in August more about. So, we only have a couple midwestern events to talk about in this issue. Stay tuned in the September issue as we get ourselves to Classic Game Fest in Austin, Game Over Expo in Phoenix and Bill Lange gets us an update on Long Island Retro in Garden City, NY.

## BN Video Game Con

Coming back to a fun show for another year is always fun and having Walter Day with us was a blast! Walter also brought along a surprise guest at the show for his card ceremonies, Billy Mitchell, who stopped by as he was doing some business in Chicago during the week of the show. Last year the show was one of the first in the post COVID era and landed over a thousand people, and I think this year even beat that. There is no doubt people wanted to get out and shop for cool retro games and more...



The floor was packed with tons of vendors, with

dozens of choices to look for used games, crafts and more. As usual, the Old School Gamer staff had a blast at the event. If you are anywhere in Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Indiana or even Wisconsin or Minnesota you need to consider coming out to this one-day event in Bloomington, IL.

[bnvgcon.com](http://bnvgcon.com)

## Des Moines Con

The same weekend as BN Video Game Con, there was a general Comicon 15 minutes away from our offices in Central Iowa. While Ryan, Walter and Rachel were at the Bloomington event on Saturday, Paige and Amy Skinner were setting up



and rocking in downtown Des Moines. Ryan and Rachel joined them on Sunday after driving back from Illinois.

For the first produced large scale geeky event post COVID or of any kind in the last 3-4 years, this was amazing. While I only got to see Sunday's festivities, I thought it was fantastic! This event was produced by Nerd Street Productions, who does events in other cities nationwide. Ben and his crew brought together probably the vast majority of the Iowa geeks of different kinds together for the first time. There were plenty of people into comic books, sci-fi movies (like Star Wars's 501st Legion), and hundreds of cosplayers of different kinds. The video game arena was anchored by Old School Gamer with its free play zone but was honored to have Turtle Power Games from Cedar Rapids and several other companies exhibiting video games.

Old School Gamer has plans to be even more involved in this show next year since it's right on our home turf!

"The inaugural Des Moines Con exceeded my expectations, it seemed like everyone had fun and we can't wait to return







on June 3-4 of 2023! Attendance for the event in May was about 7,000, and we expect even more in 2023. I heard from so many of our exhibitors and special guests that Des Moines Con was one of their favorite cons of the year, and so many are already signed up to come back next time!" - Ben Penrod, Show Producer

[desmoinescon.com](http://desmoinescon.com)

## More on the KC Retro Gaming Swap & Collectibles Show

The KC Retro Swap and Collectibles Show is a family friendly event, with several shows under their belt so far. It started with a small group of like-minded nerds in a parking lot at a KC retro video gaming landmark, A-game in Independence, Missouri.

In March of 2021, they kickstarted a series of parking lot swap events that have quickly grown to be some of the best retro video game, comic book, and toy swap meets in Kansas City by answering the call from the retro gaming community that looks for places to trade, buy, and swap retro video games and collectibles.

Given the location, (the Midwest) these swaps moved indoors for the winter, and since then there have been two shows held at the local Ivanhoe Mason Lodge in Kansas City. Definitely a smaller scale than, say, the Midwest Gaming Classic, Classic Game Fest, and Portland Retro Gaming Expos of the world, but these shows have big dreams. Dreams of a larger space to meet demands of a larger audience.

Well, this rag-tag team of retro game lovers have found a larger venue.

The Stoney Creek Hotel in Independence, MO. gets them up to 9,000 square feet of space. The upcoming show in August will feature new and exciting artists, vendors of new and vintage Toys, Video Games, Comic Books, Pokémon cards, & Collectibles of every kind inspired by Anime, Cartoons, Super-Heroes, Television, Movies, and other Pop Culture.

The creators and team members that plan and operate the show (Nathan Walker, Abby Whited & Scott Whited) aim to provide a space for fans of all ages who enjoy these multitudes of nerdiness that we have all grown to love, to grow and connect during these shows, feeding a community desperate for an intimate and meaningful community after the tragedy of living life during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been a part of their motivation to safely transition back to conventions, and provide to our community an avenue to create, to play, and to make connections in a world where that sometimes is difficult. At the invitation of Nate, Old School Gamer came down to their event earlier this summer and saw the community and was instantly hooked.

The next event is where it's going to start exploding. The next Sunday event will include dressing in your favorite cosplay, finding that collectible or rare video game you remember playing as a kid and that you have been hunting for, connecting with fellow collectors and friends, or finding your inner competitive side by competing in a video game or card tournament.

The event starts August 21st at 8am at the Stoney Creek Hotel in Independence, MO. Come join Old School Gamer, the producers of the event and hundreds of video game players, collectors, nerds, or whatever you want to call us. This event is geared to bring people together, share, play and have fun. Let's build community in KC, get past the "funk" that COVID-19 brought to the world and celebrate retro video games!



# KC RETRO

## SWAP & COLLECTIBLES SHOW

AUGUST 21 ↓ 8AM-4PM

STONE CREEK HOTEL | 18011 BASS PRO DRIVE | INDEPENDENCE, MO 64055



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KUNG-FU MASTER

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BURGER TIME

WINDHAMMERS

STREET FIGHTER

HEAVY BOLLE

ALIENTORM

THE JET SET

THE JET SET

KUNG-FU MASTER