

Retro Rearview: MORTAL KOMBAT

Written by DarkTetsuya

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I thought I'd celebrate the recently released reboot of the long-running martial arts tournament/gore-fest with a look back at the series. It's Retro Rearview: Mortal Kombat! So hit the jump, because IT HAS BEGUN!!!

The year was 1992. Street Fighter II had already been out a year and the arcade scene was flooded with everyone trying to cash-in on the 2D fighting game craze. Enter Midway's entry into the fighting game genre, Mortal Kombat. Midway had already gained notoriety for such games as Joust, Robotron: 2084, and Defender. But MK was their first attempt at a fighting game in the hopes to compete with Capcom's colossally successful Street Fighter II series.

But MK had done many things differently than SF2. First and foremost is the use of digitized graphics instead of sprites. So all of the characters looked somewhat more photo-realistic than all the other games released at the time. The other big difference MK had was its control scheme. Two punch buttons (High and Low), two kick buttons, and a block button. Which mainly meant you didn't have to pull back on the joystick if you wanted to block an opponent's incoming attack.

The one notable thing about MK is regarding the last thing MK had that SF2 didn't: massive amounts of GORE! Almost every punch or kick that lands on your opponent rewards the player with a small splattering of blood! And if you defeat your opponent in a best two-out-of-three match, you'll get to humiliate him via a fatality. Where your opponent meets a violent end in a wide variety of ways, such as Sub-Zero's (a mysterious ninja who's mastered the art of shooting ice projectiles from his palms) where he rips his opponent's head off with the spine still attached! Or the evil mercenary Kano's, where he punches into your chest, and rips out your still-beating heart!

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The Mortal Kombat legacy spread and grew across several games:

Mortal Kombat - The arcade original, featured seven characters such as Sub-Zero (a Lin-Kuei ninja who mastered the art of shooting ice projectiles from his hands) his rival Scorpion (who burns his enemies alive in his fatality) in their quest to save EarthRealm from the evil shape-changing wizard Shang Tsung and his four-armed right hand man, Goro! As an aside, it's more likely you bought the Genesis version compared to the SNES version, since Nintendo had a strict 'no violence' stance on their games. (*Fortunately they'd change this stance real fast after lackluster sales of MK1*)

Mortal Kombat II - The sequel to the original MK, which bumped up the roster from seven to 12 (Technically its from 6 to 12, as Kano had mysteriously vanished in between MK and MKII.) Featuring new characters such as female ninjas Kitana (who wields deadly fans) and Mileena (her demonic counterpart who wields a pair of deadly sai) MKII cranked things up with new fatalities, as well as other kinds of -alities, such as 'babalities' (turn your opponent into a pre-adolescent version of themselves) or 'Friendships' which is most likely a play on the government's growing concern about violence in videogames.

Mortal Kombat 3/ULTIMATE Mortal Kombat 3 - Building on the success of MKII, MK3 added even more new characters (such as the cyborg ninjas Sektor and Cyrax) as well as the addition of the 'Run' button located just to the lower left of the 'Low Punch' button. This allowed players to dash in to start a combo assault on their opponent. Also new to the roster were a few 'Secret' opponents, such as 'Jade' (the 'reptile'-character for the female ninjas) as well as 'Noob Saibot' (an all-black shadow ninja named after the series creators Ed Boon and John Tobias)

Also new in MK3 were some all-new 'alities' like the 'Animality' where the winning combatant transforms into an animal to destroy their opponent in a violent rage. or the 'Brutality' which eliminates your opponent in an epic combo attack not seen since Killer Instinct's 'ULTRA' combo!

Mortal Kombat: Trilogy - Released on the PSX and N64, this epic game featured **all** of the characters from the various MK games all crammed together in one game. In addition MKT also featured a new exclusive character called 'Khameleon' (a male one on PSX, and a female on N64) who randomly switches abilities between all the ninjas in the game.

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Mortal Kombat 4 - The last arcade version of MK, two notable additions included weapons (perhaps inspired by Namco's 'Soul' series of fighting games in the arcade) for the combatants, and new updated 3D graphics. The usual assortment of new characters, secrets and fatalities are included in this new entry. The game was released on the SEGA Dreamcast as Mortal Kombat GOLD, which featured six new characters not seen in the arcade game: Kitana, Mileena, Cyrax, Sektor (unlockable) Kung Lao and Baraka.

Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance - The first game to feature a 'Konquest' story mode which introduces you to the characters and gameplay mechanics in MK:DA. Also new is the 'Krypt' which is similar to the shops in other games where you can save up Koins and unlock different things (characters, concept art, and other various surprises)

MK:DA also marked the return of 'Test Your Might': a bonus game where you hammer the buttons as hard as you can in sort of a 'strength tester'-style game. Also in MKDA is the parody 'Test Your Sight' which is actually similar to the bonus round in the Midway classic game, Tapper.

Mortal Kombat: Deception - The Krypt and Konquest modes from MKDA return, in addition to several new modes: Chess Kombat (Chess with MK characters) and Puzzle Kombat (Like Super Puzzle Fighter II TURBO, but with MK combatants)

MK: Mythologies/MK: Special Forces - Released on the PSX/N64, Mythologies was their attempt at an adventure game using the MK engine. Sadly the MK engine just didn't work for an action-platform game (since you still had to use up/up-left/up-right to jump on platforms, so the controls left a lot to be desired. MK: Special Forces was an action game featuring Jax from the MK series. Haven't played it myself, but I heard it was about as bad as MK: Mythologies.

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe - Recently released for PS3/360, this was MK's answer to the Marvel Vs. games released by Capcom, only this time it was the combatants taking on the DC Universe characters like Batman, the Joker, the Flash, and so on. Unfortunately given the non-gory nature of the DC Universe the game had to settle for watered-down fatalities and a "T" rating, which probably hurt it in the long run when it came to fans looking for an epic gore-fest mashed up with DC's characters.

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Mortal Kombat 9 - Simply titled 'Mortal Kombat' this latest game in the series serves as a 'reboot' to introduce new players to the MK universe, while also retaining enough of the stuff that worked from classic MKs for veterans of the original arcade games. One ultra-gory new feature is the 'X-Ray' moves which show you just what kind of damage your attacks are causing your opponent. The new 'mission' mode is very interesting, providing different crazy modifiers to your matches so you'll never know what to expect next!

I would say this is the end of the article, but the MK celebration continues later this week, as I'll try to go more in-depth about some of the secrets from your favorite Mortal Kombat games! Secret Characters, hidden modes, fatalities, and quite possibly one of the strangest hidden character stories of all time, next time on Retro Rearview!!