

HOLGER

VS

CPU

THE HISTORY OF FIGHTING GAMES

1984-2024

CHAMP

YIE AR
KUNG-FU

MORTAL KOMBAT

STREET
FIGHTER II

FINAL
FURY

STREET FIGHTER

STREET FIGHTER

YIE AR KUNG-FU

MIDWAY

STREET FIGHTER 4

STREET FIGHTER

Holger Krupp

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The Evolution of Fighting Games

Fighting games have always stood at the crossroads of skill, spectacle, and storytelling. Since their inception in the mid-1980s, the genre has evolved from pixelated depictions of martial arts into a rich tapestry of diverse characters, complex mechanics, and vibrant communities. Over the course of four decades, fighting games have transcended their arcade roots to become a pillar of gaming culture, shaping not only how games are played but also how players connect, compete, and celebrate their shared passion.

The story of fighting games begins in 1984 with *Karate Champ* and *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, early titles that laid the foundation for the genre. These games introduced the concept of one-on-one combat and simple movesets, offering players their first taste of virtual martial arts. Yet, it wasn't until Capcom's *Street Fighter* series debuted in 1987 that the genre truly found its footing. *Street Fighter II* (1991) revolutionized fighting games with its deep mechanics and diverse roster, turning arcade machines into battlegrounds where rivalries were born and legends were made.

The early 1990s saw an explosion of new franchises, each bringing unique innovations to the table. SNK's *The King of Fighters* series introduced team-based mechanics, while Midway's *Mortal Kombat* shocked the world with its graphic violence and controversial fatalities. Titles like *Samurai Shodown*, *Pit-Fighter*, and *Soul Edge* further expanded the genre's horizons, offering new themes, weapon-based combat, and 3D movement.

As the arcade scene began to decline in the late 1990s, fighting games found a new home on home consoles. Games like *Tekken*, *Dead or Alive*, and *Capcom vs. SNK* brought arcade-quality experiences into living rooms, allowing players to train and compete at home. The advent of 3D fighters pushed the boundaries of what was possible in the genre, with titles like *Virtua Fighter* and *Soul Edge* paving the way for more realistic animations and dynamic gameplay.

The 2000s saw the genre adapt to a rapidly changing landscape. Online play began to take shape, and community-driven games like *Skullgirls* and *Fighting EX Layer* emerged. *Super Smash Bros.* gained traction as a competitive series, while crossover games like *Tatsunoko Vs. Capcom: Ultimate All Stars* and *SNK Vs. Capcom Chaos* kept the spirit of collaboration alive. At the same time, major franchises continued to evolve, with *Mortal Kombat* (2011) and *Street Fighter V* bringing modern sensibilities to classic formulas.

The 2010s heralded the rise of esports and a renewed focus on competitive play. Events like the *Evolution Championship Series (EVO)* became global spectacles, drawing players from around the world to compete in games like *Dragon Ball FighterZ*, *Injustice: Gods Among Us*, and *Granblue Fantasy: Versus*. The fighting game community (FGC) grew stronger than ever, fueled by grassroots events and the passionate dedication of its members.

Today, in the 2020s, fighting games stand at the dawn of a new golden age. Titles like *Guilty Gear Strive*, *MultiVersus*, and *Tekken 8* showcase how far the genre has come, blending classic mechanics with modern innovations. Rollback netcode

has revolutionized online play, making global competition more accessible. And with new games on the horizon and an ever-growing community, the future of fighting games looks brighter than ever.

This book explores the rich history of fighting games from 1984 to 2024, highlighting the pivotal moments, iconic titles, and cultural shifts that have defined the genre. From the humble beginnings of *Karate Champ* to the cutting-edge visuals of *Guilty Gear Strive*, we'll trace the evolution of fighting games across four decades.

Whether you're a veteran of arcade battles or a newcomer to the scene, this journey through fighting game history will offer insights into the genre's past, present, and future. Welcome to the story of fighting games—a tale of fierce competition, passionate communities, and the relentless pursuit of mastery.

1980s - The Birth of a Genre

The 1980s were a transformative decade for video games, marked by technological innovation, creative experimentation, and the emergence of new genres that would redefine entertainment. Among these innovations, the birth of the fighting game genre in 1984 stands as a pivotal moment in gaming history. This era not only laid the groundwork for future competitive gaming but also showcased the ingenuity of developers as they harnessed the power of arcade machines to deliver thrilling, fast-paced experiences to players worldwide.

Before the advent of true fighting games, early arcade titles like Pong (1972) and Space Invaders (1978) emphasized competition and reflex-driven gameplay but lacked the direct player-versus-player combat that would define the genre. The 1980s saw the evolution of games exploring physical confrontation in rudimentary ways, such as boxing simulations like Heavyweight Champ (1976) and Punch-Out!! (1984). However, these games focused on sports realism and simple mechanics, leaving room for innovation.

The fighting game genre as we recognize it today was born with the release of Karate Champ in 1984 by Technos Japan. This groundbreaking title introduced players to one-on-one martial arts combat, complete with distinct moves and a focus on skillful execution. Its impact was immediate: Karate Champ inspired developers to experiment with the idea of head-to-head battles, combining precise controls with strategic depth. It wasn't long before imitators and innovators followed suit, creating games that expanded on these core mechanics.

As the decade progressed, the genre evolved rapidly. Titles like Yie Ar Kung-Fu (1985) introduced diverse characters with unique fighting styles, while Street Fighter (1987) added special moves and a greater emphasis on strategy. These innovations captured players' imaginations and turned arcades into arenas for competition, fueling a burgeoning culture of rivalry and camaraderie.

The 1980s were a time of experimentation and growth for fighting games. The genre blended martial arts-inspired action with the era's burgeoning arcade technology, producing memorable experiences that captivated players. This period set the stage for the 1990s explosion of fighting games, where titles like Street Fighter II and Mortal Kombat would revolutionize competitive gaming and elevate the genre to new heights.

This chapter explores the origins of the fighting game genre, its milestones in the 1980s, and its lasting impact on the gaming world. From the simplicity of Karate Champ to the foundations laid by Street Fighter, we will journey through the era that gave rise to one of gaming's most enduring and celebrated styles.

KARATE CHAMP

The title "KARATE CHAMP" is displayed in a stylized font. "KARATE" is in white with a black outline, and "CHAMP" is in red with a white outline. The text is set against a blue banner that tapers from left to right. On the left end of the banner is a circular inset showing a karate fighter in a red gi performing a high kick. On the right end is a large, blue, clenched fist.

Karate Champ

Karate Champ, developed by Technos Japan and published by Data East in 1984, is a groundbreaking arcade fighting game that established the foundation for the fighting game genre. It offers a unique and engaging gameplay experience, combining precision controls, competitive elements, and an emphasis on martial arts techniques.

In Karate Champ, players control a karateka (a karate practitioner) in one-on-one combat against either another player or a computer-controlled opponent. The goal is to win rounds by landing successful attacks and earning points. Unlike modern fighting games with health bars, Karate Champ employs a point-based scoring system that rewards players for executing clean, well-timed moves. A single hit can end a round, emphasizing accuracy and strategy over button-mashing.

The game's controls are highly innovative for its time. Instead of a single joystick and buttons, Karate Champ uses two joysticks per player. This dual-joystick setup allows for a variety of moves, including punches, kicks, jumps, and defensive maneuvers. The precise combinations of joystick inputs give players access to over 15 different moves, making it one of the most complex games of its era. Mastering these controls requires skill, timing, and practice, adding depth to the gameplay.

Karate Champ also includes diverse gameplay modes. Players can engage in competitive matches or participate in bonus stages that challenge them to break objects like boards or deflect projectiles. These mini-games add variety and test players' skills beyond combat scenarios.

Karate Champ stands out from earlier games for its focus on martial arts realism and competitive play. Previous games, such as Kung-Fu Master (1984) or earlier action titles, often emphasized fast-paced action against waves of enemies, whereas Karate Champ introduced a more deliberate, one-on-one combat system.

The game also pioneered the concept of competitive multiplayer in fighting games. While earlier arcade games like Pong and Space Invaders offered two-player modes, Karate Champ made head-to-head combat a central feature, laying the groundwork for future fighting game franchises like Street Fighter and Tekken.

Additionally, the dual-joystick control scheme and point-based scoring system differentiated it from simpler action titles, offering a more nuanced and skill-oriented experience.

By blending innovation, realism, and competitive play, Karate Champ set new standards in gaming and solidified its legacy as a precursor to modern fighting games.

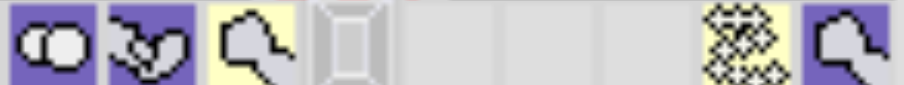
1984

GALACTIC WARRIORS

IP 15000 HI 19850
PP TIME 1:14



OUT



Galactic Warriors

Galactic Warriors, released in 1985, is a landmark title in the fighting game genre, developed by Konami. It distinguished itself through innovative mechanics and its unique space-themed aesthetic, setting the stage for many conventions in the genre.

At the heart of Galactic Warriors lies its vibrant arena format, where fighters—mechanized combatants equipped with advanced weaponry—battle in imaginative, interstellar settings. Departing from traditional fighting mechanics, the game introduced an expansive plane of combat that emphasized verticality and stage interaction. Characters could traverse vertically, adding layers of strategy as players utilized aerial maneuvers to gain advantageous positions.

Unlike its contemporaries, Galactic Warriors introduced a customizable weapon system. Players could arm their fighters with an array of futuristic weapons, each with distinct attack patterns and tactical advantages. This mechanic encouraged diverse playstyles and strategic depth, as players could tailor their loadouts to counter specific opponents or capitalize on their own strengths.

The game also employed an energy meter dividing offensive and defensive capabilities. This provided players with tactical decisions: utilize energy for powerful attacks or conserve it for defensive maneuvers like shielding. The energy management system deepened the strategic component, rewarding players who mastered the balance between aggression and defense.

Galactic Warriors left an indelible mark on the fighting game landscape. It anticipated several features that would become staples in future titles, such as nuanced character customization and complex energy systems. Its daring deviation from grounded combat to a sci-fi arena paved the way for future innovation in thematic diversity within the genre.

This title also inspired the emergence of arena-based fighters, influencing later games that adopted a similar approach to engaging environments and verticality. The emphasis on a dynamic stage became a precursor to the fully interactive arenas seen in modern titles.

In terms of competitive play, Galactic Warriors was ahead of its time. It attracted a niche but passionate fanbase that celebrated its depth and strategic possibilities, marking the early days of what would grow into a thriving competitive community focused on skillful play and strategic mastery.

In conclusion, Galactic Warriors is both a product and a pioneer of its time, with mechanics and thematic choices that pushed the boundaries of what fighting games could achieve. Its legacy lives on as an inspiration for genre innovation and as a herald of the rich, varied landscapes to come in fighting games.

1985



三四郎

PLAYER-1
00

HIGH SCORE
100000

PLAYER  KO



ROUND 1

Onna Sansirou: Typhoon Gal

Onna Sansirou: Typhoon Gal, released by Taito in 1985, is a unique arcade fighting game that stands out in the history of the genre for its all-female cast and distinctive martial arts-inspired gameplay. The game's innovative mechanics and its focus on female combatants marked a notable departure from the male-dominated rosters typical of the era.

In Onna Sansirou: Typhoon Gal, players control the titular character, a skilled martial artist, as she battles through a series of one-on-one matches against other female opponents. Set in a dojo, the game emphasizes a traditional martial arts theme, with a variety of moves that reflect realistic karate techniques.

The controls include a joystick for movement and two buttons—one for punches and the other for kicks. Players can execute a range of attacks, including standing, jumping, and crouching moves. One of the game's signature mechanics is the ability to grab opponents during close combat, allowing for powerful throws and takedowns. Mastering these moves requires timing and precision, as opponents grow increasingly challenging with each round.

The game also features a dynamic scoring system, rewarding players for executing clean hits, throws, and successful counters. Matches end when one character's health bar is depleted, with players advancing to face new challengers in the dojo.

A defining characteristic of Onna Sansirou: Typhoon Gal is its all-female roster. At a time when most fighting games, such as Karate Champ (1984) and Yie Ar Kung-Fu (1985), featured predominantly male fighters, Typhoon Gal broke new ground by spotlighting women in combat. This was a bold move that challenged traditional gender norms in gaming and martial arts representation, offering players a fresh and empowering perspective.

The game's focus on female fighters was complemented by its setting and aesthetic. The dojo environment, coupled with the detailed animations and traditional martial arts theme, created an atmosphere that celebrated skill and discipline over brute strength.

Another innovative aspect of the game was its grappling and throwing mechanics, which added depth to the combat system and set it apart from contemporaries. These mechanics required players to engage in close-range combat strategically, emphasizing technique over sheer aggression.

While Onna Sansirou: Typhoon Gal did not achieve the widespread popularity of some of its contemporaries, its all-female roster and unique gameplay mechanics made it a pioneering title in the fighting game genre. It remains a fascinating example of how games can challenge conventions and broaden the scope of representation in interactive media.

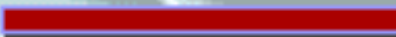
1986

STREET FIGHTER

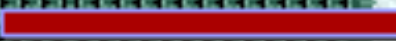
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PLAYER1 



ENEMY 

FIGHT!



Street Fighter

Released by Capcom in 1987, Street Fighter is the game that launched one of the most iconic fighting game franchises in history. As a pioneer in the genre, it introduced many of the mechanics and design elements that would define future titles. While its sequels overshadowed it in popularity, the original Street Fighter laid the groundwork for the competitive fighting games that followed.

In Street Fighter, players assume the role of Ryu, a martial artist traveling the world to participate in a series of one-on-one battles. A second player can join to control Ken, effectively allowing for competitive multiplayer matches. The game features a roster of opponents from different countries, each with unique moves, personalities, and fighting styles.

The gameplay involves two primary actions: punches and kicks, each with varying strength levels. These actions are executed using a six-button control system—light, medium, and heavy versions of both punches and kicks. Players can perform a range of moves, including basic strikes, jumps, and crouches.

What truly set Street Fighter apart were its special moves, which required specific joystick and button combinations to execute. Iconic techniques such as the Hadouken (fireball), Shoryuken (dragon punch), and Tatsumaki Senpukyaku (hurricane kick) debuted in this game. While these moves were challenging to perform consistently due to the game's stiff controls, they added depth and a sense of discovery for players.

One of the most innovative aspects of Street Fighter was its introduction of special moves, a concept that became a staple of the fighting game genre. The idea of rewarding players for mastering precise inputs and timing added a layer of complexity and skill that was groundbreaking at the time.

Another unique feature was the global roster of opponents. From the sumo wrestler E. Honda in Japan to the kickboxer Adon in Thailand, the game emphasized international diversity in its characters and settings. This approach added variety and personality to the experience, making each match feel distinct.

The game also experimented with pressure-sensitive arcade buttons in some versions, allowing players to vary the strength of their attacks based on how hard they pressed. Although this feature was eventually replaced with the more reliable six-button layout, it showcased Capcom's willingness to innovate.

While the original Street Fighter received mixed reviews due to its challenging controls and difficulty, it succeeded in introducing key mechanics and design principles that would be perfected in Street Fighter II (1991). Its legacy lies in its pioneering contributions to the genre, establishing a framework for competitive fighting games and setting the stage for one of the most enduring franchises in gaming history.

1987

靈界導士™

CHINESE EXORCIST

1 PLAYER 0/60 HI-SCORE 50000
POWER!!!!!!!!!!!!!! POWER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



Reikai Doushi: Priest of the Spirit World

Reikai Doushi: Priest of the Spirit World, developed by Home Data and released in 1988, is a unique entry in the early fighting game genre. It stands out for its supernatural theme, innovative mechanics, and emphasis on atmospheric storytelling. While not as widely known as contemporaries like Street Fighter or Yie Ar Kung-Fu, the game's ambition and thematic depth helped differentiate it within the genre.

In Reikai Doushi, players control a spiritual warrior who battles various supernatural beings in a series of one-on-one duels. Each opponent represents a different spirit or ghostly entity, and the player must defeat them to progress through the game. The setting and narrative draw heavily from Japanese folklore and mysticism, creating a distinctive and eerie atmosphere.

The game uses a standard joystick and button setup, with controls that allow for punches, kicks, and defensive maneuvers. Players can perform a variety of moves, including basic attacks, jump strikes, and counters. Additionally, special moves tied to the spiritual theme—such as energy-based attacks—add an extra layer of complexity.

A notable feature of Reikai Doushi is its health system, which incorporates a "spirit meter." This meter depletes as players take damage or use certain abilities, emphasizing the need for strategic resource management. Matches end when one character's meter is fully drained, rewarding both offensive and defensive gameplay.

What truly sets Reikai Doushi apart is its supernatural theme and atmospheric presentation. While many fighting games of the era focused on martial arts or competitive sports, Reikai Doushi embraced a narrative-driven approach centered on spirits and the afterlife. The game's roster of ghostly adversaries—each with unique designs and abilities—contributed to its distinctive tone, making it a standout title in terms of aesthetic and storytelling.

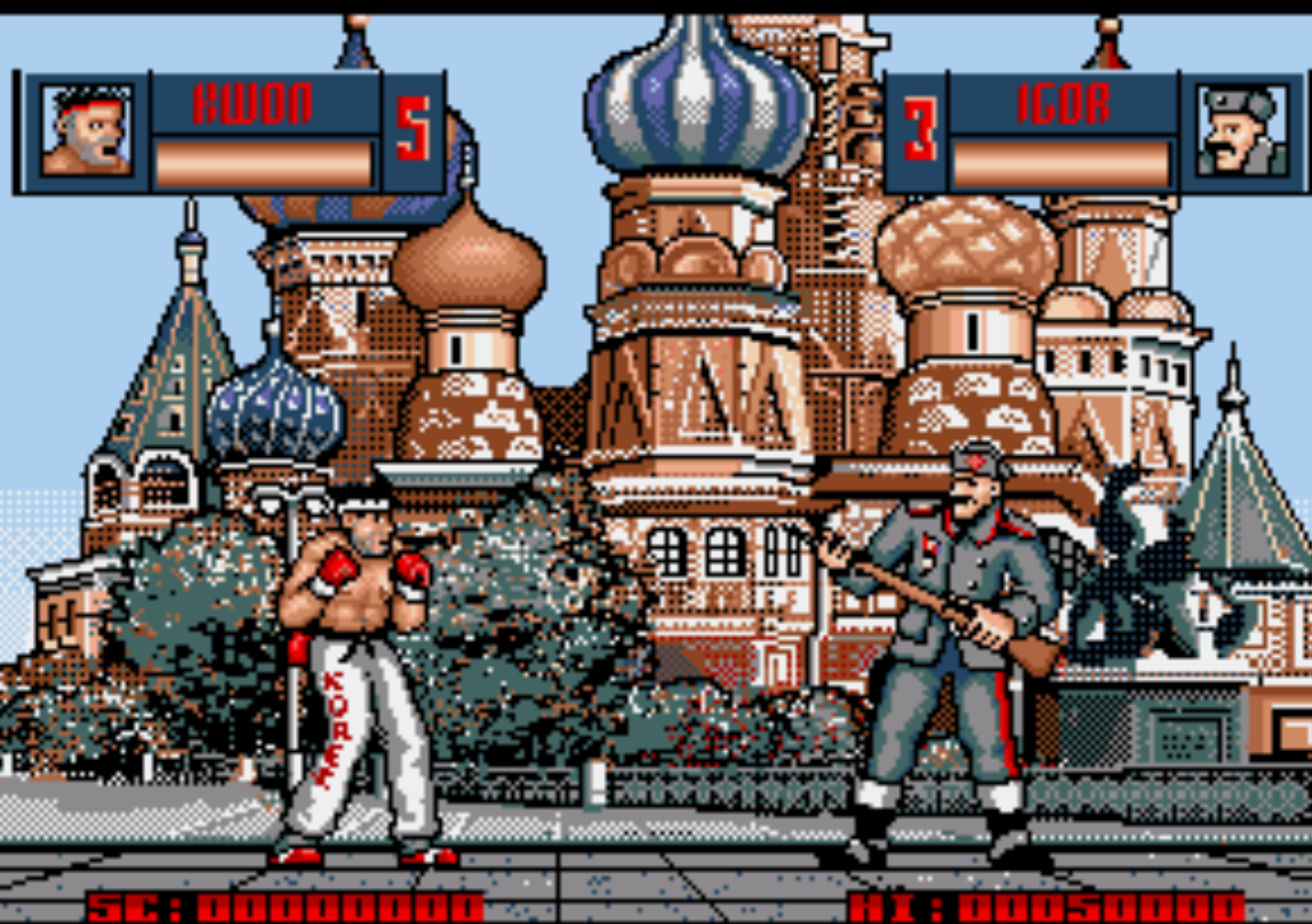
The game also introduced several forward-thinking mechanics. Its spirit meter added a layer of strategy not commonly seen in other fighting games of its time. Players had to carefully balance their offensive and defensive actions to maintain their spiritual energy, creating a more nuanced approach to combat.

Additionally, Reikai Doushi incorporated cinematic elements such as dramatic intros and victory animations, enhancing the game's immersive quality. These features helped establish a storytelling tradition in fighting games that would later be expanded upon in franchises like Mortal Kombat.

Although Reikai Doushi did not achieve widespread acclaim, its creative design and innovative mechanics left a lasting impression on the genre. It remains a cult classic, celebrated for its unique vision and early exploration of storytelling in fighting games.

1988

HUMAN KILLING MACHINE



Human Killing Machine

Human Killing Machine (HKM), developed by Tiertex and published by U.S. Gold in 1989, was designed as an unofficial follow-up to Street Fighter for home computers. However, while it sought to emulate the success of its predecessor, the game fell short in several areas, becoming infamous for its lackluster design and controversial themes. Despite this, it remains a notable example of early fighting game development on platforms like the Amiga, Atari ST, and MS-DOS.

Human Killing Machine puts players in the role of Kwon, a martial artist traveling the globe to face a series of opponents in one-on-one battles. Each opponent represents a unique cultural stereotype, and battles take place in various international locations. The goal is to defeat all challengers and establish Kwon's dominance as the ultimate fighter.

The controls are simplistic, with players using a joystick or keyboard to execute basic punches, kicks, and jumps. Unlike the intricate control schemes of Street Fighter, HKM relies on straightforward inputs and a limited move set. Matches are won by depleting the opponent's health bar over multiple rounds.

One of the game's challenges is its rigid and unresponsive control system. Timing attacks and avoiding enemy strikes can feel inconsistent, leading to frustration. Each opponent follows a predictable pattern, and victory often requires exploiting these patterns rather than engaging in dynamic combat.

While Human Killing Machine aimed to stand out as a spiritual successor to Street Fighter, it is most notable for its controversial themes and technical shortcomings. The game's roster of opponents drew criticism for perpetuating exaggerated cultural stereotypes. For example, players face characters like Igor, a Soviet strongman, and Maria, a Spanish bullfighter. These depictions were seen as insensitive, even by the standards of the time.

From a gameplay perspective, HKM lacked the depth and polish of its contemporaries. The absence of special moves or advanced mechanics limited its appeal, especially when compared to Street Fighter or Yie Ar Kung-Fu. Its repetitive gameplay and poor hit detection further diminished its reputation.

Despite these flaws, Human Killing Machine is remembered as an ambitious but flawed attempt to bring fighting games to home computers. Its legacy serves as a cautionary tale in game design, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity and gameplay refinement. While it failed to achieve the acclaim of its inspirations, HKM remains a curious artifact of the late 1980s fighting game boom.

1989

PIT-FIGHTER



\$0

BUZZ

KO's



EXECUTIONER



\$0

KO's



\$0

KO's



SAH-OI 1

SAH-OI 1

CLOCK 00 : 00

CREDITS : 1

02 : 00 RECORD

Pit-Fighter

Pit-Fighter, developed by Atari Games and released in arcades in 1990, is a landmark title in the fighting game genre. Known for its digitized graphics and gritty underground fighting theme, the game stood out for its unique presentation and innovative approach to combat. While it has been met with mixed reviews over the years, Pit-Fighter remains a cult classic and a significant milestone in arcade gaming history.

Pit-Fighter revolves around underground brawling tournaments, where players choose one of three fighters: Buzz, a professional wrestler; Ty, a kickboxer; or Kato, a karate expert. Each character has distinct strengths, weaknesses, and fighting styles, adding variety to the gameplay. The goal is to progress through a series of increasingly challenging opponents, culminating in a showdown with the game's final boss, the Masked Warrior.

The game uses an eight-way joystick and two buttons—one for punching and one for kicking. Players can execute basic attacks, throws, and unique moves specific to their chosen fighter. The combat takes place in an arena filled with hazards, such as barrels and crowds of spectators who can shove fighters back into the fray. This interactive environment adds a chaotic element to the matches.

One of Pit-Fighter's distinguishing features is its cooperative mode, allowing up to three players to team up and take on opponents simultaneously. This multi-player aspect added a social and chaotic dynamic, making the game a popular choice in arcades.

Pit-Fighter was groundbreaking for its use of digitized graphics, a technique that captured live-action footage of actors and converted it into in-game sprites. This technology gave the characters a realistic appearance, setting it apart from other fighting games of the time and paving the way for titles like *Mortal Kombat* (1992).

The game's gritty, street-fighting aesthetic also distinguished it from the more traditional martial arts themes seen in earlier games like *Street Fighter* or *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*. The underground setting, raucous crowd, and interactive arenas gave Pit-Fighter a raw, brawler-like atmosphere that resonated with players seeking a more visceral experience.

Despite its innovations, Pit-Fighter was criticized for its clunky controls, repetitive gameplay, and limited move sets. The digitized graphics, while novel, sometimes felt stiff compared to the fluid animations of traditional sprite-based games.

While Pit-Fighter was not as polished or enduringly popular as some of its contemporaries, it holds an important place in the history of fighting games. Its pioneering use of digitized graphics and emphasis on gritty realism influenced the development of future titles and helped expand the genre's thematic possibilities. For better or worse, it remains a nostalgic favorite for fans of early 1990s arcade gaming.

1990

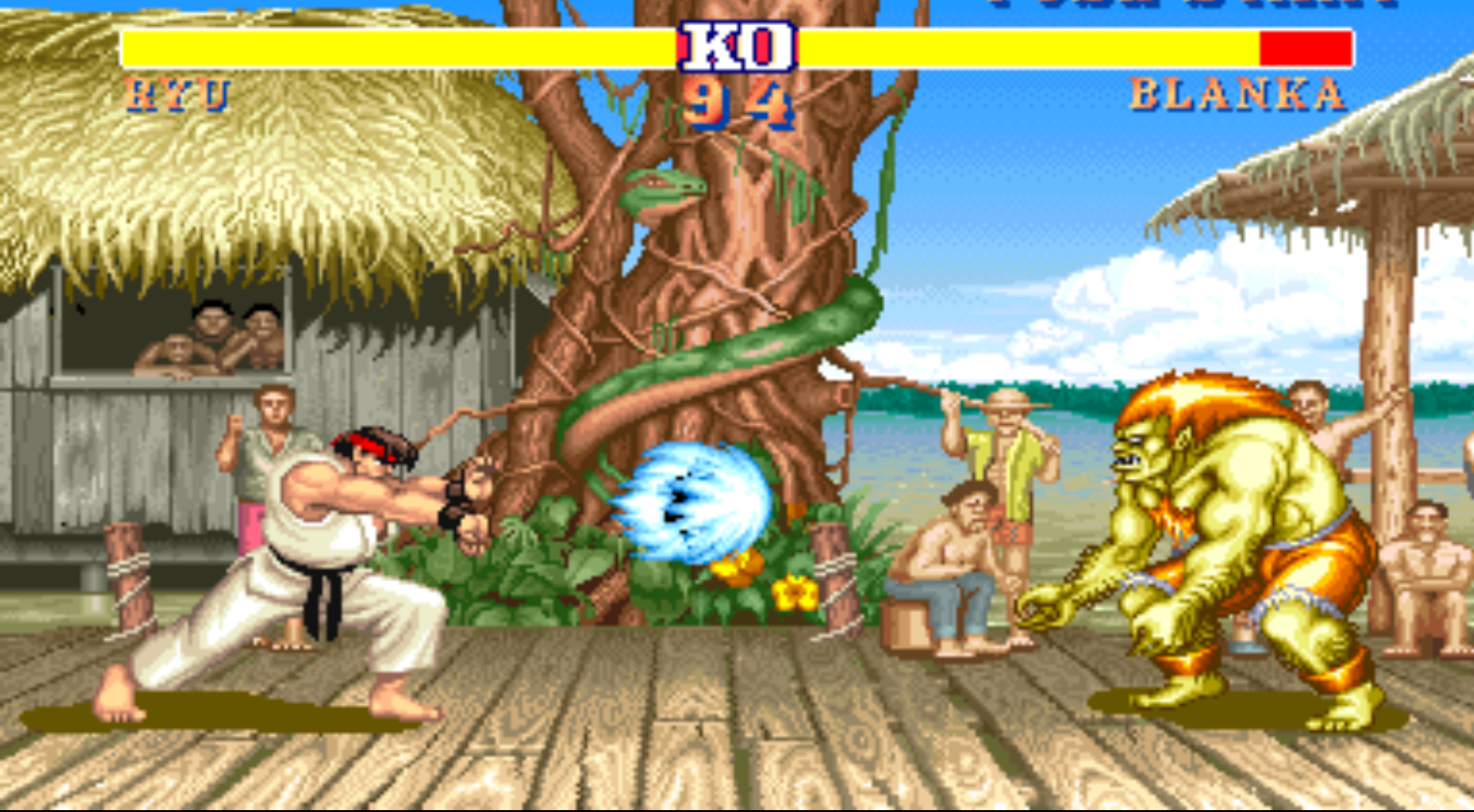
STREET FIGHTER II

1P 500 NI N 50000 PUSH START

RYU

KO
94

BLANKA



Street Fighter II

Released by Capcom in 1991, *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior* is widely regarded as the game that defined the modern fighting genre. Building on the foundation of the original *Street Fighter* (1987), it introduced revolutionary mechanics, vibrant characters, and a competitive spirit that transformed arcade gaming. *Street Fighter II* not only became a cultural phenomenon but also set the standard for future fighting games.

Street Fighter II pits players in one-on-one matches where the objective is to deplete the opponent's health bar using punches, kicks, and special moves. The game features eight playable characters, each with a unique fighting style, backstory, and special abilities. This diverse roster includes iconic fighters such as Ryu, a disciplined martial artist; Chun-Li, an agile Chinese warrior; and Zangief, a powerful Russian wrestler.

The game's control scheme consists of an eight-direction joystick and six buttons, allowing for three punch strengths and three kick strengths. Players can perform basic attacks, block, and execute special moves through specific joystick and button combinations. Signature moves like Ryu's Hadouken and Chun-Li's Spinning Bird Kick added depth and excitement to matches.

One of the most notable innovations was the inclusion of "combos," where players could chain multiple attacks together. Although initially unintended, this mechanic became a cornerstone of fighting game design.

Matches are played in a best-of-three format, with players progressing through a series of opponents before facing four non-playable bosses, including the final adversary, M. Bison.

Street Fighter II revolutionized the fighting game genre through its deep mechanics, memorable characters, and competitive focus. Unlike earlier titles that featured limited rosters or repetitive gameplay, *Street Fighter II* offered distinct fighters with their own moves and strategies, encouraging mastery and experimentation.

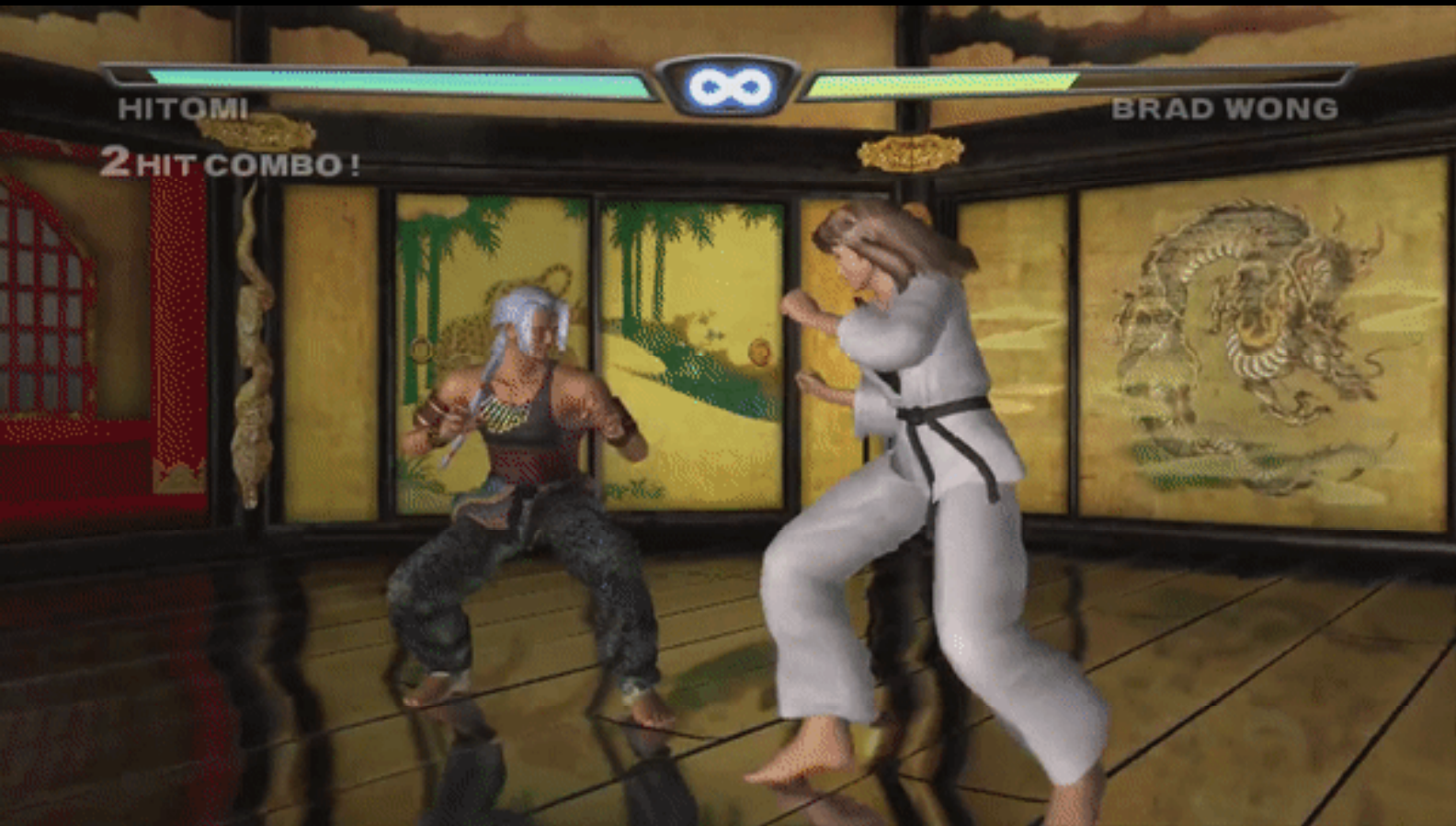
The game introduced a two-player competitive mode that became the centerpiece of its appeal. Arcade-goers could challenge each other, fostering a community of players and popularizing tournaments. This emphasis on player-versus-player combat transformed fighting games from solitary experiences into social phenomena.

The game's visual and audio design also set it apart. Its vibrant, detailed graphics and dynamic sound effects brought characters and stages to life, while a memorable soundtrack added to its appeal.

Street Fighter II was a massive commercial success, spawning numerous iterations, including *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* and *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*. It reinvigorated arcades worldwide and laid the groundwork for esports by establishing the competitive fighting game scene.

1991

DEAD OR ALIVE 3



HITOMI

2 HIT COMBO!



BRAD WONG

Dead or Alive 3

Dead or Alive 3, released as an exclusive launch title for the Xbox in 2001, was a major step forward for Tecmo's DOA series. Building on the foundation laid by its predecessors, DOA 3 refined the series' signature fast-paced combat, dynamic counters, and environmental interactions while leveraging the power of next-generation hardware to deliver stunning visuals and cinematic presentation.

The core combat system of Dead or Alive 3 retains the series' hallmark Triangle System, where strikes beat throws, throws beat holds, and holds beat strikes. This rock-paper-scissors mechanic adds a layer of mind games to every match, making prediction and reaction just as important as execution. The game also emphasizes counter holds, allowing players to reverse an opponent's attack with precise timing, rewarding defensive play and tactical thinking.

One of DOA 3's standout features is its use of multi-tiered stages. Players can knock opponents through walls, off cliffs, and into new areas of the stage, creating dynamic, cinematic moments that add excitement and unpredictability to battles. Stages are filled with hazards, like falling rocks or electric fences, which can be used to gain an advantage or trap opponents.

Compared to other fighting games of the era, DOA 3 distinguished itself with its focus on fluid, realistic animation and accessible gameplay. While games like Tekken leaned toward technical depth and slower pacing, DOA 3 prioritized speed, counters, and spectacle, making it approachable for newcomers while maintaining depth for experienced players.

The game also introduced new characters, such as Hitomi and Christie, expanding the roster to 16 fighters. Each character had their own unique fighting style, from martial arts to assassin techniques, adding variety to the combat experience.

Visually, DOA 3 was a showcase for the Xbox's graphical capabilities, featuring detailed character models, realistic lighting, and beautifully rendered stages. It was one of the best-looking games of its time, setting a new benchmark for the genre.

Dead or Alive 3 was both a critical and commercial success, helping to establish the Xbox as a viable platform for fighting games. Its blend of high-speed gameplay, interactive stages, and cinematic presentation solidified Dead or Alive as a major fighting game franchise, competing alongside Tekken and Virtua Fighter.

The game's innovations in environmental interaction and counter-based combat continue to influence 3D fighting games today, making DOA 3 a key chapter in the evolution of the genre.

2001

MULTI VERSUS



MultiVersus

Released in 2022 by Player First Games and published by Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment, MultiVersus is a free-to-play platform fighting game that brings together characters from various Warner Bros. franchises into a chaotic crossover brawler. Taking inspiration from the Super Smash Bros. series, MultiVersus differentiates itself with its focus on team-based gameplay, unique character abilities, and live-service model that keeps the game evolving over time.

With its diverse roster including characters from DC Comics, Looney Tunes, Scooby-Doo, and more, MultiVersus appeals to both casual players and competitive fighting game fans. However, its 2v2 team-focused gameplay makes it distinct from traditional 1v1 fighting games and even from other platform fighters.

The core gameplay of MultiVersus revolves around 2v2 matches, emphasizing cooperation and synergy between teammates. Unlike most fighting games, where matches are typically 1v1, MultiVersus is designed with team dynamics in mind, encouraging players to coordinate their attacks, support their allies, and use their abilities strategically to gain an edge.

Each character in MultiVersus fits into a specific role. This role-based system adds a layer of strategy and variety to matches, as players must balance offensive and defensive playstyles while working together to achieve victory.

MultiVersus introduces a perk system that allows players to customize their characters' abilities before a match. Perks can enhance attacks, increase defense, or boost team synergy, creating different playstyles for each character.

The game also features special mechanics for certain characters, such as Tom & Jerry, who fight as a duo, and Bugs Bunny, who can create temporary safe zones and warp tunnels.

Unlike most traditional fighting games, MultiVersus follows a live-service model, with regular updates, new characters, stages, and cosmetics introduced through seasons. This approach ensures the game remains fresh and engaging, with constant updates to balance the meta and address community feedback.

The free-to-play structure makes the game accessible, though it includes microtransactions for cosmetics and premium content.

MultiVersus stands out in the platform fighter genre by prioritizing team play and character customization. Its focus on cooperation, varied roster, and live-service updates make it a fresh take on the genre, appealing to both casual players looking for a fun crossover experience and competitive players seeking depth and strategy in a team-based format.

2022

Honorable Mentions

Fighting games have a rich history filled with groundbreaking innovations, iconic characters, and competitive communities. While this book highlights one game per year to illustrate the evolution of the genre, it would be remiss not to acknowledge other titles that made significant contributions along the way. The "Honorable Mentions" chapter is dedicated to those games that, despite not being the primary focus of their respective years, have left an indelible mark on fighting game culture.

The selection process for the main entries was challenging, as many years witnessed multiple influential releases. Some games introduced new mechanics that became staples of the genre, while others refined existing ideas to perfection. In some cases, a game's cultural impact or role in shaping the competitive scene warranted inclusion. However, no single list can fully encapsulate the depth and variety of fighting games from 1984 to 2024.

The games featured in this chapter include titles that pushed the boundaries of technology, storytelling, and gameplay design. They introduced innovations that influenced future generations of fighting games and, in many cases, still hold up as classics today. These honorable mentions celebrate the diversity of the genre, from arcade hits that defined a decade to hidden gems that gained a dedicated following.

Each of these games contributed to the vibrant tapestry of fighting game history. They represent the creativity, risk-taking, and passion that have driven developers to create experiences that resonate with players across the world. Whether they set the stage for future milestones or carved out unique niches of their own, these titles deserve recognition for their role in shaping the legacy of fighting games.

Consider this chapter a companion piece to the main timeline—a place where unsung heroes and cult favorites get their time in the spotlight. It is a tribute to the depth of the genre, a reminder that for every celebrated classic, there are countless others waiting to be rediscovered and appreciated anew. These honorable mentions serve as a testament to the enduring appeal and ongoing evolution of fighting games.

URBAN CHAMPION



STAMINA

193

TIME

86

ROUND=01

COM=3

YOU=3

Urban Champion

Released in 1984 for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), *Urban Champion* is Nintendo's earliest entry into the fighting game genre. While simplistic compared to modern fighters, the game introduced core concepts like blocking, stamina management, and environmental hazards, making it an important historical stepping stone. Interestingly, its core objective—to push opponents off-screen—bears a notable resemblance to the ring-out mechanics seen in the *Super Smash Bros.* series, which Nintendo would launch over a decade later.

In *Urban Champion*, players control a generic street fighter in a side-scrolling urban setting. The objective is to push the opponent completely off-screen and into an open manhole to win the match. Unlike traditional fighting games, where rounds are decided by depleting an opponent's health bar, *Urban Champion* focuses on positioning and stage control, rewarding players who can force their opponent backward through the environment.

The focus on forcing the opponent out of bounds—rather than simply draining their health—makes *Urban Champion* stand out as a precursor to Nintendo's future approach in *Super Smash Bros.*. In both games, players win by controlling the space and sending opponents flying off-screen, a key difference from traditional 1-vs-1 fighters like *Street Fighter*.

Urban Champion also features environmental hazards, adding unpredictability to matches. These elements give the game a playful, chaotic feel, a tone that Nintendo would later refine in the *Smash Bros.* series.

Though *Urban Champion* wasn't a commercial hit, it holds a unique place in Nintendo's history as its first fighting game and one of the earliest console-exclusive fighting titles. Its focus on pushing opponents off-screen and environmental interactions set it apart from its peers in the genre. While it lacks the depth of later fighters, its push-based win condition can be seen as an early inspiration for the knock-out mechanics in *Super Smash Bros.*, making it an interesting precursor to one of Nintendo's most beloved franchises.

Urban Champion is a curious relic from Nintendo's early years, notable for its unique win condition and interactive stages. Though overshadowed by more advanced fighters that came later, its goal of pushing opponents out of the stage feels like a direct ancestor of *Super Smash Bros.*' platform-fighting gameplay. Despite its simplicity, it marks Nintendo's first experiment with competitive fighting, paving the way for future innovations in the genre.

1984

SWAMPY

BY DELPHINE SOFTWARE



0 P1 **FURY**

087³⁰ KO

0 P2



Shaq Fu

Released in 1994 for the Sega Genesis and Super Nintendo, Shaq Fu is one of the most infamous fighting games of all time, remembered more for its bizarre concept and critical backlash than for its gameplay. Developed by Delphine Software International and published by Electronic Arts, the game starred NBA superstar Shaquille O'Neal in a martial arts adventure that took him from the basketball court to a fantasy realm filled with strange enemies. Despite its unique premise and extensive marketing campaign, Shaq Fu is widely regarded as one of the worst games in the fighting genre, failing to deliver on both gameplay quality and player expectations.

The game's story centers on Shaquille O'Neal visiting a dojo in Tokyo on the way to a charity basketball game. There, he's mysteriously transported to The Second World, a fantasy dimension where he must rescue a young boy named Nezu from an evil sorcerer named Sett Ra. The premise was ridiculous even by 1990s standards, but it fit the era's trend of celebrity-driven games.

The roster of fighters included a mix of bizarre characters, like the mummified sorcerer Sett Ra, Voodoo, a priestess, and Beast, a humanoid creature, alongside Shaq himself. Despite the colorful cast, none of the characters stood out in terms of personality or gameplay.

The gameplay in Shaq Fu followed traditional fighting game mechanics, but the execution was severely lacking. The controls were clunky and unresponsive, making basic actions feel slow and frustrating. The game had no combos or special moves that felt satisfying to pull off, and many of the characters had identical move sets, resulting in repetitive and uninspired fights.

The hit detection was inconsistent, making it difficult to land attacks, and the jumping mechanics felt awkward and floaty. The game also suffered from imbalanced difficulty, with some fights feeling too easy while others were unfairly difficult.

Shaq Fu was panned by critics upon release, with complaints about poor gameplay, odd design choices, and lack of depth. It has since become a cult favorite for its notoriety, frequently appearing on lists of the worst video games of all time.

In 2018, Shaquille O'Neal himself embraced the game's infamy by releasing Shaq Fu: A Legend Reborn, a tongue-in-cheek reboot that abandoned the fighting game format for beat-'em-up gameplay, aiming to redeem the franchise's reputation.

Despite its failure as a fighting game, Shaq Fu remains a pop culture curiosity, remembered more for its bizarre concept and historical notoriety than for any gameplay merits. It stands as a cautionary tale about celebrity tie-ins and the importance of gameplay over gimmicks in the fighting genre.

1994

スラップハッピーリズムバスターズ

SLAP HAPPY RHYTHM BUSTERS



Slap Happy Rhythm Busters

Released in 2000 for the Sony PlayStation, Slap Happy Rhythm Busters is a unique 2D fighting game with rhythm-based mechanics, developed by Polygon Magic and published by SCEI in Japan. The game combined traditional fighting game elements with hip-hop-inspired aesthetics and music-based special moves, making it stand out from other fighters of its time.

With its cel-shaded visuals, dynamic soundtrack, and fluid gameplay, Slap Happy Rhythm Busters feels like a mix between Guilty Gear and Bust A Groove, offering a distinct and stylish take on the genre.

At its core, the game plays like a traditional 2D fighter, featuring a four-button system for light and heavy attacks, along with a variety of special moves and combos. However, what sets it apart is the "Rhythm Buster" system, which allows players to perform powerful super moves by executing rhythm-based inputs.

When a player activates a Rhythm Buster, a timing-based mini-game appears, requiring them to press buttons in sync with the beat. Successfully completing the rhythm sequence results in high-damage attacks, rewarding both precision and musical timing. This blend of rhythm and fighting mechanics gives Slap Happy Rhythm Busters a unique feel, making timing and beat awareness just as important as traditional fighting strategies.

One of the game's most striking features is its cel-shaded art style, giving characters and environments a comic book-like appearance. This was an early use of cel-shading in a fighting game, predating Guilty Gear X and Jet Set Radio.

The game's urban, hip-hop-inspired theme is evident in its graffiti-covered stages, stylish character designs, and a soundtrack filled with funky beats and breakdance rhythms. The music is central to the gameplay, influencing not only the Rhythm Buster moves but also the game's overall pacing and energy.

The game features a colorful and eccentric roster of fighters, each with their own unique fighting style and rhythm-based super moves. The characters range from street brawlers and breakdancers to bizarre, over-the-top designs, adding to the game's playful and stylish personality.

While it doesn't feature licensed hip-hop artists or real-world influences, the overall presentation captures the energy and attitude of underground music and dance culture.

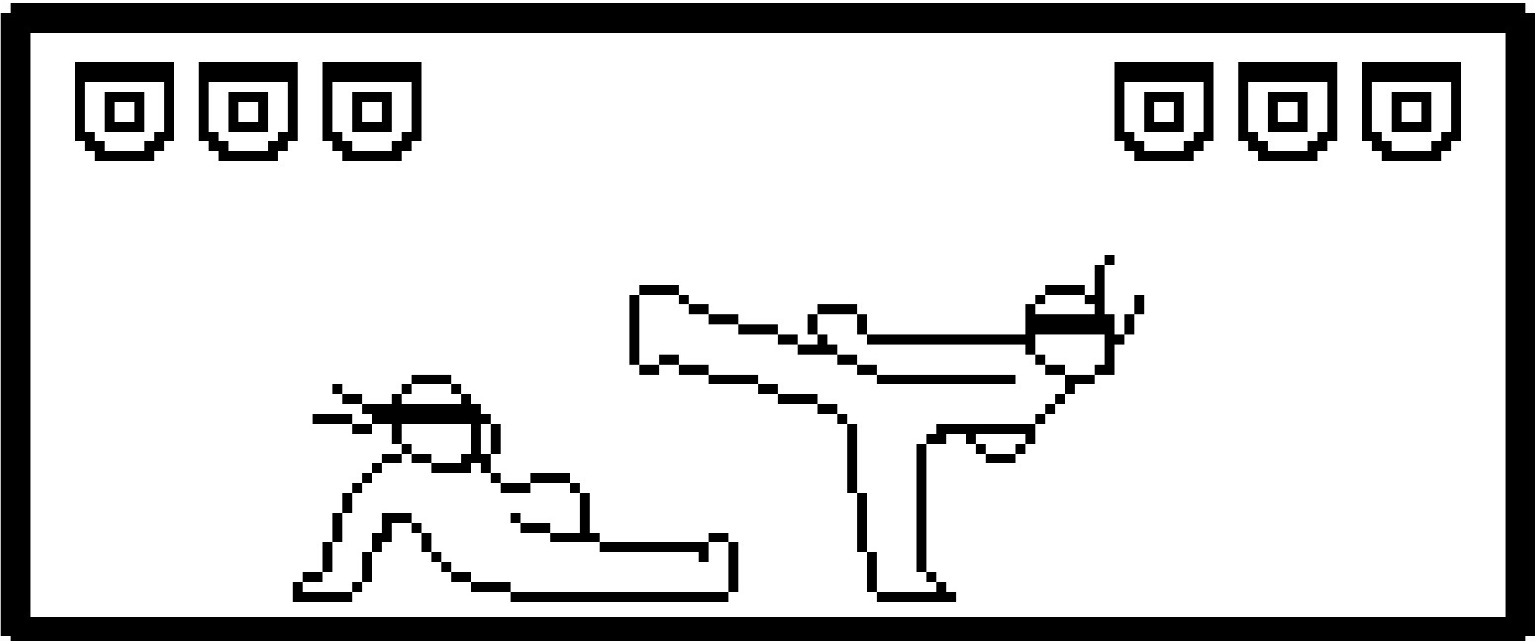
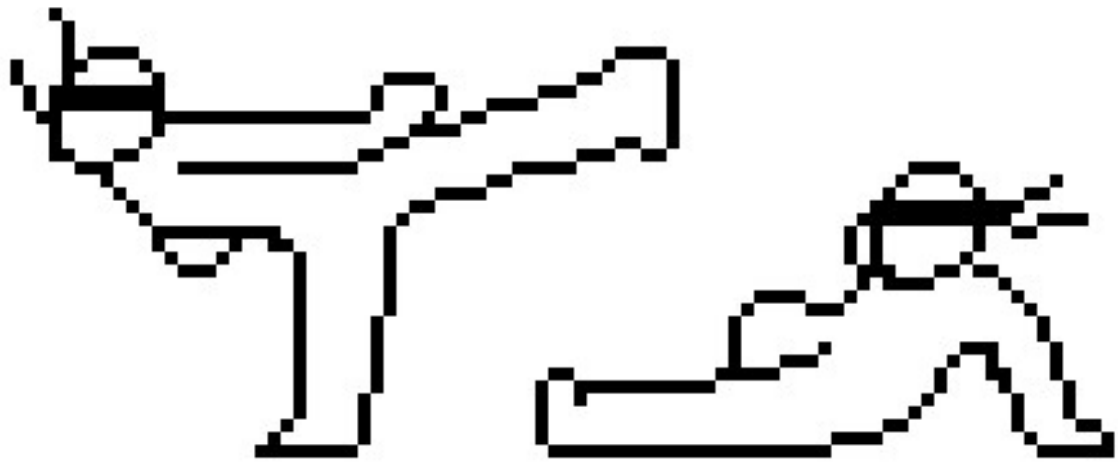
While it never spawned a sequel, its influence can be seen in later rhythm-based fighters like Persona 4: Dancing All Night (which mixed RPG and rhythm elements) and experimental indie games that combine music with traditional gameplay mechanics.

For those looking for a stylish, experimental fighter that breaks away from the usual Street Fighter and Tekken formulas, Slap Happy Rhythm Busters remains a hidden gem worth discovering.

1995

FOOTSIES

ROLLBACK EDITION



F □ □ ⊗

P1

FOOTSIES

ROLLBACK EDITION

000

000

□ □ □ F

P2

FOOTSIES

Released in 2019 by HiFight, FOOTSIES is a free-to-play indie fighting game that distills the genre to its most fundamental concept: spacing and neutral play. Designed to teach players about the "footsies" concept, the game removes complex inputs, combos, and flashy mechanics, instead focusing solely on positioning, timing, and mind games. FOOTSIES serves as both a teaching tool for beginners and a deceptively deep challenge for veterans looking to sharpen their fundamentals.

In fighting games, "footsies" refers to the neutral game—the phase of the match where players are trying to control space, bait out mistakes, and punish their opponent's whiffs. It's about controlling your character's position relative to your opponent, using movement, spacing, and pokes to gain an advantage without overcommitting to risky attacks.

Many fighting games, like Street Fighter and Tekken, rely heavily on footsies, but they often layer it beneath complex combos, special moves, and mechanics. FOOTSIES strips all of that away, letting players focus entirely on the art of spacing and punishing mistakes.

FOOTSIES is played with only two buttons: Attack Button & Forward Dash Button.

There are no special moves, super meters, or combo systems. The game revolves around outmaneuvering your opponent and landing a clean hit. One successful attack knocks the opponent down, and players can punish whiffed attacks by timing their own poke perfectly. Winning in FOOTSIES requires anticipating your opponent's movements and making split-second decisions to capitalize on mistakes.

Despite its minimalist approach, FOOTSIES has become a respected tool within the fighting game community. By focusing solely on neutral game fundamentals, the game has been used by veteran players, streamers, and content creators to teach beginners the importance of spacing, patience, and punishing mistakes—core skills that apply to any traditional fighter.

FOOTSIES also gained popularity for its free availability and low barrier to entry, making it an excellent resource for newcomers intimidated by more complex games like Street Fighter or Tekken.

It demonstrates that fighting games are ultimately about mind games and fundamentals, proving that complex combos and special moves aren't necessary for engaging, strategic gameplay. FOOTSIES is a unique, minimalist fighting game that distills the genre down to its core fundamentals: positioning, timing, and neutral play. By stripping away complex mechanics, the game highlights the essence of fighting game strategy, making it an excellent learning tool for beginners and a challenging test of fundamentals for veterans. It's a reminder that at the heart of every great fighting game lies the art of footsies—the battle for space, control, and psychological dominance.

2019

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