

Mortal Kombat

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Special to QMI Agency

The wizards at NetherRealm Studios reportedly did extensive research to determine what exactly “kombatants” hoped for in a next-generation *Mortal Kombat* game, and franchise fans overwhelmingly favoured a return to arcade fighter fundamentals. The result is a new *Mortal Kombat* with a refreshing old-school vibe.

Mano-a-mano 3D beat-em-ups such as *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe*, the franchise’s last major entry, have waned in popularity in recent years, not garnering nearly the attention as brawlers in the *Super Street Fighter IV* and *Marvel Vs. Capcom 3* vein, both of which restrict player movement to a 2D plane.

Working with 3D characters that move within a 2D space, *Mortal Kombat*’s developers were able to craft a top-tier, tournament-worthy, side-view arcade fighter, which retains the series’ best elements and

stands to compete in the recently re-invigorated genre.

How does it differ from its competitors? *Mortal Kombat* offers a striking level of photo-realism — real actors were motion-captured, in contrast to *Street Fighter* and *Marvel Vs. Capcom* characters who are always hand-drawn in a comic book style, and as a result *Mortal Kombat*’s over-the-top characters — thunder gods, cocky movie stars, bikini-clad assassins — are perhaps quirkier and better personified.

This *Mortal Kombat* also features gruesome X-ray attacks that provide *CSI*-style, extreme close up jump-cuts of your opponents’ bones being broken and internal organs getting rattled to mush.

A particularly engaging mode called king of the hill — winner stays, everyone watches as they wait their turn — sets *Mortal Kombat*’s online offerings apart from the crowd. Spectators are represented on the periphery of the screen in



avatar form. This little extra enhances the player’s sense of battling in a group. And the game’s story mode is a nice surprise, built around a well-presented (and deliberately ridiculous) narrative straight from a martial arts flick.

Most significantly, though, *Mortal Kombat* games have always featured repertoire of semi-secret special moves, which are now revealed in-game to players over time, but were originally disseminated via word-of-mouth by excited gamers in

arcades and corner stores all over North America.

These special moves, *Mortal Kombat*’s notorious “Fatality” sequences, involve the winner of each match approaching the staggering loser, and keying in a specific, memorized sequence of joystick and button inputs, which, if entered correctly, punctuates the match with an act of violence so horrific, onlookers can only cringe, in a sort of joyful disgust.

For instance, the ice ninja Sub-Zero’s original fatality

sequence entailed ripping his opponents head from his body, which produces distinct wet, crunching sounds, and then proudly holding up the head, with a piece of spinal cord dangling beneath it.

Fatality sequences and the words “Finish Him!” splashed across the screen at the end of each match are the series’ trademark elements. Learning Fatalities and witnessing the reactions they garner, has always been a big part of the *Mortal Kombat* buzz.

MORTAL KOMBAT



RATING: MATURE

**NETHERREALM STUDIOS/
WARNER BROS.**
Xbox 360, PS3

This latest entry succeeds in carrying the franchise and the genre forward while embracing its past.

BottomLine

Returning to old-school sensibilities, *Mortal Kombat* feels more relevant than previous franchise entries. X-ray attacks will make you wince. Fatalities are wetter, crunchier, and more disturbingly fantastic than ever.

A history of fatalities: Mortal Kombat through the years

STEVE TILLEY
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Perhaps more than any other video game franchise, *Mortal Kombat* is a mainstream entertainment property, and one that’s been yelling “get over here!” from various screens for two decades now. A sampling:



ARCADE GAMES

Born as a coin-op game in 1992, *Mortal Kombat* was renowned for its lifelike (at the time) graphics and gory “Fatality” finishing moves. Arcade sequels included *Mortal Kombat II*, *Mortal Kombat 3*, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat* and *Mortal Kombat Trilogy*.



HOME VIDEO GAMES

Virtually every video game system released from 1993 onwards has had at least one *Mortal Kombat* game, from the defanged SNES version (with grey sweat instead of red blood) to the underrated Xbox adventure game *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks*.



TV SHOWS

The animated *Mortal Kombat: Defenders of the Realm* ran for one season in 1996, and the fondly remembered, live-action *Mortal Kombat: Konquest* also lasted one season, ending with a cliffhanger in 1999. Finish it!



MOVIES

The wonderful if cheesy *Mortal Kombat* live-action movie was a hit with fans in 1995, but its 1997 sequel, *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, was a dud. Somehow the visual effects were far worse in the second movie. How does that happen?



ONLINE

The gritty, shot-in-Vancouver *Mortal Kombat: Legacy* prequel series is partway through a 10-episode run on YouTube, starring Michael Jai White (*Spawn*) and Jeri Ryan (*Star Trek: Voyager*) and chronicling the events leading up to the first game.