

MORTAL KOMBAT VS. DC UNIVERSE

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Often when the discussion of epic franchises and/or characters – be they from films or video games or books or comics – a phrase I’m sure many of you notice that gets tossed out quite a bit is something to the effect of, “When two worlds collide…” etc. I’ll be honest with you all, I’m not big on clichés, and most of the time I will admit my bias stems from the very fact that they are clichés and thus, carry an air of intellectual laziness and many times, even outright unimportance. However, as the saying goes, “every dog has his day” and I believe some situations just scream out for a nice tidy summary that more times than not shows up in the form of…you guessed it…a cliché.

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe is just such a game. Talk about “when two worlds collide” this could be the most perfect fit for that tired old phrase since it was first uttered in public.

It also just so happens that the two worlds in question, those of the Mortal Kombat video game (and film and comic book) series and the DC Comics universe, are two worlds that I (as well as the vast majority of you out there, my loyal readers) grew up being nearly totally obsessed with and immersed in. Admittedly I was always a little turned off by the characters of the DC Comics universe because, for the most part, they had little to no complexity as characters. They always did good things and always chose right over wrong no matter the circumstance. There was none of that “moral equivalency” or “cultural relativism” or any of those other sniveling spineless excuses used by the ever-present crop of apologists (mostly in the news media and university system…you know who I’m talking about) for those who do evil. But then again, there was also never any juicy internal conflict that we as readers, watchers, and listeners have grown so accustomed to ever since the birth and subsequent popularity boom of the “anti-hero.”

The mythology surrounding the Mortal Kombat universe, on the other hand, is more or less dominated by evil and conflict. Even the purest and noblest of “good guy” type heroes (like Liu Kang and Kung Lao) had very dark deeds in their pasts.

These opposing thematic elements were definitely not missed by Ed Boon and the rest of the Mortal Kombat design team over at Midway. For example, one of the quintessential features of any and all Mortal Kombat games, (of course I could only be talking about) the Fatality, is at its very core, a coup-de-gras style final death-blow performed usually with much fanfare and with an equal amount of carnage just for carnage’s sake. Call it what you will, but the Fatality instantly propelled Mortal Kombat as the standout franchise in what seemed like the endless sea of Street Fighter II one-on-one fighter knock-offs. It was (and is) as inextricably linked with the Mortal Kombat series as stomping on turtle shells is to the Super Mario Bros. series.

So by now a few obvious questions I’m sure have entered your mind and I plan to address them so stick with me. The most glaring I think would be how would DC characters like Superman and The Flash, who are famous for NOT killing even the most dastardly of opponents, perform their Fatality? Well, the short answer is…they don’t. The design team has introduced something new just for the DC “good guys” to replace the Fatality and it is called the Brutality. I had the opportunity to see some early working demo footage from the game and among the sequences shown was one of these Brutalities performed by none other than the man of steel himself, Superman. I will refrain from spoiling it for all of you by not going into detail about the move itself, but its safe to say that even though the opponent is not technically killed, he is mercilessly beaten and the effect is more or less the same. Think of it as sort of a “Diet Fatality.” There is still plenty of blood, plenty of horrific sound effects and visuals but its just not quite as visceral (or as violent) as a proper Fatality. The good news on this front is that the characters taken from the Mortal Kombat universe (among the ones I saw were old favorites such as Scorpion, Sub-Zero, Shang Tsung, and Sonya) do in fact have proper fatalities with all the decapitations, incinerations, disembowelments, and all around tearing limb-from-limb that one would expect from any installment in the Mortal Kombat series. Additionally, the DC villains (such as Catwoman and the Joker to name a few) also will have the ability to perform proper fatalities.

Another question I’m sure at least a few of you out there are asking (I know I did) is “wait…isn’t Superman like unbeatable? Isn’t that the whole point of Superman?” And you would be correct in this assumption. However, the development team has come up with a rather plausible way to bring Superman down to the same level playing field as the rest of the characters. And no, they didn’t just give every other character in the game access to Kryptonite. It turns out that (as is explained in the 1st player story mode of the game) that along with Kryptonite, Superman is nearly powerless against magic. This fits in extremely well considering the heavy emphasis on sorcery present in nearly all aspects of the Mortal Kombat universe.

Also brand new for this latest installment is the introduction of multi-tiered arenas. For example, in the old days knocking an opponent out of the ring resulted in that round being over but now we have the ability to crash through walls and over ledges right along with our opponent. The coolest part is that you can actually engage in combat while falling from one tier of the arena to the next and the damage inflicted during these mid-air melees will register in full once the two combatants have hit the ground. One must really see this in action to get a full understanding of just how awesome it is.

All-in-all…I am very excited for this one. Not just because of the nostalgia factor of having characters from two of my favorite fictional worlds square off…but because this game really does look stunning and offers some fresh new gameplay elements into a genre where, let’s face it, originality isn’t exactly in abundance. Look for it on the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 this November 16th and as always…keep it right here for news, clues, and reviews. I WILL SEE YOU ON THE BATTLEFIELD!