

An excerpt from "Steel Sharpens Steel" by Grant Patterson

My peers were gathered around a singular arcade machine, and the money they had been handed to buy drinks and pizza throughout the night wasn't going towards fulfilling theirs (or anyone else's) basic human needs. It was going towards establishing dominance. Hierarchy. A pecking order based in sheer meritocracy, where skill was the only thing that mattered and your time possessing the crown could be measured in both minutes and quarters.

The kids on the skating rink had found an activity, whereas the kids in front of the arcade machine had found a religion. Something to believe in. Something worth fighting for.

The game in that machine was *Street Fighter II*.

While it remains a fun footnote and cultural touchstone in the lives of so many, I've found that this single game somehow managed to bend my entire existential timeline on this planet around this precise moment in human history. And it was such an unassuming thing, too; two sticks, six buttons next to either stick, a coin slot on either side. Eight characters with different secret motion-based moves, and standard strike tools mapped to each button which would change depending on the context of standing, crouching, jumping, or distance. Hold back to block, forward and medium punch at close range to throw.

The words 'I got next' accompanied the slapping of a small metallic disc upon the plexiglas protecting the monitor. The sticks were circular gated, making some moves require a lot of precise execution to properly perform. There was a discipline that emerged in that corner, and those that learned and practiced and dedicated themselves to their art wouldn't just do well at the game, they'd do well against other people that claimed to be good at the game. This wasn't bragging rights on a leaderboard, this was death chess at a thousand micromoves per minute.

This was combat. This was your reputation.

Written by Grant Patterson. This excerpt from the book *Digital Archaeology: Retrogaming Recollections* is © 2024 SCAR Productions. Please do not distribute without the author's permission. Direct all inquiries to Rob Strangman at [gadiusone \[at\] yahoo \[dot\] com](mailto:gadiusone[at]yahoo[dot]com).