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BLACK CHARACTERS IN THE STREET FIGHTER SERIES

Capcom's first Street Fighter game, which was created by Takashi Nishiyama and Hiroshi Matsumoto made it's way into arcades from around late August of 1987. It would be the first game in which Capcom's golden boy Ryu would make his debut in, but he wouldn't be the only Street fighter.

 "The series's first black character was an African American heavyweight boxer."

The story was centred around a martial arts tournament featuring fighters from all over the world (five countries to be exact) and had 10 contenders in total, all of whom were non-playable. Each character had unique and authentic fighting styles but in typical fashion, the game's first black character was an African American heavyweight boxer.

Five years later Capcom would release their sequel to the original SF game, Street Fighter II, which one again featured characters from around the globe. The original Japanese version saw the debut of a black American boxer boss character.

Balrog in Street Fighter II: The World Warrior

The character shared some similarities to actual boxer Mike Tyson, so in order to dodge an impending lawsuit from Tyson, Capcom changed the character's name. Formerly Mike Bison, he was renamed and now referred to as Balrog.

Balrog wouldn't be the last black character to make an appearance in the series, since his inclusion there's been several others, but Capcom hasn't been one to stray away from racial stereotypes,This has resulted in controversial characters whose designs and personalities are often hit and miss.

These particular Street Fighter characters bought that extra ounce of oomf and charisma that the series would've been missing had they never existed, let's take a closer look.

Mike (Street Fighter 1)

Mike's first and only appearance was in Street Fighter 1 as a former heavyweight boxer who left the profession after unintentionally killing one of his opponents. Standing at 6'5 he's the series first black character.

Mike enters the first World Warrior due to being low on funds. Unfortunately he was eliminated from the competition after Ryu defeated him and hasn't been seen since. It's believed that Mike was possibly the black fighter who was knocked down in that offensive Street Fighter II intro.
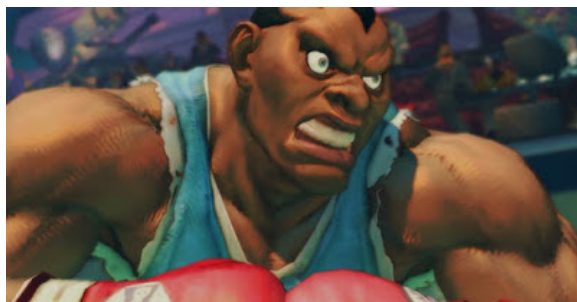
At one point it also believed that Mike and Balrog was the same person. However Capcom addressed this rumour and stated that this isn't true, mostly likely because of lawsuit woes. The Street Fighter World Warrior Encyclopedia (hardcover version) also says they're separate characters.

Balrog (Street Fighter 2)

First appearing in Street Fighter 2 as a boss, Balrog is a tall, well-stacked and heavily chiselled American American boxer. He is often portrayed as a self-centred, hotheaded, proud yet sadistic individual.

He's a antipathetical pugilist who is possessed by riches and a vicious, domineering mean streak. Balrog has deliberately cheated in his fights in and outside of the ring, whenever he wanted to. Escaping from a life of poverty, Balrog was once a prominent boxing champion and prime fighter.

Balrog's Appearance in Street Fighter IV

He was eventually prohibited to compete in the ring after permanently ending the career of one opponent, incidentally killing another and also for using illegal tactics (specially his head butt). So the former champion joined the criminals of Shadaloo and gradually climbed the ranks, and eventually got promoted to M. Bison's primary enforcer.

"Balrog was once a prominent boxing champion and prime fighter."

Balrog's reason for joining the Shadoloo criminal organization have always been due to wanting his fair share of wealth, celebrity status and glory so he can ride off into the sunset without a care in the world. As such, Although Balrog would swindle, rob or even commit murder, he is not heinous so much as he is greedy, and has little interest in Shadaloo dealings.

Balrog vs Ryu in Street Fighter II

Balrog also loves women, with the only exception being Chun Li. Besides her he greatly dislikes Vega (his infrequent partner who also works for the Shadaloo) due to Vega's "metrosexual" portrayal and tends to make fun of him at times. Balrog is one of the most stereotypical characters in the game,

Dee Jay (Street Fighter 2)

The series only Jamaican fighter Deejay first appeared in Super Street Fighter II as one of the four new playable characters. He was one of the only characters to be designed by Capcom USA. His creator James Goddard modelled him after martial arts movie star and Tae Bo creator, Billy Blanks.

Despite his character design being inspired by real life kickboxer Billy Banks, he hails from Jamaica, but without any character background, you probably would have thought otherwise due to the voice actors which Capcom over the years have hired to portray him. His name is also a play on the word DJ (disc jockey).

Dee Jay is usually a kind hearted, lively and carefree individual who enjoys fighting, dancing and producing beats. His attitude is very clear in most of his in-game poses, art and photos where he is almost never seen without a huge grin and thumbs-up hand gesture.

Dee Jay is seldom seen without his signature grin; such uncommon moments are displayed in his Street Fighter II loser portraits and losing by time over in Street Fighter Alpha 3. He always tends to see the positive side of everything in life, constantly smiling and rarely letting things get to him.

Known as "The Southern Comet", Dee Jay is a happy-go-lucky kickboxer who scraps to rhymatic beats. rapidly climbing to the top of his division, he flies around the globe seeking new challengers. He is also one of the most rhymatic characters in video games.

Elena (Street Fighter 3)

First appearing in Street Fighter III: New generation, Elena is the first ever black female to appear in the Street Fighter series. She's a African princess who comes from Kenya and her tribe has a historical tradition of fighting. Her father, leader of their village, is a conventional healer who has qualifications oversees for a doctor's degree in medicine.

Elena wants to explore the world, whilst meeting new people on her journey. She studied as an exchange pupil in Asia, where she become good friends with a girl called Narumi. She later left Japan and continued her education in Europe.

Elena's got a thick physique

Elena's a young female with a strong, clear spirit and a beaming "tomboyish" persona. She's usually seen with smiling or giggling. While very lively and pure hearted, she's also highly intelligent, companionable and culture-accommodative, always willing to learn more

about the world, which is one of the reasons she travels.

Elena is unusually lanky for a woman, has dark skin, straight cropped silvery-white hairstyle and blueish eyes, She fights her opponents barefoot and has long, powerful legs. Besides her complexion, Elena lacks African features and kinky hair compared to real women in Kenya, Her name also has no culture ties to Africa and she has an unusual accent.
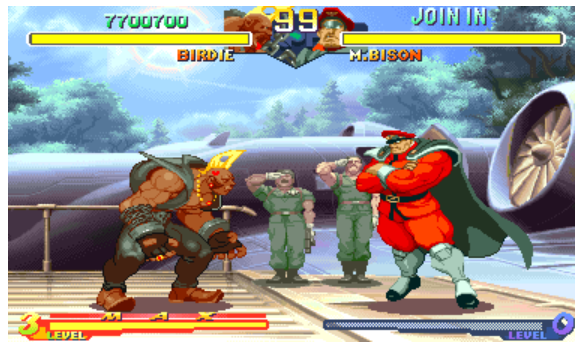

Some fans believe she was modelled after Storm Ororo, a Marvel comic book superhero who she shares several similarities with. Both are dark skin, have silverish-white hair and are African princesses from Kenya. Elena has one of the most revealing outfits for a playable female character in the entire Street Fighter series.

Birdie (Street Fighter Alpha)

Birdie first appearance was in the original Street Fighter game as one of the ten non-playable characters who challenged Ryu, he would later reappear in the Street Fighter Alpha series as a playable character.

Birdie's character design has been altered with each of the Street Fighter games that he has made an appearance in. Although he's usually portrayed as a very tall, late 1970s Cockney, British punk rocker. In Street Fighter 1 he is depicted as a gangling, athletic white/light-skinned man with a blonde mohawk.
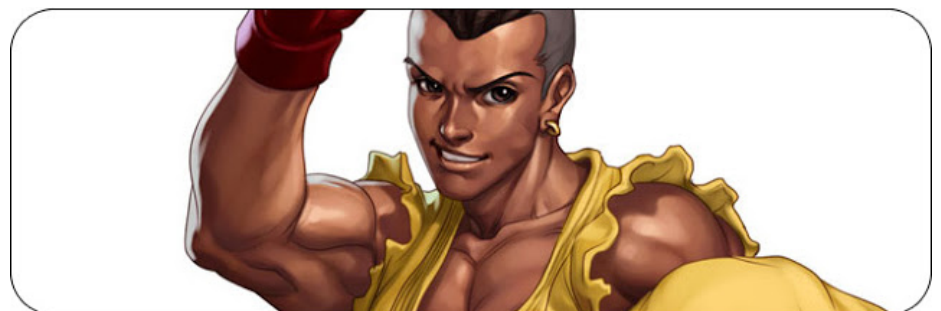
However in the Alpha series his look is drastically changed. He is now a large, dark-skinned black British man with bleached blonde hair, a broad pointy brown moustache that extends to the sides of his head to become sideburns and black features. Birdie's reason for his change of appearance is that he was ill, which made his skin turn pale.

In Street Fighter V, Birdie's stomach has become fat. He's overweight and in addition looks dirty and rumpled. This drastic change in his physique from Alpha is disappointing and makes Birdie lose much of his appeal.

Birdie is fierce, ill-natured and mostly unsympathetic to others around him. He also has a weird way of licking his chain connected to his arm. In Street Fighter 5, Birdie is bestowed as more of a laughable glutton who's obsessed with consumption, even during battle.

Sean Matsuda (Street Fighter III)

Sean first appeared in Street Fighter III, He is a dark-skinned Afro-Brazilian kid with kinky hair who wears a gi similar to Ryu and Ken's. He has a older sibling called Laura who appears in Street Fighter V. In Street Fighter 5 it appears that Sean has been whitewashed as seen in his sister's story.

Sean is overeager to prove himself, and dislikes being called weak. He frequently mentions Dan Hibiki, a character who isn't present in the Street Fighter 3 games, as a

prime example of powerlessness, and hence he detests being compared to.

Sean Matsuda and his older sibling Laura were brought up in Brazil, although their paternal granddad was Asian. A keen basketball player, his main interest is martial arts. Some time later, Sean witnessed seasoned World Warrior Ken Masters fighting in the U.S Martial Arts Tournament and swore to become his student.

It's believed that at one point Sean Matsuda was originally meant to be African-American rather than Brazilian but his nationality was changed when they added Ken to the SFIII series. His stage in New generations is in NYC (but not Alex's stage). He is a basketball player, a sport that is usually affiliated with Americans and he is dark-skinned with kinky hair.

It's implied that Elena was suppose to be the Brazilian character, Okamoto visited Brazil to study capoeria as he wanted to add a Brazilian capoeirista to the roster and Elena is a pretty common name in Brazil, whilst Sean's name is not.

Dudley (Street Fighter 3)

Dudley is a British boxer who first appeared in Street Fighter 3. He was born into an affluent family and his dad was a extremely well paid ex athlete who turned prosperous business man, adding to Dudley's already immense riches. Dudley is a well-built and dark-skinned British man.

He fights with a set of blue boxing gloves, which he never seen without. Wearing them when reading a paper, tending to his flowers, during teatime, driving and even grooming his moustache.

Dudley's persona is rather different during the Street Fighter III games, where he was snobby and prideful, this attitude was toned by Third Strike. In Street Fighter IV however, he lacks this patronizing behaviour and is well mannered. Due to the series timeline (with SFIV happening before SFIII), it's to be understood over the years Dudley became more snobbish and confrontational.

Dudley is said to based after real life boxer Chris Eubanks, a black British boxing champion of Jamaican descent who was famous in the 80s and early 90s. Eubanks trademark attire included a monocle and bowler har.

Pullum (Street Fighter EX)

Appearing only in the Street Fighter EX series, in the first game Pullum was pretty fair skinned so it was presumed while a poc she wasn't black. However in later games she has been depicted as a dark skinned female with somewhat plump lips,

She's the child of a rich Saudi Arabian man who seeks vengeance against the criminal organization Shadaloo due to their severe mistreatment of her grandfather. After attaining clues from a book entitled "Shadaloo" she vows to get revenge and employees a bodyguard called Darun Mister.
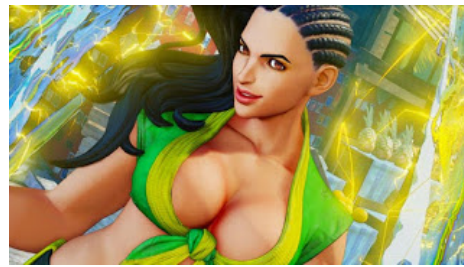
Pullum shares several similarities with both Dee Jay and Elena. All are dark skinned fighters who battle using dance moves. Both Deejay and Pullum also handle musical instruments (Deejay is seen with maraccas whilst Pullum has a tambourine.)

Laura (Street Fighter 5)

First appearing in Street Fighter 5, Laura is the third of the new characters to be unveiled by Capcom, as the older sibling of Sean Matsuda and third Brazilian character to be playable in the series after Blanka and Sean.

Despite being Sean's sister, Laura is extremely pale in comparison to Sean's depicted look in the Street Fighter III. She has brown eyes and long silky black hair,with the right side being worn loose whilst the other side is in cornrow braids.

Laura is a free spirited and lively young woman who relishes in experiencing thrills. Similar to Makoto, she wants to support her family's fighting art by promoting it worldwide. Laura also enjoys advising other characters and her character-specific vs quotes shows it's almost effortless to befriend her.

Laura has been trained by their granddad in the art of the family's Matsuda Jiu-Jitsu, when her younger brother Sean leaves home to became a student of Ken, Laura becomes heir of the art. Now inheritor of her Grandfather's fighting art, Laura seeks opponents to battle so she can promote her fighting style.

The character we see today in Street Fighter IV known as Rufus didn't always look that way, his original concept art was that of a slender and bald African American man called King Cobra. A character that to this people many people hope is revived and implemented into the series.

Created by Daigo Ikeno, King Cobra was originally meant to be the athletic counterpart to Ryu and Ken. His fighting style was supposed to be "breakung-fu", which integrated elements of Chinese martial arts with break dancing, which they perceived as a popular craze in USA at the time.

The character's design simply oozed with charisma and looked like a perfect yet fresh addition to the Street Fighter games. The series really didn't have a character like King Cobra and had Capcom kept the original design they would have broken down a stereotypical barrier and created a unique character whose look really stood out, only Capcom did a 360 and the result was Rufus.

King Cobra or a character similar in appearance to him would be a perfect addition to the Street Fighter series but unfortunately there hasn't ever been one. Capcom came close to creating an almost perfect character but failed in the delivering the goods. Nonetheless it's never too late and King Cobra would make a great edition to the series.

Black Street Fighter Characters

17 COMMENTS:

KYZON TŌSEN 27/02/2014, 00:59

It seems as though Japanese development is cursed to always have some sort of stereotype on display when a character of African decent is made. King Cobra would have been a fresh, welcome addition.

Reply

ELCEN 27/02/2014, 01:03

Deejay is the coolest black character in the sf series, I'm digging his vibes mon. Balrog needs a chill pill.

Reply

VANDADUST 27/02/2014, 01:05

Dudley was huge improvement over Balrog in terms of stereotypes and the King Cobra guy would have been amazing, why Daigo Ikeno.. WHY?

Reply

SORAPAPU 27/02/2014, 01:08

I can't believe King Cobra became Rufus, what was Capcom thinking.. ?? and Mike could be Balrog's dad you never know..

Reply

SCARLET JACOBS 27/02/2014, 01:23

My biggest complaint is how in the world did Elena not make the cut in SSF4 nor the Arcade edition, yet African stages are present in this game; fans even wanted her. She is such a unique character, she brings diversity to the SF series and is the only character in the SF universe to have the fighting style capoeira; it's like the missing art in SF.

Reply

SION STOMPEM 27/02/2014, 01:32

Why didn't King Cobra make it? Are you saying instead of Cobra we got Rufus?! That's embarrassing. Balrog's sort of like Mike Tyson in his prime minor the Shadaloo dodgy business.

Reply

JES BICKSON 27/02/2014, 02:10

I really wish Capcom didn't just discard King Cobra.

Reply

SEAN JOHANSONN 16/02/2016, 15:36

Who's bright idea at Capcom was it to make Birdie a fatass in Street Fighter

I really hope Elena comes back in Street Fighter 5, it would also be cool if they gave her kinky hair as an alt skin.

Reply

XSHINAKUMA 16/02/2016, 23:35

I agree, King Cobra or a black shoto character like him would do wonders for Street Fighter. The Arabs have their own character Rashid who is pretty cool so why can't black players have a character that's relatable to them?

Reply

JALEN 04/06/2016, 17:20

I'm black and I can tell you right now that there's no way that Dudley is black, he's white, the guy looks nothing like a black person. Pullum Purna definitely isn't black, she's a Saudi. Laura is half Japanese, as her father is Yuichiro

Matsuda. From her appearance, her being half Brazilian must mean that her mother is a white Brazilian. So she is also not black. This is most likely why they whitewashed Sean in SFV, because from their backstory, and his sister, it would not make sense for him to be an Afro-Brazilian while his sister is a white Brazilian. Sean was one of the best black characters in the game, but now he ain't black anymore. They need to bring back King Cobra, but give him a decent name.

Reply

Replies

SELENA ERVIN 13/06/2016, 00:32

There is no way Laura is white because her father is Asian.

Reply

SELENA ERVIN 13/06/2016, 00:31

Yeah Laura is somewhat black..Lots of Brazilians are black. There no way she's white because her father is Asian.

Reply

STEVEN THOMPSON 14/08/2016, 20:53

Where is akuma?

Reply

STEVEN THOMPSON 14/08/2016, 20:54

No akuma???

Reply

PHILLYPUGILIST 04/09/2016, 14:16

Pullum isn't black she's Middle Eastern/Arabian

Reply

look black but her in game image she doesn't look black. Seems like they've tried to whitewash Sean but decided to make him black again i think(from what I've read on your site)

Reply

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