

Rolling Stone

Q&A: Shaquille O'Neal Is Sorry for Shaq-Fu, Raising Money for Sequel

The former NBA star talks Shaq-Fu: A Legend Reborn, retiring from rap and, yes, 'Steel 2'

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MARCH 12, 2014

Few video games have been as culturally divisive as Shaq Fu, the 1994 console game starring the still-in-his-prime NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal. Some people hate it — as one online critic declared, "To say that Shaq Fu is bad is like calling genocide 'a little naughty'" — and some claim to love it, ostensibly for the same reason people claim to love *The Room*. It's the only video game in history to have both a website devoted to finding and [destroying all existing copies](#), and a [competing website](#) trying to save the game from extinction.

[Shaquille O'Neal's All-Star Playlist](#)

Its reputation for 16-bit awfulness may explain why O'Neal, 20 years later, is determined to make a sequel. Nobody wants a blemish like that on their permanent record, certainly not the Big Aristotle. But unlike George Lucas, who decided to rewrite history on his own dime, Shaq is looking for investors. The now-retired player has [launched a campaign](#) with crowdfunding platform Indiegogo, asking for \$450,000 from fans to help make Shaq Fu: A Legend Reborn a reality.

To their credit, Shaq and his partners seem to be in on the joke. Part of their pitch is admitting that the first Shaq Fu was kinda awful. (They're even selling T-shirts with the tagline: "Don't FU It Up!") And while some of the investment incentives are a little iffy — \$500 for Shaq to follow you on Instagram? \$15,000 for "Ballin' at Shaq's Shack"? — quite a few suggest that Shaq actually welcomes outside creative input. For \$500, you can contribute to the score, submitting your "beats, samples, song ideas and vocals to the game." You can have your head animated into the game for \$2,000 ("You can decide to either be a hero or a villain"), and for a whopping \$6,500, you can even contribute drawings.

It's an interesting strategy. Not only is Shaq getting crowdsourced investors (and all the free publicity that comes with it), but if the new Shaq Fu sucks as hard as it did back in 1994, this time it's at least a little your fault.

Shaq spoke to *Rolling Stone* about his future as a video game tycoon, *Steel 2* and why he may be more invincible than Superman.

Let's start with the most obvious question. Why?

Why make another Shaq Fu?

Indeed.

Mostly because of the technology. When I first did the game, we were sort of at the end of analog technology. Things have come so far since then. You know how you play video games now and they really consume you? One day, my son was in the room and he was playing one of those war games. I sat next to him and watched, and I was like, "Damn." The technology and the graphics are so advanced, they actually make it feel like you're in a war.

Is the Shaq Fu sequel about redemption? Are you righting the wrongs of history?

Well, I wouldn't call it redemption. It's about getting it right this time. I'm a guy who even though I'm in the now, I live in the future too.

A future that's about correcting the past?

I know people make fun of the first Shaq Fu. They're like, "Ha ha, it's cute, but it's not good enough." I think I know what they mean. It looks dated.

That's the only problem?

At the time, that technology was cool and advanced. But that was 20 years ago. Now, they've got technology that just blows me away. So when [Big Deez Productions] asked me what video game I wanted to do, with all this new technology that's coming out, I didn't think twice about it. I was like, "Let's do another Shaq Fu."

When was the last time you played the original Shaq Fu?

I haven't been able to. I have like 100 boxes of the game. My kids want to play it. And I want them to see it.

You want them to see it?

Yeah. But I can't find an old machine anywhere. What was that machine that played it? Sega?

Sega Genesis.

Yeah, that's it. Sega. And I can't find an old Sega nowhere.

Not even on eBay?

Nothing. It's not out there. I'd pay for it. I'd pay somebody for one of those machines.

How much? We may have some readers willing to make a deal with you.

Make me an offer.

Are you a gamer? Do you play video games?

I used to when I was younger. Let's put it this way: Sega Genesis Double Dribble was my favorite game. We used to have tournaments in college in the dorm. And then my father came down, and he said, "If you keep failing classes because you're always in here playing video games, I'm going to break your neck." That was the last time I was really into it. But every now and again, I'll play with my kids. I like Grand Theft Auto and Mortal Kombat. All the fighting games.

And when it came out, you played Shaq Fu?

Oh yeah. I was the best. And when the new one comes out, I will be a master at that too. I'll challenge anyone in America to a duel.

Are you being serious?

I will challenge anyone.

Can we make this official?

You know what? Once I become a master, I might put some money behind that. That's a good idea; I think I'm going to do that. The Shaq Fu Grand Tournament. You've inspired me. And the top five guys get to play me. The winner gets a monetary prize.

How much?

I'll give them a thousand dollars. Five guys in the finals, and if one of them beats me, I'll give them a thousand.

You're paying for this game, or attempting to pay for it, with a crowd-funding campaign. Investors are getting some generous creative perks.

Yeah, I want everybody involved. Even if they just come to the table with negative ideas.

Like if they say, "Please don't do this"?

Sure, yeah. For me, criticism is motivation. So I listen to criticism. I listen to praise. I listen to all of it.

You're letting people bid for input on the visual side, but what about the script?

What do you mean?

Is there a dollar amount that somebody can invest where they get script approval? Where they can say, "Maybe tone this down a little, make it more like *The Walking Dead* and less reminiscent of the worst video game in history?"

Sure, why not? I'm open to that. Anything is negotiable.

Have you invested your own money?

Of course. Why wouldn't I?

There's been some criticism of these crowd-sourcing efforts, especially when it involves a celebrity who maybe has enough to fund the project out of their own pocket. Why are you making fans pay for you to star in another video game?

I can understand that. But this is just a way of raising money. What's the difference between crowd-sourcing and going to the bank? The smart business people go to the bank. You know what I mean? What's the difference?

Well, a bank would charge you interest. And they wouldn't give you money in exchange for you following them on Twitter.

Maybe. I don't know.

With Shaq Fu getting a resurrection, what about your rap career? Can we expect a *Shaq-Fu: Da Return of Da Return* album?

No more albums for me. I may in the future do a couple of shows, but I'm done rapping. It would be crazy for me to put out another album as a 42-year-old rapper. That's nuts.

Chuck D is still doing it, and he's in his 50s.

Yeah, I know. Guys like Chuck D and Master P and Redman and Jay-Z. But those guys are immortal. I'm thinking about going to law school. I'm a businessman. All of that stuff was fine when I was younger, but I'm an old business tycoon now. It wouldn't be advantageous.

What about *Kazaam 2*? Is that on the horizon?

Probably not. But I'm talking to the powers-that-be about coming out with *Steel 2*.

You're kidding.

No, I want to do it. *Steel* had the same problem as Shaq Fu. The technology we had in *Steel* was okay, but then here comes *Iron Man* and the *Star Wars* prequels, and we look like amateurs. If I could get some new updated technology behind this *Steel* project, I would re-do that.

Would you cast yourself in the lead?

I would love to. Give me the choice, I'll always be the superhero.

You're a Superman fan.

Huge.

You've got the Superman crest everywhere, in your home and your car and even tattooed all over your body. Do you have a Superman fetish?

I don't know if I'd call it a fetish. When I was a kid and I saw the movie and I was watching Superman fly, I was like, "I want to be like that guy." And second of all, my first name starts with S. You know what I mean? If my name was Tom or Jonathan, I probably wouldn't have been into it as much. But my name starts with an S. It just makes sense.

What's your kryptonite?

I don't have one.

So you're better than Superman?

No, no, that's not what I'm saying.

You don't have a weakness, but Superman gets all fluttery in the knees if somebody points a glowy rock at him. That means you're better.

I'm not saying I'm better than Superman. I'm human, and just by being human I think I have many kryptonites. But I don't have a kryptonite.

Back in 2010, you were officially endorsed by the [Siegel & Shuster Society](#) as the NBA's one true Superman. How'd you make that happen?

I think over my career, they've just seen that I've been a person that really lives up to that title. To me, when you say role model, it's a guy who's played roles. It's every guy that has played a certain role and then

something real comes out, which is enough. But with me, what you see is what you get. You know what I mean?

Not a clue, no.

What you see is what you get. When I teach the kids, I don't pretend to always be better than them, that I have the perfect way. I'm not about, "Dress like this. Talk like this." I never do. I think that's why the kids still relate to me.