

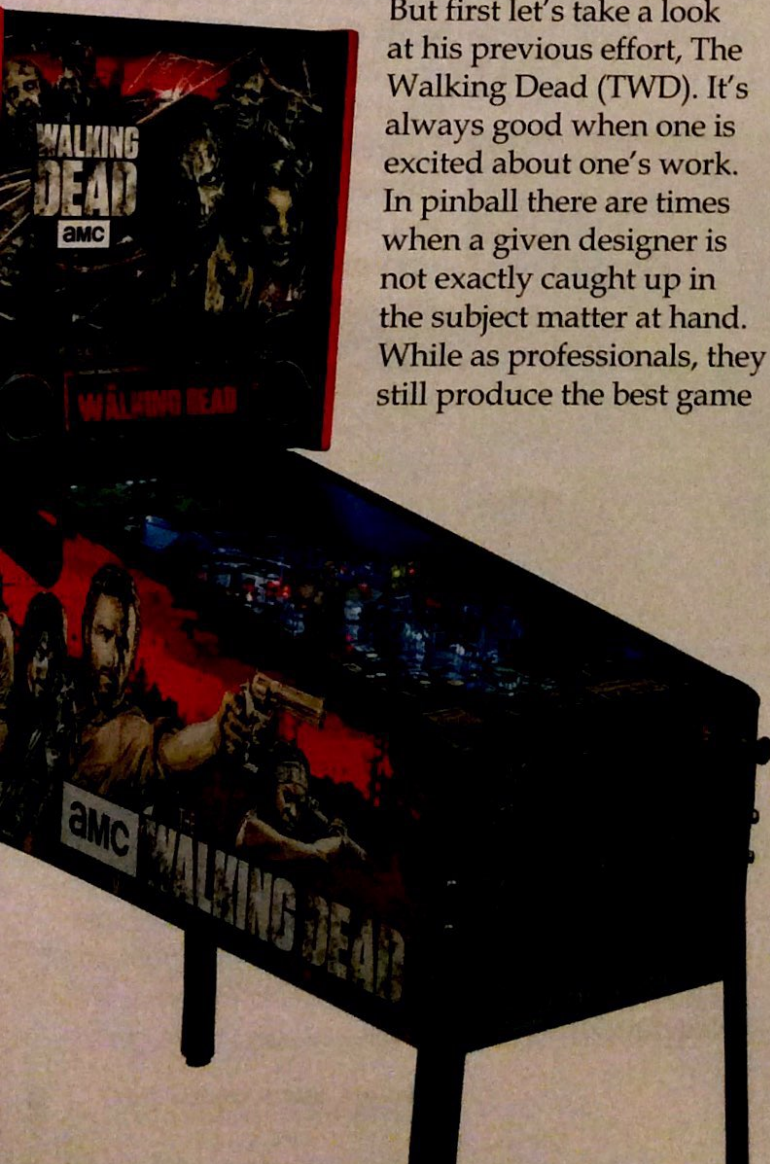
KISS OF DEATH PINBALL!

Mike Sorenson takes a look at the most recent games from designer John Borg: The Walking Dead and KISS

Designer John Borg has created a couple games lately that have been received well by the pinball community and he deserves a break. As I type this, John is resting and visiting his mother (good boy, John!) in Florida after finishing his work on Stern's KISS.

THE WALKING DEAD

But first let's take a look at his previous effort, The Walking Dead (TWD). It's always good when one is excited about one's work. In pinball there are times when a given designer is not exactly caught up in the subject matter at hand. While as professionals, they still produce the best game



they can, it is a definite plus if the creative staff is working with a subject they know and love. This project was one that John was excited to create. "I



was a Walking Dead fan as soon as I heard about the show coming," he admitted. "I sat in front of my TV 15 minutes before Episode one aired. It was and still is my favorite TV show. I had been talking about it at Stern and when I found out we got it I was ecstatic!"

The game is based on the mega hit AMC show. For those who don't know much about it, here is a bit from the Stern press release for the game:

"AMC's The Walking Dead, the most watched series among Adults 18-49, is based on the comic





book series written by Robert Kirkman and published by Image Comics. The drama tells the story of the months and years after a zombie apocalypse. Stern's The Walking Dead pinball features everything fans would want in a flesh-eating pinball world. Players fight to survive the zombie apocalypse alongside series icon, Sheriff Rick Grimes, by battling zombies and completing various game missions. The game includes multiple zombie toys for adrenalin-filled zombie battles at familiar locations from the show such as the Prison and Cell Block C. A brilliant high-definition zombie-filled art package heightens the player's excitement."

Speaking of art, I asked John about the fact that it is more zombie than character focused. "The art is more zombie like but we also used the likeness of four characters from the show," John explains. "The zombie heavy art will keep the game fresh in the event 'we' lose more characters in the future. I do love the Premium cabinet with the characters on it though."

Over a year ago PGJ publisher Jim Schelberg was at a presentation by the Michigan Comic Con featuring five TWD cast members. With the pinball game in mind, he asked them about the famous barn scene that occurred in the season finale for season two. They thought it was a good question because that scene was pivotal to the plot at the time. Jim, sitting in the front row, shot video of the panel discussion and couldn't wait for the game to come out so he could post his video.

Apparently AMC didn't care that Jim had this killer video of the cast talking about the barn and suggested to Stern that the prison that played a big part in season three was similar but more importantly gave a more current feel. All at Stern agreed; the barn was replaced with the prison for the final version of the game and the interview



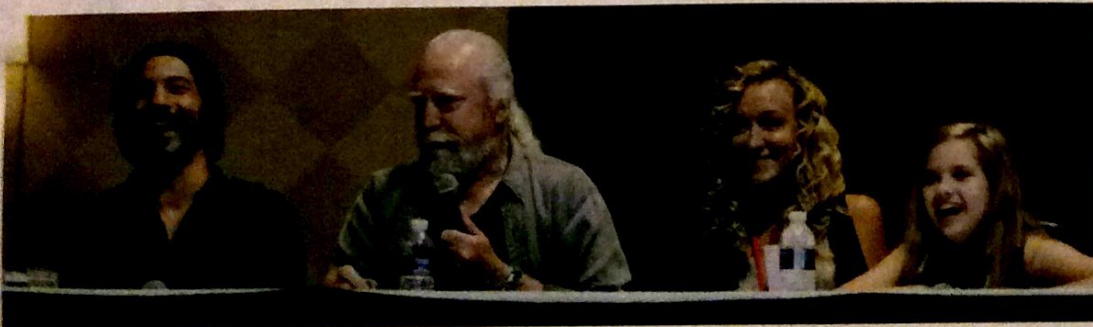
and excitement was dashed ... but it made for a better game!

"I bought a barn shaped birdhouse and originally had plans for a rotating unit with several characters on it," John remembers.

"I also had plans for a ball lock that dispensed one ball at a time to mimic the scene where the zombies came out of the barn, one zombie at a time."



In fact, when asked about his favorite shots, John said he likes to bash the prison with the ball and



Cast members discuss the barn scene at the Michigan Comic-Con

didn't make it to the final versions. One was Teddy Bear Girl (TBG). The round featured a scene from the very first episode of the show with Sheriff Rick, (John's fav character) and this young girl ... who happened to be a zombie. The rules would step the player through the dialog between Rick and TBG for each shot made, start a huge Hurry Up sequence and end in the display as Rick "took her out." Even though she was a zombie and wanted to eat John's favorite character Rick, it was thought at Stern that killing a young girl, zombie or not, would not be appropriate for a pinball machine.

"Also, the first draft I designed," explains John, "had lit inserts that allowed you to play as one of the four characters in the game. Each character would have to complete certain tasks. We abandoned that early on but we added the lights for the Kill Counter. The counter keeps track of killed zombies and awards the bonus when the ball drains ... I like that idea a lot."

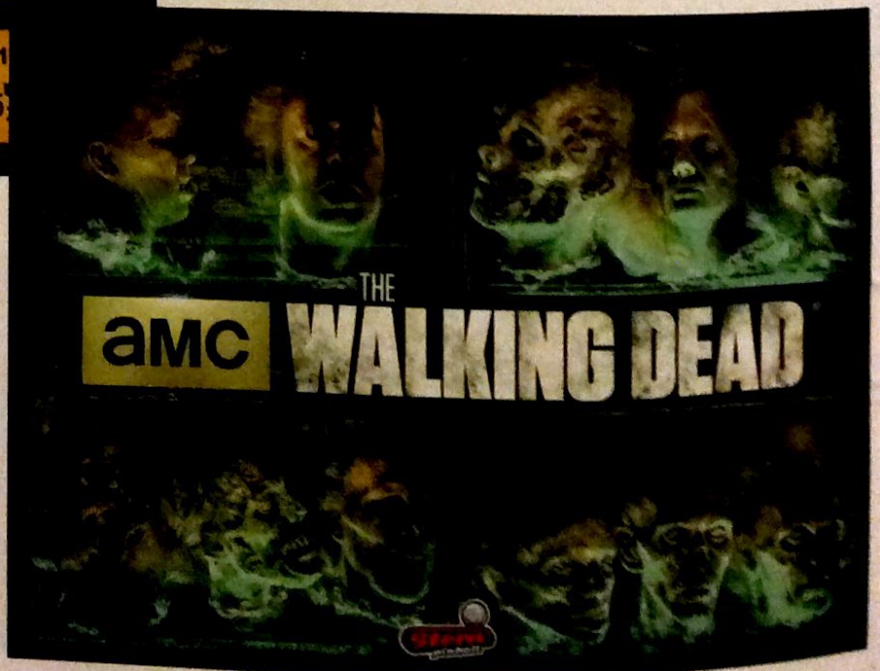
John told me he really likes the Governor's Fish Tank Topper with a lighting package that is synced with the game. The tank, along with the other items, were sculpted by Greg Nictero, TWD's EP and Special Effects Makeup Designer. The Stern Art Department's Greg Freres and Steven Martin designed inside cabinet wall graphics that are offered by Stern as well.



AMC WALKING DEAD
 \$1.00 = [coin] x1
 SUPER VALUE
 \$2.00 = [coin] x2

kill the prison zombie. "I also really like the skill shot with the star rollovers a lot and the right hand shot that takes the ball back to the shooter lane as well. A personal favorite of mine is watching the zombie that comes to the fence in the dot matrix and gets clubbed in the head - it's ME!"

While the game is great and the Limited Edition is sold out, there are some items John would have liked to include that





John tells me. "I had originally planned for one and it's great that our friends at Mezel Mods took care of that for me. They also made a barn model that bolts in by the left orbit shot."

John is very pleased with the game and is happy with the response from the public.

"Lyman, Mike Redoble, Robb Blakeman, Tanio, Mark Galvez, Mike and Tom Kysivat, Dave Cadeau, Jim Shird, Reyna, Gaby and the whole crew worked really hard on The Walking Dead," says John.

As if that wasn't enough, "Mezel Mods made a tower that bolts into the game that is very cool,

As I said, when you're excited about what you're doing, it shows!

KISS

Ok, so now we jump from a scary game to a game that LOOKS scary. From a subject that, to be blunt, is dead to one that is very much alive and has been so for decades!

ONE OF THESE THINGS IS NOT LIKE THE OTHERS ...

In this edition of the PinGame Journal's "FIND WHAT'S DIFFERENT" we present a group of Gene Simmons KISS heads. But one of them is not a plastic figure about to be mounted on the playfield of a pinball machine. One of these heads is actually designer John Borg! See if you can find which one is John! (The answer will appear in the next issue of the PGJ.)





The band KISS, formed in 1973, has reached many milestones but it's not many licenses who have inspired more than one pinball machine, and KISS now joins their ranks.

The first from Bally in 1978 this game is still collected and played today. Featuring a design by Jim Patla and the famous art package by Kevin O'Connor. Kevin was brought back to do this second KISS game and one can recognize that fact in an instant.

Kevin did a beautiful job on the art package along with Greg Freres and Steven Martin. Kevin's illustrations are all hand drawn. "We had a great art guide to reference from," John reviles, "but we wanted to have a game with hand drawn art and it's absolutely stunning. We even went back to capture the early pop bumper caps with heat stamped band members on top. The bumper caps are lit with RGB LED lamps that can produce many colors and that ties in with the rules and special events in the game. The other thing we decided to capture from the past was the 16 lamp grid. However this modern version plays much differently than the one on the Bally machine."

Here's a bit from the Stern press release: "Stern Pinball's KISS pinball machines reflect the energy, excitement and experience of a live KISS concert. Players will experience 10 famous KISS hits in the concert arena playfield and embark on an exhilarating experience ultimately becoming elite members of the KISS Army. Players score points and finish game objectives to fuel the audience's energy and excitement. Higher scores amp the experience—the higher the energy level, the bigger and louder the show—resulting in a KISS concert experience like none other. Players are awarded for completing game goals with a variety of in-game front

row seats, backstage VIP access and fun multi-ball modes that thrill players of all skill levels."

John described the detail of one of his favorite toys. "I designed the floating ball mechanism with Paul Stanley in mind. During a KISS concert a cable with a large ring or a foot stand appears on the stage. If you've ever been to a KISS concert you know what comes next. There is a lot of banter from Paul like, "Do you want me to come out there?!!" Then he gets on the device and it carries him over the crowd to a platform. He then, of course, ROCKS the joint!

"You shoot the right ramp that returns the ball to the right flipper. When you have qualified Love Gun Multiball, the right ramp allows the ball to go to the back panel where it's attracted by a magnet that moves it from the ramp to a platform where it is released. The ball drops from the platform into the Starchild mini play area. It's a very cool pinball toy that fits perfectly with the theme of the game. Dave Link from Evolution Studios did the sculpture work. We started out with foam patterns to check size and fit. The finished pieces are beautiful."

Sound is important for any pinball machine but it is obviously critical in a game featuring the music of a group like KISS. "We had a new guy, Bob Baffy, create sound effects," John explains, "and we had custom voices provided by Gene Simons and Paul Stanley. Brian Schmidt is back doing sound work with us. He did some work to improve the new Spike sound system including the addition of bass and treble adjustments so you can tune in to your liking!

"The LE has an amplifier with a solenoid in it. It has a wire linkage to make Paul rock to the music. The Paul figurine is in all models but the LE and Premium models include the amp mechanism. The Gene head with tongue was the first thing I thought of when I started on the game. On the LE, the player can lock three balls in the head. When it's time to lock balls they go into an up kicker and into the ball lock in the head. When multiball starts they are ejected one by one at high speed from Gene's mouth. The Pro model does not include the ball lock but balls virtually lock and eject from Gene's mouth. I couldn't or





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Stem
pinball

John Conner



wouldn't want to make Gene a bash toy so I raised him above the playfield and put a spinning disk under him. It sends the ball back out in all kinds of crazy directions.

"When I start a game, I start with ideas for toys and then figure the shot geometry. Sometimes the geometry causes changes to the toy ideas and they change or move. It's always a challenge to balance all that and put out the best game."

With KISS, John had an added challenge to contend with as the entire company picked up and moved during the time the game was being developed. "The move didn't have much effect on the game development," John remembers. "I was near finished as the move started but finding things was a small issue when we arrived in Elk Grove. Getting stock from the new building while I was building the game in our old location was a bit challenging but it all worked out."

"The new building is so clean and very large. Our new offices are very nice. We have a kitchen now and a huge lunch area where everyone can congregate. In the old building there was little room and some people just ate at their desk or work station. We're very happy in our new home."