

# One *of a* Kind

Collector Julius  
Viloria shares his  
rare and custom-  
made pieces that  
you don't have

Interview photos supplied by Julius Viloria



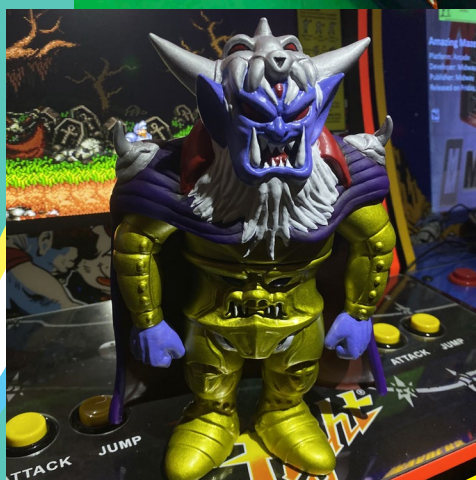


But don't feel bad, because nobody else has them, either.

CIB copies of Bio Force Ape and Time Diver Eon for the Famicom. A "big red" version of the Neo Geo Mini and an actual neon sign from King of Fighters' Pao Pao Cafe. He expresses his creativity through his ideas for products that don't really exist...other than in his collection.

And when he's not scoring custom gaming goodies, he's acquiring rare items that many collectors didn't even know existed.

Julius and I have been in touch on social media for several years, and his photos of the pieces in his collection and his new acquisitions never fail to stun. I finally had to ask him about his mania.







**National**  
**FAMILY COMPUTER**  
ファミコン

**When did you first get hooked on video games?**

Hooked, hmmm that's a bit tough as my memories there are a bit hazy. For a long time, I didn't have a proper console and had an IBM PC XT with monochrome monitor a few years before I got a console. In fact, my first console was a US NES, which I didn't get until the summer after 6th grade/before 7th grade, I think. At home I was mostly about toys, watching TV or playing outside (haha). I would say around 4th grade or so I really began to appreciate the arcade big time and my favorite game in that era was SNK's Ikari Warriors. When I was younger, I loved to play with army men and play "war" with my friends. So, the theme and awesome rotary joystick really grabbed me. Yeah that was the time when you could say I began to love video gaming in general. Before that, the odd end times where I got to play a console or arcade game, I was simply amazed that I could control something on a TV screen. It was like a remote-control toy!

**I think I've read posts in which you've mentioned spending time in Japan when you were young. Can you tell us a little about this period, and about how video games were part of your life then?**



In elementary school, every other year or so my grandmother and I would take trips around Asia. Also, just after 6th grade, my entire family moved to the Philippines for two years. While we lived there, my mom and I would travel to countries in Asia during long vacations... like 3-day weekends or anytime I had a week or more off from school. The places I enjoyed the most were Japan and Hong Kong due to videogames and toys! Korea was all right.

It wasn't until after I got a NES did I start paying attention to videogames on these trips. Before that I was mostly interested in ninja stuff and robot toys such as Super Sentai (Power Rangers), super robots (Mazinga, etc.), Dougram, Panzer Galient, Orguss, Transformers, Macross/Leigoss, etc. In fact, my relatives overseas called me "Robot Man." Many, many years later, once I got some disposable income, I started collecting robot toys and kaiju hardcore around 2000-2003. This coincided with the release of Robotech for the first time on DVD. This was the hobby I engaged in before re-discovering and starting to "collect" videogames again.

Well, going back to Japan and stuff around that time...yeah, it was pretty amazing to see the games and platforms we loved in their actual heyday from 8-bit Famicom, SEGA Mark III to 32-bit Sony Playstation. I was able to see them first hand in Japan. What you saw then in terms of game shops was very, very different from what Westerners living in Japan show you in their YouTube vids and their stories on message boards, social media, etc. Back then there weren't secondhand shops selling used games. Also, games weren't just sold in game shops but in Department stores, electronic stores, etc. Non-dedicated video game shops had a section or







booth selling games. They usually had multiple TVs and you could try games before you bought them. One of the great things about not having games “sealed” in plastic. In fact, I got my first 8-bit Famicom console at an electronics shop. I remember trying many games before I made my selection of “Legend of Kage II” aka Fudō Myōō Den, released many years later on NES as Demon Sword. That first summer I got a Famicom for my birthday, I got a good amount of Famicom games like Namcot Star Wars, Macross, Sky Destroyer, Legend of Arumana, etc. You have to also realize multi-carts hadn’t come out yet. When the first multi-carts came out that was a big deal and they were very expensive...however that’s another story unto itself, haha!

Another thing I’d like to add about this era that grabbed my attention, as it was different from



America at the time, was that games in shops were heavily discounted a few months after release. Stores did this to make room for the new games that were coming out. That meant that sometimes you could get a game new to you, for as low as twenty US dollars. They didn’t start discounting games like this in the US for NES or SMS until very much later. This was another way I was able to accumulate more games than normal during the summer I got my first Famicom.

In terms of commercial releases, it seems like you basically just buy everything cool that comes out -- is that the case, or are there more specific criteria that determine what you add to your collection?

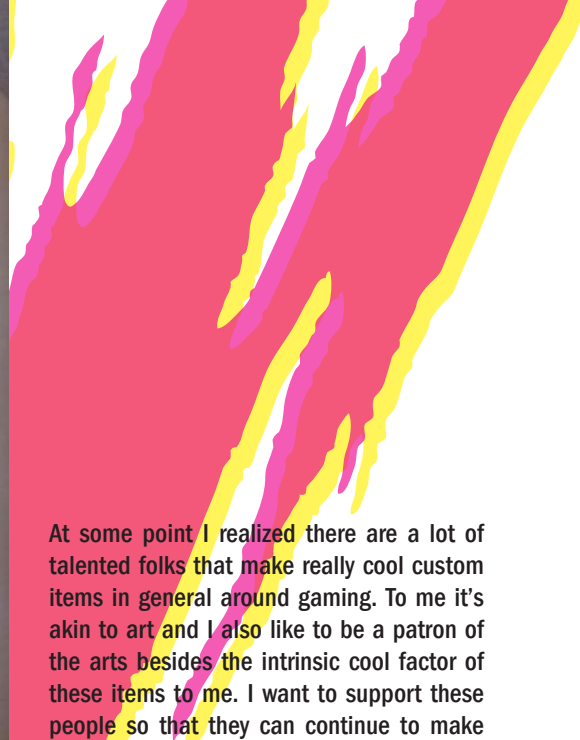
Hmmm... I think that’s true. I pretty much just gravitate to what I think is cool. However, there are commercial release games that I consider my “collection pieces,” usually Japanese games and those games that are just there to play, usually non-Japanese games. This is because when I decided to start collecting games again, I told myself I would only collect Japanese games. This was because I preferred the packaging art and many games that I thought were good were only released in Japan. This was an idea to limit myself and not just buy everything under the sun.

However, there are games I “just want to play” and don’t really care about its collectability aspect. For example, the NBA 2K games. In general, though for commercial games, I put priority on games that I feel might be hard to get later. So, I put a priority on getting a new game that has a low print run, or other niche aspect before buying triple A titles that sell millions of copies. I can always buy that later, for much cheaper too, for the most part.

Tell us about some of your custom CIB games, like your Famicom and Mega Drive titles. Can you give us a clue as to who makes them and/or how they are made? Are there multiple copies, or is each one a one-off made just for you?







At some point I realized there are a lot of talented folks that make really cool custom items in general around gaming. To me it's akin to art and I also like to be a patron of the arts besides the intrinsic cool factor of these items to me. I want to support these people so that they can continue to make awesome things. Second, I'm a person that

Some start-off as one-offs made for me, but the creator usually wants to leverage their work by trying to sell more of it. However, some were made to be intentionally limited. These all depend on the person who is making them for me. I'm usually pretty secretive about these sources for multiple reasons. One, the maker approached me and offered me to be part of a super limited release. Two, which is a more common scenario, is where I spent much time and effort to find someone that could make high quality CIB reproductions/customs for a particular platform. For some platforms its ridiculously difficult to find someone that can make high quality CIB customs. For the most part it's due to limited knowledge of Japanese and to a lesser degree, no access to making cardboard boxes. Whereas you can find millions of folks doing US style CIB or cart only reproductions/customs. Because there are so few people that do what I'm looking for, I'm hesitant to unleash the horde on these sources as I do not want someone spoiling the party for me. In the past, I have shared info on a source and some folks pissed him off due to their low-balling and or nit-picky demands. Now that resource refuses to do any more of these reproductions/customs. Now I don't have a maker for a particular platform. That's fine and dandy for some folks, but not for me who spent all the time and effort (sometimes years) to find a source which often is

in some remote country no one ever thought of to go to find a maker.

Did you reach a point at which you realized that official releases weren't enough, and you wanted to add one-of-a-kind customs to your collection? Or did your imagination just start wandering one day, and you said "hey, wouldn't it be cool if X game existed in Y format," and the next thing you knew you owned games that had never existed before?

Well, that's part of it. In terms of official releases, I have most of the games I want. However, there are many good games that were unreleased in Japan or protos, homebrew, etc. and due to my OCD, I want in Japanese style format to match my collection, haha! Also there is a certain cool factor to me having a game in a particular format that didn't exist in such a format but looks official haha.

You've also had game room items made, such as standing signs (like the replica Neo Geo lighted sign which I LOVE) and neon wall-hanging signs. Please tell us about some of those.

has always liked to have as many options open to me as possible. This applies to everything, like career, life path, etc. Why do I have to settle for hoping companies will create what I want when there are so many people out there that can make it happen. Ideas are constantly popping into my head and often I have multiple custom projects with multiple people going on/in-progress. Sometimes the ideas come to me so fast and furious they start to queue up with the people I'm working with haha.

A lot of the inspiration for the ideas I have are from memories of what I've seen in Asia back in the day or a mix with good gaming memories I've had in the States.





As for your game room, what is your current collection/setup like? Which consoles are your favorites, that you focus on more than others?

To be honest, I don't consider myself to have an actual, proper "game room." I have a computer room/home office where I have some videogame stuff. I also have a garage where I keep my "real" arcade machines. I have a room where I like to watch movies that has some game stuff. But I don't have what I consider a dedicated game room. In these places I have a couple systems hooked up and maybe a couple CRTs too. However, I always have a media center/gaming PC hooked up to the main display in each room. I may also have a few game themed toys or knick knacks on display.

My overall number one favorite console is the Super Famicom, followed by Megadrive and PC-Engine. The holy trinity of 16-bit is my favorite generation and emanates out from there in both directions chronologically. Progressively modern games that look like or mimic that era are my favorites in terms of console, PC, handheld or arcade.

You also collect and mod Arcade 1up cabinets. What attracts you to those? What kind of mods do you make to them? (RasPi, new controls, new art, etc?)

Yes, I do. I ran out of room for regular full-sized arcade machines, so these are a nice next option to scratch the new arcade machine itch. They're also so light and easy to move around, I can pick one up myself and move it room to room or up and down stairs. They're very practical inside a standard sized home. They also feel very much like a combination of a US style arcade with all the nice dedicated art but in the form factor of a Japanese arcade machine. Especially when you don't use a riser and sit on a stool to play. They're also easily replaceable so I don't get nervous about modding them and trying things out on them.

I wish people would give them a try instead of simply bashing them like elitists. To the people that bash them on the cost, they go on sale every now and then or you find used deals where you can get them as low as \$50-100.

I like to put in medium to full spec gaming PCs in mine as I want to be able to run current gen retro themed PC games as well as emulate systems up to PS3/Xbox 360. A Raspberry Pi is much too weak or kludgy to do that...for example, streaming PC games to your Pi. Meh, I'd rather

run directly. Also, the Pi runs much older versions of emulators compared to the PC, where some arcade games aren't even supported yet. If you put a little legwork in, you can find used PC hardware powerful enough to run all this stuff for a few hundred bucks. It also saves you countless hours of trail-and-error trying to tweak every last bit of performance out of your Pi. On top of that, some things are just flat out impossible on the current Pi hardware offerings.

I actually put in a decent amount of stuff into my 1ups. New panels, joysticks/buttons, sound amp/speakers, lit marquees, USB hubs/extra

disk drives, etc. You could say why dump all this money into things like these, but why not? It's something I'm going to own for years. Why not constantly improve it so it is useful to me? Who cares that the net spend could be as much as a real arcade? I already stated I don't have room for anymore full-sized machines, nor want the effort to move one around the house. At the end of the day they're used quite frequently compared to my real arcade machines and I think that's what matters the most. If the mods you dump into them get actual real use and really enhance the experience, then it's worth it.







### Do you collect original arcade hardware as well?

Well I used to, until I ran out of room for more full-sized arcade machines. I started with collecting US arcade machines and game boards. Then I transitioned to Japanese arcade machines only. After a little over a year I ran out of room and stopped collecting. Some machines I have are at the houses of friends, haha! For a time, I even had

them at the Midway Entertainment offices in San Diego! Yes, of Mortal Kombat/NBA Jam fame. Imagine a NeoGeo Candy and SEGA Astro City with NeoGeo and Capcom games in the company office arcade haha.

A little after I stopped buying new to me arcade machines, I continued to collect arcade boards and carts. However, several times some really

expensive and rare boards died on me. I got frustrated with the fragility of these things and how much money basically went down the toilet I decided to quit that part of game collecting. Sure, a lot of the stuff can be fixed now, but the hassle and risen costs of arcade game board/cart collecting has turned me off. Seems like everyone under the sun does it now. Plus, to be completely honest, I'm perfectly satisfied with just emulating the arcade games. I'm pretty knowledgeable enough with PCs/computers (I'm a former SW Engineer by trade) and can configure/tweak them well enough to be able to run the games in a manner which I'm 90-95% satisfied with the experience.

I still have all the arcade stuff I had when I stopped collecting. I mainly keep most of it in my garage. However, these days I mostly play on my Arcade 1Ups out of convenience. I actually keep those inside the house as they're much easier to move around in a standard sized home.

### What other video game related items do you collect? (Figures, books, videos/laserdiscs, etc.)

Yes, haha. I pretty much collect anything videogame related that grabs my interest. I have pretty sizeable collections of game figures/models, posters, vinyl records, books/mags, laserdiscs/cassettes, tokens/coins, jackets/clothing/accessories, boardgames, store displays, etc. It's a sickness I know. The more oddball the more I naturally gravitate to it. I really like unique pieces. Things like an inflatable Sparkster/Rocket Knight figure store display, an extremely rare Contra token, Kunio Kun themed boxers, a Hudson Soft Star Soldier Caravan Championship wrist watch, official Gradius high-top sneakers, a SEGA Megadrive gold plated ring,

## スカジャン

Sukajan, or souvenir jackets, typically made of silk or satin and featuring elaborate embroidered designs, became popular after WWII, and are still cool -- and expensive -- in Japan! As you can see, Julius' collection also includes highly collectible video game-themed sukajan!





Technos Super Dodgeball projectile launching action boardgame, etc.

What are your favorite games to play? What games are you good at, and what games do you wish you were better at?

These days I like to play games that you can play for 20-30 minutes. No long tutorials, grinding, or any of that. Quick pick up and play action, so mostly arcade style games. I like shmups, vs fighting, beat'em ups, run-n-gun, arcade style racers, and action platformers the most. Occasionally a puzzle game. These days I don't think I'm good at any games anymore (haha), but I think I'm a little above average when it comes to vs fighting games. I wish I were better at shmups, but I still have fun on them regardless.

When I was younger, had a lot more time, and a better overall player, I used to enjoy FPS games like DOOM/Quake 2 Capture the Flag/Counterstrike, Dune 2/Starcraft, and action RPGs. I actually was in a couple clans and competed in the OGL/PGL for Quake 2 and Counterstrike. I built our websites, ran our clan's own game servers, IRC channel, led training exercises/scrimmages, and spent a lot of time recruiting new talent.



At what point do you think you would stop collecting -- or would that point even exist?

I've actually "quit" collecting or paying attention to videogames a couple times in my life. The first was around high school and the other sometime during college. However, I learned early on not to sell my stuff when I lose interest as I know my passion for the stuff is cyclical. In the past when I got over certain toy hobbies, I would trade or sell them off for a new interest... like baseball cards. However often I would come to later regret such a decision. So, when it came to videogames and other hobbies, I would just hold on to the stuff until I got interested in it again.

Although I have noticed I play less and less as time moves on. I increasingly prefer passive entertainment like watching a tv show or movie when I have free time. As time moves on, I'm turning more and more into just a collector than a gamer. So, who knows when I just flat-out completely lose interest... however I kind of doubt that as I'm an extremely sentimental person with strong nostalgic ties to things I found joy with in my youth.

What's next? What games are you still chasing after for your collection, if any? And what ideas for custom projects do you have?

There are still platforms where I haven't "got all the games I want" like original Game Boy. So, there's always stuff I want eventually, but the drive to collect in full force has died down for me. I'm more relaxed and chill in my "collecting" these days.

There are many custom objects I want made, haha...too many! Some are of ideas that have been in the queues of these custom builders for several years. Probably the latest big project in the works is a 3-foot tall working replica of a SEGA Astro City. Complete, not just a bar-top machine. Hopefully that will come out by the end of 2020 or early 2021.

