

The Houdini “Master Mystery” pinball was a concept and design I presented to the management at American Pinball. Any new pinball company needs a very strong first title to start the flow of games, and since many in the pinball community love magic, doing Houdini proper was the right choice as there never has been a Houdini pinball.

Houdini was the master showman and greatest magician / escape artist ever known in the late 1800s and early 1900's so it was a good choice. He died on Halloween night in 1926 and his wife Bess tried for 10 years to communicate with him from the other side. That story sets up the whole game and rule set basically. I worked on the original art concepts, visuals, playfield design and eventually built a fullsize game mockup out of foamcore “Nordmanite” in June of 2016. I presented the game concept and presentation deck to the American Pinball people in early July 2016 and we got the go ahead to build the real game to make the September G2E show in Las Vegas. It was exciting at the time as this was “their” game and not an older Jpop title or anything. The design fee for the complete game was \$110. (one-hundred and ten) from me as a gift of good luck to their new pinball company startup.

So in reality we had about 3 months to make 2 complete prototypes and ship them to the show. The Master Mystery title was chosen as it was one of Houdini's silent films he made back in 1920 and also gives us a peek into this incredible man of magic, and no licensing fee as he is in the public domain.

As you can see from the photos taken the pinball game was to be designed to look really full of features, but be built simply engineering wise. So the use of ramps, bumpers and other toys was limited and precisely placed to make manufacture easy. This design needed 1 more revision on tweaking some shots and mechs. The playfield personifies Houdini's life and story along with his wife Bess at the pinnacle of their career. The playfield art has a ton of hidden characters, props, messages and ancient iconography to tell the story for real magic collectors and pinball players alike.

Some of the playfield features include and most are pinball firsts!

- catapult Bullet Catch magnetic multiball feature
- motorized up/down vanishing pop bumper
- bubbled crystal ball mystic yogi soothsayer
- illuminated laser cut & art etched plastic ball guides
- classic 1980's style bold and colorful handrawn artwork style
- water torture cell playfield with prisma changing Houdini
- the Hindu rope climbing spin target feature
- reversing ball Python target ramp feature
- laser cut stainless steel ramps with hidden Spirit Ring
- gigantic Magic Spot color changing infra red rollover button

You will notice also there is a 1970's design theme underlying all the other elements, classic "lock saucers" like on Williams™ Flash and the beautifully laid out arrows as we find on Firepower™ or Black Knight™. The thinking on the design was to allow the ball to be as much as possible in play and not obstructed too much for the player, so the shots are long and the ball guides are swoopy as on some of my other games.

We had a very small team at American Pinball at the time from my recollection, to get these engineered, printed, fabricated and assembled before the show. We all burned the midnight oil most nights. The vendors we used all work long hours to get these parts back to us, especially the wire cable guys. Personally, my timeframe for games has been 7-11 months from start to proto build, but in this case we managed to do all in 3 months and achieve functioning games for the show that looked amazing. The truck was missed so the game had to be driven to Las Vegas, non-stop, over a 26-hour time frame one way. We managed to meet up with Penn & Teller during the trip to Vegas and received some feedback, as they are both big Houdini fans. I told Penn we had the "Bullet Catch" in the game, he scrunched his face and said "Houdini never did the bullet catch, that was Ching Ling Sool!". Penn is very tall. He was right as we used the bullet catch from the Houdini Mini Series on television as it looked cool. Anyways he left me red faced in front of Teller. Master and apprentice.

The artist on the game was Matt Andrews and this was his first full game art package developed under my direction. We both worked extremely hard to complete the backglass fantasy painting, cabinet torture cell paintings, details and of course the hand drawn playfield which simply is the nicest playfield I have seen in a long while. Personally, I spent a lot of time on color palettes, setting the playfield type and doing all the art and dielines for the playfield plastics as well as bundling all the production files for vendors. Matt did a perfect job on everything as doing a whole game by one artist is really a huge undertaking, especially with all the hand drawn details and magical creatures he managed to squeeze in in 3 months. The winged gryphons behind the flippers are the coolest and hark back to the 1970's. Many hidden gems and secret items are placed all over the game, wonder how many people have found so far?

The game ultimately had a real sparkly new look, with the stainless steel, clear star posts, led lights and etched plastic playforms. It was bold, bright and colorful which certainly looked much different than any other magic game previously made in pinball, as is fitting for the great Houdini. A showman. The freaky thing was, there were many on this game, was when you stood the cabinet up before attaching front legs, it was like Houdini was in the tank of water hanging upside down all shackled up. Jpop