

H1s, Obsidians, and more Switch Drama

ThereminGoat, 2/22/2020

For the record, and if it wasn't already noticeable, I love switch related drama. I mean, I *really* love switch related drama. Thus, given how long the last week has been with work and classes, I was gifted directly from the keyboard gods themselves with an implosion that I was only mildly aware of prior. While I do not have the switches in hand yet, the very fresh nature of this drama has led me to decide to present the drama now and the switch reviews later once I have them in hand. In fact, prior to writing this document I've paid invoices for both Obsidian and H1 switches to be delivered and I couldn't be more excited.

The Switches

Obsidians:

First making a secretive appearance on ZFrontier on December 27th of 2019, these 'Obsidian' switches were the most recent creation of an up-and-coming switch seller/designer in China known by the name of 43 Studios. The other three switches he had designed prior include a similar to Gateron Ink looking switch called Caramel, Nanas, and Raras, which were recently sold on Massdrop in early January. In addition to designing switches, his profile on ZFrontier also boasts interest checks for keyboards that are assumed to be Chinese and/or Eastern exclusives, much like his switches.

The switches, which were demonstrated in several marketing style photographs, featured matte black nylon housings and black, POM stems eerily reminiscent of Cherry MX Black switches. In addition to this, while not shown in any of the marketing pictures, the side of the top housings of these switches apparently boasts and engrave '43' after the name of their designer. The springs in these switches are supposedly black and have a 62g bottoming out force, though no pictures of them were included in the original ZFrontier post. Selling for 3.3 Yuan (or roughly \$0.47) each, these were available between January 14th and February 14th via a QQ style groupbuy.



Figure 1: Obsidian switch sample photo from 43 Studios' ZFrontier post.

H1s:

Originally, the H1 switches made their debut in Korea in early January of 2020, being sold by HHHH who is a keyboard designer and vendor out of Korea. Much like their Cherry MX Black inspirations, these switches also featured matte black, polycarbonate over polyamide housings with a matte black, POM stem. (It's worth noting here that while Polyamide is not necessarily Nylon, Nylon is the name for the family of semi-aromatic polyamides. All Nylon is polyamide but not all polyamides are Nylon.) Featuring 78g, gold plated springs, these switches supposedly are not like original JWK molds, and were modified by HHHH in order to fit his



Figure 2: Picture of Korean H1 samples from Enigma's IC post.

desired specifications. In addition, the stems came with a tiny amount of factory lubrication from JWK.

After selling quite well on HHHH's website in Korea, these switches were pushed to a western market in early of February of 2020 by Enigma, a US based keyboard designer and friend of HHHH. As of the time of this writing, these switches were currently still under interest check on Geekhack, though are receiving a large amount of attention. The current list of vendors who have agreed to sell these switches includes Novelkeys, MyKeyboard, ILumKB, and DailyClack.

*Both of these pieces were produced by JWK, the factory which is known from its (in)famous association with Durock.

The People

The drama surrounding these switches is heavily exchange based through the Geekhack interest check for the western-facing sale of the H1 switches, and thus in order to clarify any confusion prior to starting a discussion of the drama, the following are the three main people involved with said drama:

-1. HHHH

Also known as Quad-H or 'Salamander Guy', HHHH is a Korean based keyboard and switch designer who is the primary designer and Eastern seller of the H1 switches. Prior to his involvement in the drama, below, he was not initially involved in any way with the western based interest check for H1 switches.



Figure 3: Picture of HHHH's high-end Salamandar TKL board which ran in February of 2019.

-2. 43 Studios

43 Studios is a Chinese based keyboard and switch designer who is the primary designer and exclusive seller of the Obsidian switches. Prior to his involvement in the drama below, he had never made a known western social media account, and instead is most active on ZFrontier and in private QQ servers.

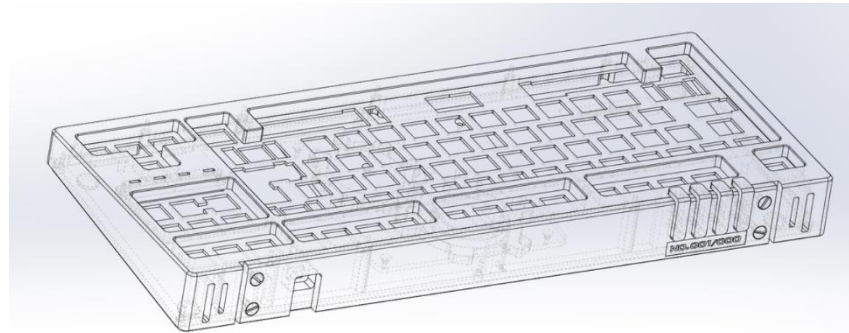


Figure 4: Interest Check design for 43 Studios' New Radiance TKL board which is currently on IC as of the writing of this document.

-3. Eniigma

A US based, burgeoning keyboard designer, Eniigma is a friend of HHHH who is currently running the western facing interest check for the H1 switches. He was not involved in any part of the design of the pieces, and simply is serving as the person to run the interest check for all of us who don't speak or read Chinese.



Figure 5: Prototype photograph and render of Eniigma's Infinitum TKL which is still under interest check at the time of writing this document.

The Drama

The entirety of the drama and exchange between the above-mentioned parties takes place on Eniigma's H1 interest check thread on Geekhack which was started on February 8th of 2020. The initial post contained a very thorough description of the pieces being sold as well as some photos and typing tests in order in proper interest check fashion. Prefacing the impending drama, a witty devil by the name of ThereminGoat asked Eniigma about the similarity of the H1 pieces to 43 Studios' Obsidian pieces, as at the time it had appeared to myself and other collectors that the Obsidian switches were more established than these. Shortly thereafter, on the following day, HHHH responded directly to me claiming that he did not in fact own the existing molds but did modify them from the original ones sold.

However, as time progressed, several accounts were beginning to take note of the similarity between H1s and Obsidians and starting to kick up some drama. While both Eniigma as well as HHHH did an extremely good job at being direct, honest, and kind about the similarity of these pieces, it still did result in a direct prompting from 43 Studios. Posting on February 22nd, 43 Studios addressed the concerns of 'plagiarism' of the H1 switches by stating that he initially placed an order with JWK in October of 2019, received his samples in late November, and then proceeded to sell them from January 14th to February 14th. While providing chat screenshots substantiating this claim, 43 Studios rounded out the response by threatening litigation and that he had the paperwork to support such.

A bit over two hours later, HHHH responded to the accusations and threat of litigation by 43 Studios with a very similarly styled response. Substantiating all of his claims with translated direct message screenshots, HHHH started by pointing to the origin of his idea being in August of 2019, nearly 3 months prior to the start of the Obsidian switches outlined by 43 Studios. Further along, HHHH backs up that while he received his samples from JWK on a later date than 43 Studios, based on their screenshots, he claims that it was likely due to the fact that 43 Studios lives in China, where JWK is based, whereas HHHH lives in Korea. HHHH then brings forward the knowledge that the H1s were based on modified stock JWK molds and that the production factory had acknowledged that the molds and materials for the similar Obsidian switches were different than the H1s. HHHH then finished off on a relatively refreshing note for keyboard based drama and complemented the idea of 43 Studios and even supported that the switches both could and *should* coexist on the market.

Finally, in order to round off the drama, Eniigma made a final post in the geekhack thread summarizing the situation briefly and clarifying that the molds, based on the shared information, were clearly not the same for the H1 switches and the Obsidian switches. The other non-summarization point made in his post was to clarify that HHHH was going to be reaching out to JWK in order to clarify the situation and make sure no wires were crossed on his end with respect to the pieces.

As of the time of this writing, no further statements had been made by either of the party above regarding the situation.

Fleshed out Timeline:

Based on the evidence provided from both HHHH and 43 Studios, the following is the unified timeline with respect to what happened to the switches:

August 2019

- Idea first posited and explored for the H1 switches by HHHH.

October 2019

- 43 Studios placed an order with JWK for the Obsidian switches.

November 2019

- 11th : Samples of H1 switches were ordered from JWK by HHHH.
- 26th : Samples of the H1 switches were received from JWK by HHHH.
- 28th : Samples of the Obsidian switches were received from JWK by 43 Studios.

January 2020

- 6th : Groupbuy for H1 switches began in Korea.
- 14th : Groupbuy for Obsidian switches began in China.

February 2020

- 8th : Eniigma posts Geekhack interest check thread for western H1 switch groupbuy.
- 14th : Groupbuy for Obsidian switches ended in China.
- 22nd : Drama explosion.

Final Conclusions

While the dust is almost certainly not settled on the dram and background surrounding these pieces, based on the current provided evidence it appears as if the H1 switches came prior to the Obsidian switches with neither of them being an intentional copy of the others' switch. While this may seem like a grand coincidence then given the timing, I have had conversations with other westerners who were exploring a similar option of a modernized MX Vintage Black style switch. As I receive both of these switches in the future, I aim to release a joint review in order to compare and contrast these two switches and find the merits of each.

Further Reading:

Western facing H1 Interest Check Geekhack Thread:

Link: <https://geekhack.org/index.php?topic=104578.150>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://geekhack.org/index.php?topic=104578.150>

Original 43 Studios Obsidian ZFrontier Post:

Link: <https://www.zfrontier.com/post/detail/18102>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.zfrontier.com/post/detail/18102>

43 Studios' Radiance IC Zfrontier Post:

Link: <https://www.zfrontier.com/post/detail/18877>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.zfrontier.com/post/detail/18877>

HHHH's Salamandar TKL GB Geekhack Thread:

Link: <https://geekhack.org/index.php?topic=99370.0>

Wayback:

Eniigma's Infinitum TKL IC Geekhack Thread:

Link: <https://geekhack.org/index.php?topic=103574.0>

Wayback: <https://web.archive.org/save/https://geekhack.org/index.php?topic=99370.0>

HHHH's Personal Blog:

Link: <http://blog.naver.com/sin jy1988>

43 Studios' ZFrontier Profile:

Link: <https://www.zfrontier.com/user/home/2547918>

Killer Keemstar Drama Alert Remix (This is actually fucking trash):

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIBlyEjEpM4>