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THIS IS SO YOU CAN READ THIS IN AUTHENTIC TWO-PAGE MAGAZINE MODE.

Cover created by Frank Cirocco, and taken from the original 1988 US arcade flyer promo.



UH-OH. NEW MAG ALERT!



Hello and welcome to ***Golden Age*** issue zero.

This is basically a "dummy" of what creators Paul Glancey and I hope to turn into a full-on bimonthly publication.

So! What exactly is ***Golden Age***?

It's a periodical for sure, but not quite a magazine. I don't want to compete with "proper" mags like *Retro Gamer*. They do what they do incredibly well and have the resources and full-time team to be able to put together superb monthly organ – as to be expected of a product from a leading large-scale publisher. There's no way I can do that, so my ambitions are a tad more modest.

I also don't want to try to recreate a magazine from the past. I just don't think it's possible to remake something as unique and period-specific as *ZZAP! 64* or *Mean Machines* and magically bring it back as it was before. Those publications were created at a different time in a different place when we were different people and part of a team of individuals who sparked off one another to produce something really special.

Plus, to be honest, if I wrote the kinds of things I used to say about the poor sods in *Mean Machines*' Insult Corner, I'd be dragged off to Madame Spanky's Pleasure Parlour for a serious pegging from her big boy knobbler deluxe sensitivity trainer.

However, if perhaps even a flicker of a smile just cracked across the weathered chops of the now middle-aged version of 12-year-old you, then this is working as intended.

Because what I do know is that I can make a really freakin' cool, high production value, very fun to read deluxe periodical whose words and pictures will make the now you chuckle and laugh like my old mags did when you were 12 years old. And that's the whole point of ***Golden Age***.

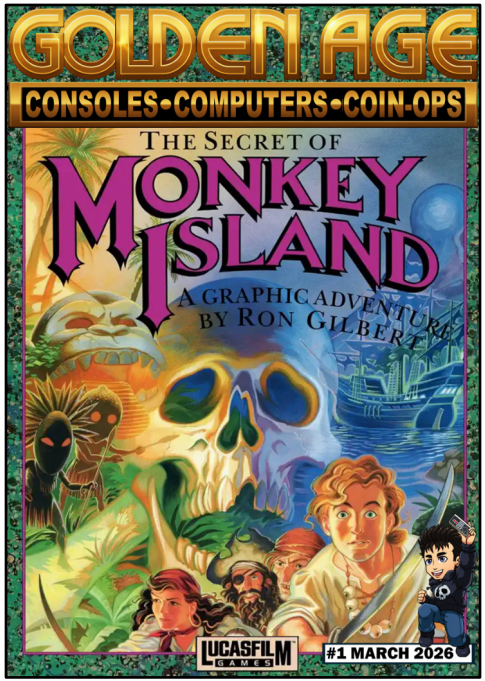
It's not about recreating something from the past but instead taking you back there as my erstwhile coworkers, star guests, and I (if we can make this Kickstarter work) regale you of tales about the best (and worst) games and systems of the last century through a series of features written in our classic conversational style.

It'll be nostalgic, entertaining, and funny – covering 20th century gaming only.

Its angle is very much a human perspective. Pontifications and ponderings about why we liked things. Why things happened the way they did. Long-forgotten minutiae that'll



▲ *This isn't a real cover, but is instead a demonstration of how we'd like the covers to look. Ideally, we'd like to pay an artist to paint bespoke covers, but we'll need to hit a stretch goal for that. Otherwise we'll be using iconic and memorable official art like this.*



▲ ***Golden Age**'s features will be written by people who experienced the games and events back in the day, making them personal and authentic rather than feeling like Wikipedia articles.*

teleport you back decades in an instant. Basically, cool stuff that we think will tickle your nostalgia-cobblers and give you a good old-fashioned belly laugh or two.

Like I said, we'll talk about the good games – but we'll also drag out duffers for a kicking too, as oftentimes the greatest comedy lies in the ruins of the worst tragedies.

Something that I feel will make this mag feel unique (and make it even more fun to read) is that we'll be writing entertaining collaborative pieces.

These will echo one of the most important aspects of my old mags – multiple opinions combined with inter-personal joshin', jibin' 'n japin'.

Basically, we'll pick a subject and bounce it between the writers to create a feature that feels conversational, dynamic, and spontaneous. Mag meets podcast, basically.

At the end of the day, we just want to celebrate old games in a really fun way, talking about what we were doing, how we were feeling, what made the games great or not so great, plus whatever other funny shit we can recall.

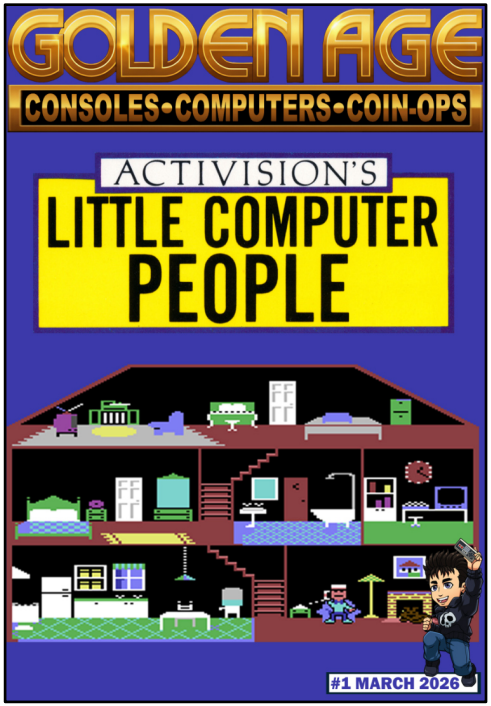


Definitely not a traditional magazine, but instead something that captures the spirit of what we used to do but isn't trying to be something it's not.

We'll produce six fab-looking, deluxe, perfect-bound, issues per year in an A5 book format with an elegant design across its 68-at-minimum top-quality-paper pages.

And yes, it's A5. I'd love to make it A4, but holy freakin' crap are mags expensive to print these days. A4 size and shipping would just be stupidly expensive and you'd all cack your pants at the horribly exoritant price I'd have to charge you.

And anyway, the content and design will be the same no

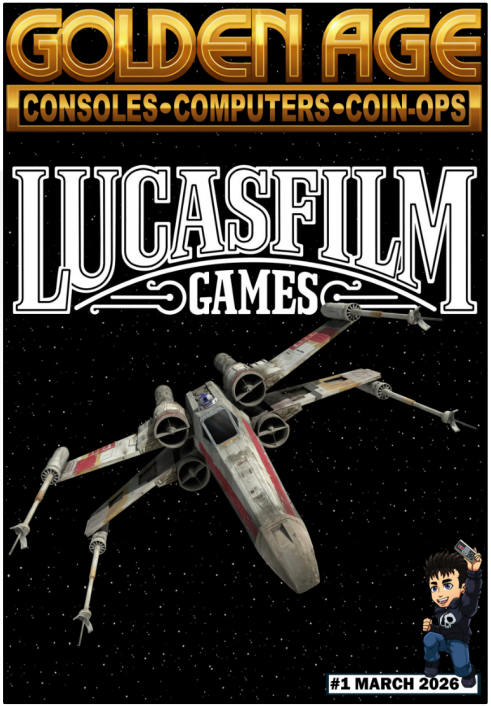


matter what the size (as indeed will be the font size so you can all easily read it with yer clapped-out eyeballs). Plus A5 is small enough for you to surreptitiously slip it into your back pocket on your way to the lav for a cheeky bog read.

Bottom line, ***Golden Age*** will have the same kind of conversational tone and style as my book, *Games of a Lifetime*, so if you enjoyed that, you'll very likely love this.

So! Are you up for that? We most certainly are, but we can't do jack without some moolah, and that's where you come in.

At the bare minimum, if you pledge on Kickstarter and we make our goal, you'll get six 68-page deluxe issues in your first year, which will look and read like this dummy, only better. And hopefully if we get enough re-ups after a year, we can commit to another year of mags (but we'll cross that bridge when we come to it).



If by some miracle we do break our financial target, we've got some cool stretch goal ideas, like commisioning bespoke, properly painted old-school video game mag covers and more of the "chibi" figures you see here so we have different types to match the games à la *Mean Machines*.

We also have plans to up the book size to a really chunky 84 pages, and beyond that add cool "free gifts" of the type we'd have traditionally stuck on the cover of a mag back in the day (but no VHS tapes, okay?).

But first things first. Have a gander at this fine dummy issue and see what you think.

Hopefully your interest will be piqued enough to bung some spondoolicks our way, and we can crack on with producing something really cool-looking and fun!

Over to you!

Jaz

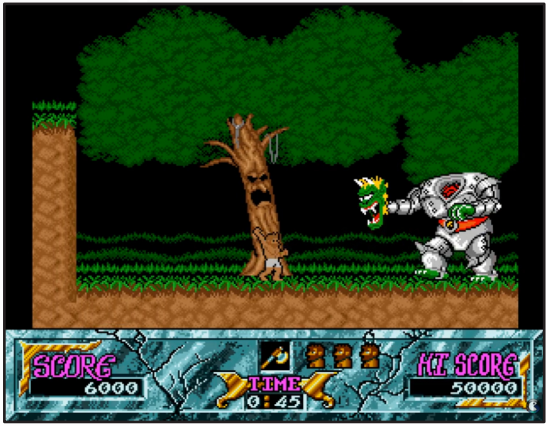
GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

...'N THE QUEST FOR ARCADE PERFECTION IN YOUR OWN HOME!

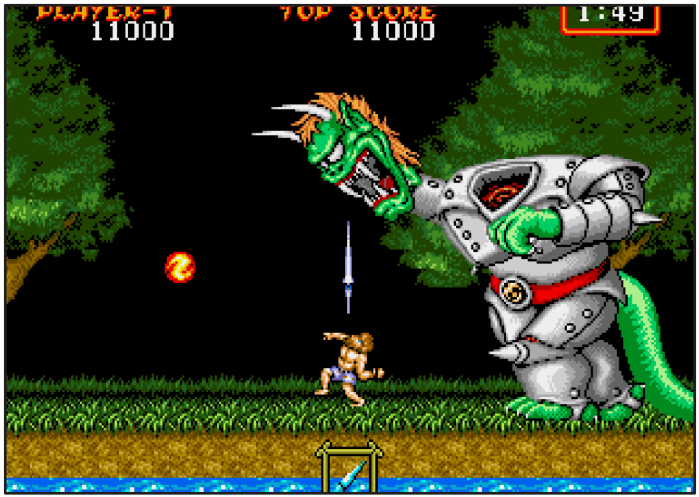


In 1989, European gamers were approaching a Big Decision. Where should they go from 8-bit? Whether they played on a Spectrum or a Master System and no matter how much they loved *Fantasy World Dizzy* or *Psycho Fox*, they understood that Upgrade Time was approaching.

Commodore's Amiga was already the sexy choice in the home computer space. A sophisticated 16-bit powerhouse with sensational graphical and audio capabilities, this was the Commodore gaming micro that could finally stake a claim as the true successor to the Commodore 64. By the end of 1989 there were already almost 2 million of them in use. More than 70% of that user base was a thriving European scene of gamers enjoying ground-breaking titles like *Populous*, *Starglider 2*, *Kick Off* and *It Came From The Desert*.



▲ *The Amiga port was great… until you saw the Mega Drive version. Sure, the Amiga version's graphics were generally good and it was very playable, but its smaller screen and that clunky status panel made it feel very much like a home computer port, rather than a truly authentic recreation of Capcom's original arcade game.*



▲ *Comparatively, the Mega Drive version felt like a seriously authentic arcade port. Full screen, original coin-op presentation, and audiovisuals that aped the arcade machine made this totally feel like the real thing.*

JAZ: *From the mid to late-80s, a 16-bit computer was totally the expected upgrade path. We just assumed that everyone would jump from their 8-bit computers to a 16-bit one – and by the late 80s with the Atari ST beginning to fade away, the Amiga seemed poised to become the next dominant system.*

However, it was very expensive, and not everyone could afford an Amiga. Plus, parents, who usually footed the bill for these kinds of things, were no longer under the impression that computers were essential for little Johnny to get ahead of his classmates – because they'd realized that most kids just used their computers to play video games and weren't remotely interested in programming or other more practical or utilitarian activities.

But there was another factor too.

PG: Indeed. For many players of the time, the "coin-op experience at home" was still



▲ *The SNES version was no slouch either. Indeed, this and the Mega Drive version were both exceptionally powerful advertisements for the arcade credentials of these new 16-bit systems. The home computer versions just couldn't match them.*

the benchmark fantasy for their gaming experience. And by the very late 80s, that looked like it might be realised by the emerging new consoles.

The Master System and NES had slowly been chipping away at the home computer market share from throughout the latter stages of the 80s, but they were only a taster.

By the late 80s, the PC Engine's emergence had generated huge excitement and swiftly found itself at the heart of the European import gaming revolution.

However, just a year or so later, the Mega Drive was swiftly becoming the upgrade choice for European gamers who wanted to be at the frontier of arcade-style instant thrills in their own living rooms.

And no surprise. This 16-bit beast came stripped for action, with hardware specifically focused on moving detailed, colourful sprites and backgrounds, and pumping out

multi-channel music and sound effects. And while import systems were relatively expensive, they were still cheaper than 16-bit computers, and everyone knew that, when Sega's 16-bit box finally became officially released, it would be even cheaper.

However, it was still a tough choice, with arguments to be made on either side.

Fortunately, I was lucky enough to be working at *Computer and Video Games* magazine so I could see the best of both worlds during working hours. Even so, when my own money was at stake, I agonized over what I wanted to take home to play at the end of the day. For me, though, that decision was made a lot easier by one game, or at least one game in different forms.

When it hit arcades in 1988, Capcom's *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* was a showcase for coin-op excess; a haunting, punishing, and visually spectacular sequel to *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* that pushed the boundaries of what the custom arcade hardware of the time could achieve. You must remember it – the platform-shooter loaded with graveyard zombies, forest



▲ *The Mega Drive version was a revelation when it arrived at CVG's offices in late 1989. Absolutely jaw dropping stuff.*



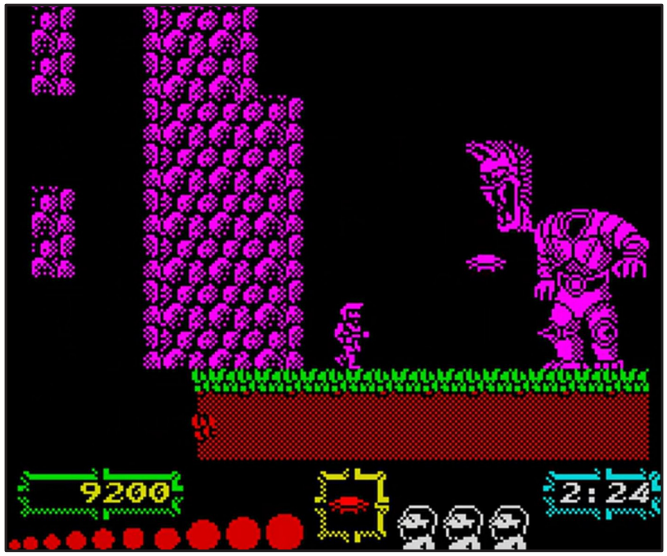
▲ *The original coin-op in all its fabulous pixel graphic, top class sound, and rock freakin' hard gameplay glory. Shovel in them ten pence pieces baby. You'll be skint in an arcade minute.*

demons and worse, with a golden-armoured, lance-flinging knight named Arthur at the heart of the action.

JAZ: *I most certainly do. I'd become a huge* Ghosts 'n Goblins *fan in 1986 when I encountered the coin-op at Ludlow's traveling fair. Yes it was absolutely rock freakin' hard, but Capcom's classic graveyard thriller was an audiovisual masterpiece and I loved it.*

A few years later, I discovered its sequel, which looked and sounded better, and despite being even tougher than its predecessor, was even more fun to play.

The thing is, it wasn't just Ghouls 'n Ghosts *I loved. It was arcade games in general. Like most gamers at the time, I'd grown up with coin-ops, and they were still the biggest thing in popular gaming.*



▲ *The very late 80s was a period when many 8-bit ports were judged less on their quality, but more in sympathy for the platform they were on. "Not bad for a Speccy port, etc."*

I mean, from the early 80s when we had endless clones of coin-ops through the mid to late 80s when official arcade ports were often the most heavily marketed and biggest-selling products of the era, arcade games were a central pillar of the industry – and, like Paul says, the idea of the perfect arcade experience at home was very much the holy grail of gaming.

PG: By 1989 the home computer conversions of *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* were ready for release. US Gold, the UK publisher with deep pockets and a patchy record for quality, had thankfully chosen one of Britain's best action game teams, Software Creations, to bring *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* to home computer players.

Meanwhile in Japan, Sega had turned out their own conversion, with none other

than a pre-*Sonic the Hedgehog* Yuji Naka leading the team.

Though a quirk of fate, and largely thanks to the fast-growing period console importers, *Daimakaimura* (the Japanese name for G+G on Mega Drive) hit the UK at almost the same time as the Amiga game.

It was agreed that Software Creations had done a perfectly respectable job with their Amiga conversion and reviewers of the day tipped their hats to it as one of the best home arcade conversions the Amiga had seen at the time. However, I had already seen the Mega Drive game and, although the hardware power of the two platforms was comparable, the contrast in their software was so stark that it pointed towards a divergence in my expectations of what 16-bit gaming would become.



▲ *The Amiga version's unique score panel was a bit of an eyesore that also reduced the size of the playing area.*

In almost every respect, the Mega Drive version WAS the arcade game. It looked like the arcade game. It moved like the arcade game. It sounded like the arcade game. And it played like the arcade game.

JAZ: *Yep. I remember being absolutely blown away when I first played the Mega Drive version of* G+G. *It really did look like a perfect copy of the original. At closer inspection it wasn't quite pixel-perfect but it was close enough to feel like an authentic version of the original coin-op.*



▲ *The Mega Drive's sprites felt more authentic, the backgrounds were more accurate, and the arcade-style overlaid highscore score and life meter added to its air of authenticity.*

PG: The Amiga version, by comparison, was more like an *interpretation* of the arcade game.

Mega Drive Sir Arthur, the undead attackers and the monstrous boss characters were impressively detailed, and all moved with fluid grace, and the screen was filled with the coin-op's vibrant scenery, albeit rendered in a slightly more limited colour palette. On the Amiga, the characters were notably smaller and looked coarser, because of colour palette limitations. You could probably point at other hardware constraints as the cause for simpler character animation, weaker visual effects and more choppy movement. And to further distance the visuals from the coin-op's, about one-fifth of the Amiga screen was given over to a marble-effect status and score display.

JAZ: *Yeah. I saw the Amiga version after the Mega Drive game, and remember thinking – this looks good, but that screen surround completely ruins the experience. The Mega Drive, with its full-screen effect felt totally authentic. The Amiga's big screen border was something the arcade game didn't have, and it ended up feeling like a compromise and a bit of a knock-off to be honest.*

PG: Where the Amiga game stood out more auspiciously was in its audio. The Mega Drive game was replete with thrilling sound effects and familiar FM-synthesised anthems for each level – certainly everything I wanted from the game. The Amiga version had no sound effects at all. Instead, Software Creations' star musician, Tim Follin, had supplied a suite of orchestral PCM chip tunes that played the arse out of the Amiga's custom Paula chip. Extraordinary music was a hallmark of Software Creations' games, and this collection was one of best heard in any Amiga game at the time. Ditching the sound effects was quite a choice for an action game, but Amiga owners were developing a taste for expressive soundtracks, especially since David Whittaker's ethno-synth *Shadow of the Beast* music, so even though this was another example of the conversion being an "interpretation" of the coin-op rather than a copy, the audio was justifiably lauded as a unique highlight.

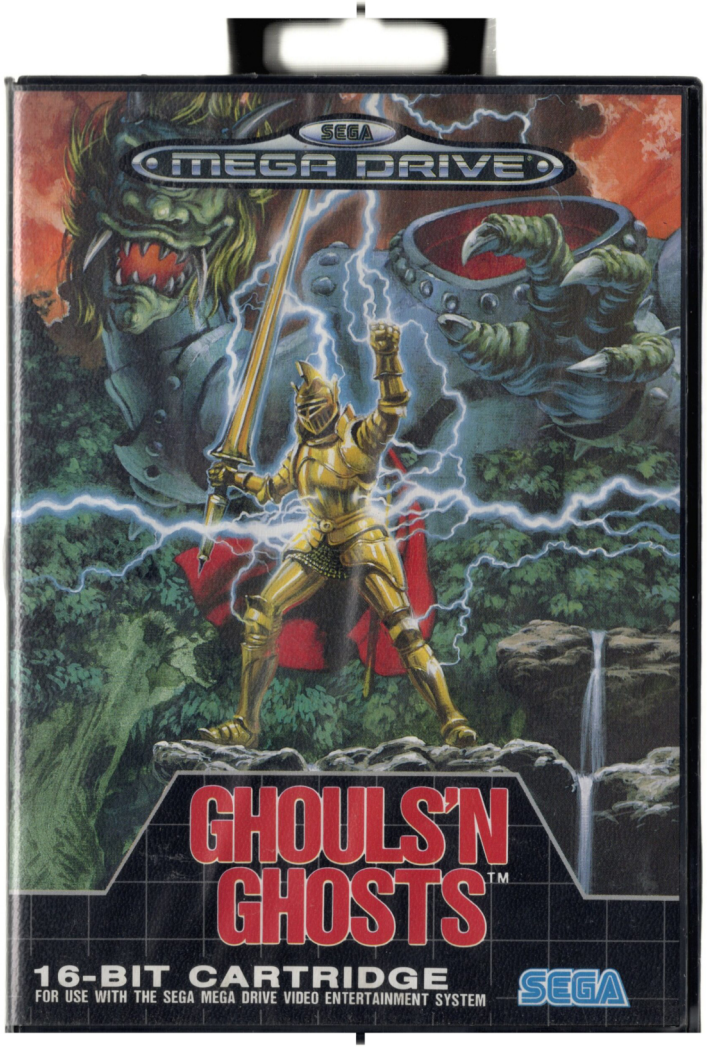
JAZ: *I'd agree with that. In a way, it reinforced the fact that the Amiga was a great machine with huge potential, but that its strengths were not recreating authentic coin-ops, but more in its original games where talented developers, unhampered by efforts to copy arcade audiovisuals, could create cool and original things more suited to the system.*

PG: The third and most important comparison lay with



▲ *Another Mega Drive shot that shows off just how bright and colorful the game was - which looked even better when it was moving because of all its cool, color-cycling flame effects.*

the gameplay, though. Where the Mega Drive game was barely distinguishable from the coin-op in most respects, the Amiga game undeniably felt compromised. That's not to say it wasn't fun to play. The variety of weapons, enemies and level designs put the game ahead of less ambitious action titles on the system. Although technical limitations did appear to constrain features such as the number of enemies on screen at one time, there was one notable disadvantage the Amiga player had: unlike the Mega Drive, with its three-button controller, the Amiga was lumbered with its 1970s-



standard, Atari-style 9-pin port which only allowed for joysticks with a single fire button. The poor benighted player was stuck in the nightmare scenario of having to launch precision jumps by pressing up on the stick. The shortage of joystick buttons had plagued home computer coin-op conversions for years. In retrospect, if only the original Amiga hardware design had provision for a two or three-button joystick port, the world might have been a different place.

JAZ: *Yeah, as someone who at the time constantly articulated the "gameplay is king" mantra,* Ghouls 'n Ghosts *was a perfect example of what I held dear. It got the feel of the game absolutely spot-on. Perhaps because the programmer who ported the coin-op not only had access to its source code and ROM data but could also talk to the developers of the original machine.*

Meanwhile, the UK team that created the computer ports had an original coin-op and bugger-all else. They did a fantastic job, but their work did end up feeling like an interpretation rather than a truly spot-on copy, which was what the Mega Drive version felt like.

PG: I felt the same way, and the brilliance of *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* was one of the main reasons I bought a Mega Drive. I wasn't particularly wowed by *Altered Beast* or *Alex Kidd in Miracle World* or those other early entries, but *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* pointed towards what I wanted the games I played at home to be like: "Arcade perfect."

After all, I was a kid who'd grown up in and around the seaside arcades in the North-East of England. It was the sights and sounds of coin-ops that set my expectation of how video games should look, sound and play. That was tempered when I got a ZX81, and every alien I shot looked like the letter "A", but the dream remained. With every computer



◀ *The original arcade flyer from UK coin-op distributor Electrocoin delivers a sales pitch AND playing tips. Maybe that artwork wasn't the best, though.*

and console generation, the real arcade experience came closer, which is why I fully embraced the Mega Drive.

And before you say it, I know there were more faithful Amiga arcade conversions than *Ghouls 'n Ghosts*. Arc Development's *Forgotten Worlds*, Ocean's *New Zealand Story* and Graftgold's *Rainbow Islands* all deserve a shout-out.

But this is not a piece about how Amigas were lame and the people who played on them weren't as cool as us console kids. I had a whole ton of fun on Amigas, STs and PCs over the years – because they offered entertainment that consoles didn't or couldn't.

This is simply about a moment in time when – at least for me – the coin-op really did come home.

JAZ: *Absolutely the same for me. I'd been playing on the PC Engine for a few years, and that sported some outstanding arcade conversions, but there was just something about Mega Drive* Ghouls 'n Ghosts *that put Sega's new 16-bit system into overdrive.*

Because there it was. A console that delivered the authentic arcade experience that the vast majority of gamers wanted at a relatively cost-effective price that was cheaper than its computer competition.

These days we'd call it disruption – and that's exactly what it was. The Mega Drive was the right place, right time, right-spec, right-priced system that did what the vast majority of gamers wanted. You can argue the contrary, but at the end of the day you're arguing with history because we all know what happened.

Console gaming was in the ascendancy, and that seismic shift in gamer's tastes was very much driven by games (especially arcade ports like Ghouls 'n Ghosts*). They helped change the face of gaming as we knew it – and there was no looking back!*





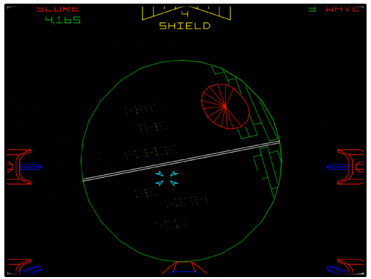
THE LONG WALK



The Golden Age of Arcades ushered in an era of incredible coin-ops and ground-breaking gameplay experiences, but if you lived out in the UK's provinces, the latest and greatest cabinets could be hard to find. The vagaries of arcade distribution and the budgets of your local amusements operators, who were trying to make significant coinage from these expensive machines, meant there was no guarantee that the latest hits would turn up in your town. Perhaps supplies had been snapped up by operators in London or some other arcade mega-hub, or maybe your local coin-op guy had seen them and simply didn't think they would resonate with their clientele.

Such was the case with Atari's legendary *Star Wars*, which I'd played when I visited London in the summer of 1983 to participate in CVG's National Arcade Championships. Upon my return to my hometown of Aberystwyth on the west coast of Wales, I remember raving about the game to my friends. Which is not surprising, as anyone who played it back in the day will attest that it was a simply astonishing machine whose vector graphics and amazing sampled speech delivered a white-knuckle movie-like experience unlike anything seen before it. It really was the absolute freakin' biz.

However, having only had the chance to give it a few goes in the King's Cross arcade where I discovered it – and on its most difficult and unforgiving setting no less – I was absolutely dying to play it again. As the weeks went by, I hoped that my local



◀ *A long time ago in a place far, far away, young Jedi Jaz embarked on an arduous, hazard-frought quest that would ultimately end in the destruction of the Empire's Death Star. In a carvan park just north of Aberystwth.*

arcade on the Royal Pier in Aberystwyth might acquire one. Its owner did have a terrific taste in games and often got the biggest and most popular ones. But in the case of *Star Wars*, no dice. I have a feeling he just couldn't get hold of one, because it would have been an absolute money-spinner for him, but for whatever reason, he didn't acquire one for his establishment.

The weeks turned into months and still nada. I'd even traveled up the coast by rail to see if I could find *Star Wars* lurking in the arcades of Borth, Tywyn, and Barmouth, and had traveled south by bus as far as New Quay to no avail. Sure, I found a few machines that I hadn't seen, but the one I was absolutely gagging to play eluded me.

But that changed early the following year when one of the regulars at the pier asked me if I knew about the arcade in Clarach – a diddy little village north of Aberystwyth that was home to an enormous caravan park. Apparently, the owner had invested in some coin-ops and put them in a shed next to his office, creating a bijou arcade-ette for his guests. Which apparently included "a *Star Wars* game."

Bazinga! Within the hour I was hot-footing it north to check it out. Thanks to weird Welsh geography, the journey from Aberystwyth pier to Clarach Bay village was three and a half miles by car, but on foot was a far shorter two-mile trek. But while I say shorter, it involved taking the spectacular but highly challenging coastal foot path, which wound its way up Aberystywth's most famous natural landmark, the notoriously steep and rugged Constitution Hill, and down the other side. Literally making the journey uphill both ways. And yes, it was also technically downhill both ways, but it was the kind of downhill that had you walking sideways in certain parts so you didn't slip on the gravelly path and slide off the very tall cliff onto the jagged rocks below. As had happened to several people over the years.

But hey. I was a fit teenager and was more than willing to risk life and limb to play *Star Wars*, so off I trudged. Over hill and down dale to where I found the arcade, well, shed with coin-ops in it, and entered to the sound of a choir of angels as I immediately spied a stand-up *Star Wars* machine in the corner with a couple of wee kids pretending to play it because that's what wee kids did in arcades when they had no money.

I'd like to think I politely asked them to move aside so I could play, but I think the sight of a sweaty Mohicanned dude with big docs with red laces



▲ *Aberystwyth in 1985. If I wanted a game of* Star Wars *arcade, I had to walk over that hill. And no, you couldn't walk around it. That shore was deadly and you'd be swept away or dashed on the rocks. Fun times!*

steaming toward them probably sent them scattering like pigeons. Only to return a minute later to peer around me to see what was happening on screen.

But I digress. Coins inserted – 20p a go and on normal difficulty level where you could actually earn extra lives, unlike in London – and I began to play, kicking off what would become a several-months-long love affair with the machine.

Up until spring, I made that journey from Aber to Clarach many times. Which was actually great, because I became so fit, I was able to run the entire two-mile trip from my school to the pier at top speed in the mornings when I bunked off. Why so great? Because it essentially gave me more time at my destination and also enabled me to leave slightly later to arrive in time for end-of-day registration so I could announce my presence and not alert the Feds to my truancy.

But I'm not penning this tale to impress you with my rock-hard teenage thighs and tight buns, but more to reminisce about the lengths we sometimes went to back in the day to play our favorite machines. And don't get me wrong. I'm certainly not complaining. It's just what we did back then – and games like Atari's *Star Wars* made the effort absolutely worth it!



SPOILED FOR CHOICE



There was none of that having to hike over col and cwm for me to get to video games when I was growing up in Newcastle upon Tyne in the late 70s/early 80s. They were everywhere!

Every weekend when I was aged eleven-plus there was a rain-or-shine trip to The Coast – Whitley Bay or Tynemouth. Here there were at least half a dozen substantial arcades, with no shortage of coin-ops, and many a tuppenny coin-pusher to distract my Mam.

When I was a Junior Player I'd be in The Rotunda, on *Space Invaders*, counting 22 shots for the mystery ship, or rocking Sega's *Sea Wolf* because of the awesome periscope controller and the promise of a free game if you got a high score. Being



▲ *Sector wars, as depicted in Sega's chatty* Astro Blaster.

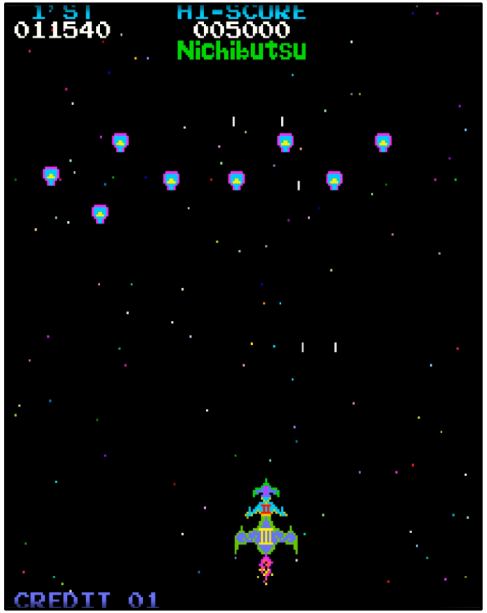


▲ Scramble. *Note the fuel gauge. Are you noting it?*

just a kid, I was hardly an expert player, though. For years I was losing at *Scramble* because I didn't realise there was a fuel gauge at the bottom of the screen that had to be refilled. I thought *Galaxian* was bugged because every time I'd fire a shot the last one disappeared off the screen.

The real gods were the leather-jacketed Rockers, melting the fascia of the *Defender* machines with their tab-ends while they wielded those impossible controls to clear the world of Mutants and Baiters. The atmosphere was rich with cigarette smoke and the sounds of Williams trademark thrumming sound effects, but in the background there was the harsh metallic voices of the robots in *Berzerk*, The Gorfian Robot telling some luckless loser that they were a "Space Caa-det" and from a far corner, the recruiting call: "Fighter pilots needed for sector warrrz! Play - *Astro Blaster*!"

If Mam had to work Saturday morning to clean the priest's house, Dad would let me challenge him to a two-player

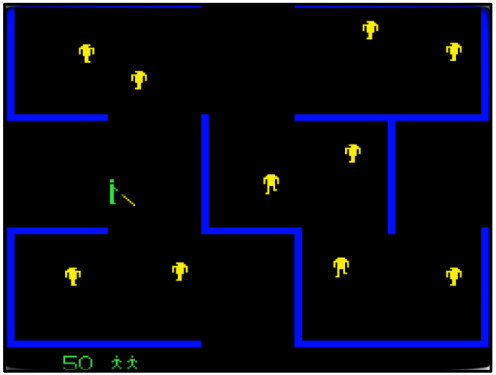


▲ Moon Cresta: *Triple-ship fire-power, bitch.*

game of Cinematronics' *Space Wars*, or Midway's *Boot Hill* or even Fun Games' *Biplane*, before it was time for Seaside Chips and a walk around the lighthouse.

Before we'd go, though, there was the mandatory credit that had to be played on Exidy's *Starfire*, the *Star Wars* knock-off with the awesome HUD, which was only found in the arcade a bit further down the seafront where there was also a sit-down *Tail Gunner* with a memorably floppy joystick. In later years, the same arcade was the first one to get a sit-down *Space Harrier*, which I never played, partly because it looked like a terrifying bucking bronco of a machine, and partly because it was 20p instead of 10p. Stand-up *Out Run* was a safer bet, especially after my friend Jason Benham (author of C64 games like *Batty* and *Guzzler*) showed me that flipping from high to low gear was the easy way to slow the Ferrari down for sharper bends.







▲ *A trio of stellar classics!* Star Fire *(top),* Berzerk *(bottom), and* Out Run *(right) demonstrate the incredible evolution of coin-ops through the early 80s. Just a handful of years separate these greats, yet they feel like games from totally different eras.*

I branched out when I went to secondary school on the other side of town though. The walk from the Metro to the bus passed the tiny office of NODA Taxis, where there was a rotation of compact cabinets, and I could make the high score tables with my duck-shooting skills on *Carnival* or tankbusting in *Battlezone*. That done, I'd find my schoolmates hanging around the cafe in Eldon Square bus station, where there was a mezzanine floor with *Cosmic Avenger* and *Moon Cresta*. It took a bit of practice but eventually I took the crown as *Moon Cresta* champ, and the first of my posse to actually dock all three stages of the ship and still make it to the bus before it left for school!



— FIRE TRUCK —

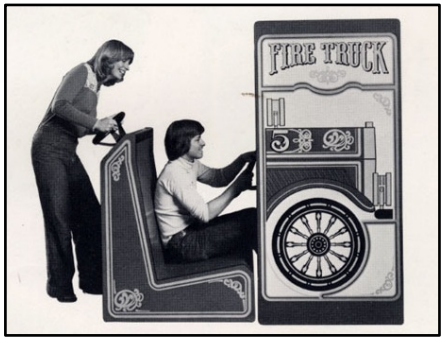


The late 70s was a wild time for video games. While *Space Invaders* simultaneously revolutionized and popularized coin-ops in 1978, there were some really weird and wonderful machines that were released during the disco era that were created before Tatio's seminal shooter set the template for games to come – that frankly are rarely talked about.

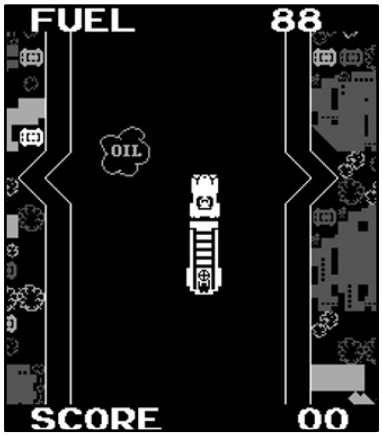
Many of these offbeat and often highly original video games became lost in the shuffle as arcades quickly filled with the kind of new-fangled and far more popular classics that we tend to associate with the Golden Age of Arcades these days. Games like *Galaxian*, *Missile Command*, *Pac-Man*, *Asteroids*, and *Berzerk*.

But before these classics existed, there were oddities that were swiftly consigned to the dusty, less-traveled areas of your local arcade as the Golden Age of Arcades truly got underway.

One such game was Atari's *Fire Truck*, which was later re-released as a single-player stand-up machine called *Smokey Joe*. However, the first iteration of this game was unlike anything we'd seen before – or indeed since. You certainly couldn't miss this bright red and orange monster



▲ *Fire Truck offered a very cool asymmetric co-op arcade driving experience that remains unique even to this day.*



▲ *While you certainly couldn't miss the gloriously bright red and orange Fire Truck cabinet in any arcade, unfortunately its action was displayed in black and white, 'cos this was the olden days.*

when you walked into your arcade, what with its huge portrait monitor, seat with a steering wheel and – somewhat puzzlingly – a second steering wheel attached behind the machine's large seat.

I remember seeing it for the first time, and once I'd rubbed my eyeballs that were watering from *Fire Truck*'s searing paint job, checking it out. The conceit, as you might have guessed from the title, was that it was a game in which you drove a classic American ladder fire truck – one of those cool, very long articulated emergency vehicles designed for fighting high-rise fires. And if you're not familiar with these things, they have two steering wheels – one for the cab pulling the ladder unit, and one at the back of the truck to steer the trailer unit so that it can navigate narrow streets.

In one-player mode, you'd choose which part of the fire truck you wanted to drive (by inserting a coin into the front or the back of the machine) and the computer would drive the other unit. However, this was best enjoyed as a two-player game because this essentially asymmetric driving experience was just plain fun.

As was the format of driving games back then, players had a time limit and had to hit checkpoints to extend that time so they could keep playing. However, doing so involved coordination. If the cab driver was a clumsy buffoon unable to drive smoothly, the second player controlling the ladder unit would have a nightmare



▲ *The original 1978 flyer. Hot stuff indeed.*

time trying to keep the rear unit in line with the front (making it difficult to maintain speed and perhaps hitting roadside hazards that would slow the truck). Meanwhile, with an oaf at the wheel of the trailer unit, the cab driver would have a similarly difficult time keeping the vehicle straight so it could sail through the next checkpoint without running out of time. Which, as you can well imagine, was a recipe for recriminations and yelling for the inept, and two-player salutations and satisfaction for the skilled.

I remember playing the game with my brother – him driving the cab unit (as driving the trailer unit was more difficult and had far more of an impact on the speed of the vehicle), and both of us skillfully guiding the eponymous overhead-viewed fire truck down the game's scrolling black and white streets.

It was just cool, and quite different to many of the other late 70s driving games of the era that often involved frantic steering wheel spinning to keep your vehicle on the track. No, this was different as you needed finesse to keep the tractor and trailer units perfectly in line. A little bit of correction here, a light touch on the wheel there. This wasn't a game for the ham-fisted, that's for sure.

However, at this juncture I'm going to derail my meanderings and note that this is one of numerous weirdo 70s games that I will be talking about if we actually manage to get this magazine off the ground. In a feature which I've dubbed "*Disco Days Drivin'*," I'll be talking about other period driving games, some of which are reasonably well known today, some of which were extremely rare, and some that were just plain interesting.

And in a way, this highlights one of the facets of what I want this magazine to be. It's certainly not academic or journalistic, but more oral history, nostalgia trigger, and video game archeology. You won't be reading long pieces about games full of technical details or with interviews with programmers and the like. There are other publications that already do that far better than I ever could.

No, this is just people who have lived through gaming history talking about stuff they saw along the way. Favorites and greats. Disasters and the infamous. There'll be anecdotes and insights for sure, but what we want to do with ***Golden Age*** is make it feel like a conversation with people who saw gaming history unfold before them. Who lived it. The highs and lows. Warts and all. With prose that will make you go "I remember that," or perhaps "well, that I did not know," or even hold your finger up and go "aaaaaaah," as some long-forgotten nugget of info helps you piece together something that never made sense to you or sheds new light or perspective on something you hadn't thought about. And maybe we might even surprise you with something old that's new to you.

That's what we want ***Golden Age*** to be all about, so here's hoping you'll join us.



▶ Fire Truck*'s owners' manual, lest it break down and need fixing.*

GOLDEN AGE
CONSOLES•COMPUTERS•COIN-OPS

Bloody hell. I just realized it's been well over 30 years since I last wrote a "next issue" page, but here I am, doing just that for what I hope will be a fully-funded first issue of Golden Age.

This is just a taster of the kinds of things Paul Glancey and I are currently working on that I hope is sufficiently appetizing to persuade you to cough up some dough so we can actually publish this thing.

Re-review (Not fade away)

Paul and I will pick an old game and stroke our chins about what we thought of it back in the day and why.

Next issue – a beloved C64 classic that I reviewed extremely positively when it was released in 1987 but personally didn't like at all.

Disco Days Gaming

In a multi-part feature, I'll be looking at driving games from the decade of disco and bell ends (the trouser variety, not the trouser snake variety). Some of this stuff is really weird and old, plus I get to mention *Ain't Gonna Bump No More (With No Big Fat Woman)*, if that makes things any more alluring.

It Came From the 80s

A game we're covering next issue comes from the very, very early 80s. It's black and white and wobbly AF, but somehow, amazingly, it's still actually good.

Odd Stuff We Liked

In this regular feature, we dig up an old game that we loved at the time but has either aged badly, created some kind of controversy, or wasn't received well by our readers. And in this case, it's the latter – ya flamin' Philistines.



Betcha didn't buy this

This is where we drag out something we raved about that didn't sell for whatever reason. Probably because you spent your pocket money on some licensed Ocean shite like *Transformers* or *Knight Rider* rather than actually buying the good original games we were recommending at the time.

Right idea. Wrong Era

This is a chin-strokey feature where we look at an ambitious game that bit off more than it could chew, but was actually a good idea (but before its time). I'll bet you ten billion quid you won't know what game we've chosen because it's weirder than a wobbly wank spanner.

Weird and Wonderful Prehistoric Gaming

P 'n me will be waxing lyrical about early gaming that's not quite actual video gaming but existed at the same time as very early video games. Things like the Merlin system above and those strange old dedicated LED coin-op ports. Basically, weird old stuff you've probably long forgotten about but is interesting and fun.

Anyway, fund this sucka, and you'll be able to read all of this stuff – plus the other supa swingin' shenanigans we have planned.

JAZ

Jazza's final bit: Yeah, so this ain't actually Jazza, but MEAN YOB. I live rent free in Jaz's poncey bonce, occasionally appearing in his social media responses when irritating knobheads set him off. Anyway, I'm still around, so don't be surprised if you see me occasionally appearing in the magazine. Perhaps not in name, but most certainly in terms of tone and style. I mean, I'd be happy to answer emails, but I don't think any of you could be arsed to write them. And even if you did, you've all become fairy soft snowflakes who'd flounce out of the room blubbing like a big girl's blouse at the merest hint of a right royal roasting.

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