

The history of Galloping Ghost, the USA's largest classic arcade

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- The arcade's sign in Brookfield, Illinois.
Nate Anderson
- Pixel art characters adorn the wall behind the front counter.
Eric Bangeman
- A character from *Rampage*... made out of tiny plastic beads.
Nate Anderson
- Galloping Ghost really has over 700 arcade games.
Nate Anderson
- There was a *Galaga 3*?
Nate Anderson
- Ars Managing Editor Eric Bangeman relives his misspent youth by playing *Q*bert*.
Nate Anderson
- An old FBI warning about pirating video games.
Nate Anderson
- Many of the controllers have been "well loved" over the last two decades.
Nate Anderson
- Gotta love custom controllers, including my personal

favorite, the handlebars from Paperboy.

Nate Anderson

- An original SEGA label on the back of the *Zaxxon* cabinet.

Nate Anderson

- Just about every controller is represented, from joysticks to exceptionally realistic guns.

Nate Anderson

- The parts room.

Nate Anderson

- Old CRTs are always in demand to fix ailing machines.

Nate Anderson

- The arcade also has a number of sit-down games, including *Sega Strike Fighter*, but most are stand-up, old-school affairs.

Nate Anderson

- A TV displays current high scores for hundreds of titles.

Nate Anderson

- Galloping Ghost specializes in obscure titles, including this Japanese import, *Peaceful Death*.

Nate Anderson

- Doc Mack, the owner of Galloping Ghost, holds several world records, including this one in *King of Fighters 1996*.

Nate Anderson

- Many of the old cabinets had terrific art on the sides.

Nate Anderson

- The side cabinet art from *Jail Break*.

Nate Anderson

- My personal favorite, the art from *1943*.

Nate Anderson

- Fans help keep the play floor from getting too sweaty—those CRTs weren't built to modern energy efficiency standards.

Nate Anderson

- Another aisle of machines.

Nate Anderson

- The Galloping Ghost model is simple: Pay \$15, and play all you want. (This has since been bumped to \$20.)

Nate Anderson

If you're anything like us, you're itching for a return to physical gaming experiences like expos and arcades. The next best thing this week is a new 30-minute mini-documentary (embedded below) about the history of Galloping Ghost, a Chicago mega-arcade whose massive collection, full of rarities, was given the Ars Technica spotlight years ago.

The story is told primarily by arcade co-founder Doc Mack, who sits in his arcade's main office and recalls how the idea for an arcade began in part when he was a lowly clerk at a Babbage's in the '90s. *Mortal Kombat* co-creator Ed Boon came into his shop to buy video games, and Mack worked up the nerve to ask how he got into the game industry. A terse interaction followed, and Mack read between the lines: "Wow, Ed Boon didn't want to hear anything I had to say." Mack took the meeting as motivation to realize he'd have to change gears entirely to pursue his games-industry dream and start his own business.

The documentary skips over Mack's exact path from Babbage's to his own arcade, merely hinting at "business ideas" he had along the way, before jumping ahead to a friend prompting him to co-found and open an arcade in 2010. While trying to score classic arcade machines in the run-up, he was stunned to discover that out of 80 venues he visited, none had a working cabinet for *Mortal Kombat 2* (one of his admitted favorites) for sale. "That motivated me," he says.

After this and the story of a "barn find" of 114 dormant arcade machines in Iowa for \$5,000 total, the documentary settles into a groove of showing footage of customers diving into the games and offering their personal anecdotes, along with a breakdown of Doc's decision to forgo typical things

like “ticket redemption” games or quarters. (Galloping Ghost charges a flat fee to enter, at which point all games are free to play, no quarters required.) This footage appears to have been captured well before pandemic-related measures changed average attendance at arcade facilities (an issue that has already wreaked havoc on arcades around the world), and this doc avoids any commentary on current events. It’s just about the games.

In Galloping Ghost’s case, that includes a number of rare and prototype games, including a pair of unreleased Atari games donated to Mack by arcade-era legend Brian “Rampage” Colin and a restored prototype of the unreleased *Primal Rage 2*. (When asked about how the arcade’s rarities have affected business, Mack says plainly, “A couple hitchhiked here from Oregon just to play *Primal Rage 2*.”) The rare games are shown briefly as examples of the arcade’s massive 750+ selection of cabinets—and the doc doesn’t even get into Galloping Ghost Pinball, the company’s sister site down the block dedicated to flipping pins.

For more historical nuggets and amusing anecdotes, check out the embedded doc below. And while the documentary doesn’t mention it, Galloping Ghost is currently running a crowdfunding campaign to expand its primary facility in order to offer over 1,000 arcade cabinets for play.

[embedded content]

Galloping Ghost mini-documentary, from Diamond Head Productions.

Listing image by Nate Anderson

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