

ALL FORMATS

116 PAGES MONTHLY

Wireframe

LIFTING THE LID ON VIDEO GAMES

NEW DOOM

The rise of the nineties-style retro FPS

FLASH GAMES

The fight to preserve browser game history

DO IT YOURSELF

Code a block-pushing puzzle game

Issue 42 £6

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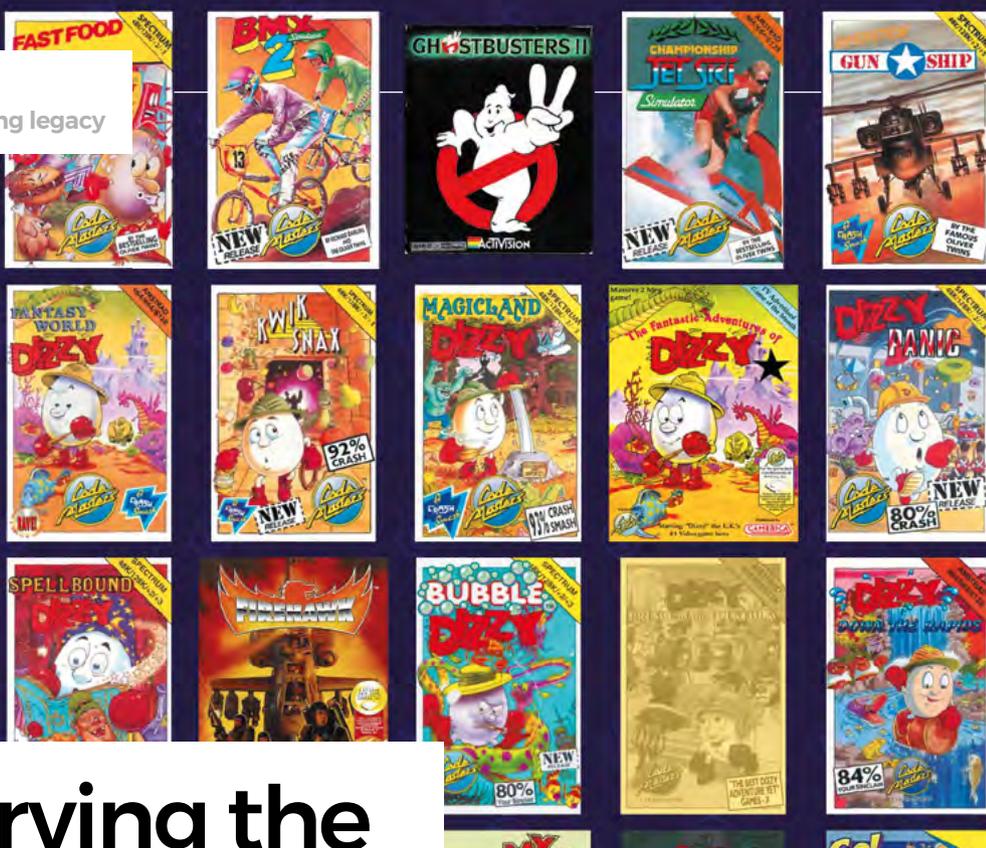
BIOHAZARD

SUSPENSE, CO-OP SHOOTING, AND BODY HORROR IN GTFO

Tackling industry racism • Ghost of Tsushima • Wholesome video games

Interface

Preserving a gaming legacy



Preserving the Oliver Twins' gaming legacy

While so many stories from the industry's early years are sadly lost to time, the Oliver Twins have spent lockdown preserving their Codemasters legacy online

▼ Click on a game and you'll uncover some candid information about its making.

Coronavirus has had far-reaching effects on society, and its impact will last for many years yet. Lockdown has meant different things to different people. The games industry hasn't been hit too badly; obviously, there are exceptions, but by and large, we're an industry that can work remotely, and sales of games have risen.

Museums have, on the other hand, been badly hit by the pandemic. They all had to close, including the National Videogame Museum (NVM) in Sheffield. When talking to people at the museum, we found that while interest in retro games and the history of the UK games industry has grown, few developers have kept much stuff

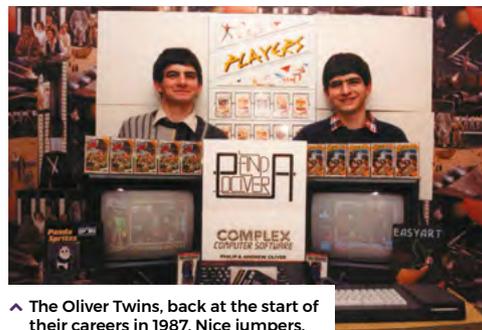
from those early pioneering days. Paper designs and notes were discarded, and disks with source code and assets have been lost, written over, or just become unreadable with age.

It turns out that Andrew and I are quite good at keeping a lot of this stuff. As a result, we've often been asked to talk about and display our collection at museums, including the NVM. Obviously, this hasn't been able to happen in lockdown.

RETRO INTEREST

Andrew and I grew up at a time when computer games were just getting started; back then, they were accessible enough that we were able to start programming them and make games ourselves. It was an era that fascinates many gamers today, especially those who aspire to work in the industry.

The broader public interest in retro games seemed to start around 2000, and we were interviewed a few times about games we'd written in the mid-eighties. We found it hard to remember all the details, so we decided to attempt to catalogue the games we'd written, since we'd kept many of the development files. This led to us creating nothing more than a simple Word document. At the same time, Andrew decided to buy [OliverTwins.com](https://www.oliver-twins.com) before



▲ The Oliver Twins, back at the start of their careers in 1987. Nice jumpers.



someone else nabbed it and tried selling it back to us. With nothing to put on the domain, we simply published the Word document in HTML as a holding page, and it remained there for several years.

Around 2008, a member of the media team at our studio, Blitz Games, had some spare time so we suggested they improve the site. The new build included all the details of the games along with some box art and screenshots. It looked respectable, but such is the pace of change in technology and people's expectations that it eventually started to look quite dated. We've always been too busy to do anything about it, but were aware that the site needed attention. We also knew it needed starting from scratch with a modern browser-based GUI editor, something like Squarespace, WordPress, or Wix (in the end, we chose the latter).

With lockdown imposed, and usual work and travel restricted, we thought now was the time to start over. The new website, then, covers the games we created from 1983 to 1993, starting when we were teenagers at school, playing and making games when we should have been doing homework. We show just how basic those early games were with type-in listings, and graphics produced on graph paper and converted into hex codes.

In total, there are 176 games recorded on the site – 54 titles across 16 platforms. Behind each game is a brief background story about when we made it and why; there's artwork, screenshots, scans of old magazine adverts and reviews, and in some cases, the original design notes. You can even play emulated versions of the games through your browser.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The next question is, should we start adding the Blitz years? The original PlayStation and Nintendo 64 era is now considered retro. We've already written a feature on the making of *WarGames: Defcon 1* (see page 58), and we're often asked about *Glover*, our original N64 title released in 1998.

Recently, we attempted to work out how many titles we created at Blitz Games (initially called Interactive Studios) before its closure in 2013. The final tally is 70 titles across 14 different

formats – a total of 161 games over a period of 20 years. While some of those games are better than others, we're proud of them all – and the people who made them. To prevent those games being lost and forgotten, we kept the Blitz Games website alive, but it too suffers from being unmaintained and frozen in time. Or maybe that's a good thing?

THE VALUE OF HISTORY

With lockdown continuing and the website complete, we're not about to start expanding into those Blitz years just yet. Still, we hope the revamped site will give the next generation of developers a grounding in what it was like to try to make engaging games with great characters, graphics, audio, and depth in just 32kB of memory.

Our path through the industry wasn't a bed of roses – there were many low points, but thankfully enough high points to keep us driving

forward. Our experiences were fairly typical of the period, but many developers aren't telling their own stories from those days, since they became too disillusioned and

left the industry, or in a few cases, become so successful that they couldn't spare the time to delve back into the past. There's also the danger that successful developers will paint an unrealistic picture of working in the industry; our story was tempered by some hard times, where grit and determination were the only way through.

What's great about history is that the older it is, the more fascinating it becomes if the detail is there, simply because it's so far removed from what we know and take for granted today.

Understanding where you've come from is not only interesting, but it's also helpful to see where you're going as you can clearly see the trajectory. You can also see the pitfalls that have happened along the way, and hopefully, avoid them in the future. 🍷

“Our story was tempered by some hard times”

Interface

Preserving a gaming legacy

Get solid chest. Drop beside cliff. Head left and get rubber snake. Hit stone on the way to lower platform on screen below.
 1 Go and get glass sword and camera.
 2 Head back to beach and drop sword and camera.
 3 Enter water and get salt water spade.
 4 Arrange objects so spade can be dropped before snake.
 5 Go to wedding alone and drop spade on it. Go back and get camera and sword. Enter water. Stand on bubble and walk on across the rocks.
 6 Give camera to storekeeper. Take boat to pier and drop.
 7 Get axe. Drop sword on gravestone. Do not go down gravestone. Get fish.
 8 Cross ocean. Drop axe on bridge but don't go down yet. Arrange objects so that rubber Bible or snake can be dropped on picking up other object.
 9 Go down bridge. Get treasure. Take treasure to store keeper and drop outboard motor on pier.
 10 Get golden key from pier. Go down gravestone. Get dynamite. Head right until you are in a room with half a barrel blocking an entrance. Drop golden key on this. Go down. Get microwave oven.
 11 Cross ocean again. Drop oven on pier.
 12 No boarding the boat until it is covered!
 13 You've found Blackbeard's secret kitchen! Ideal for those midnight snacks!
 14 Congratulations! You have successfully solved all the puzzles and truly earned your freedom. Good luck Dizzy.

KEY
 1 Bag of gold coins
 2 Gold coin hidden behind scenery
 3 Gold coin
 4 Singular Abuser mug
 5 Sharp glass sword
 6 Small video camera
 7 Rubber snake
 8 Intra-red detector
 9 Rubber axe
 10 Tube of toothpaste
 11 An empty solid chest
 12 Salt water spade
 13 Spade of dynamite
 14 The woodcutter's axe
 15 The cursed treasure
 16 An old Holy Bible
 17 An old empty biscuit
 18 A large golden key
 19 A microwave oven

As well as design documents and game information, the site also preserves scans from eighties magazines.

A number of the Oliver Twins' games can be played directly through the browser, including *Robin Hood* and *Fantasy World Dizzy*.

