

## An excerpt from "Champion For a Day" by Dr. Kenneth Horowitz

I used to get my coin-op fix at a local pizza place called Tasty Freeze. At the time, it was as though every town in Puerto Rico had one. There, you could enjoy a delicious slice of pizza and a cold icee for a mere seventy-five cents, leaving that last, precious quarter for a game. And it was usually one that could provide some decent play time. One would never risk wasting it on some random title. No, that quarter had a purpose!

And what better end to that final twenty-five cents than to put on as best a public show as possible? There were many games that could keep me entertained for a good while on such a paltry sum, but there were a few that I had mastered utterly. These select cabinets were the ones that I played religiously, either because I was a fan of the characters and subject matter or because they were relatively new and no one had yet seen their endings. Capcom's *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* fell into the former category. The end of the original *Ghosts 'n Goblins* had always eluded me, and I was determined to make sure I saw the sequel's credits roll. Several of my friends were also determined to finish the game, and while I wasn't the first in town to beat it, I could count myself among the few who could claim they did. Still, it kind of irked me that someone had climbed that particular summit ahead of me.

A new game at the Tasty Freeze gave me a chance to rectify that situation. The 1989 Data East brawler *Fighting Fantasy* (also known as *Hippodrome*) arrived and attracted all kinds of attention. Players took on the role of a young warrior competing in a tournament to name the planet's champion. The 2D combat took place inside a giant colosseum against all kinds of mythical creatures like gargoyles, lizard men, and even a dragon. The game proved popular among the locals, despite its stiff controls. In hindsight, we were perhaps too young to realize that *Fighting Fantasy's* difficulty owed more to its poor gameplay than an honest challenge, but such was the case with many titles we played in the arcade and on our consoles; we were used to it, and even the most broken games were playable when there was nothing else available. In all fairness, the game wasn't that bad, but it certainly had its flaws. Did I care? Absolutely not.

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Written by Ken Horowitz. This excerpt from the book *Digital Archaeology: Retrogaming Recollections* is © 2024 SCAR Productions. Please do not distribute without the author's permission. Direct all inquiries to Rob Strangman at gradusone [at] yahoo [dot] com.