

**JIM ZESPY**  
**Logan Arcade – Chicago, IL**

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**[Begin Jim Zespy – Logan Arcade]**

**00:00:00**

**Tom Barker:** Alright this is Friday the 21st, I'm here with Mr. Zespy at the Logan Hardware Arcade.

**00:00:07**

**Jim Zespy:** Hello hello.

**00:00:14**

**TB:** Alright, do you have any questions before we-?

**00:00:17**

**JZ:** No.

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**TB:** How long have you been in the arcade business?

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**JZ:** I guess as far as having games, um, location? Would be 2009.

**00:00:32**

**TB:** Okay, so fairly new. How old is this specific business?

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**JZ:** We started the bar in February of last year. Oh sorry - this year. February of 2014.

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**TB:** Why did you want in the industry?

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**JZ:** I've been a collector and restorer for a while. I'm a big fan of coin-op history, video games, and arcade games. Both mechanical, video game, and pinball. For a while and I started with consoles, handhelds, and things like that of course that led me to the bigger machines. *[Laughs]*

**00:01:17**

**TB:** What were your expectations when you started opening in the video game industry?

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**JZ:** My expectations? I mean I guess just hoping to have fun, hoping that other people would enjoy the stuff that I enjoy as well.

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**TB:** Your expectations pretty much the same, now?

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**JZ:** Yeah you know, maintenance is - I knew would be an issue, but the things that are an issue as far as maintenance are slightly different than I thought. Coin mechs - just an ongoing, constant struggle. So the the most important thing - I mean games, I guess without it - the game doesn't work. So yeah it was more than I thought because before that for many years the arcade that we have at the recordstore was on freeplay so we didn't have to deal with that. Otherwise it was about what I expected.

**00:02:08**

**TB:** Okay. Is this a nine to five job?

**00:02:13**

**JZ:** It's more of a nine to - twelve job **[laughs]**. It's because it's a bar, it's open late, so you know. We're here until two in the morning most nights, sometimes three.

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**TB:** How do you feel about those hours?

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**JZ:** It's nice, it's fun you know - a little tiring. It's nice to be here when it's quiet to get stuff done and it's nice to be here at night to see the hustle-bustle and see people enjoying the games, you know?

**00:02:42**

**TB:** How would you describe a typical day at your job?

**00:02:48**

**JZ:** A typical day - a little bit of problem solving, a little bit of shoveling to get just crap done, and a little bit of enjoyment somewhere in a mix of those things

**00:03:03**

**TB:** What impact do you think games have on the players?

**00:03:07**

**JZ:** You know I think some of it is nostalgia. I think that's why there's a lot more places to play now than there ever has been. I think it's a theme people like, I think people think of it that way, but think a lot more people are into it, especially at our location. I go to a lot of the other locations and people, you know they play and they're having fun but it's very shallow - like as far as the play. They're not playing a deep way. Where I feel like we get a broad mix and we try to encourage people to play games with each other. We have games like Killer Queens - brand new, it's one of the few that exist right now on test, and it's a very social game. So we try to make it social: we have little leagues and specific nights we try to get people together to play and make it more of a social sort of thing, so. Hopefully what they're getting out of it is a little bit of fun, a little bit of distraction, and a little bit of social interaction at the same time.

**00:04:08**

**TB:** Can you describe the leagues a little more?

**00:04:11**

**JZ:** There is a couple leagues: there's the Chicago Pinball League of Pinball Chicago, run by Ben Vigeant. He does a league over the whole city where there is multiple locations involved, and each location has a home team and they kind of go around from location to location playing in a bracketed league. Then we have a local one, the Logan Arcade Local Pinball League, which is run by our tech James and that's more about being social and it's always here, it's only at this location. The games change every week. It is rated, there is scoring, and there is some competition but it's meant to play different games, get to know them, and get to know other people through pinball.

**00:04:57**

**TB:** Do you have league nights and stuff like that?

**00:05:00**

**JZ:** Yeah, we do league night every Tuesday, for the local league, and then every Monday during the season for the Pinball Chicago League run by Ben.

**00:05:12**

**TB:** Do you think arcades have an impact on the community?

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**JZ:** Not as much as they once did. You know, they were both an awesome place for a family to go play and also a place that some communities were afraid of, they thought it was a bad element - but nowadays I think the impact, again a little bit of nostalgia, a little bit of fun - but I think that there is a younger group of people getting into it, by younger I mean in their early twenties, that didn't grow up with this stuff and it's becoming more

than nostalgia and they're actually getting into it. I see people trying to get higher scores and trying to compete with their friends so hopefully it has longer legs than just this bubble that's going on right now, you know, that's the hope.

**00:06:00**

**TB:** So what makes a good coin-op game?

**00:06:03**

**JZ:** You know it's - ah - I forget who said it first, but it's easy to understand, hard to master. That's what everybody in the industry says in multiple interviews, documentaries, and in person. That's what designers and that's what Gary stern will say, that's what Joey will say from Stern. I think that's a lot of it. I think nowadays I don't think it needs to be a full immersive experience - I think that's nice, like the new Star Trek-err, Star Wars game that came out that's basically a Gundam pod. But it's insanely expensive, super cool looking, but as an operator I couldn't see it ever making enough money to pay for itself. But anyway a good game for me is a balance of, the same things, easy to understand, hard to master. But also now more of a social element - a game that you can kind of take some ownership over, and have fun with. I think if a game is too intimidating up front, like Marble Madness is very hard, but everyone remembers it - or thinks they remember it - but they remember the NES version, which is a hand controller, not a trackball. It's actually a very hard game and we have it set, not just to easy but to very easy - and most people can't get past the first level. But it's a great game. I think nowadays no one-not many people are old enough to remember when games came out you had to learn to play them. Most of the people that come here are from the nineties, and they remember the joystick is always directional, for your character, and you have a button that's either kicking or punching, and you move one direction. You know - that's the depth of most players' knowledge. Where a game like Tron or Gorf, or Marble Madness, you need to learn the game and learn the controls before you'll understand what you're doing - or StarGate or Defender or Robotron. But those are very very very good games, but they require a little bit more from the player upfront. So I think for a game nowadays it has got to be easy to understand because people's attention spans are

so short that they'll just walk away - unsatisfied. Like that game didn't work! Well, there's three instructions the first one is: this moves, this shoots, second instruction-but they don't even read that. It happens to me too with pinball. There's a small card with a very small amount of instructions - but I still don't read it, and I'll sit there on four games - what am I supposed to do? Well it's written right there, if I take the time, you know?

**00:08:34**

**TB:** What makes a bad coin-op game?

**00:08:37**

**JZ:** I guess the opposite, you know. A game that's hard to understand. Maybe even easy to master, I don't know, or hard to master. Games that require too much out of the player up front. Where they just don't understand what the point is of the game. Which is too bad because I feel like some of those games, like Defender or Robotron in particular, or Smash TV, they're actually not that hard to understand, but the threshold is much lower for people nowadays. They just don't want to take the time to figure out a game. So I guess a game that is too hard to understand upfront becomes intimidating, so people just walk away, you know.

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**TB:** How often do you play your own machines?

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**JZ:** You know not often enough. I play in the league now and that's been great because it's making me-it just makes you play differently when there's a little bit of competition or something on the line, and not to mention the league gives-like a regiment, like you have to practice and you have to be there on a specific day, a specific time, you have to play. I'm trying to get back to playing more but it used to be that all these games were just mine in my private collection, so **[laughs]**. I could play them whenever I wanted, it was kind of on my terms, where now I might be waiting in line for a game and it's, you

know, it's just a little different. I try to play a few times every day, even if it's just a game here or there.

**00:10:06**

**TB:** What makes a good arcade environment?

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**JZ:** I think, for me, it depends on how you define that. If you want it to be an old-school arcade, it should be kind of creepy, it should be a little bit wet - **[laughs]** kind of gross, and really dark. But that's not the vibe I'm going for. I want it to be inclusive, number one, I want it to be based on a love of the games and a love of the machines and not just, you know, some people that get into arcade games now, it's just a theme. You could be into tiki bars. It doesn't matter. It's just a skin to put over a place that's meant to sell booze. It's not about the games, it's not about playing them. It's just a theme, you know. But for me, a good arcade, you should be able to hear the games but not be totally overwhelmed, the lighting should be a little bit lower so you're focusing on the games, and it just feels a little bit more mellow. I think that you should have space around a game - like we really obsessed about, you know, we want the most games possible, but obsessed about how close can a game be, like on a pinball game, before you're really up on somebody else - especially the two players standing next to each other. Then maybe there's a two player game on each night and you got a guy waiting behind you. So just keeping it comfortable and inclusive, and just having a nice vibe, you know. I think that's a lot of it for me.

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**TB:** Have you ever been to any arcades with a bad environment, you would say?

**00:11:46**

**JZ:** Yeah, you know, I've been to a few arcades where the focus was, I don't know what the focus would be, but it was like the environment was so loud and so packed. Things like, the layout of a game. I was at a place where there's a game I wanted to play, but it was off in a corner, cut off by a little bit of a wall, so that if you had one person playing a



game, let's say in this row of four here, if somebody was playing Q\*bert, nobody could get to any of the other games without asking them to move. It's like that's not, it had no flow to it, and the games had no rhyme or reason for where they were at - they were just kind of shoved wherever. And it felt like no one had ever played the games that worked there, because it's like man you can't orientate a game that way, or you-. I think that or a setup on a pinball game, if a pinball game isn't leveled, or if something is setup badly, or there is an arcade I went to recently, where they had great games - expensive games - but there'd be like a flipper rubber broken. You can't play the game. And it's like, that's literally a five second fix. You just open it up, put a rubber on it, and you shut it. That's it, it's working. But they, because they don't come from that world, at this particular place, they had to wait for some tech to get there. And it's like no man, just open the game up, fix it, you know, so.

**00:13:10**

**TB:** What is your favorite arcade game?

**00:13:13**

**JZ:** My favorite video game? Or pinball game?

**00:13:17**

**TB:** Uh, video game.

**00:13:18**

**JZ:** My favorite video game. I really like Q\*bert's Qubes. I really like Nibbler. I like Pac-Mania, I guess it's not a favorite. Uhh, my favorite right now is actually Super Breakout. Based on of course, Breakout, and Steve Wozniak did the design work, for, based on what Nolan Bushnell wanted which is a classic brick breaking game. But it's, again, easy to understand, way harder than you'd think. And awesome. So simple and fun, the sounds are easy and simple. I'd probably say right now it's that game or a Namco System One game called Dragon Spirit. It's basically a shmup, but you're a dragon, and it

has a ground shooting element as well as, you know, regular fire button - so you have bombs and fire buttons. And it's just really hard and really weird, so I like that a lot too.

**00:14:12**

**TB:** Are there any tricks you know for it?

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**JZ:** Not so much, you know, just time. You gotta practice.

**00:14:20**

**TB:** Just skill, basically?

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**JZ:** Yup. I really like shmups lately. My friend Jeff got me into it, he's a collector of shmup stuff and plays in that scene, and used to have a big get together once a year, here, with us. And those guys, they're just fun players, they're competitive, but they're very, uh, welcoming like group. They're very nice guys. And it's all about getting to know a game in a deep way where you sit down, at home, with a PCB and either a Supergun or a-or-a-or some sort of JAMMA cabinet, and you learn this game, you know? But that's an extension of like Japanese arcades where, you know, with the super plays and people getting really deep into a game, so.

**00:15:02**

**TB:** While working here, what is the weirdest thing that has ever happened to you?

**00:15:05**

**JZ:** *[laughs]*. Weirdest thing.. Well, learning that *[laughs]*, bathrooms get destroyed every night. Tagged, and broken - just like what the heck. Um weirdest thing. I think game wise it's just realizing how young some of the people are, they don't- like people think they remember Tron, or they think they remember Pac-Man, but they remember it as far as the pop culture part of it. They don't actually remember playing the game,

because if they did they would know how to play it. And they'll step up to Tron and say 'I don't understand', well they're not grabbing all of the controls. Maybe they're grabbing only half the controls **[laughs]**. Or Robotron, where one person will grab one joystick and they don't understand why it doesn't work and it's like no, you gotta play with two joysticks. Or Pac-Man where they're like, 'Oh this is really slow and boring', and it's like yeah - 'cause you don't remember original Pac-Man and you've never really played it in the arcade before. That's kind of interesting to see.

**00:16:09**

**TB:** Have you noticed any major changes over the time that you've been here?

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**JZ:** No, I mean, you know, five finger crowd. We rotate games a lot. It's interesting to see what games people play and don't play. Which is kind of a moving target. It's fun, a lot of fun.

**00:16:33**

**TB:** What did you do before you entered the industry?

**00:16:35**

**JZ:** Been in the music business on and off since the nineties. Got a record store with John down the block, Logan Hardware Records. That's where we started with video games, that was in this location first. We had video games in the back room on free play, as kind of a museum collection. Now that's down the block, and we still have games on that location as well.

**00:17:04**

**TB:** What was your best day ever, at this job?

**00:17:08**

**JZ:** You know one day that was really nice, well, it's always nice when, you know, arcade legends stop by: you have Eugene Jarvis, or Mark Ritchie, or Steve Ritchie, or Gary Stern, or George Gomez, or John Trudeau, or, you know, John Borg, you have these designers and people that have been in the industry stopping by to play or check things out, that's a lot of fun. But one of the best days was, I was sitting there watching people play Killer Queen, that new game that we have, and it just, had a nice vibe, of grabbing people that you didn't know and they wanted to play with each other. They were having fun and yelling and screaming at the game, and just it reminded me of what I think arcades used to be, what I remember them being. Which was, you know, you might meet up with someone you don't know and be like 'Hey you're pretty good at that, why don't we play a game together?', or 'Can you show me what you did there?', or it's just a different vibe. We've had that a few times and it was really nice to see because, I think it's a living thing, or can be a living thing, it doesn't have to be this flashing of hand level of nostalgia, you know?

**00:18:25**

**TB:** How has the industry impacted your life outside of work?

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**JZ:** Little less sleep *[laughs]*. It's just really satisfying. Coin-op in general is just a cool history, and a very American history. I just uh, I love it, and it's kind of like, I always say I'm the equivalent of the crazy cat lady, but for video games. I just can't stop getting them. Someone will say, 'Oh we found another ten of these! They're going to be thrown away', and I'm like give me those, I'll take them, I don't have anywhere to put them, but I'll take them. Because I-it's a finite resource, these things, a lot of these games are thirty something years old. Most of these games are older than the players. And it's part of our, part of our history. Part of this American history of gaming, and I don't want it to be lost, you know? And it's fun, I really enjoy the history a lot.

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**TB:** What major projects have you worked on that were important to your career?

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**JZ:** Coin-op wise?

**00:19:29**

**TB:** Yeah, coin-op wise?

**00:19:32**

**JZ:** Let me think, I guess I've been lucky enough to just have nice discussions with people like Andy from Raw Thrills or Eugene or Gary, Stern or just you know, shoot the shit with George Gomez, that's just, it's not that's important, but it was important to me because these are people that they know what they're talking about, and someone like George who came from Marvin Glass and Associates or worked there and did toy design, you know, and then worked on video games, I mean he worked on that CapCom cabinet over there, he designed that, or he worked on Gurf and he hid his initials in different parts of the game and he showed me that. That stuff is cool. I love that stuff, so.

**00:20:15**

**TB:** How do you feel about people playing marathon games sessions?

**00:20:19**

**JZ:** I love it! I would have a hand full. We had a guy playing Nibbler for I forget how long, over 50 some hours. It was three days almost, I think. Straight. I think that's great, I think that, you know, people would think that that's something nerdy, or novelty, or they think it's funny that these guys want to play these marathon sessions but I think it's amazing. I think like Walter Day would say 'These are athletes', you know. I think of it in that way. I think because it's on video games or has this nerdy or geeky context people would-. People don't think of it that way, but I do. I think it's really cool when someone plays to some insane level. I watched Ronnie McDonald play his hundredth game of Chaoused rolling the game over, at the Old Williams, on one of my machines, in front of the game designer. And the game designer afterwards, I got to sit there and listen to him talk to Ronnie about it and 'I didn't even know what the game would do at that level',

cuz, he has never seen anyone at that level. He designed the game but he had no idea of where would it go, you know. That was very cool to see.

**00:21:28**

**TB:** Have you had anyone play a major record at one of your machines?

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**JZ:** Yeah, we had a couple things. I guess in this location we had the one hour Tron Ice score board record by David Cruz who's a Tron Master. And that was very cool to see, especially since Tron, if you're gonna play a one hour, you're not coin pressing, you're trying to clear levels so changes your patterns dramatically. So that was cool to see. We had high scores on Nibbler. We had high scores on-. Look we had Rick Carter here from Nibbler and did a world record. We did Tetris for both main and arcade were put here by the same guy in the same game. First game that he'd played in, I think he said in five years, and he just killed it, that was Jimmy Linderman. He also set the world record on PacMania which is cool to see because I like that game. Yeah, there've been a handful of ones that were cool to see.

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**TB:** Has this affected your business in a positive way?

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**JZ:** The high scores?

**00:22:37**

**TB:** Yeah

**00:22:39**

**JZ:** Ah, I think that it brings some attention to the place in thinking that it's a nice little new story, you know, but-. We actually the day that we had these awesome players here

earlier this year, Don, Donald Hase was playing Centipede. And he's just messing around with the game, and doing really well of course because he is an amazing player. And it was all mushrooms, and looks crazy and it gathered the crowd because when you're playing at that level but people can tell. They look at the screen and they're like 'Holy shit, I've never seen that. That's insane'. He's playing and this guy leans over to a dude next to with his phone and was like 'this guys is at, whatever, I'm out.' And he goes at it, I don't remember, whatever, and goes 'Good luck, the world record is 250 million' and then the guy next to him, Mitch, was Mitchell Alley, looked at him and said 'Yeah, he's the world record holder. He's just screwing around with the machine', and the guys was like 'What?!' and just started telling everyone that story that night like 'That's the guy with the world record holder for this game, and blah blah blah, at the same place'. Kinda cool.

**00:23:43**

**TB:** What was your busiest year?

**00:23:45**

**JZ:** This is our first year here, so, you know. Work in progress.

**00:23:56**

**TB:** How do you feel about arcade equipment for games like face motorcycles, racing simulators, stuff like that?

**00:24:04**

**JZ:** Ahm, you know, if we had more space I think it would be cool to have games like that that are more immersive. I would love to have Gondon Pods if money weren't an object. There's a lot of Japanese games I would love to have if money were no object. But, I don't know, I want them all *[laughs]*. I want all of them.

**00:24:27**

**TB:** What are some of the risks you've taken in this industry?

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**JZ:** Just collecting these games and trying to open a place like this I guess was a risk, you know. Other people do it, but they do it for different reasons, and I don't know, I guess the risk for us was, would people understand what we are trying to do and understand that we're not just another arcade bar? Would they notice that? I hope so, you know.

**00:24:57**

**TB:** How do you interact with other parts of the industry like trade organizations anything like that?

**00:25:01**

**JZ:** You know what, people stop in, there's a Replay Magazine did a thing on us. I think that is one difference between us and any other places, is that most other places don't really care about the industry as much. It's just about having a bar and having fun, and they don't pay attention to some of the smaller parts of the industry, so. We've been including and that's very nice.

**00:25:26**

**TB:** How has marketing the arcade over the years done?

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**JZ:** You know, we don't do a ton of marketing, what we do is mostly facebook and things like that, so.

**00:25:41**

**TB:** What is the reputation of the arcade industry in general?

**00:25:42**

**JZ:** A little city, I'd say, you know, it has a funny history. It was, pinball was illegal in the States until 1976. Mayor Laguardia ran on a campaign on removing pinball from New York. That was, on his reelection campaign, that was his main plan form, and that's



pretty insane. And it was made illegal in all major cities until '76. So probably it has kind of a city, gambling-ish, generally people think of it that way, but I think that if you just scratch one notch below the surface you realize it's actually a pretty amazing history of gaming, but gaming for, you know, the money making devices, so it has to balance fun and revenue, you know.

**00:26:27**

**TB:** Why do you think there's such a resurgence in old style games?

**00:26:30**

**JZ:** I think part of it is nostalgia, part of it is 'Oh I remember that. That was on Nintendo'. I think another part of it is you can't experience like a pinball game. There's great emulation out there. The guys from Pinball Arcade Farsight, awesome games and I play them on my phone and, you know, when there's an iPad around I'll play it on there, but it's just not the same. Involves a physical game in a physical world. We gotta play it that way. So I think that's part of it, emulate wise. Videogamewise, you know, it's just a different experience. It's like people say why is vinyl making a resurgence? Well, because it's a physical clumsy object that is fun to interact with instead of just clicking on your Spotify on your phone, you know. Sure I can play Cuber right here by myself on my phone, but I think most people would say it's a lot more fun to play in the upright if you can, you know.

**00:27:26**

**TB:** Do you see that continuing?

**00:27:27**

**JZ:** I hope so. I think that some percentage of the people would hold on. Watching the people who play here and in all the other places in Chicago, you know, probably the majority of them are in for the long haul, but they're not gamers, they're just looking for something fun to do, and that's great. That's fun, and hopefully it will convert some of those people over to the long term players. But, I don't know, I hope it goes long ways.

00:27:55

**JZ:** There's Whitney. Hey man!

00:27:56

**WR:** What is up my man?

00:27:58

**JZ:** What's up brother?

00:27:59

**WR:** How are you doing?

00:27:59

**JZ:** I'm good man, doing good.

00:28:00

**WR:** Awesome, awesome! Yeah, sorry it took me a little longer to get here that I thought.

00:28:05

**JZ:** Here's the guys that are gonna interview you. They are doing two separate projects.

00:28:09

**WR:** OK

00:28:09

**JZ:** So I'm doing this one, and these people over here would be doing one with you. I figure you can be upfront here because it's quieter.

00:28:16

**WR:** OK

**00:28:16**

**JZ:** You wanna throw your bags in my office?

**00:28:17**

**WR:** Yeah, dude.

**00:28:19**

**JZ:** He runs Broken Token

**00:28:21**

**TB:** Oh, OK

**00:28:24**

**TB:** Have you faced any special challenges in the coin-op industry?

**00:28:29**

**JZ:** Yeah, you know, there are weird laws about how many games you can have in different places, you know, that was a challenge. That's a challenge anywhere in the States. And that's a backlash of people back in the day trying to hold back arcades because they were afraid of [inaudible] or drugs, or whatever bad connotation they have. But otherwise no, I mean is a challenge in any business. Keep the lights on, keep the people having fun, you know.

**00:29:02**

**TB:** How would you describe the culture of your business?

**00:29:07**

**JZ:** Hopefully it comes out as inclusive and sincere, cuz that what we thrive for, is to be very inclusive environment and just sincerely we love these games and most of the games on the floor are games I personally love. That been said, if someone really loves the

games I don't love, that's fine. This is supposed to be inclusive, so I put it on the floor, you know.

**00:29:33**

**TB:** How do you decide the price of the game?

**00:29:35**

**JZ:** You know, for us, we keep basically the cost of the game was when it came out, give or take. And it just need to feel like a good value because there's a very fine balance between 'Sure, could that game take a dollar?' Probably could. You'll lower the amount of people who play it and maybe end up summing to the same revenue, you know, where if you kept it at a quarter or fifty cents more people play it, the revenue might be the same, but by having more people playing it, get more people into it, you get more business. So you have to find the balance between the feeling like a value for people. If it's too low, like a lot of the places there's free play, a lot of the guys I know don't enjoy it as much because it's not monetized, you put no value in it. If you're playing a game 'So what? I'll play it again'. What if you came here with five bucks, and all you had to do is to put five bucks. Well that game, that quarter, just meant something to you, because you only have twenty of them, you know.

**00:30:35**

**TB:** Is this a family business?

**00:30:36**

**JZ:** Sure, I mean is my family, it's me.

**00:30:43**

**TB:** What is your main demographic?

**00:30:45**

**JZ:** I would say, you know, twenty one to forty five. We have a very good mix in general. There's probably a little bit more men interested in it and that come in, but it's pretty balanced, especially compared with the other businesses that I've visited. I've seen more balance, age wise especially.

**00:31:09**

**TB:** Any special tactic that you used to target that demographic?

**00:31:15**

**JZ:** You know, tried to build it right and have a nice place so the people come and have fun, really.

**00:31:22**

**TB:** What are your biggest daily concerns?

**00:31:24**

**JZ:** Maintenance. Maintenance, maintenance, more maintenance.

**00:31:32**

**TB:** What is your turnover of customers?

**00:31:36**

**JZ:** During the day, as far as of how many people through the door?

**00:31:40**

**TB:** Yeah

**00:31:40**

**JZ:** I don't know, you know. It's hard to say. I would say that most people who come in here spend a couple hours from what I see.

**00:31:51**

**TB:** Do you have like a lot of repeat customers?

**00:31:51**

**JZ:** Yeah, there are regulars that come in specially on the weekends. We have regular customers that, you know, these people that made facebook pages about some of our specific games and they try to come up with times for people to come out and have fun and coordinate groups of people coming out, so.

**00:32:12**

**TB:** How do you compete with other arcades?

**00:32:15**

**JZ:** You know, by just putting our best foot forward, by trying to letting them know that we really give our shit about these games, both in the curating of the games as well as the maintenance and upkeep of the games. We try to keep it fresh, we put new games in all the time, way more than anybody else. And that's also because we have a bigger pool to pull from because we have a lot of games compared to most places. And then just trying to make it an inclusive nice place, you know, paying attention to the things like 'Is the music too loud?', 'Can people talk?', you know, trying just to pay attention to the environment, you know.

**00:32:55**

**TB:** How has the home digital gaming affected your business?

**00:32:59**

**JZ:** I think it helps. I think that a lot of the people that have, you know, a little arcade where you can download stuff on XBox and things like that, where they can experience some of these games cheaply at home, and then find out 'Oh shit! These exist? In

Chicago?', I might have to go and play World of Madness in person, you know. So I think it's helpful.

**00:33:22**

**TB:** How do you choose the games you put in your business?

**00:33:25**

**JZ:** Originally I tried to have a balance of all different eras, all different manufactures, and all different kinds of games to try to have a balance, and then we just kind of watched what people gravitated towards and tried to fill the holes and take out games that people didn't enjoy and put in games that people do enjoy. You know, it built on things that people like. Like if someone likes Cuber, try Cuber to Cubes. If people like, I don't know, Black Knight, maybe look at Black Knight 2000. If people like Tron, try Discs of Tron, you know, things like that. Moving kind of laterally when possible.

**00:34:02**

**TB:** Are there any benefits to be in the coin-op industry?

**00:34:06**

**JZ:** Fun. I like it. Eugene Jarvis always says, you know, 'You are a -- you're monetizing', I think it is the way he says it, 'It's one quarter at time. That's how you know how you're doing it'. And I think that's amazing, because it's incremental. It doesn't seem as much but a quarter at the time over many games, over many days and you can afford to pay for these games and maintain them, you know. That's the hope and it's fun to see because it's kinda like everyone is coming in with a handful of votes, so they gotta vote for a game and I always say 'If you like a game play it because if it doesn't get played we're gonna pull it'.

**00:34:46**

**TB:** Are licenced games more profitable?

**00:34:48**

**JZ:** I think upfront is very helpful because someone already has an attachment to it, like The Walking Dead does very well because people know the theme, they know the show. The show is the most watched thing on TV right now, so of course that helps. If it was the exact same game and it had some, you know, the spoke theme probably it wouldn't do as well, you know, not sure why.

**00:35:15**

**TB:** How do you feel about ticket arcades?

**00:35:16**

**JZ:** Like redemption? I think it can be really fun. I think sometimes those games are a little bit not very deep, but then there are the other ones that I've played that are totally ingenious and fun. I mean, obviously Whac-A-Mole, which was designed by Aaron Fechter, and was based on the game that Bob's Space Racers wanted him to make. Still an awesome game, still makes money. Simple, and fun. And then I see other stuff like a, there's an operation game that came out. Such an obvious theme. They've done A Hundred Hundred Hippos, but that was a really cool game. Really simple and fun to play. The redemption is kinda cool, you know. I enjoy going on Chuck E Cheese once in a while and doing that sort of thing.

**00:36:05**

**TB:** What makes pinball popular?

**00:36:07**

**JZ:** I think, like I said earlier, it's a physical game that exists in the real world but you can't properly emulate or play in any other form, so.

**00:36:21**

**TB:** What makes one pinball machine better than another one?



**00:36:25**

**JZ:** You know, that's a tough thing. I think it could be theme, I think it can be flow, I think it can be speed of the game, I think it can be just how it feels which it's kinda silly to say but certain shots feel good, and there are fun to play. I think theme in pinballs do pretty well because people know, you know, you walk up to AC-DC or Metallica and you know what is gonna sound like because you know those bands, you know. Or Tron, or like I said Walking Dead.

**00:36:56**

**TB:** What was your first coin op experience?

**00:37:00**

**JZ:** I don't know if it was my first, but probably my first was going in the nights in Columbus in Fargo, North Dakota with my twin brother and we would play an old Williams Pitchen bag mechanical game. It was great because for one quarter, one person got to be the pitcher and one person got to work the bat and that was a lot of fun. It was mechanical and kind of weird and exciting to play because there wasn't any mechanicals around at that point. So that's probably my earliest that I remember.

**00:37:31**

**TB:** What do you see as the future for coin-op?

**00:37:32**

**JZ:** I think the future is gonna be -- I think the future could be really bright if people break out of the mold a little bit and do games like Killer Queen that are more social and that -- You gotta start where people are at right now. Where people are at now is that don't have long memories, and either they didn't play or don't remember playing more complicated games, so I think they gotta be simple and fun, not intimidating upfront. Social and competitive that are also cooperative like Killer Queen. I think games like that would really help. And also accessible and not stupidly expensive. I think Raw Thrills and Play Mechanics do a great job and nanphide does a great job, but a lot of those games

are drivers or shooters, you know, that's basically what people are doing, and for good reason. But I think that people can branch out a little further and look at the independent gaming scene and look at what people are doing there. Look at what people can design on smaller simpler systems. Maybe open software up and include small groups of independent developers and do more of a crowd source to code set up where people could almost hexite design levels, or chain rules sets for games and involve people, you know, more.

**00:39:02**

**TB:** What do you see as the future for your arcade?

**00:39:06**

**JZ:** If I can cram more games in here, more games, you know. Hopefully people just continue to have fun and wanna come out and learn about different games and how to play them and bring their friends, you know.

**00:39:18**

**TB:** Do you have any plan to expand?

**00:39:20**

**JZ:** There *[Laugh]* is no space, unfortunately we can't expand but uh yea you know just keep shuffling games around find interesting new games to play or world games and maintain the one's we have the best we can.

**00:39:36**

**TB:** Are there any arcade around here?

**00:39:38**

**JZ:** Yeah, there is a bunch, one, two, three, four, five. Five or six right now.

**00:39:48**

**TB:** What make your arcade different from others arcade in the marketing stand point?

**00:39:52**

**JZ:** I think that in the fact our the style of the place is building have been here for a long time. You know, the ‘Yeah we have the original bar from the thirties, ‘yeah, we try to keep things as if they were always here same as the games as if this arcade has been here for a long time’. We want that vibe of, you know, it is not a new hip cool place. Should look like this is a bar that always here and now they have more games. That is the vibe we are going for.

**00:40:08**

**TB:** Yeah

**00:40:31**

**TB:** Have you always been in charge in your business?

**00:40:32**

**JZ:** Yep.

**00:40:38**

**TB:** What do you want people to know about the coin-op industry?

**00:40:41**

**JZ:** I want them to know that this is a real important part of the history of America. You know it is an American thing and part of our culture and I also want people to know it’s just like video games that’s not just screwing around but there is a little more that than if you want there to be there can be a lot more there. If you really want dig deep into the game you know.

**00:41:11**

**JZ:** Yeah I have seen insurgents and like people playing more euro games than playing more boards games. That is great I feel like you can take the same interests and put it in pin ball game or video game cause there is that depth of play for a lot of the games

**00:41:30**

**TB:** How many games do you have to maintain to get a good income?

**00:41:33**

**JZ:** No, you don't think about the games as a source of income as much as think of them as supporting themselves maintenance wise. This, you know, they have parts that wear out and things that can be replace. So I think that more that way.

**00:41:50**

**TB:** What is the life cycle of the game?

**00:41:52**

**JZ:** You know, upfront there is always a bump cause it is the new kid on the street. Then usually plateaus out in a couple of weeks and at that point loss is maintain well. It depends on people interest and how much they play. On a newer game I would say maybe 3 months or so. Before really levels out if it is exciting. So people are like 'yeah yeah, I know of this game. What is the next thing?', you know. Somewhere around there

**00:42:25**

**TB:** Instead you would rotate the games?

**00:42:28**

**JZ:** Constantly we pull things that aren't working. You know physically they aren't actually playing well or just people are just not playing because they don't like game play. I will move things around which I think another place well put the game and leave it and gotta move things. It is about the flow and it about the context means around its about where they are at. Physically place that can change people experience a game that

does well. Doesn't do well. When this specific area might do better by over by door.  
Might do better next to different game. You have to move things, you know.

**00:43:07**

**TB:** Where do you buy you machine?

**00:43:09**

**JZ:** Usually we buy them broken from old operator or any collection we buy from other friends. You can buy games retail, but not advisable to do so because it is expensive. Then we do most of the work ourselves so you know we can buy boat anchors We can buy horrible machines and do the work ourselves and get games that we couldn't afford if we are buying them from retails, you know.

**00:43:37**

**TB:** You fix them by yourself?

**00:43:39**

**JZ:** We have a full time tech and we bring in part time guy and once in a while hire another guy with me.

**00:43:48**

**TB:** How often do you repair?

**00:43:51**

**JZ:** It's a full time job for James. Everyday it gets more than full time job.

**00:44:01**

**TB:** Where do you get your parts for machine especially the older one?

**00:44:04**

**JZ:** A lot of these games are couple of game in one. Where we have two broken games and make on working games and harvest parts from the other. There are some collectors that make new parts for games, then there are some stock for parts like –We claim to have a distributor couples weeks ago that, not distributor, operator that got two huge boxes of wico joysticks that we can use for board or parts. Its just gotta find them where you can.

**00:44:40**

**TB:** Does some more of your machine need more maintenance than other machine?

**00:44:42**

**JZ:** *[Yawn]* pinball, some more is almost always more to maintain than video games. It just more moving parts than your bashing it with a ball all day, you know.

**00:44:55**

**TB:** Generally how do people interact over your machine?

**00:44:59**

**JZ:** You know, I think they have fun, I think that most people interact with them pretty well. They are not beating them up too bad.

**00:45:07**

**TB:** Did you ever see people mistreating it?

**00:45:09**

**JZ:** Yeah, it happens when they are not playing so well, it not so bad.

**00:45:13**

**TB:** Yeah.

**00:45:16**

**TB:** How do you protect them?

**00:45:18**

**JZ:** You know, just by being around *[laugh]* you know that that nature of the beast these thing are made to be played and they are made to put in environment like this. If you have generally a decent crowd, you don't have to worry about that. I think we do it we have a great um customer base. People that come in and play

**00:45:38**

**TB:** Have you been injure by machine?

**00:45:39**

**JZ:** Oh yeah I dropped machines on me *[laugh]*. I was moving machines, it's typical, you move a bunch of game late at night. If you were on road trip and come home and you got to unload them, unload them yourselves. You bump and end up dropping a pretty heavy game. You are lying there like 'Man I don't want someone find me trap under a game'. I got the game off myself. Been, you know, you got good size jolts from different games. Usually dumb stuff like that.

**00:46:13**

**TB:** Has anyone been injure in this arcade specificity?

**00:46:16**

**JZ:** Ah just little things. Just myself and James typically when you are working on the game.

**00:46:24**

**TB:** Earlier we were talking about cool people in the industry?

**00:46:27**

**JZ:** Yeah, you know, Chicago is really home of gaming the home to the pinball for sure and coin op in general. A lot of the most famous video games came out of here as well and um because that a lot of the designer are still around here. That's just really fun to see those guys come in play games, be able to talk about history in gaming in general. It was a huge industry, you know, mostly centered in Chicago.

**00:47:02**

**TB:** Did you met Walter Day?

**00:47:03**

**JZ:** Oh yeah Walter did a series of baseball cards basically but the history of gaming he actually he did one of me. It was super cool, couple floating around here. He gave me a stack of one last time I saw him. Pretty nice and kind of blew my mind. Walter is a very very very nice guy and he's been very supportive of me and the things we tried to do. He's been awesome and very good. Him and Mark. Mark works with him. Mark introduced me to so many people I think they know that I am coming at it with some reverence and some love for the history so they were very nice to introduce me to people.

**00:47:55**

**TB:** Have there been any specific skill over the time with them?

**00:47:59**

**JZ:** Well I have been become a better player of all kind of different games. Just be having them around more and learning how to fix stuff, not as much or more but –When I first start collecting I learn a lot.

**00:48:16**

**TB:** The one is I ask you yet?

**00:48:28**

**TB:** You have a pretty low employee turn over? People like working here?



00:48:33

**JZ:** What's that.

00:48:34

**TB:** Do you have a high or low employee turn over?

00:48:37

**JZ:** Pretty low, People tend to stick around. Think it is a decent jobs.

00:48:44

**TB:** Do you play any console games?

00:48:46

**JZ:** Yeah, I mostly retro console games or some homebrew 26 hundred 78 hundred games. I really like handheld. I collect game and watch tomy tomytronic. Epoch one of my favorite is Antec, I really like VFD style games. Like large scale integration like Alis VFD games are kind of my wheel house, I like those a lot. if I had more time I would collect them and play handheld.

00:49:26

**TB:** What games do you recommend for people to learn coin op?

00:49:32

**JZ:** You know, I keep saying Robotron is an amazing game. Nibbler is an amazing game. Think those are great places to start for more for just Killer Queen, Break out, Super Break out. I like all those games right now.

00:49:52

**TB:** What kind of advice do you give for someone who is pursuing a similar career?

**00:49:57**

**JZ:** Just give a shit, do it for the right reasons. I think that will come across any business, lot of people give in to business because of business people. That's okay they can do a decent job that way. If it lacks passion other than the bottom line that will come across it the same way that everybody got into video games in the 80s. Everybody. And it screwed it up for a lot of people because there was a glut of horrible design games and it caused the video game crash. Cause everybody was like 'I can make money, I can do that'. There was a lot of shitty games and there were people who gives a crap about making games. Trying to make things and now there is this a lot of bad games kind of polluting the waters. I think 'Give a crap', you know, 'Like what you do'. Enjoy it. Be passionate about it. Good thing will happen

**00:50:53**

**TB:** Were you alive during the crash?

**00:50:54**

**JZ:**No, I mean, I was but I don't remember, I was too young. I remember there was some shit horrible games. What is this shit? It's horrible. You know ET: horrible. PacMan for 2600: awful just awful. You know.

**00:51:11**

**TB:** Do you have particular producer of games that you like?

**00:51:15**

**JZ:** For handheld I really like Antec Company base in the States. Compton back in the day I really like their games, I like adventure vision. I like Epoc, I like –well any LSIVSD for handheld. I'm Nintendo guy at heart and I just felt connected to Nintendo. I like their quality control. They always have decent decent high quality stuff, they just didn't churn things out it seems. Shigeru Miyamoto is gaming god. I like things he is

involved in. Cave as far as modern games I think their games are amazing. There is such a specific genre, bullet hell. Smuk games

**00:52:06**

**TB:** Is there a game that you absolutely hate?

**00:52:08**

**JZ:** You know I am not a big fan of shooter. I wouldn't say I hate them. It gets really boring to me cause it can be exciting for a little bit but it then get kinda boring. It's just weird for me, like we have area 51 in here and no one was playing it and everyone is standing right next to the screen just shooting it, didn't require much skills. They were literally 2 inches away form the screen. It was like 'Man this is not how you play shooting games'. Stand back and also has this weird connotation form, I don't know I just, just to see people with their handguns that look realistic shooting real seriously look kinda of weird, you know. It's not. I understand that is most games are *[laughing]* shooting something. I don't know, just not my thing.

**00:52:56**

**TB:** What's are the oldest game you have here?

**00:52:57**

**JZ:** Right now properly Super Break Out or maybe Abracadabra somewhere in that zone. Early 70s.

**00:53:11**

**TB:** Are there any qualification or skill would need to come into this career?

**00:53:17**

**JZ:** A little bit of decent ability as far as repair, you know, at least being interested at learning that stuff. You don't need an electronics degree or any of that, be helpful but you don't need to have that. I think up front if you did, if you understood bridge rectifier work a –like the basic of electronics. That be very helpful but I think if you are motivated you

can learn it. A lot of these games are not that complicated. At the end of the day there are a complicated work on. But at the end of the day that not new micro computing or crazy new technology, you know. When traces are that big on a pcb pretty easy to work on compare to the new stuff.

**00:54:06**

**TB:** Are you talking about the –a free to play arcade how did that affect your store?

**00:54:07**

**JZ:** Yup

**00:54:12**

**JZ:** Well I think it helps it brings people in for another reason. It gives people something to do and it s fun, you know, it's fun. Fun weekend for people to do to come in to shop for record. Bring in their family, bring in their kids or and if have someone in your group not interested for shopping for records for an hour they can play games. Most people will play games for an hour even if they are horrible at it. They will enjoy it; hunt around 30 different games you know.

**00:54:40**

**TB:** And what you see yourself doing in 10 years

**00:54:43**

**JZ:** Probably find more stores for all the crap I have collected. You know that's probably the truth hopefully still doing something related to the gaming. I enjoy toys and gaming a lot and I like to be involved in the world, that world as much as I can. If I can make a living doing it, you know.

**00:55:02**

**TB:** Do you see yourself staying or leaving?

**00:55:04**

**JZ:** No, I think so. I live in the neighborhood, work in the neighborhood and stay in the neighborhood. ... Knock on wood

**00:55:15**

**TB:** How does the bar interact with other gamer?

**00:55:20**

**JZ:** It's another draw. It's a different draw, I think, obviously its all adults in there. Not everyone acts like it though. I think it's nice, makes it social. People come out, can have a beer, have a drink and relax and unwind blow off some steam playing classic games.

**00:55:51**

**TB:** What have been your high point in your business career?

**00:55:56**

**JZ:** You know I, I on an off I can meet some of my heroes and work with them both in arcade games and music business. It's been nice, you know, *[laugh]* I hope that there is more high points to come. It's always the hope.

**00:56:32**

**TB:** Is there anything you want else to know?

**00:56:36**

**JZ:** Nothing I can think of. I think we went through quite a bit.

**00:56:40**

**TB:** Thank you for interview.

**00:56:41**

**JZ:** No problem man. So you guys are having fun in that class? Sounds interesting.  
Is it mostly about video games or coin op?

**00:56:52**

**TB:** Pretty much everything.