

Arcade Reviews: Big City Special Madison, Wisconsin

Madison, Wisconsin - one of the great fag capitals of the Midwest. I spent some time here visiting family a couple months ago (the Badgers suck btw) and discovered that this place has something worth bragging about: arcades, the best concentration of arcades I've seen outside of a megacity.

The Kickback Bar - 7622 Lisa Lane, Middleton

The slickest place in town, in half of some converted warehouse space. All pinball, all the time - there are some token arcades and bar games like Big Buck Hunter but this place is clearly all about the pins. Nothing super old but a lot of the latest Stern stuff, plus all the obligatory Williams tables and some choice picks like Banzai Run. Too bad they're all hard as balls and almost all of them are a dollar a play. I told the guy at the bar that one of the games would kill your ball every time with a particular shot and that was bullshit. His response was basically "git gud scrub." Still, if you're a pinball geek this is probably the no.1 place to go in the region outside of an actual arcade museum.



Aftershock Classic Arcade - 1444 E Washington Ave, Madison

Would be the best place in town if they fixed their games. If you're looking for museum quality you aren't going to find it here - a bunch of games had LCDs shoved in, and many of the rest were either blown out or clearly in need of a tune-up. Gauntlet and Fish Tales in the back weren't even working, Pole Position was unwinnable. It sucks because they have everything else - reasonable prices (only the big showpiece cabs and the pinballs cost more than 25 cents a play) and a fantastic selection of classics. Nothing crazy (other than Cyber Sled, a working Tempest and some B&W driving game I'd never seen before) but a lot of Atari/Namco games you don't usually see in the wild and a good mix of 80s and 90s. The bar is reasonably priced, the bartenders are chill and the food doesn't suck, and more than that it's the place that comes the closest to that 80s/90s arcade feel without actually being a dump. Recommended.



I/O Arcade Bar - 924 Williamson St, Madison



My erstwhile student relative pointed this place out - it's where the college kids go to get drunk and play skee-ball, apparently. Mostly skews towards the newer stuff - they have some ugly thing that's like Tapper for hipsters, DDR, MvC2, Guitar Hero, and that Enter the Gungeon lightgun game that's probably the only good thing to come from that benighted series. On the other hand they have Moonwalker, Cyberball, NBA Jam, one of those Midway multi-sports machines, and Gauntlet 3D on top of the classics you expect in a barcade. There's

a nook for pinball in the corner, the Evil Dead machine was pretty fucking great even if it kicks your ass and they have big tournaments every month. The centerpiece of the arcade is Killer Queen, which I can only describe as an ASSFAGGOTS version of Joust but much more fun than that phrase would imply. The machines all surround the bar which makes getting around the place a bit of a pain if you're not there to get blasted, and of course it's packed on the weekends. If you're fine with that and in the neighborhood it's a good stop. Wait, they have "all gender" bathrooms. Fuck.

Ryan's Retro Arcade - 1305 E Main St, Stoughton

It's out of your way if you're staying in Madison proper, but if you're a pinball nerd (like me) it's well worth the trip. The owner is apparently a longtime collector because he has all kinds of weird shit, just not in the same quantity as the other places. Old school games from the 70s, video pinball from 2000, a micro shooting gallery, even a mechanical mini bowling game. You pay \$15 to get in and then you can play as long as you want. It's just a shame that it's so far out of the way, but I talked to the owner and he said he wanted to give people in town something to do other than get drunk and boy I can relate to that.



There's another arcade I didn't get a chance to visit called Geeks Mania near the mall, it's another pay one price deal. Supposedly that's where people take their kids for birthday parties and shit. The games list on their website looks good, though with dumbfuck kids running around who knows how many of those are working.