



POLYBIUS  
THE URBAN LEGEND

ANDY BRIGGS



***IT'S NOT JUST A GAME...***



## **INTRODUCTION**

Spy Quest is more than just a book - it's an entire immersive adventure game that you can play at:

[www.spy-quest.com](http://www.spy-quest.com)

Uniquely it is also available for you to play in hotels and resorts around the world - from the UK to the USA and Mexico! So you have no excuse to be bored on holiday - you can be a **real** member of the Spy Quest Agency!

Check out the list at the back of the book, for where you can play it and follow us @SpyQuest for the latest news about upcoming books!

Download the free Spy Quest app from iTunes and select 'Spy Cam', then hold the camera over the illustrations to discover the secrets hidden within the book.

Now, turn the page... and let the adventure begin!

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## ***CHAPTER ONE***

### ***THE PAST***

Kevin bowed his head against the driving rain. As far as he could remember it had rained every day since he had been in England so he should be used to it by now, but he wasn't at all. He hated it as much as he hated the fact he had been forced to move here with his parents, far from the sunny shores of California.

He was now convinced that rain was the usual weather for this sleepy seaside town. He hurried towards his destination, drawn to the colourful neon lights like a moth to a lamp.

It was a bright and busy computer arcade. Kevin grinned as he looked around the welcoming sight. Dozens of tall wooden cabinets housed state-of-the-art computer games. Children of every age clustered around them, cheering the players on,

pressing greasy fingers against the screens, while the players guided characters with knobbly joysticks and colourful buttons. The heady mix of electronic music, beeps and chirps of the games filled his ears. The arcade's exciting atmosphere always made Kevin grin no matter how bad his day had been. He was glad he was alive now, in the 1980s, to witness what he assumed must be the height of computer technology. How could it possibly get any better?

His usual favourites, Pac-man and Asteroids, were surrounded by older kids who looked in no rush to leave. Kevin searched for a free machine, one hand jingling the pocket money in his pocket that his Gran had given him. It seemed that every machine was taken. He knew he should have arrived earlier, but his mother had forced him to finish his dinner before he was allowed out.

He pushed his way past the crowds gathered around the change booth where Mrs Carroll was constantly breaking down one-pound notes into ten pence coins for the gamers. Kevin spotted Mr Carroll in the far corner of the arcade, amongst the less popular gambling games. He was crouching behind

a new machine, stretching to plug it into the socket although his meaty arms barely fitted through the gap between the cabinet and the wall.

“Evening, Mr. Carroll!” chirped Kevin.

Mr Carroll flinched - banging his head against the machine’s overhanging console as he turned to look at Kevin.

“OW! Blimey, Kevin! You ought to stop creeping up on folks like that! Nearly gave me a heart attack!”

A cigarette wobbled from Mr Carroll’s lips, and Kevin resisted pointing out that they were more likely to give him a heart attack. Instead, Kevin examined the new machine. It was a tall black wooden cabinet with plastic green and red stripes providing the only colour. It was drab compared to the other games. Kevin didn’t recognise the logo - a single eye in a circle that was made out of tiny numbers: zeroes and ones. He recognised it as binary, the language of computers.

“Is this a new game?” asked Kevin. He expected it to be another dull poker machine since Mr Carroll was setting it up in the gambling section.

“Aye, it is. Odd thing too. We weren’t expecting

a delivery this month, but it turned up in a crate outside the door. In the pouring rain mark you. That's why I set it over here. No room for it."

With a grunt, Mr Carroll plugged the machine in, and then rolled it back against the wall. They looked at the screen expectantly. Lines of code ran across it; white text against black. As Kevin watched he was suddenly aware that the name of the game was not written anywhere. Where the lettering should have been was just the binary eye. The longer he stared at the eye, the more piercing the gaze appeared to be...

The machine beeped and the screen flashed once, jolting him from his daydream. Another flash... then the screen remained blank. After several painful seconds, a word appeared.

"Polybius," read Kevin and rested one hand on the stumpy joystick, and the other on the two coloured fire controls: one red, the other white. Then another message blinked up: INSERT 10p.

Kevin glanced at Mr Carroll, but knew better than to ask for a free go. Mr Carroll and his wife owned the arcade and were always friendly to the local kids, but they drew the line at charity.

Kevin pulled a fist full of coins from his pocket. A few pennies, more two and five pence pieces as well as the annoying half penny coins. Amongst them were five gleaming ten pence coins. Mr Carroll saw the money and nodded approvingly.

“Let me know what you think of it,” he said, patting the machine before heading off to help his wife in the change booth.

Based on the bland case design, Kevin didn't have high expectations for the game he was about to play. He shoved the ten pence into the slot and heard it clatter into the empty metal cash box locked away in the heart of the machine. At least he would be the first ever to play this game in his town, maybe even the whole country. The world even!

As he rested his hands on the controls he felt the familiar thrill he always experienced after he'd spent forty minutes loading up a game at home on his brand new Commodore Vic 20 computer. It had been a present from his parents when they had moved. The games helped ease the pain of leaving his friends behind and made him feel privileged, as hardly any of his friends had a computer at home.

The Polybius screen flashed and vector graphics crisscrossed in a whirl of colours. The lines formed a tunnel and he was immediately speeding along shooting odd shaped villains that zoomed towards him. His fingers rhythmically tapped the buttons and his onscreen character fired lasers and missiles that detonated the bad guys in a shower of pixels.

Kevin was instantly addicted. The controls were straightforward and he had managed to get into the game without reading through any instructions. Branching tunnels appeared - not just left and right but also up and down. Unusual pairs of symbols marked each branch. Every time Kevin took a branching tunnel the screen would flicker and his head would hurt as if a headache had just jumped into his forehead, beaten up his brain, then jumped out again.

After a minute, Kevin started to think that the symbols had some meaning, a hidden code. He wasn't aware what it was, or even how he had come to that conclusion, but the fact he hadn't been killed yet meant he was doing something right.

The screen continued to flash with more regularity. Kevin was sure he saw numbers and letters

in those brief whiteouts, and when the flashes faded they left an afterimage on the back of his eye - which seemed to overlay with the action on the screen and revealed an even more complex series of equations he couldn't decipher. But it was all over in seconds and Kevin's attention was drawn back to the game that was becoming increasingly fast and furious.

From across the arcade, Mr Carroll changed a pair of pound notes for some spotty teenagers, before glancing across at Kevin. The boy was still frantically hammering the buttons so Mr Carroll assumed the game was addictive, which was good news. The bad news was that he hadn't seen Kevin put in any more than his original ten pence. Mr Carroll didn't want games that were too easy or else he'd never make any money.

The clatter of three fifty pence coins drew his attention back to the counter. Mr Carroll changed them to smaller denominations for a boy who was eager to resume his game as the INSERT COINS TO CONTINUE countdown spiralled towards zero. The ten-pees were snatched before they hit the counter and the boy ran back to the game.

Mr Carroll glanced back at Kevin.

He was gone.

With a frown, Mr Carroll looked around. There was only one way in and out of the arcade and the boy had been hooked on the game only seconds before and had plenty of coinage to pay for several more games. The Polybius machine was dark once more, with only the simple logo on the screen. Mr Carroll's attention was drawn back to the counter as another group of teenagers demanded change.

He was the last person to see Kevin. Even after a nationwide missing person campaign.

Even stranger, when Mr Carroll opened the arcade the following day to show the police the game Kevin had been playing - the machine was gone.

It had vanished without a trace.



*Polybius...the arcade machine*





## ***CHAPTER TWO***

### ***GAMING FOR GEEKS***

Total concentration. That's what Sam Rayner needed to complete his mission. Complete and utter devotion to the task in hand. He focused, fearing to blink in case he missed his target. He tried to blot out every sensation, every sound.

"Sam!" came the faint irritating voice.

Sam's eyes narrowed. His sweaty palms nearly dropped his weapon of choice.

"Sam!" repeated the voice, this time it was louder.

"We're moving into position," crackled another boy's voice over his headset.

"Roger!" acknowledged Sam. The rest of his team were in action, relying on him to do his task. Teamwork was the only way they could possibly hope

to win the war.

Then he saw his target - a large tank, barely visible through the rubble and burnt trees at the end of the street. He would have to get closer, and that meant the possibility of alerting the enemy troops hidden around him. He had no choice.

“I see it, but I’m too far away for a clear shot. Got to get closer.”

“OK,” said the voice over his headset. “Be careful.”

Sam edged from cover. A quick look around the street didn’t reveal any enemy activity so he took his chance. He made it halfway down the street before something struck him hard on the arm - forcing him to run into a crumbling wall.

“SAM!” screamed the irritating voice in his ear.

Sam looked around to see his sister’s face was centimetres from his. It was creased in a scowl. Sam was growing more convinced that the scowl was Rebecca’s natural expression.

“I’ve been calling you!” she shouted, despite the fact she had torn his headset off.

Sam groped to retrieve it, but Rebecca held it

just out of reach. He could already hear the sound of gunfire and his companions yelling.

“Give me that back! We’re in the middle of an operation!” he hissed. He looked back to his target in time to see an explosion close by, followed by half a dozen enemy soldiers appearing around the corner and raising their weapons at him.

“NO!” yelled Sam - but it was too late. Multiple shots struck his virtual soldier who collapsed to the floor, oozing digital blood.

“Well you’re dead now,” said Rebecca calmly - then she snatched the remote control and turned the television off.

“What have you done?” squeaked Sam. He was trying not to shout, but it was difficult to control his temper under such provocation. “It took us ages to get to that level! We were almost at the end of the game!”

“It’s only a stupid game,” sniffed Rebecca. “Anyway, dinner’s ready. Mum has been shouting you forever.”

“That could have waited,” said Sam who had lived on reheated meals all autumn half-term. “This was important!”

Rebecca shook her head. “When will you grow up?”

“Grow up? I’m twelve!”

“Duh! We’re twins. I know that! I mean grow out of playing silly computer games.”

Sam threw his controller down and followed his sister into the kitchen. In the good old days he would have retaliated with a punch to the arm for what she had done, but the endless trouble that placed him in had eventually convinced him that it wasn’t worth it. Besides, there were smarter ways of getting revenge.

When Rebecca had pleaded to their parents for a mobile phone, Sam had stolen it one night and swapped all the phone numbers around so Rebecca had never been sure who she had really been texting when she was gossiping about her friends. Sam was delighted to see that ruse didn’t win her any popularity contests in school. Another time, while shopping, he had attached a security tag from a clothes shop to her coat so she set off the alarms in almost every store they visited. Each time Sam took revenge he knew Rebecca couldn’t prove he had done anything, even if she suspected so. That made it even sweeter.

Sam slouched at the table where his mother and father were already eating, their gaze fixed to a gloomy soap opera playing on the television positioned at the end of the counter. His mum glanced at him and flashed a smile.

“You’re finally here! Help yourself. It’s your favourite, my world famous spaghetti.” Then she turned back to the television.

Sam scooped a forkful of sludgy pasta. He decoded what his mum had said: “favourite” she meant the one he hated the most, and “world famous” she meant because people across the globe avoided it at all costs. The spaghetti was so congealed that the fork stood up on its own inside the bowl.

“Playing secret agent again?” said dad without taking his eyes off the TV.

“Yes, and I’d nearly completed the level on multiplayer mode before the nerdinator here ruined the whole thing!”

Rebecca scowled at her brother. She hated the nickname Sam had created, it was just because she studied hard to get good marks in school. What annoyed her was the fact Sam never studied but always

did equally as well. It was because of his good grades that his parents allowed him to play so many computer games without interfering.

“That’s nice,” said mum without taking her eyes from the soap opera.

Sam played with his food, chopping it into ever-smaller pieces. It beat actually eating it.

“Another five minutes and I could have won that million pound prize,” said Sam. Rebecca shot him another evil look. His parents stared at the television.

“Well done, son,” said dad on autopilot.

Sam sighed and put his fork down. “Finished.” He glared at Rebecca, silently daring her to snitch on him. For a change she remained quiet and brushed her long brown hair behind her ear, clipping it in place with one of hundreds of long metal hair grips she kept on her person at all times. Sam dumped the contents of his plate in the bin, placed the plate in the dishwasher and took three pieces of fruit before heading back to his game.

It was a pointless endeavour. His virtual team had long since been defeated and had gone offline. Sam didn’t have the heart to start the game all over again

with a new team. Instead, he picked up a book - a new spy thriller. It was part of a series he was rapidly becoming addicted to. He'd enjoyed them so much that he had begun to neglect his hobby, dabbling as an amateur magician. He'd learnt most of the tricks from the Internet and had just perfected picking handcuff locks for an escapism routine before his father had given him the novel.

The story was a welcome break from the game. He loved games but no matter how impressive the graphics and gameplay were, he knew they were just fake simulations compared to his own vivid imagination. He often dreamt about how terrific it would be to be a spy in exotic countries, experiencing real danger; but he realised that it was an unlikely goal. He had once surfed the Internet, scouring through job sites to see if any of them advertised "spy" as a job. After several months of fruitless searching he had given up and decided to focus on a more realistic goal.

Many of his friends wanted to be professional footballers when they left school, but Sam wanted to be a professional games player. His sister had predictably laughed when he announced his new career plan. Even

when he showed her that teams around the world earned thousands by playing games against each other. In Korea it was even a national spectator sport worth millions! However, now he was starting to wonder if even that was a realistic job. Being old must be boring!

With a deep sigh he took the novel and headed for the peace and solitude of his bedroom.

When Sam woke up the next morning, he had no idea how the day's events were set to lead him on an extraordinary and dangerous adventure.

It started as usual. His blissful lie-in was shattered by his sister shouting about losing something or other. A pillow across his ears failed to blot out the nasal shrieking. To make matters worse, his parents insisted they all go shopping together so they could plan the week's meals. Apparently Sam's pasta sabotage hadn't gone unnoticed and his mum now insisted he needed to be there to pick his own meals if he didn't want to starve to death.

Cruising down the endless supermarket aisles was mind-numbingly boring. Sam made the most of the situation by taking along his handheld games

console and playing a new first-person shooter his dad had bought him the previous week, entitled CODE ONE. It wasn't a bad game as it incorporated some difficult problem solving with shooting bad guys.

Sam had raced through the levels but had eventually been troubled by a logical problem that involved opening a door by turning various tumblers that were spread across a room. The problem was that when one tumbler was turned it would turn another one half way across the room - usually that would be the tumbler Sam had only just set. Sam knew that it was just a matter of logically working out how the tumblers were connected, but it was so frustrating that he had stopped playing the game for the last few days.

However, now he was standing opposite the baked beans, the solution suddenly revealed itself. Sam's fingers darted across the control pad and he felt a thrill of excitement as the tumblers finally rotated into the correct position and the door opened in a blaze of light. He hurried his character through the portal and was surprised to see the words:

GAME OVER

"Huh?" he blurted aloud. It had been a good

game, but rather short. He was about to complain but another message appeared:

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU HAVE QUALIFIED FOR THE PRO-GAMER LITE CHAMPIONSHIP!

Sam's mouth went dry. The PGLC, was the biggest gathering of game players in the country. It was the video game equivalent of junior league footballers being talent spotted by the bigger clubs.

This was how people became professional gamers!

The message faded from the screen. Sam panicked. He hadn't had any time to enter his details, how would they know who he was? He pressed every button, but the elusive message refused to appear onscreen again.

He spent the rest of the shopping trip sulking in silence. By the time he returned home, Sam had convinced himself that it was just a joke that everybody saw at the end of the level.

As they entered the house a single message greeted them on the answering machine. Everybody's hands were full carrying the shopping, so it was ten

minutes later, after everything had been stored away, before Sam's dad played the message back.

"This is a message for Sam Rayner.

Congratulations, Sam, you have won a place at the PGLC tournament this Monday. You and your family are cordially invited to come to the Glendevon Castle Hotel in Scotland..."

Sam was so excited that the rest of the message passed in a haze. There was a phone number for Sam's dad to call back. It took several attempts to convince his parents that it was a serious offer before his dad finally dialled the number and had a hushed conversation with the person on the other end of the line.

When he hung up, his smile betrayed the good news.

"Sam's only gone and won us a holiday at a luxury hotel! Pack your bags!"

For Sam, the very best moment was the stunned look on his sister's face. She finally found her voice, albeit with a begrudging tone.

"Well done, I s'pose. Looks like you didn't waste all your time playing those stupid games."