

Wheel Out the Digital Dark Age Klaxon!

Originally published at <https://www.bitsgalore.org/2022/11/03/wheel-out-the-digital-dark-age-klaxon>



Still from video of "Wheel Out the Digital Dark Age Klaxon".

Dutch electro outfit the Digital Dark Age Crew are one of the forgotten legends that used to be a mainstay of Rotterdam's late 90s to mid-2000s underground electro scene. Their music was characterised by relentless electro beats, sparse synth lines, and lyrics that typically commented on the fragility and transience of digital media and digital information in general. In a twisted turn of events, this very theme would eventually define the Digital Dark Age Crew's own history, ultimately leading to the group's dramatic demise in 2007. After a fifteen year absence, the Digital Dark Age Crew have now made a long overdue comeback with their new track "Wheel Out the Digital Dark Age Klaxon", which was released today on the occasion of [World Digital Preservation Day 2022](#). Time to take a look back at the history of the Digital Dark Age Crew, and their continued relevance today!

Early history

Much is unclear about the exact origins of the Digital Dark Age Crew, and over the years, several of the group's former members have provided different and often conflicting accounts on this. However, music historians agree that the project was founded in 1997 by Dutch producer Marinus Nullbyte, who ultimately became the sole constant member throughout a succession of many lineup changes. Seen invariably donning a space helmet during live performances and in rare photos of the group, Nullbyte's true identity remains a secret to this day, and has been the subject of much online speculation among fans.

Releases

The Digital Dark Age Crew's output was released mainly on cheap, home-burned CD-recordables. These would often spontaneously disintegrate within a year after purchase, which somehow added to the group's mystique. From 2005 onward, they also made their releases available through [Myspace](#). Fourteen years later, it turned out that these were all lost as a result of Myspace's infamous [server migration incident](#).



Digital Dark Age Crew logo.

Burn a Million PDFs

In their later years, the group shifted their focus to multimedia productions. Without doubt the most notorious of these was 2007's "Watch the Digital Dark Age Crew Burn a Million PDFs". While shooting video footage for this project just outside their headquarters, the group accidentally burned down their recording studio, in an unfortunate combination of misjudging the flammability of the source material they were working with, and a sudden change of wind direction. The fire, which resulted in the loss of all the master tapes of their output thus far, effectively marked the end of the Digital Dark Age Crew.

Digital Dark Age Klaxon

Following the group's dissolution, founding member Marinus Nullbyte turned his attention to a variety of other activities and projects. His fascination with the fragility of digital media continued, and was only further strengthened by the events that led to the downfall of his former group. Around 2016, Nullbyte first came up with the idea of a "digital

dark age klaxon”, which was to be an intricate device designed to provide a warning signal in the event of impending digital doom. Details about the inner workings of this digital dark age klaxon remain somewhat nebulous, as Nullbyte has kept the project, which appears to be in a perpetual state of development, under close guard. He maintains though, as he has done for the past six years, that something tangible will be released “soon”.

Legacy

With much of their output gone forever, it’s tempting to think of the Digital Dark Age Crew as a group that is now largely forgotten, except perhaps by a few of their most determined old fans. But dig a little deeper, and it’s clear that their influence is still present today.

For a start, it may be no coincidence that the term “[Digital Dark Age](#)” made its [first appearance in the information science literature](#) in 1997, the very year the Digital Dark Age Crew appeared on the scene. It’s not a long stretch to assume that the paper’s author took inspiration from both the message and the infectious electro sounds of the Digital Dark Age Crew’s early work. If true, the Digital Dark Age crew may have set in motion a chain of events that ultimately led to “father of the internet” Vint Cerf [warning of a coming “digital Dark Age](#)” in 2015.

Moreover, Nullbyte’s post-Digital Dark Age Crew work on the digital dark age klaxon has been an ongoing source of puzzlement, speculation and inspiration among digital archivists and other information professionals the world over, and has even spawned [its dedicated hashtag](#) on Twitter (which, ironically, could [itself](#) be the subject of [looming digital disaster](#) at the time of writing).



Marinus Nullbyte of the Digital Dark Age Crew during a recording session for "Wheel Out the Digital Dark Age Klaxon".

Comeback

Earlier this year, Nullbyte decided to once again put on his old space helmet, and revive the Digital Dark Age Crew project. The first result of this latest incarnation of the group, now essentially a Marinus Nullbyte solo venture, is the new track "Wheel Out The Digital Dark Age Klaxon". The trademark Digital Dark Age Crew elements are instantly recognisable. Musically, the track offers a fresh take on the classic Digital Dark Age Crew sound. The lyrics intersperse the familiar subject of digital decay with key moments from the history of the group itself. Both themes are held together by a chorus that alludes to the digital dark age klaxon, but which ultimately leaves the listener none the wiser about the specifics of this puzzling device!

It will be interesting to see whether the return of the Digital Dark Age Crew is a one-off, or perhaps the start of a new string of releases. Whatever the case, for now please enjoy ... Wheel Out the Digital Dark Age Klaxon!