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Video Games & Computer Entertainment

February 1989 \$2.95 CANADA
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Cover: Maurice Molyneaux displays his computer artistry on an Atari ST.
Model: Roman
Photographers: Ladi von Jansky, Linda Matthews



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VideoGames & Computer Entertainment

PUBLISHER

Lee H. Pappas

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Andy Eddy

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Clayton Walsum

ART DIRECTOR

Jan V. Simons

MANAGING EDITOR

Dean Briarty

COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

Arnie Katz

COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Bill Kunkel

NEWS EDITOR

Joyce Worley

CONTRIBUTORS

David Plotkin

Howard Wen

COPY CHIEF

Katrina Voit

COPY EDITORS

Sarah Weinberg

Anne Denbok

Pat Romero

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Norma Edwards

CHIEF TYPOGRAPHER

Klarissa Curtis

TYPOGRAPHERS

Judy Villanueva

David Buchanan

CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

John Berado

Alan Hunter

Greg Martin

Rob Westerberg

VICE-PRESIDENT, PRODUCTION

Donna Hahner

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT

Steve Hopkins

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING

JE Publisher's Representatives

Address all inquiries to:

6855 Santa Monica, Blvd., Suite 200

(213) 467-2266

San Francisco - (415) 864-3252

Chicago - (312) 445-2489

Denver - (303) 595-4331

New York City - (212) 724-7767

CORPORATE DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING

Paula Thornton

ADVERTISING PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

Janice Rosenblum

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Irene Grudstein

Letter from the Editor



Here we sit staring at a new year, one that could provide a great deal of excitement for video gamers all over. It appears that the electronic-gaming industry—both for computers and game consoles—is doing well, and will continue at a good pace for a while. Signs of more competition are springing up, such as the rumor that Atari will introduce a new generation of video-game console employing the 68000 microprocessor. This is the same chip that serves as the main brain for Atari's ST line of computers, as well as the Commodore Amiga and Apple Macintosh, all powerful machines in their own right.

Unfortunately, the recent shortage of DRAMs (Dynamic Random Access Memory), important components of computers and video-game consoles, has plagued the entire electronics industry, slowing up production of both machines and cartridge-based software.

The effects of the DRAM crisis even cast a shadow over the Summer Consumer Electronics Show (CES), which was held in Chicago in early June 1988. The many announcements of new game cartridges, for instance, reflected the game industry's current growth level, but almost every manufacturer qualified their announcements with the statement "... depending on the supply of chips."

Thankfully, the video-game industry has learned a few lessons over the years. For one thing, the industry as a whole is more protective of its product. Sega is the only company that produces software for their machine (though Parker Brothers is expected to release Sega-compatible products, perhaps by the time you read this), and Nintendo oversees virtually everything targeted for their NES. By keeping a tight rein on the games for their machines, Sega and Nintendo can be sure that the quality of their product will remain high. As the former leader of the video-game world, Atari also learned a lot about the industry due to the video-game crash of the early '80s.

Once the chip supply picks up again (currently, the signs show that this is already taking place), the supply of computers, game consoles and cartridges will greatly increase. This may result in a minor, but possibly welcome, problem: too much to choose from!

And that's where VIDEOGAMES & COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT comes in. As the quantity of products on the dealers' shelves grows, deciding what to buy becomes more difficult. We know you need help separating the good from the bad and, with that goal in mind, we'll try to lead you through that maze of decisions, telling you what you need to know in order to choose the products that are right for you.

Also, once you have begun to build your software library, we'll show you how to get the most from your games. This month's strategy session on Broderbund's *Spelunker* (for the NES) is a prime example of what you can expect to find in each issue of VG&CE.

That is, of course, just a fraction of what we'll give you. All you have to do is flip through the pages to see what our experts have in store for you. But enough of this talk for now—let's ring in this exciting new year with what you came here for! Let the games begin!

Andy Eddy, Executive Editor

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Actual Amiga Screens



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Dear Editor,

I was really happy to see VG&CE on the stands the other day. The short descriptions were easy to read and provided me with just enough information to make some quality choices for the holidays. I'm looking forward to getting your magazine regularly.

—Leonard Dryer
Midland, Michigan

Dear VG&CE,

Hi! When I went to my local newsstand, I was surprised to see Video Games & Computer Entertainment on the shelf, but it was a relief also. My parents bought my brother and I a Nintendo system about a year ago, but the toy store in our area has no information on what cartridges were coming out. I'm happy to see games that I played in the arcades, like *Double Dragon* and *Marble Madness*, are coming soon. Some of the others I haven't heard of sound like fun, too! Keep it coming! Thanks.

—Billy Vogel
Decatur, Alabama

Dear Editor,

When I picked up the first issue of your magazine, I wasn't at all expecting what I found inside. As a 27-year-old game fanatic, I'm bothered by the cartoonish appearance of the other magazines I've seen on electronic gaming, but I was pleased to see that you've taken a more mature approach. Thanks and keep up the good work.

—Walt Nelson
Schenectady, New York

Thanks for the compliments, guys. We're more than happy that you dis-

covered us, and you'll find more in future issues to keep you coming back!

Dear VG&CE,

I know you won't print this letter, but I had to write you anyway. I have 20 Nintendo cartridges, and your Buyer's Guide was totally out of line in giving some of the scores you gave. For example, *Kid Niki* was much better than the 2 you gave in *Playability*. What gives?

—Tom Foley
Bridgeport, Connecticut

*Thanks for the criticism, Tom, and here's your letter to prove that we can take it. In fact, we appreciate your taking us to the carpet on our reviews. We have to be honest and say that reviews are strictly opinions of what our reviewers feel. You may prefer arcade games (like *Kid Niki*) over adventure games (such as *Pitfall*), so you may grade differently if you were reviewing. We try to be less affected by tastes because we have a responsibility to our readers. Read our reviews, but keep in mind that one man's ceiling is another man's floor.*

Dear Editor,

In reading just one issue of your magazine (great cover art!), I've become a real fan. This is just what I've been waiting for. I wanted to ask you something, though. In Andy Eddy's review of *Contra*, there was a secret hint on how to get extra guys when you start. I was wondering if you planned on giving us more of those kinds of hints. I sure would like to get them to use and share with my friends. Thanks.

—Paul Pettit
Santa Barbara, California

Glad you like us, Paul. Sometimes the "easter eggs," or hidden bonuses you speak of, are hard to discover. You can be sure that as we dig up these treasures, we'll pass them on to you. Also, thanks for the compliment on the cover.

By the way, we encourage our readers to send information on any tips and hidden bonuses they discover to us at VG&CE, 9171 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 300, Beverly Hills, CA 90210. We'll pay \$10 to the earliest entry of a tip that we use.

Dear VG&CE,

I was happy to see your magazine, and most of all the strategy hints on *Blaster Master*. I'd never even heard of this game, but asked the owner of the store where I buy my cartridges to tell me as soon as it comes in. Are you going to keep doing these articles? I'm not the greatest player and get frustrated very easily, but I can see that the tips would be a real help to me and my friends.

—Tony Dobush
Oneonta, New York

Dear Editor,

Lee H. Pappas' strategy guide on *Blaster Master* was very well done, and I'm going to get a copy of the game as soon as I find it. I hope you can put more of these hints in your magazine.

—Rebecca Ann Altieri
Jonesboro, Arkansas

*Yes, Tony and Rebecca, you'll be seeing more of the Strategy Sessions in future issues of VG&CE. In fact, if you look inside this issue, you'll see a detailed article on Broderbund's *Spelunker* and Konami's *Life Force*. This not only tells you a great deal about how to play the game, but also gives you a map of where everything is!*

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Compiled by Joyce Worley

Money Talks

Epyx's French Connection

Epyx is adding a French accent to their software lineup, under a licensing agreement with UBIsoft. The French developer will provide seven UBIsoft titles to the American publisher, for release under Epyx's *Sports Action/Strategy* and *Masters Collections* lines.

The first release scheduled for this winter is *Trials of Honor*, a medieval European adventure. The story, cast against the Dark Ages, sets the player on a quest to prove their valor and right to rule, after a usurper seizes the throne. Tests of strength and cunning, archery trials, and monster slayings win the warrior the right to rid the Rhone of wrong.

The game will be offered for Amiga, Atari ST, Commodore 64 and IBM-PC.

Out of the Skies & Into The Drink

Bruce Artwick and the SubLogic engineering staff have finally got their heads out of the clouds. The famed flight-simulating crew looked from blue skies into blue waters, and turned their combined talents to *Up Periscopel*, a submarine simulation.

The simulation, marketed under the ActionSoft label, puts the player in command of a WWII fleet-class sub, patrolling the Pacific. Features include standard SubLogic goodies—like adjustable time scales, surface and attack radars, variable-power periscope and Torpedo Data Computer—to let gamers recreate 14 different historical situations or hunt the enemy on their own. The sub is armed with one deck gun and various torpedos, and the enemy targets include freights, tankers, troop ships and destroyers.

Like other products done by this



high-flying team, *Up Periscopel* simulates reality in the geography. Major islands and land masses are properly located, but there are a few uncharted atolls to keep the navigator on his toes!

Captain John Patten, U.S.N. (Ret.), worked with the SubLogic crew to give the program technical and strategic realism. The program is available for Commodore 64, Apple, and IBM-PC computers.

Mac Takes Flight to Smithsonian

P-51 Mustang Flight Simulator (for Macintosh Plus or SE) will appear in a new gallery of the National Air and Space Museum wing of the Smithsonian Institute, opening May 1989. The new gallery (*Beyond the Limits*) will use the program as an example of inexpensive flight simulation, giving the public hands-on experience.

The simulator was designed by Donald A. Hill, Jr., the author of *Ferrari Grand Prix* and *Fokker Triplane Flight Simulator*. Major features are realistic flight characteristics, ground targets for strafing, dogfights, explosions, 13 camera-viewing angles, parachute bailouts and a complete replay routine.

The flying adventure, set against the backdrop of WWII, sends the flier from



England into occupied Northern Europe to attempt to master the skies through dogfights with Me 109s. An unusual two-player option requires two Macs in the same room, connected directly by cable. This allows wingmates to fly formations, do aerobatics, team up on ground targets or even blast away at each other.

MicroIllusion (Yaba Daba Doo)

Hanna-Barbera's cartoon characters now inhabit the halls of MicroIllusions. The company acquired the rights to use the characters in computer software, and will unveil a line of games based on the familiar personalities.

James Steinert, president of MicroIllusions, promises to maintain the integrity and story plots, as the company creates arcade-style games and adventures for each of the Hanna-Barbera animations. The initial software group includes entertainments based on *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*, *Scooby-Doo* and *Johnny Quest*. MicroIllusions expects to release all titles for Amiga, Commodore 64, Macintosh and MS-DOS computers.

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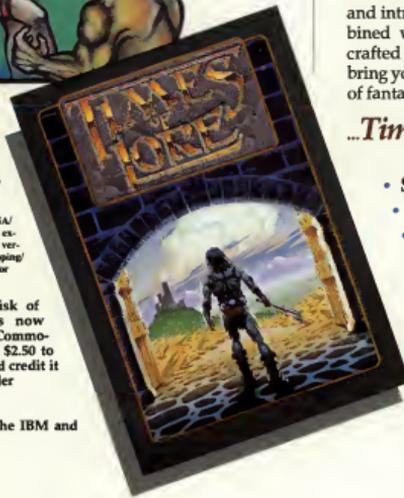
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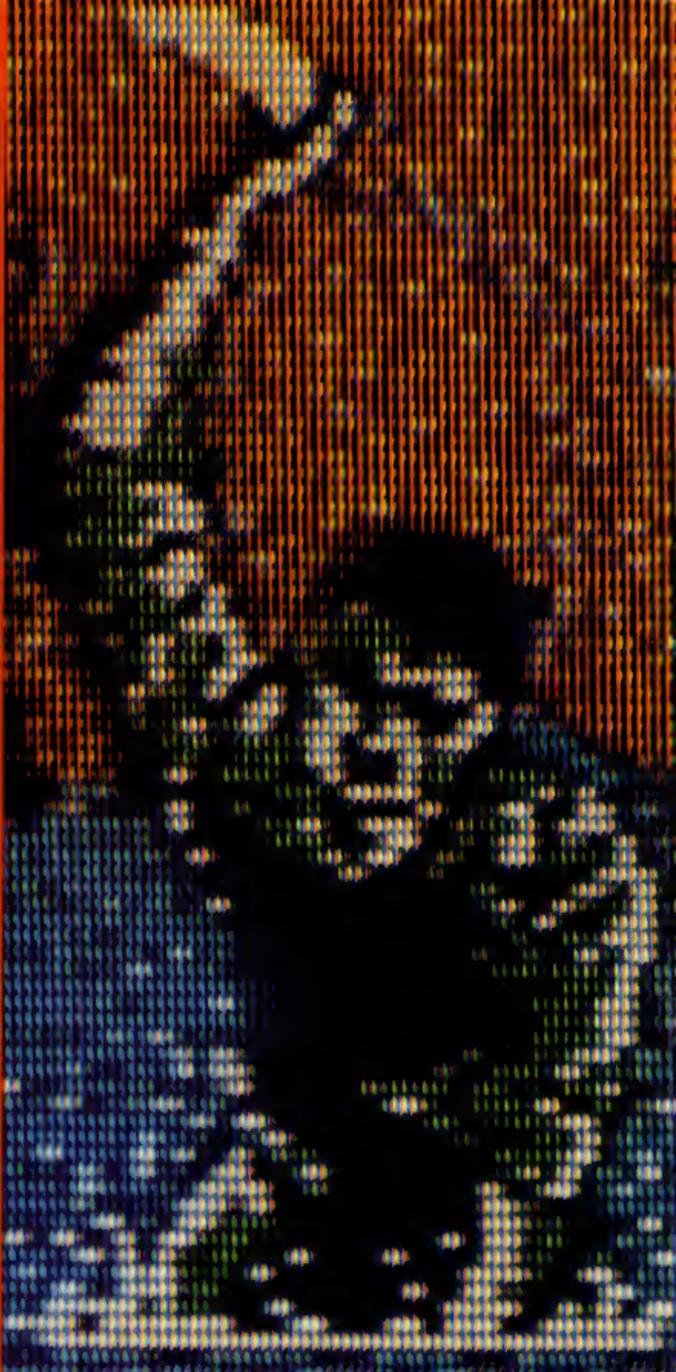
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Video Gamescope

Nintendo takes TV

Mario has finally hit the big time. The famous plumber, Nintendo's most popular social climber, and his buddy Luigi will host *Super Mario Brothers Power Hour*. Steve "Pee-Wee's Playhouse" Binder is the creative consultant for the program produced by

Nintendo and DIC Enterprises. Live action segments starring Mario and Luigi will be mixed with four animated programs per show. The animation sequences *Super Mario Brothers* and *The Legend of Zelda*, will be joined by cartoons based on other Nintendo titles.

Shaping Tomorrow

Down the Manhole

Activision's first Hypercard adventure, *Manhole*, lets the user explore five disks worth of make-believe. The first screen reveals a manhole with vines growing from it. Click the mouse on the manhole and a giant beanstalk climbs up to the sky. The gamer can climb up the beanstalk, into a mysterious castle and a sky filled with meteors. If the gamer descends into the manhole, the exploration takes him through a sunken ship in an ocean fantasy world.

The vast cast of characters include aliens, a walrus, rabbits, dragons, dolphins and others living in these fantasy kingdoms. Many stationary items are operational, such as the piano that actually plays, the radio which can be changed from one station to another



and television with real programs to watch.

Strictly speaking, *Manhole* is not a game. Instead, it is an activity for all ages, an exploration of strange new worlds which unfold through point-and-click interaction. The entertainment program was created and programmed by Cyan, brothers Robyn and Rand Miller. It requires one megabyte of memory, a hard-disk drive and Apple's HyperCard.

Seeing in 3-D

Just plug them into the second joystick port and voila!, 3-D viewing, with the new Stereoscopic glasses from Haitex Resources (Carrollton, TX). The *X-Specs* open and close a high-speed liquid crystal optical shutter at 60 frames per second, to control what each eye sees. The brain then combines the images into a 3-D image.

The \$125 glasses will be available first for the Amiga. Commodore 64, IBM PC/AT, Macintosh and VCR interfaces are currently in development. Over 40 independent development firms are working on software to utilize the *X-Specs*.

X-Specs are already in use in the UCLA Medical Center for brain scan imaging, and in other universities and



labs for molecular modeling. However, Haitex is not blind to the entertainment possibilities; the Amiga glasses come packaged with *SpaceSpuds*, an outerspace arcade action game developed by John Schultz.

Sierra Shows Its Colors

Sierra president Ken Williams announced that Sierra On-Line will support the color-graphics capabilities



of the Macintosh II. The company's 3-D *Animated Adventures* now run interchangeably on Macintosh II, Macintosh Plus, SE, and Macintosh 512 computers, but they come up in color when loaded on the system that supports it, while continuing to look the same on B&W monitors.



Williams explained his company's support of the Mac II with the following statement: "Although the Macintosh II is primarily targeted at the business user, Sierra will provide color 3-D Animated Adventure games because that is what we think Macintosh II users will demand. Why would someone want black and white when they can have color and enjoy the graphic capabilities of the Macintosh II? Once software with color is available, very few Macintosh II owners will go back to black and white."

Games which currently support the Mac in color are: *The King's Quest* series, the *Space Quest* series, *Police Quest*, *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* and *Leisure Suit Larry*. These will soon be joined by an enhanced version of *The Black Cauldron*.

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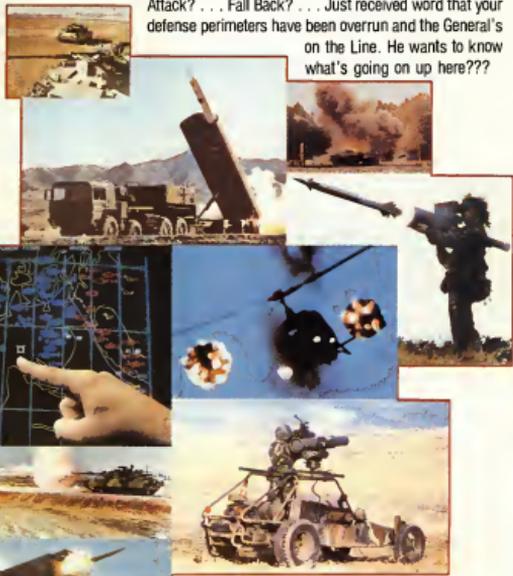
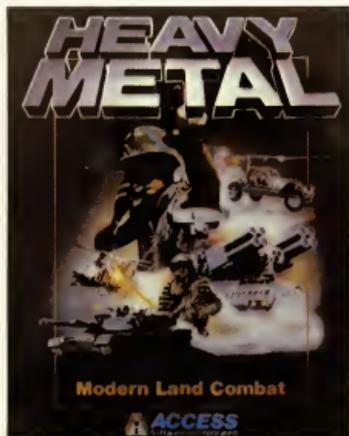
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Time to power up your ADATS (Air Defense Anti Tank System) and start knocking down incoming MIG Fighters. Seems easy until they start coming in 6 or 8 at a time. Now you're in serious trouble. But don't forget, you're also the Company Commander. Charlie Company is on the horn and wants to know what to do.

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Do you have what it takes to move up the ranks in today's army? Take the **HEAVY METAL** challenge and find out!

Some were born to lead, others to follow. Maybe it's time to re-evaluate.



(AMIGA SCREENS)

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Promotions

Incentives To Buy

This is the time of year to watch for sales promotions, and the software community has some incentives that add glamor to your purchases. Details of each promotion will be found inside the software, or at point-of-purchase displays in the stores:

—IntelliCreations has a Hawaiian sweepstakes for *The Hunt For Red October*, based on Tom Clancy's novel. Two purchasers will each win round-trip airfare for two to Hawaii, three days and four nights hotel expenses, and a free rental car, plus a tour of a fully operational submarine.

—Epyx has a consumer sweepstakes for *Print Magic* where they'll award two three-night stays at a Palm Springs, CA., resort, plus round-trip airfare. Other prizes include CD players, bicycles, videocassette recorders, Casio keyboards, telephones, and paper packs.

—Intracorp's "Murder on the Atlantic Contest" requires the player to answer each of the 15 questions on the entry blank, and write the end to a completion statement. The top prize is \$10,000, and 2,500 gift certificates will also be awarded.

—While supplies last, specially marked packages of *The Print Shop*



(Broderbund) will contain a free copy of *Special Edition Graphics Library*.

—Specially marked boxes of *Tower Toppler* and *Technocop* contain sweepstakes entry blanks. The winner will gain a vacation for four to California, with airfare, hotel and expenses paid. Two additional trips for two to Los Angeles will be awarded, plus 500 runner-up game posters.

—Accolade's sports-game sweepstakes will award five gamers a "Sports Fan Fantasy For Two." The prizes include a day at a live sports broadcast with an announcer.

—Sierra On-Line has a joint promotional agreement with Ad Lib Inc. Sierra customers will be able to take advantage of a \$20 rebate on the Ad Lib Music Synthesizer Card.

—Mrs. Marion Reichert, of Bennington, VT, won a trip for two to Europe in the Broderbund "Where in Europe is Carmen Sandiego? Sweepstakes."

fortress where the opposing army is headquartered, to stop a futuristic invasion.

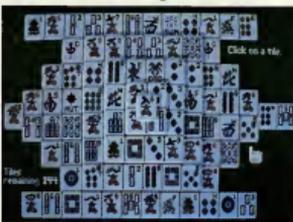
Data East will produce Bally Midway's hit coin-op *Rampage* for the NES. In this version, George the Ape and Lizzy the Lizard crash through 128 levels, destroying city after city. A solo gamer assumes the role of either monster, and two-player mode lets both behemoths pillage through the cities, smashing up the real estate and gobbling up the citizenry. Gamers get points for everything their monster destroys. If the on-screen uglies get electrical shocks, or eat poison or don't eat enough, it shows up on the damage bar which indicates the creatures' condition.

The two-megabyte game, Data East's 11th title for NES, will retail for \$44.95.

World Computerists Shanghai'd

Activision's addition, otherwise known as *Shanghai*, has reached worldwide proportions. The award winner is currently the most widely published computer game of all time, for 24 computer systems: Amiga, Apple II and IIGS, Atari ST, MS-DOS/Tandy, Tandy Color Computer 3, Commodore 64/128 and Macintosh in the U.S.A.; Atari XE/XL in Europe; NEC 9800, NEC 8800, Sharp X-1, Sharp Shoins, Sharp X-6800, MSX-2, Mini-7, Fujitsu FMR, Sony Produce, Canon, Toshiba, Nintendo Family Computer, PC Engine, Arcade Machine and Sega in Japan.

Shanghai, derived from Mah Jongg, shuffles 144 tiles and arranges them in a five-tiered, dragon-shaped pyramid. The player removes tiles by matching pairs until no further moves are possible, or all tiles are gone.



Nintendo Acclaims Joystick

Activision's new peripheral is sanctioned as the only Nintendo-approved, wireless remote controller. It uses infrared light to eliminate the need for wires, thus providing more freedom of movement for NESers.



The Acclaim video-game controller weighs five ounces and features two fire buttons with the familiar direction-rossette, plus a rapid-fire option for those high-speed shoot-'em-ups. It's scheduled for holiday buying at \$39.95.

Coin-snatchers Go NES

APCOM's arcader, *Bionic Commando*, already available for most home computers, will be available this Christmas for the Nintendo Entertainment System. This high-action contest casts the gamer as an indefatigable commando, aided by advanced bionics. The powerful soldier fights invading forces and battles his way into the



TV Special Spotlights Hulk Hogan

Aclaim Entertainment, the manufacturer of *WWF WrestleMania* for Nintendo, will cosponsor an animated Hulk Hogan TV special, slated for the holiday season.

The new videogame slated for December shoppers will retail for around \$40-\$45. It lets compu-wrestlers use bodyslams, headlocks, dropkicks and other maneuvers, to re-create battles between WWF stars such as Hulk, Randy Savage and Andre the Giant.

Top Summer Sellers for 1988

Figures courtesy of SoftKat.

Rank	Title	Publisher
1.	Gunship	MicroProse
2.	King's Quest III	Sierra
3.	Pirates	MicroProse
4.	Defender of the Crown	Cinemaware
5.	Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer	Electronic Arts
6.	California Games	Epyx
7.	Falcon	Spectrum Holobyte
8.	Police Quest	Sierra
9.	The Last Ninja	Mediagenic
10.	Leisure Suit Larry	Sierra

Top Coin-Snatchers

(Figures provided by RePlay Magazine, based on an earnings-opinion poll of operators.)

Best Upright Video Games:

1. Double Dragon	Taito
2. Bad Dudes	Data East
3. Operation Wolf	Taito
4. Heavy Barrel	Data East
5. Main Event	Konami
6. Out Run	Sega
7. After Burner	Sega
8. Super Hang-On	Sega
9. Forgotten World	Capcom
10. Toobin'	Atari



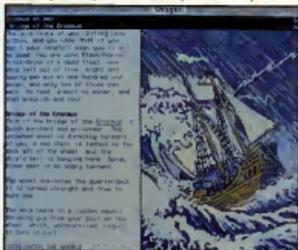
Infocom Changes Format

Infocom's Fall lineup of interactive adventures features enhanced graphics and new story lines. *Shogun*, based on James Clavell's novel, casts the gamer as a 16th-century English sea pilot en route to Japan. The feudal Japanese society erupts into a political power

struggle and the gamer, as John Blackthorne, must adapt to the culture.

Dave [Zork] Lebling collaborated with Clavell to produce a game which requires the gamer to think like Blackthorne would, rather than solving puzzles. For example, the very first problem to be overcome when the adventure begins is something a ship's captain would do almost automatically. Intricate Japanese graphics, stunningly beautiful, are used both as story illustrations and borders around the text, and some graphic animations also are used as rewards for successfully handled situations.

Shogun will be available for Apple II, Apple IIGS, IBM, Macintosh, Atari ST, Amiga and Commodore computers.



Best Software:

1. Shinobi	Sega
2. Altered Beast	Sega
3. Twin Cobra	Romstar
4. Twin Eagle	Taito
5. Championship Sprint	Atari
6. Gold Medalist	Romstar
7. RoadBlasters	Atari
8. Capcom Bowling	Capcom
9. Dead Angle	Fabtek
10. Chopper I	SNK

Sega Gives the Nod to Activation

Up until now, all Sega games have been licensed from their original publishers, then produced and sold under Sega's own banner. That's changed now, and Activation has become one of the first licensees given the right to market and sell video games for the Sega Master System.

Sega will continue to handle the manufacturing chores, but Activation will have marketing, sales and distribution rights. This is similar to an agreement between Activation and Nintendo.

Activation, the world's first third-party manufacturer of video games (for the Atari 2600, in the late 70s), already has two Sega-marketed video games, *Shanghai* and *Ghostbusters*, for the Sega Master System. The three new titles currently in design are *Rampage*, *Bomber Raid* (formerly called *Super River Raid*) and *Cyborg Hunter*, a futuristic tracking and combat game.

Double Dragon to NES

Double Dragon, currently a runaway hit in the arcades, licensed by Tradewest for the Nintendo Entertainment System, has experienced record sales. Retailers report shortages of the game, and because of the continuing chip shortage, the manufacturer has

not been able to keep supplies up to the demand.

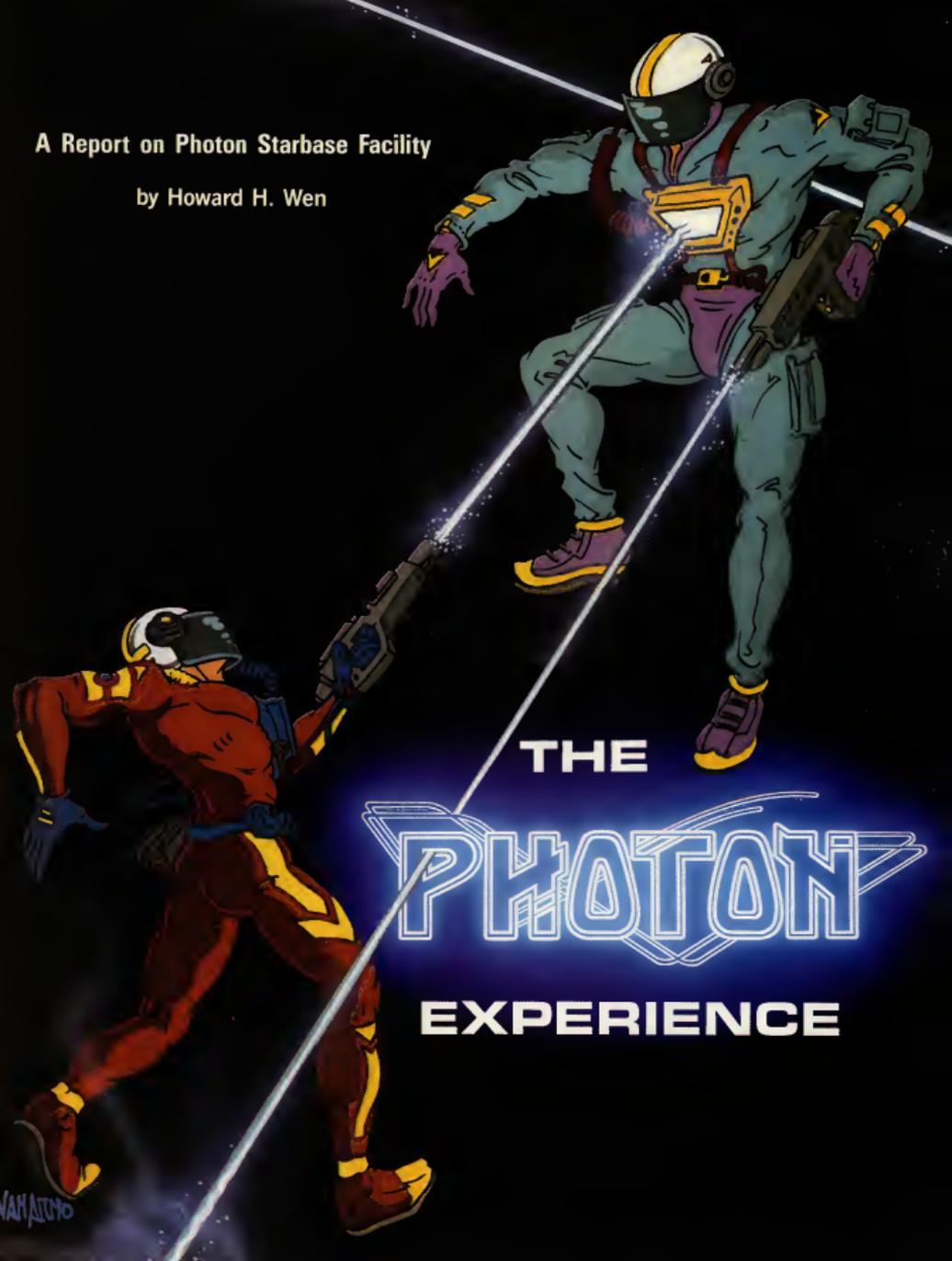
The popularity of the program continues unabated despite a play action and plot similar to many other NES games. The story stars twin martial-arts experts, Billy and Jimmy, a kidnapped girl (isn't there always?) and a fight that rages from the inner city, to the woods. And just who is this fiend, the Shadow Boss, who stole Billy's girl? Why, the villain is none other than Jimmy, who faces his brother in a confrontation.

The legend of Double Dragon has inspired Imperial Toy Corp. to create a series of puffy stickers featuring this and other popular video games, and Tiger Electronics has created a handheld electronic version for the small-game market.



A Report on Photon Starbase Facility

by Howard H. Wen



THE

PHOTON

EXPERIENCE

WAMATTO

DALLAS, TEXAS—When most people catch their first glimpse of the Photon Starbase play arena, “living video game” and “high-tech cowboys and Indians” are two of the most common analogies that come to mind.

Though Photon is both of the above, it's also more than that—as you'll find when talking with frequent players (a.k.a. Photon Warriors) and employees. Bob Boyle, Director of Retail Operations for Photon Marketing LTD., thinks of Photon more as a “step above video games” rather than simply a computer game where people physically participate.

While first-time onlookers might pass Photon off as a short-lived novelty, this “novelty” has already endured for four years and is now on its fifth. Veteran players will tell you that Photon is successful because its premise is more like that of a competitive sport, such as football or baseball, rather than an ordinary video game.

Don't ask them what a Photon game is like. Joe, an eighteen-year-old who has been playing for little over a month, is at a loss for words when trying to describe Photon. “It's like a video game—but then again it's not,” he replies unsurely.

To Joe and other faithful Photon Warriors, summarizing what Photon is and what one feels when playing it in a single paragraph or two doesn't do the game justice. All descriptions—no matter how detailed—sound too generic. Reading about it, seeing pictures of the arena or watching others play the game won't make you understand what makes veterans and others alike keep coming back for more. To know why Photon is still as successful as it is, you have to *play* it.

Today, the latest version of the Photon concept is known as Starbase, located in Dallas' historic West End marketplace—a “festival” shopping mall featuring high-concept specialty shops. “It [the West End] seemed to be the most obvious choice to us,” notes Mr. Boyle. There you'll find stores

dedicated to selling anything from antiques to designer sunglasses and even holographic portraits. The West End is also one of the few places in Dallas where you can putt indoor miniature golf and—in a large video arcade—race Atari's *Final Lap* against seven other human players. And it's the only place where you can see and play Photon's new Starbase game.

Inside Starbase

West End shoppers, as they enter the Starbase facility, are first greeted by the brightly shining logo. Because of curiosity, their first stop is usually the observation deck from where the full, open game arena can be seen below. Newcomers get the idea of how Photon is played watching red and green-helmeted players running and ducking about the playing field. Streams of green, laser-like light emit from the Photon Warriors' phaser guns whenever they shoot at one another. The mist-covered game arena—illuminated in certain areas with decorative green and red lights—and the sound effects soundtrack playing overhead, all add to the science fiction/fantasy feel of Photon. You can practice handling a phaser from one of several phaser stations on the observation deck, aiming and shooting at the players on the field. Watching a Photon game is definitely something of a spectacle itself.

Those who aren't content with just watching others play can sign up and join in the fun—the only requirement is that you be over 4-6. Upon paying a lifetime registration fee and filling out a waiver, your photo is taken and placed in an identification card for you to keep. After buying a ticket to play in one game, it's off to the “pod” stations

where you suit up in Photon Warrior gear.

The first thing to be put on is a disposable bandanna. These “party hats,” as they are affectionately called by the employees at Photon, must be worn to soak up perspiration. And believe me, when playing Photon you'll sweat so much that your party hat will be drenched at the end of every game.

As you're tying on your party hat, a uniformed attendant quickly goes over the basic rules. The object is to shoot the players on the opposing team, while trying to avoid being shot yourself. Firing at the enemy base's target three times in a row earns you bonus points. But if an opponent shoots you or you fire on a fellow teammate—whether by accident or deliberately—your phaser gun deactivates for a few seconds. When this happens, the best thing to do is retreat and duck behind the maze of walls until your phaser reactivates. At the end of a game (each game lasts about five minutes), players exit the arena and see how well they played, reading their tallied scores on computer monitors. Individual results are then totalled and the team with the highest number of points is the winner.

Learning to put on the Photon Warrior gear for the first time is probably

more difficult than playing the game itself. First, you strap a twelve-pound battery pack around your waist like a belt. Next, the helmet, chest pod and phaser (all three are already connected together for convenience) are donned. This entire setup is plugged into the battery pack.

STAR BASE

Wearing the helmet, you can hear (in stereo) an electronic "blipping" that indicates your gear is powered up. You can also hear your phaser gun when it's fired. In all, the equipment weighs over 15 pounds. Though it's designed to be worn by people of all sizes, the gear may be bulky and loose if you're on the small side—sometimes being uncomfortable and a hindrance. And no matter how tightly you adjust it, the straps tend to come loose during rigorous play.

When everybody is suited up and separated into teams, attendants lead



the players into the game arena and to their home bases. A recorded female voice welcomes the Photon Warriors and begins counting down, after which the game officially starts.

And once it starts, things get hectic

fast. Beginners who don't know the layout of the playing field all too often run into walls or trip. Fortunately, the helmet protects against head injuries, and most falls are minor.

As you move around the arena, you feel the tension of both the hunter and the hunted. Streaks of green phaser light flash past you. If you're hit, a reverberating whine echoes in the stereo of your helmet. If you hit your opponent's helmet or chest pod, a rewarding ping will sound.

After my first game I was exhausted. Whether it was because I was out of shape or because the game was so intense, I don't know—but it didn't matter: the game was worth it. (Unfortunately, my score on the monitor revealed that I had performed pretty badly.) Panting and sweating, I soon discovered another feature of the West End: Its wide variety of places to eat and drink.

Photon's genesis

The mastermind behind Photon is George Carter—a bearded, middle-aged man who got the inspiration for Photon back in 1977 when he first saw the movie *Star Wars*. "George essentially wanted to create a place where you could go and 'do just that,'" explains Mr. Boyle. Specifically, he wanted to create an environment where people could harmlessly shoot light guns at one another, and "live" the laser battle scenes from the famed George Lucas film.

So with a general idea of what he wanted, Carter and an engineer friend built the first prototype Photon Warrior suit in, where most pioneering inventions are invented, a garage. Basically, the gear operated on a patented infrared system to register a "hit," like the remote control on a television.

Due to technological limitations at the time, the original phaser didn't emit a straight beam of light like the laser guns in *Star Wars*, something that Carter wanted. Firing the original phaser was akin to shooting a gun. Though it worked, the effect was not as visually dramatic. The public would have to wait for what would be more than four years of research for the phaser to be perfected.

Meanwhile, Carter took a bold step:

he raised enough capital to rent warehouse space in a suburban Dallas office building. It was from there that Carter and his subcontractors built the first Photon play area, virtually from the ground up. The lighting and sound systems rivaled that of an elaborate discotheque, and the rugged playing field was designed to look like a cross between the Death Star corridors in *Star Wars* and a full-blown, life-sized video game. Everything was under the control of a central computer, which was programmed to regulate the game and keep the score.

As sophisticated as this system was, there were still problems. Once, the computer was fried when the building was struck by lightning. Another time the fog machine switched itself on during the night, triggering fire alarms. However, these were only minor incidences. Problems were few, and, overall, the system proved to be effective and "bug-free."

Let the games begin

On April, 1984, Photon opened its doors, and with local television and radio ad spots, business started out briskly. That briskness mounted to a surge as Photon quickly gained a loyal following, thanks mostly to word-of-mouth. Teams of league players were formed and tournaments were held. A second center in Fountain Valley, California was opened, where lines stretching for blocks were reported. Franchises appeared across the nation in major cities.

Photon had made a timely appearance—in the "Golden Age" of the video-game revolution. During that time, many had theorized that video gaming would gradually evolve into a form that was more interactive, more physical. Even though Carter himself never associated his creation with video games, Photon's principal market was made up of those who frequently played them—young males from their teens to early twenties.

Billed as "the living video game," both Photon and George Carter appeared in the pages of news, science, sports and video-game magazines. Even the ABC television network's news magazine, *20/20*, visited the Photon facility in Dallas, covering the game

and interviewing players.

With the success came the merchandising. There were Photon toys, novels, a television series, and even a workable home version. It didn't matter that all of these products were short-lived. With each of them, the Photon name was spread.

Inevitably came competition—all of which failed miserably. Carter cites that these facilities just weren't able to measure up to the quality Photon delivered. The equipment used in many "Flashlight Photons," as he calls them, were put together with simple, inferior components that could be purchased from any electronic parts store.

The more successful of the competition was *Laser Tag*, a home-version copy of Photon that managed to establish itself in the market before the equally similar, made-for-home Photon brand was released. *Laser Tag* got its share of attention, especially in 1986, but its popularity began to wane after several months.

New blood

In fact, Photon's own popularity was running down. Many franchises closed due—Carter will tell you this honestly—to the difficulty in keeping the franchises up to the quality standards that had been so important to Photon in the past.

Another factor in the slowing of busi-



ness was the two-year arcade and home video-game slump that characterized 1985 and 1986. Turned away by the sudden lack of quality in video games, video-gamers, who had always comprised a majority of Photon's customers, became disinterested in Photon as well.

It was at this point that Photon needed something to create new interest—and perhaps build a new image. That something came out of the company's research lab: a new phaser gun, one that could shoot out a beam of laser-like light.

This wasn't a real laser; laser technology was still too expensive, and laser light is too dangerous. Instead, this phaser emitted normal light, altered to look like a straight laser beam. Carter would not go into details on how this is done, as it is a patented product of his company. All he would say was that the new phaser is a miniaturized version of the pseudo-laser lights used in discotheques.

Now all Photon needed was the new image. That new image was called "Starbase," and it opened in the West End on July, 1988. Due to space limitations, Starbase is about half the size of the original Photon, but it features the best of the latter in a smaller, more intimate package. And its popularity is gaining again, coinciding with the resurging video-game industry. But this time a few things are different. Besides the newphasers, you'll find that the people who are playing Photon are different too. Starbase now has a regular flow of female players, since a great number of West End shoppers are pre-teen and teenaged girls. Even though Photon's customers still consist main-

ly of young males, the new audience will result in a potentially wider market.

There have also been changes in how the business will be run from the company headquarters. For one, franchises are no longer being sold. Secondly, projects involving the use of their pseudo-laser for various applications and expanding Starbase into other areas of the amusement industry are in development. A second Starbase center will open in early 1989 in Japan, their first foreign market.

From the past, into the future

Photon reached a plateau of success, then momentarily declined, only to return under the Starbase banner—all in less than five years. Not too many "novelties" have that kind of resilience. Maybe Starbase's success is due to marketing—or maybe it's just luck. Or perhaps it has something to do with what creator George Carter told me as we neared the end of his interview: "We didn't import Photon from another country—or any other outside source. We made it ourselves. Photon is an American original."

American originals—like apple pie, baseball, and video games—are mainstays. And, like the players in a Photon game, American originals never die.

Howard H. Wen is a freshman at the University of North Texas, where he is majoring in screenwriting. He is the author of the science-fiction satire novel, Cosmic Computer Commandos! and has had articles published both in VG&CE and ANALOG Computing.





Alex Kidd in Miracle World

Sega

For the Sega Master System (\$40.00)

Alex Kidd in *Miracle World* is obviously Sega's answer to *Super Mario Bros.* Just like its predecessor, it's a running, jumping, block-busting game where you must find your way through many different levels. But, while Alex Kidd in *Miracle World* is reminiscent of *Mario Bros.*, it's far from a clone. The creators of this program have taken extra care to produce something that can stand on its own.

The scenario: Alex Kidd, a boy on the planet Aries, returns from Mt. Eternal where he has learned Shellcore, a skill that allows one to easily break rocks. He is informed that the city of Radactian is in danger. The dying man who tells Alex about Radactian's troubles also gives him a map and a medallion fashioned from Sunstone and sends him on his way to discover the secrets of *Miracle World*.

Game play consists mostly of finding the best route through each of the 11 levels, while at the same time collecting as much money and treasure as you can. In addition, there are thousands of stone blocks throughout *Miracle World*. You'll need to use some of them for



Sega's answer to *Super Mario Bros.* is *Alex Kidd in Miracle World*, an addicting treasure hunt that's a definite winner.

stepping stones. Others will block your way and so must be smashed.

You'll find moneybags everywhere, and if you want to purchase items from the shop (trust me; you do), you have to collect all the cash you discover. There are also many boxes to open. Some of the boxes contain moneybags, some contain treasures—others contain nasty surprises.

Occasionally, you'll be able to enter the aforementioned shop—wherein you can buy many items that'll assist you in your journey. These items in-

clude Teleport Powder (makes you invisible to the enemy), Canes of Flight (gives you the power to fly) and two varieties of Magic Capsules (one calls forth some "friends" and one surrounds you with a protective barrier). Certain shops also stock Sukopako Motorcycles and Peticopters, vehicles that'll help you make it through a location faster and sometimes easier.

As you work your way into *Miracle World*, you'll find that the puzzles get harder and the amount of skill required for success also increases. Thankfully, the creators of *Alex Kidd* decid-

ed not to incorporate a time limit, leaving you free to work out your plan of attack. This makes the game more enjoyable, I think, because it eliminates much unnecessary pressure and increases the use of strategy.

You'll encounter many different creatures on your way through *Miracle World*, and all of them are out to stop you from attaining your final goal. The only way to increase your score is to shoot or punch the creatures; however, to get as far into *Miracle World* as you can, your best bet is to avoid the enemy. You may get a lower score, but you'll last longer.

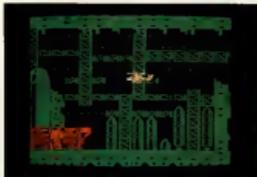
Once you've developed the necessary skills, (such as jumping up, smashing a block and grabbing the money all in a single move), you'll find this game to be about as addicting as games come. The graphics are clean and inventive, the sound effects interesting and the game play challenging and absorbing. *Alex Kidd in Miracle World* is a definite winner.

—Clayton Welnum

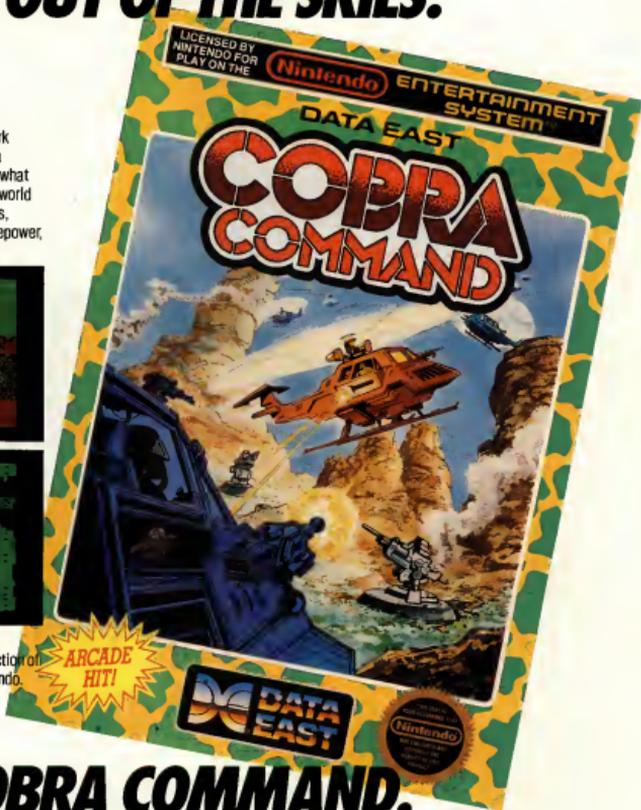
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Ghost House

Sega

For the Sega Master System (\$32.00)

Ghost House is a simple and mindless game.

Now that I've got your attention, let me hasten to say that the above is not necessarily a criticism. There's no rule anywhere (at least, not one that I've run into) that says that all video games must be complicated and thought-provoking. It all depends on what you want to get out of a game. And even that changes from day to day.

The object of Ghost House is to find and retrieve a number of jewels hidden throughout Count Dracula's mansion. The mansion is, of course, overflowing with nasty creatures, all of which are out to prevent Mick, your on-screen character, from getting the jewels.

The Derobats and the Fire Blowers are particularly annoying. The bats are constantly coming at you, usually in pairs, and it's difficult to punch them. In most cases you can get the first one, but the second one gets you. To kill the Fire Blowers, you must jump on top of them, and depending on where you are in the mansion, this can be easy or difficult. In some corridors, there's no room to jump above the Fire Blower, so you have to come up with a more creative solution.

There are other obstacles



The object of *Ghost House* is to find and retrieve a number of jewels that are hidden throughout Count Dracula's mansion.

placed around the castle. For example, you must be always ready to duck under flying knives and arrows, and hidden traps, which, if you don't jump over, will drop you down to the next floor.

Placed throughout the mansion are five coffins which contain vampires. Each of these vampires has one of the jewels you need, and to acquire the jewel, you must kill the vampire. The vampire flits at you in his bat form, quickly draining away your power. Once in a while he'll change back into his normal form, giving you a better chance

to get at him, but the transformation won't last long.

Each of the creatures in the mansion are worth points toward your score. In addition, there are treasures scattered about that not only increase your score by varying amounts, but also add some power to your power meter. The power meter (located at the top of the screen) keeps you up-to-date on Mick's health: When all the power is gone, Mick dies. You get three lives with which to try and complete your mission.

There's a trick or two you'll

discover in your wanderings around the mansion—things that are not mentioned in the game's brief manual. For instance, if you jump up and touch one of the ceiling lights, everything on the screen will freeze for a short while, allowing you to punch the creatures with no risk to yourself. However, this maneuver will work only a limited number of times, so use it sparingly.

Though the sound effects in Ghost House are nothing special, the graphics are interesting and fairly detailed. They're not as well done as the graphics found in some of the other games from Sega, but this game comes on a "Sega Card" instead of a Mega cartridge; so one shouldn't expect the game to be able to compete with its larger cousins.

If you like a lot of action and don't frustrate easily—or if you find yourself in the market for a simple game requiring little thought to play—Ghost House may be a good addition to your game library. As for myself, I doubt I'll be spending much time with it. I like a game with a lot more depth.—Clayton Walnum

Sega of America
573 Forbes Blvd.
So. San Francisco, CA 94080
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Gato

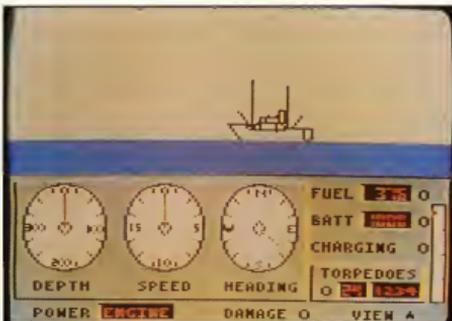
Atari

For the Atari XE Game System (\$24.95)

Originally produced by Spectrum Holobyte for the Commodore, Apple and IBM computers, the long-awaited Atari 8-bit conversion of the submarine simulator *Gato*—programmed by Xanth FX—has finally arrived.

The year is 1943, World War II, and you're the captain of a Gato-class attack submarine stationed in deep Pacific waters. You receive your patrol-mission orders from COMSUBPAC (Commander Submarine Force Pacific Fleet) in genuine Morse code. Upon familiarizing yourself with your assignment, you must complete it quickly and efficiently with only the supplies you carry on each patrol. With a disk drive, the date and amount of enemy tonnage you sink is automatically saved in a captain's log on disk.

Gato allows you to choose from many variations in play with ten levels of difficulty. In the first three, enemy ship movements are displayed on both quadrant and patrol area charts, while on the fourth and fifth levels, their presence is shown only on the quadrant charts. For the diehard gamer, message orders are received in Morse audio only on levels seven and nine, requiring that you decode them your-



The long-awaited *Gato* for the Atari XE Game System tosses you and your submarine onto the open seas to complete dangerous missions, self on paper.

Gato is played on four separate screens, mostly from the main control display. Here, your sub's depth, speed and heading gauges are shown—as are the oxygen indicator, fuel and battery reserves, damage report, periscope crosshairs, your view of the water surface, remaining torpedoes and other vital statistics.

And, of course, every sea-faring craft has a radar. In *Gato*, the radar functions pretty much like the real thing. At higher levels of game difficulty, the radar screen is the only means by which enemy ships can be located.

When your *Gato* submarine becomes seriously damaged or supplies begin to run low, the subtender—an ally ship—is available to provide you with fuel, torpedoes and repairs. Getting the subtender to help you can be tricky at times—you need to move in close enough to the ship, as well as match its course and speed.

It especially takes a while to move your sub in on the enemy—this is when the game is played in real time. However, there is a function that allows you to “warp” your submarine from one area of the patrol area chart to another without using

any power. Known as Rapid Submarine Deployment (RSD), it is intended for making a quick trip to the subtender for repairs. But this function can just as easily be used to move your *Gato* sub into quadrants occupied by enemy ships. Obviously, this method is more time-efficient than having to cruise under the ocean for several minutes.

The graphics in *Gato* are good, but nothing special. The subtender and enemy ships are represented in simple, wire-frame graphics. When an enemy ship is hit by one of your torpedoes, water erupts and the whole ship horizontally sinks straight down into the water. If your own sub is sunk, the screen rattles as water comes flooding in, filling the sub to the top.

Arcade fans wanting something of a faster pace are advised to look elsewhere, while others won't find the challenge presented in this one a disappointment. To put it simply: *Gato* is a welcome addition to the Atari XEGS line and a highly recommended game.

—Howard H. Wen

Atari Corp.
1196 Borregas Ave.
Sunnyvale, CA 94086
(408) 745-2000



Fantasy Zone II

Sega

For the Sega Master System (\$43.00)

In this sequel, Opa-Opa is back at it again, in a story that takes place ten years after the original *Fantasy Zone* tale. In *Fantasy Zone II*, the dastardly Blackhearts are threatening his home territory.

Opa-Opa has his work cut out for him. He faces eight different worlds as his journey unfolds, each one more trying than the last. Also, each world ends with Opa-Opa dueling head-to-head against one of the Blackhearts. At the end of the first level, for example, he must pilot his way through a literal logjam as he tries to kill the first Blackheart.

The main task is to make it through the multiple scenes of each world. The Blackhearts have spread a lot of cash around, but to get it you have to destroy (using missile fire and bomb drops) the crew of aliens that hold it. When you do loosen up some currency, it will stay on-screen only for a few moments, so you also have to maneuver quickly and accurately.

This job isn't tough in itself, but a lot is thrown at you at once, so you must keep your eyes darting back and forth constantly. Each of the enemies—or teams of enemies—you come across has a specific pattern of movement



Opa-Opa returns to save his homeland from the evil Blackhearts in *Fantasy Zone II*, a graphic-filled contest for the Sega Master System.

you must recognize in order to be successful. Each world brings new enemies and new patterns.

There are also bases—large, goofy-looking faces—that need to be blasted off the screen. When one is shot repeatedly, it disappears with a reward: Either it drops some loot to add to your bankroll or it reveals a warp pad.

A warp pad, if you run into them with your ship, will take you to the other corners of the world you're currently in. This is the only way to successfully complete each level, because you can't move on until all the bases are cleared. When that occurs,

you must find the red warp pad, which will bring you into the face-to-face confrontation with that area's Blackheart. Defeating the Blackheart lets a lot of cash fly, but you only have a short time to pick it up before you're shoveled off to the next scene.

It's important to hoard your money in *Fantasy Zone II*. If you don't acquire a good stash of cash, your ship will have only a minimum of firepower. Certain spots in each world have a store where you can upgrade your artillery strength and engine type and even receive an extra ship. These enhancements last only

for a short period and cost more with each successive purchase. Constant cash additions to the wallet are important.

The scenery in *Fantasy Zone II* is extremely colorful and the animation nicely done—a testament to the graphics hardware inside the Sega Master System. At times, though, the small ship you are piloting will get lost in the lavish backgrounds, making battle more difficult.

The music and sounds are also high quality, but they soon wear thin. After a short time, you'll reach for the volume control to turn them down; they become distracting. Since they really don't help game play, silencing sound effects won't change the game much and will help you concentrate better.

Fantasy Zone II is a quality challenge to the arcade-game lover. It keeps the pressure on, varies the patterns of the enemies to minimize boredom and is attractive to look at. It has some flaws, but will keep you plugging away for hours.

—Andy Eddy

Sega of America
573 Forbes Blvd.
San Francisco, CA 94080
(415) 742-9300



Super Mario Bros. 2

Nintendo

For the Nintendo Entertainment System (\$39.95)

There's no way that someone could own a Nintendo and not be familiar with the exploits of Mario and his associates. So far, two cartridges have been devoted to Mario's travels, and both of them contain enough activity and adventuring to keep the most avid gamer busy for quite a spell. My family still plugs in *Super Mario Bros.* more than any other game.

Not one to remain out of the public's eye for too long, Mario has gathered all of his friends—and a large number of his opponents—for a new trek called *Super Mario Bros. 2*. Though many of the characters and control aspects are the same, the game concept is fresh. Don't think that because you got all the way through the original *Super Mario Bros.* game, you'll be able to breeze to the end of this one!

The game opens at the entrance to the mystical land of Subcon and its 7 worlds, which are comprised of 20 different areas. At the beginning of each area, you can pick which of the four characters—Mario, Luigi, Toad and Princess Toadstool—to use. There are subtle differences in jumping and running abilities between the characters, which may have an effect on how well you do in specific areas, so the choice should be made carefully. As you learn about each area,

Mario fans will cheer his new exploits in Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros. 2*, as he attempts to journey into the dream world of Subcon and defeat the nasty Wart.



you'll also learn which player will be best suited for the terrain.

Strewn about Subcon are many objects that you may find beneficial. Everywhere you go, there are tufts of grass sticking out of the ground. When you grab the grass and pull, you'll generally find "weapons" in the form of vegetables that can be thrown at an oncoming meanie. Sometimes you'll find time bombs, helpful for blasting creatures or—better yet—for breaking a section of wall that stands be-

tween you and further adventure. There are also other treasures you'll find, such as keys (to open locked doors), 1 UPs (for free lives), POW blocks (to wipe everything off the screen) and potion bottles (which take you to a sub-space zone for coin and mushroom bonuses).

To make the game more interesting, you can turn an enemy's movements against itself, similar to jumping on a turtle's back in *Super Mario Bros.* You can stand on the backs of most

creatures in *Mario 2*, pick them up off the ground and chuck them at other beasts as a weapon. This is a nice twist, and demonstrates that Nintendo strives for uniqueness.

At the end of each area, there is a "boss" that is tough to eliminate. For example, Birdo shoots eggs at you, and you have to jump precisely in order to land on the egg, take it into your arms and hit Birdo with it. There is also a boss at the end of each world, and at the game's conclusion, the main meany named Wart must be defeated.

Above all, the challenge is *Mario 2*'s primary attraction: there are some hard levels in this game. Unlike *Mario 2*'s predecessor, you can travel back from where you just came. Unfortunately, when you backtrack, the attackers you already dispatched will return to their original locations. The pressure is constant.

Movie sequels aren't usually as successful as the originals, and often end up embarrassing. The continuing escapades of Mario and his pals prove that sequels don't always fail. Nintendo has another hit on their hands.

—Andy Eddy

Nintendo of America, Inc.
P.O. Box 97036
Redmond, WA 98073-9736
(206) 882-2040



Power Set

Nintendo

For the Nintendo Entertainment System (\$149.95)

Most people complain that, while video gaming is involving and exciting, there isn't much actual physical interaction for the player. Sure, you wiggle a joystick around for a few hours and maybe urge your on-screen character's movements with some body English of your own, but there's not much to bring a sweat to your brow. Folks, things are about to change.

Nintendo, always looking for new recreational tie-ins for the NES, is now marketing a new package: *The Power Set*. This contains the *Action Set* hardware—an NES console (and associated gear), two controllers and the *Zapper* light gun—and a new control device called the *Power Pad*. (Current Nintendo owners will either have to buy the new set or wait until Nintendo releases the Power Pad as a separate purchase; presently there are no plans to sell it independently of the Power Set.)

The pad looks something like the playfield for the old *Twister* game, with large colored dots on both sides. When plugged into the NES in place of a standard controller or joystick, the pad will send data from microswitches built into the device, depending on which dots are stood on.



Nintendo's *Power Pad* for the NES eliminates any cries of "You're a Couch Potato!" in your house, as you sprint and leap your way through their new series of interactive cartridges.

Presently the Power Set comes with a triple-header cartridge: It not only contains *Super Mario Bros.* and *Duck Hunt*, but also a Power Pad-compatible game called *World Class Track Meet*. When you select the latter program, you can compete in running and jumping events like the 100-meter dash and the long jump. To make it even more interactive, up to six players can join the challenge.

By the time you read this, Nintendo plans to be shipping two other Power Pad cartridges: *Dance Aerobics* and *Super Team*

Games. The first title guides you through the paces with on-screen feedback of how each exercise should be done. Jane Fonda beware.

Super Team Sports is a much more carefree contest, testing your abilities at team sports and obstacle-course events. While still fun, it makes you work for your enjoyment.

If you have any doubts about the Power Pad's calorie-killing effects, you can take my word for it that it'll do the trick. Nintendo was demonstrating the device at the Consumer Electronics Show

in June, 1988. When people tried it—in suits and ties, usually—their calorie-burning stomping and leaping were always accompanied by smiles.

The obvious question is whether Nintendo, and/or third-party companies, will continue to support the Power Pad with new cartridges. A look back to the first generation of video games brings to mind the *Joyboard*, a stand-on controller for the Atari 2600 VCS, marketed by a little-known company called Amiga. Yes, the same group responsible for the Amiga computer before being acquired by Commodore. Unfortunately their first effort was poorly timed (it was released just before the video-game market crashed) and the concept never caught on.

Nintendo is, by all appearances, peaking with the NES, which gives them some room to try and turn the Power Set into a decent seller. All I know is it's a lot of fun and, hopefully, will permit me to deflate some of the spare tire that rings my midsection—with a smile.

—Andy Eddy

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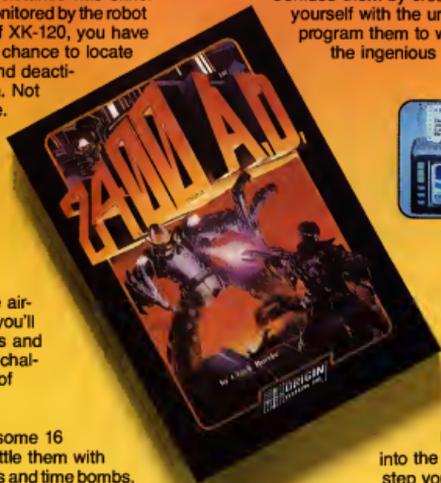
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CIRCLE #111 ON READER SERVICE CARD.



Remote Ultimate Superstick

Beeshu

For the Nintendo Entertainment System (\$54.99) and the Sega Master System (\$49.95)

Remember a few short years ago when we thought *Pong's* blocky graphics were hot stuff? Shortly thereafter, the blocks grew legs and became *Space Invaders*, hip-hopping across arcade screens everywhere. And then they evolved into the line drawings of boulders and spaceships in *Asteroids*. Boy, wasn't technology just the neatest thing?

The one thing that video-gaming technology hasn't brought us is mobility. Guitar and keyboard players can roam about onstage, thanks to cordless radio transmitters and receivers. Now, Beeshu has given Nintendo or Sega players the same luxury with their *Remote Ultimate Superstick* (RUS) joystick.

"Break loose and GO REMOTE," say Beeshu's ads; and indeed, the RUS will allow you to do just that. You can sit across the room from the game console and fire away. As long as the joystick is in line of sight of the receiving unit, you're in business. Designed for versatility, the Beeshu's stick can be purchased with either Nintendo-compatible or Sega-compatible cables. (For this article, we reviewed the Nintendo version. We assume the Sega version will also work



Beeshu cuts the cords with their *Remote Ultimate Superstick*, a wireless joystick with versions capable of connecting to your computer or video-game system.

on the Atari 2600 VCS, XE game machines and computers, as well as Atari, Amiga and Commodore computers, because they all use the same connectors.)

The RUS provides many embellishments over a normal joystick. In addition to the required START and SELECT buttons, there is a row of switches for turning the joystick on and off, alternating between Player One or Player Two, and slowing down the play (if the cartridge supports that feature). The remaining two controls indepen-

dently vary the repeat speed of the "A" and "B" buttons, though you can click them to an "off" position and defeat the auto-repeat mode. Also, on the underside are four suction cups to keep the RUS anchored to a flat surface.

In the middle of the console is a fairly tall stick, raised even higher by the design of the molded face. Thankfully, it has a sturdy, steel stem that will take abuse. The stick is very sensitive to movement—sometimes too sensitive. The joystick

switches provide audible clicks so you know when you've initiated a movement.

One of the nice features of the Beeshu stick is the availability of two sets of "A" and "B" buttons, one on each side of the unit, to give left-handers a fair chance at comfortable game control. This in itself is problematic, though: If you relax your arm while playing, you may accidentally strike the other set of buttons causing erroneous actions on-screen. Floating your hand over the joystick console to avoid this situation may contribute to early arm fatigue.

There's also a problem with the battery compartment on the bottom of the RUS. This area is just a hair bigger than the nine-volt battery it houses, so I anticipate that the battery wires will end up frayed by the crimping they'll receive over time.

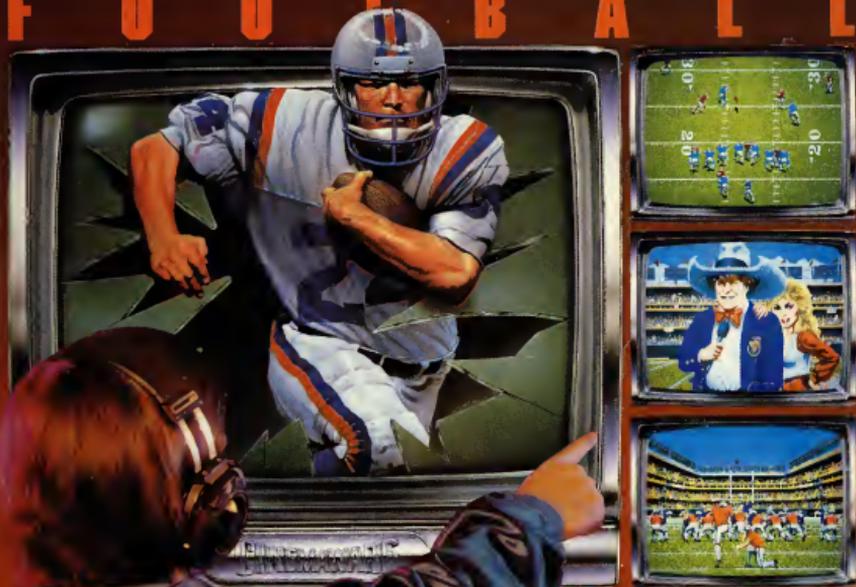
The Superstick is lightweight, but sturdy, and should stand up to a lot of banging around. Even with its few drawbacks, this product is worth considering if you are a serious videogamer.

—Andy Eddy

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CIRCLE #112 ON READER SERVICE CARD.



SPELLUNKER

The Great Cave Trek

A Player's Guide to Spelunker

by Clayton Walnum

Spelunker, unlike many of the games available for the Nintendo Entertainment System, has been with us for quite some time—years, in fact. It was a popular game on many home computer systems long before there even was a Nintendo. It has fascinated and amused thousands and thousands of people with its hidden caves and treasures. If you've recently purchased a copy of Spelunker—either for your Nintendo or some other game system—let me welcome you to the fold of those of us who have long been hooked on this game. And let me also warn you that once you get started with Spelunker, you may find it hard to break away.

Let me also warn you that although Spelunker is great fun, it can be as frustrating as hunting grizzly bears with a stick. Spelunker requires a skillful hand on the controller pad or joystick—and a willingness to practice each level until you can slip past even the most difficult puzzles. On the other hand, due to the fact that Spelunker actually has only four levels, there's a good chance that you will be able to "complete" the game within a reasonable amount of time.

Those of you who are alert undoubtedly noticed the quotes in the last sentence. The quotes are there because Spelunker makes up for its lack of length by sending you back to the beginning once you've made it to the end of the game. Of course, things get tougher the next time through—all the keys are invisible.

But enough of the chatter. If you have a copy of Spelunker, get it cranked up and going. If you *don't* have a copy of Spelunker, drop this magazine (unless, of course, you're reading it in a store; in which case, *buy* the magazine first, *then* bring it home and drop it), run right out and pick up a copy. You'll be glad you did. Not only will you have added another great game to your collection, but you'll also have a good reason to continue reading this article.

Disclaimer

As I said before, Spelunker is available in many different versions for many different computers and game

machines. This article was written based on the Nintendo version of Spelunker. But before all of you who own Spelunker in a different version go running for the exits, be aware that most of this article will be applicable (I think) to any version of the game. The details may vary a bit, but the maps and the general mechanics of game play remain the same.

I should also say that this article will not by any means lead you every step of the way through your Spelunker gaming. There are really only a few areas (ten that I've chosen) where you might need some hints; the rest of the game can be solved easily using the basic skills you will learn as you play. In addition, everyone thinks differently, so we all come up with different solutions to the same problems. In other words, though my play techniques work for me, you may have found some better ways to do some of the things presented here. That's okay. It's a free country.

The basic stuff

Don't ever fall. Spelunker is unforgiv-

ing of even the smallest of stumbles. Though many climbing games let you fall at least the height of your on-screen character, Spelunker will bring down the ax if you even hiccup while off the ground. Nothing more to be said on that subject. Don't fall. Period.

All of us who have spent time with Spelunker (and I think it would be safe to assume that includes most everyone reading this) share one feeling. We all hate ropes! Spelunker is loaded with ropes, and players find themselves always having to leap on to or jump off of them—and not always with the greatest of success. Let me say it right out front and get it out of the way: No matter how much you practice, no matter how many hours you spend cursing in front of the TV, no matter how hard you pound on your controller pad or scream at the dog for crossing in front of you—no matter what you do, you are going to lose lives to the ropes.

Don't get me wrong. Practice will help you get *better* at handling Spelunker's myriad ropes; it just won't ever result in a 100% success rate. Why? Because, in order to make a suc-



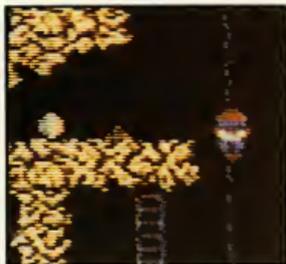
cessful leap from a rope, you have to hit two buttons—the arrow pad and the jump button—at exactly the same moment. If one button gets depressed even a millisecond before the other, *sayonara*, sucker. If you want, you can write threatening letters to the sadistic

beast that was responsible for programming the jump-from-the-rope part of the game, but nothing will change the fact that the precision required to make it through a game without falling from a rope is almost beyond human capabilities.

Accept it. Get used to it. Live with it. You beginners may find that leaping onto a rope is also a little tricky. It really isn't. You just have to make sure that, once you're in the air, you take your finger off the arrow pad (or release the joystick). Once you've got your player headed for the rope, there's nothing

Spelunker Key

Money Bag	1	Ladder	9
Bomb	2	Elevator	10
Flare	3	Volcano	11
Gold Coin	4	Miracle	12
Rock	5	Red Key	13
Energy	6	Blue Key	14
Bat	7	Bounce Bump	15
Rope	8		



The farther down the rope you are, relative to the platform, the closer to the platform's edge you'll land when you jump.

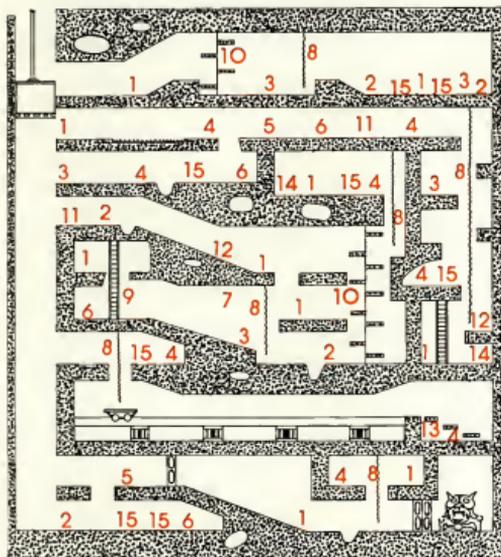
"bounce bump" or close to the edge. If you hit the bump, you may just get thrown back to the rope—on the other hand, you may go plummeting into oblivion (*Sayonara*, sucker, again). Just remember that the farther down the rope you are relative to the platform, the closer to the platform's edge you'll land when you jump.

Here's a quickie hint: Never bump your head when you jump.



If you should find yourself half in and half out of a pit, death isn't necessarily tap dancing on your doornail.

Now let's talk about the ghost. Veteran Spelunker players feel about as good about the ghost as they do about the ropes. All I can say is that the instant you hear the "ghost music," get yourself off any ropes, elevators or any location that doesn't fit the definition "good solid ground," because the ground is the only place your gun will work. Also, keep in mind that you don't actually have to aim at the ghost; just



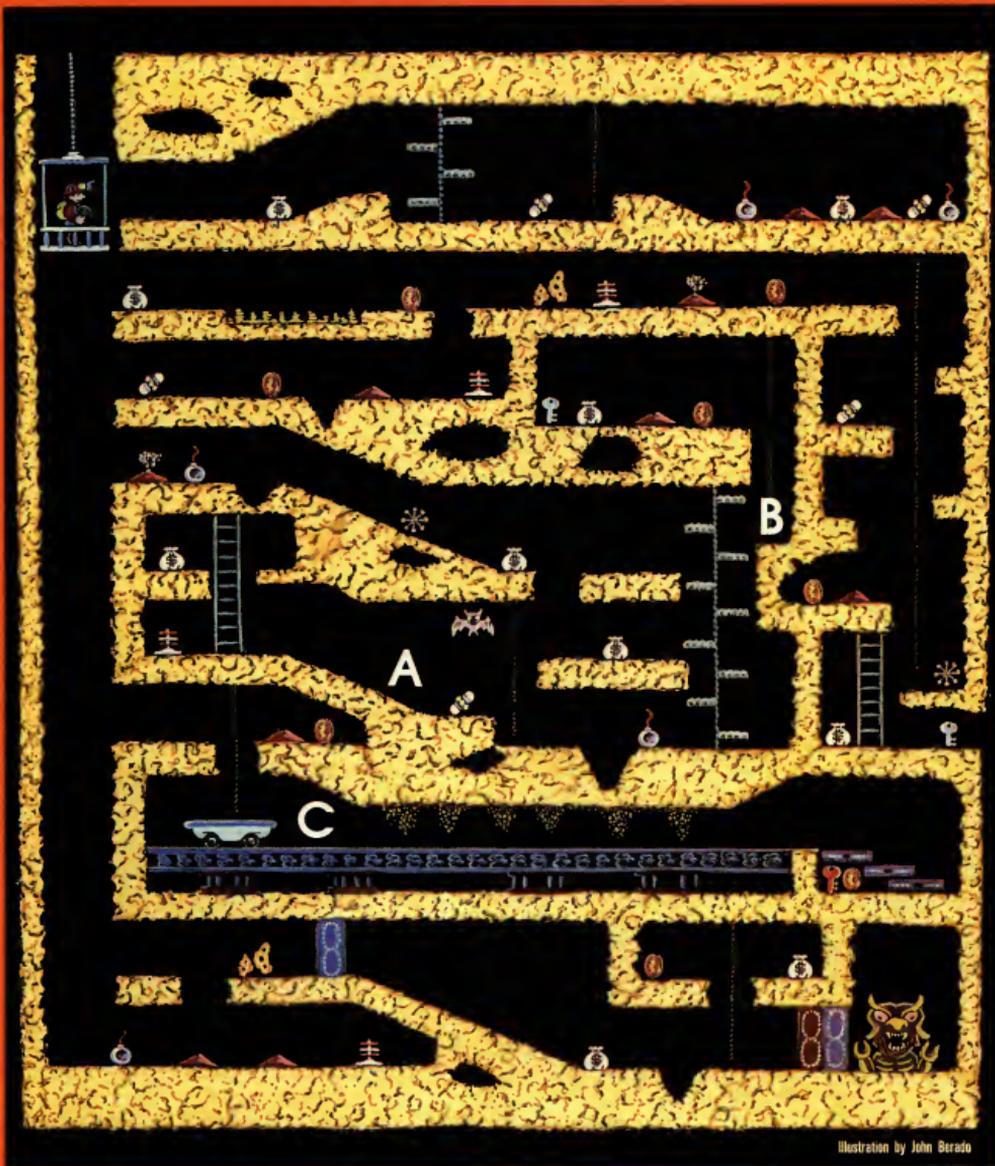


Illustration by John Berado

LEVEL 1

fire the gun at the side of the screen he's approaching from. That'll do the trick.

Here's a handy thing to know: If you should try to jump over a pit and find yourself half in and half out, death isn't necessarily tap-dancing on your doormat. You may still be able to get out. First try leaping up and toward the closest edge of the pit a few times. If that doesn't work, you might be able to get out by leaping back the way you came. If not—well, hey, at least you tried, right?

More beginner stuff: What if you're riding an elevator up and you want to go down? Simple. Just cross over when the upward-moving and the downward-moving platforms are even. (Actually, you should wait until the platform you're crossing to is slightly below you. If you try to cross to a platform that's even a smidgen above you, you'll fall.)

And while we're on the subject of elevators, when crossing from a platform to an elevator, sometimes you can walk directly on, sometimes you have to jump. Make sure you can tell which is which or you'll find yourself in gravity's clutches.

Here's a jumping hint: You may find yourself trying to get situated just right for a jump. You get into the perfect position, but then when you turn to face the right direction, you accidentally move forward a little, ruining your efforts. Did you know that you can jump just as easily facing backwards as forwards? Yep. It's the truth. Once you're where you want to be, don't worry about which way you're facing. Just jump!

Level 1

Level 1 is more or less a training ground. Finding the proper route through the caves is, with a minor exception or two, just a matter of working your way downward a floor at a time, making sure that you follow each floor to its conclusion. For example, if you look at the map for Level 1, you'll see that the second floor (which starts at the second opening on the left) continues across the entire cave and then meets up with a rope (I hate ropes!) that must be climbed down and then back up again.

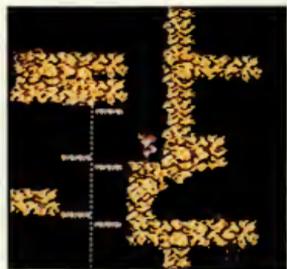
Every basic skill that you'll need for the subsequent levels will be learned on Level 1. (Of course, the other levels

require that you refine those skills somewhat, but that's what practice is for, eh?) There are three particularly tricky areas marked on the Level 1 map as A, B and C. These are the areas that I found the most difficult in my first experiences with Spelunker, so what I learned is detailed below. You lucky people get to benefit from my mistakes!



Area A: Just place yourself on the very bottom of the rope and jump up onto the platform.

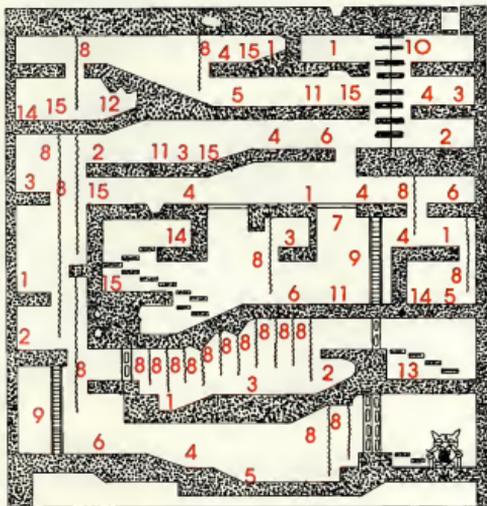
A) The first few times you try and get by the bat here, you'll get creamed. You will probably think that the trick is just a matter of timing, that you have to get onto the platform and fire the flare to blind the bat, all the while dodging whatever those things are that the bat keeps dropping. (I really would like to know what those things are. My imagination conjures up some distasteful images.) Actually, though, timing has very little to do with it, and you don't have to dodge at all. Just place yourself on the very bottom of the rope



Area B: Getting from this platform onto the downside of the elevator is a tricky maneuver.

and jump up onto the platform. You'll find yourself standing out of reach of the bat's fire, but the bat won't be out of reach of your flares.

B) Getting from this platform back

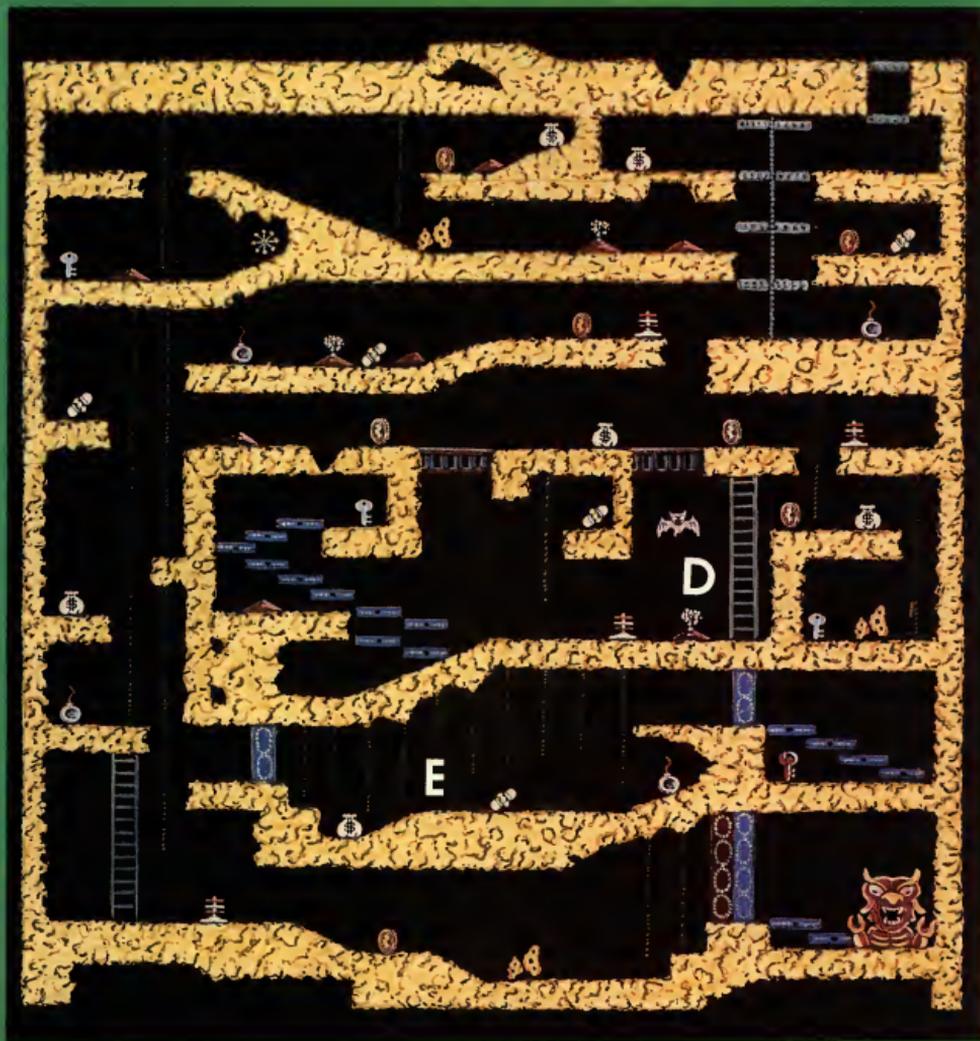


onto the downside of the elevator is a tricky maneuver. There are a couple of ways of doing it, of course. For instance, you can try to jump completely across and onto the downside of the elevator in a single leap. That's possible, but dangerous. The way that works best for me is to jump onto the upside

of the elevator, then quickly cross to the downside when the elevators are even. It's still a dangerous maneuver, though. You have to cross over before you hit your head on the ceiling—and you don't have very much time.

C) Getting the mining car past the vertically moving obstructions is the

toughest part of Level 1. There are a couple of tricks, but essentially you must practice, practice, practice. The tricks? When you're moving toward the right, you can get past the two center obstructions (the third and fourth) with one movement. Just wait for the first one to rise up, and then breeze right



LEVEL 2

through both. Coming the other way, the first and last pair can be handled in the same way. This method eliminates about half of this area's risk.



Area C: Getting the mining car past the vertically-moving obstructions is the toughest part of Level 1.

Level 2

Level 2 really isn't much trickier than Level 1 except that there are a lot more ropes. (All together now: We hate ropes!) Also, Level 2 has a couple of areas that require you to set a bomb and then scurry up a rope before the bomb blows. Like Level 1, Level 2 is fairly intuitive when it comes to finding the correct route through the caves.

There are, however, a couple of places that are nasty to get by. They are marked on the Level 2 map as *D* and *E*.

D) In this area you come across your first "enhanced volcano" puzzle. Up until this point, the volcanoes were merely a nuisance. In area *D* you've got to get over a volcano while managing to avoid a bat right above it. It's tricky, but just a matter of timing.



Area D: You've got to get over a volcano while managing to avoid a bat right above it.

All you have to do is stand on the ground between the ladder and the volcano, out of range of the bat's "droppings." About a half a second after the volcano finishes erupting, release a

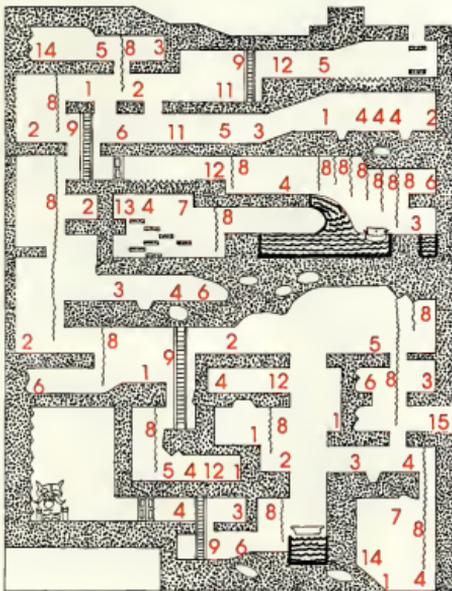
flare to blind the bat. It'll take a second or two for the flare to go off and for the bat to start dropping, and during that time the volcano will erupt again. As soon as the volcano has finished, jump over it, making sure you avoid anything the bat may have dropped before you blinded it.

To exit the area, perform the same maneuver from the other side. You'll need to practice, but once you get this move down, you'll make it through almost every time. (The unpredictability of the bat's firing can sometimes muck you up.)

E) Area *E* gives us ten ropes, only one of which reaches the floor. To get to the key under the stairs, you must leap from rope to rope, while avoiding hitting your head on the ceiling. This isn't too hard when you're going from left to right, but coming back the other way requires some careful positioning on the ropes in order to avoid the jagged ceiling. You must make sure you are as far down on the rope as pos-



Area E: You must make sure you're as far down on the rope as possible before you jump.



sible before you jump. But be careful that you don't move down so far that you fall off. You should be able to get down far enough so that there's only one "pixel" (a dot on your television screen) of the rope hanging below you. From that position, it's always safe to jump.

Level 3

Level 3 is much more complicated than the first two levels. Though it's still not too hard to find the proper route, it is a little more confusing, and there are a couple of new "vehicles" you need to use. There is one unbearably nasty rope area that I won't go into detail on (you handle it the same way as the one in Level 2), and you can plan



LEVEL 3

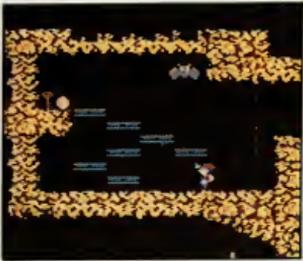


Area F: You have to plant a bomb on the rock and make it over the volcano before the bomb goes off.

on losing lives there frequently no matter how good you are with ropes. There are three areas, labeled *F*, *G* and *H* on the Level 3 map, that we should discuss.

F) Here we have a lovely combination: a rock right next to a volcano. You have to plant a bomb on the rock and make it over the volcano before the bomb goes off. Though this puzzle will seem tough the first few times you attempt it, it's really nothing more than timing. Here's how to do it: First, jump over the volcano and run to the rock.

The instant the volcano starts to erupt, plant the bomb and run back to the volcano. By the time you get to the volcano, it'll be through erupting. You'll be able to get over it and safely away from the bomb.



Area G: As long as the bat is firing at you, you have little chance of getting up the entire flight of stairs.

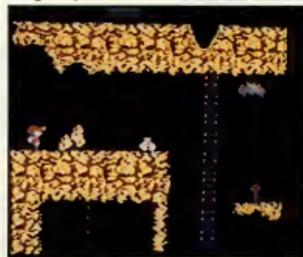
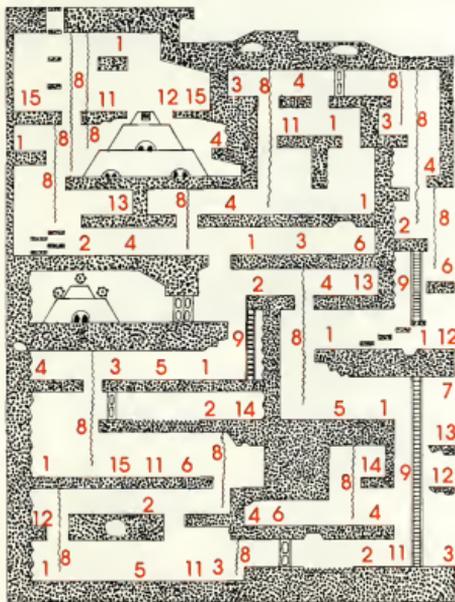
G) In area *G* we have a bat protecting a flight of stairs. As long as the bat is firing at you, you have little chance of getting up the entire flight of stairs. So your first move is to blind the bat with a flare, and then run up the stairs before the bat gets back into action. Getting down the stairs is a little trick-



Area H: There's nothing here that's worth the effort, risk or time.

er. Counting from left to right, it's the third stair that you have to watch out for. Get on the second stair and wait for the bat to move away from the third. When he does, run past him, down to the bottom of the staircase. Now all you have to do is launch another flare and sneak back to the rope.

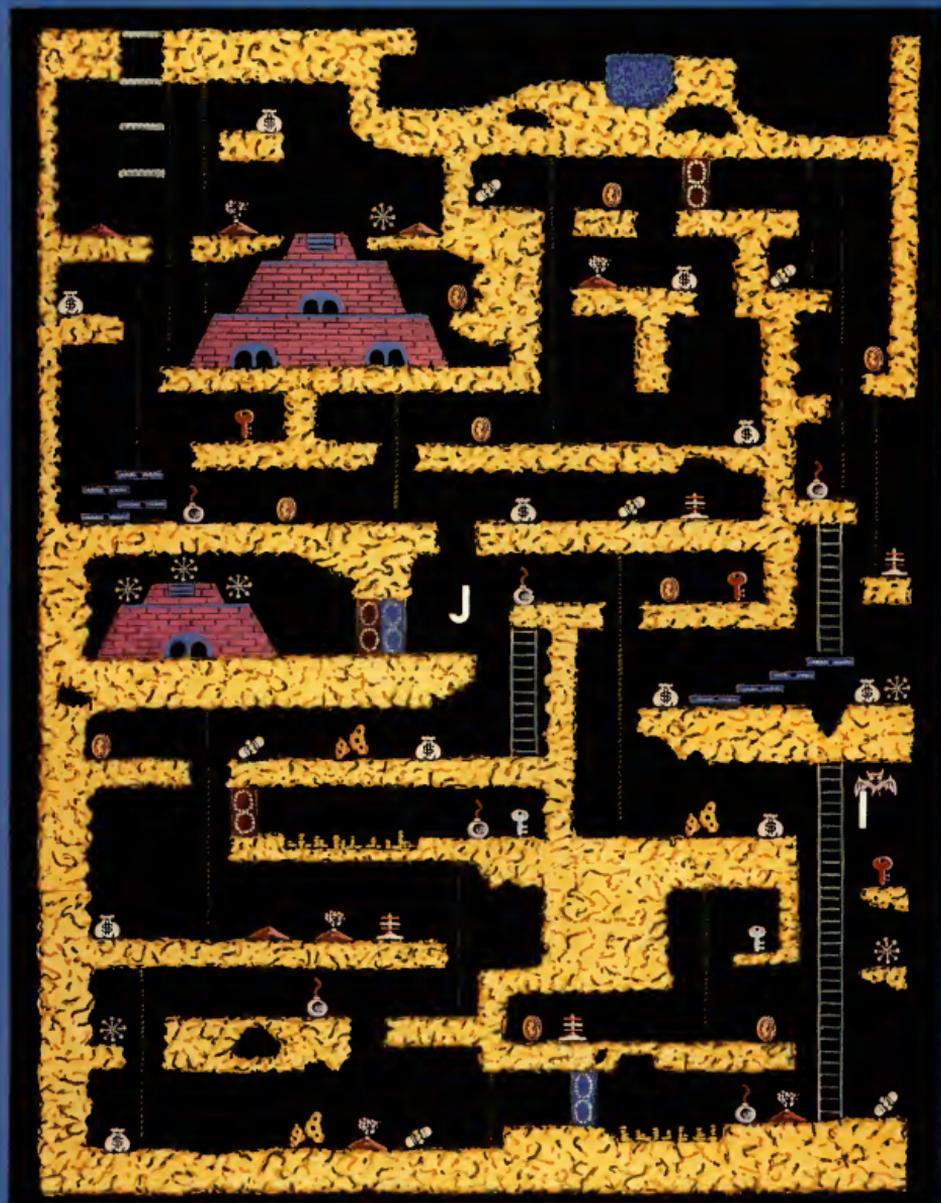
H) This'll be short and sweet. Ignore area *H*. There's nothing there that's worth the effort, risk or time. Riding up and down on the gold platform makes it tough enough to get what you *really* need (such as the key in the bottom right of the map) without risking your life, grabbing a couple of extra flares or gold pieces.



Area I: When the bat is to the far right, quickly jump to the platform, get the key and jump back to the ladder.

Level 4

Level 4 is, as you would expect, the most complex in the game. Though it's not difficult to find your way to the end, it will take a little getting used to. The first few times you play through this level, you'll probably not visit every location, and thus will bypass some items. As long as you get the keys, though, you should have little difficulty making your way to the end. You will have built



LEVEL 4

up a good supply of bombs and flares (or at least you *should* have) by the time you get to this level, so you don't have to worry about grabbing every one.

This level contains some exceptionally tricky jumps, where you need to be in just the right position in order to clear the ceiling overhead and still make it to the platform. There are at least three critical areas that you'll have to practice. Just remember that the higher you are on a rope, the farther you'll jump onto a platform, but the greater chance you have of hitting your head. There are two areas, marked *I* and *J* on the Level 4 map, that we'll talk about, and both of them require precise jumping.

I) Here you find yourself presented with a key on a narrow platform. That



Area J: This is the toughest jump in the game, and the most frustrating because the end of the game is so close.

by itself is no big deal; you should be an old pro at jumping from ladders and ropes onto platforms by the time you get to Level 4. The problem is that the key is guarded by a bat, and you need perfect timing to grab the key and get back to the ladder without getting hit. Forget the flares; they won't help you here. There just isn't enough time.

To get the key, position yourself low on the ladder relative to the platform, so that you'll land on the very edge of the platform when you jump. Then, when the bat is to the far right, quickly jump to the platform, get the key and jump back to the ladder. You'll need to practice this a few times.

J) This is the toughest jump in the game and the most frustrating because the end of the game is so close (the pyramid to the left of this area is your goal), that it's always heart-breaking to die here. But die you will—even if you

have saved up several lives—until you get the jump just right.

First, at the base of the ladder, walk towards the ladder from the left. The instant your player turns and grabs the ladder, stop. In this position you'll be half on and half off the ladder; that's just what you want. You'll still be able to climb the ladder, but there's less chance of banging your head when you try to jump. Next, you must climb the ladder until you're about three rungs from the top. You'll have to experiment to learn the exact position, but if you're as far to the left as the ladder will allow, you've already won half the battle.

Once in position, jump towards the platform. If you hit your head, you were too high. If you fall off the platform, you were too low. If you still have lives left, readjust your position on the ladder and try again, each time carefully noting your exact position on the ladder so that once you make a successful jump, you'll know how to do it again.

Once you've completed that final jump, all you have to do (assuming you have your keys) is run through the gates and to the door of the pyramid. Hurray! You did it!

When you complete Level 4, there'll be great fanfare. You'll find yourself with a heap of treasure, and you'll watch your score go up and up and up. Finally, you'll be placed back at the beginning of Level 1. It's the same game all over again (you get to keep whatever number of lives you had left over, plus one for completing Level 4), but now all the keys are invisible. The maps accompanying this article will be

When you complete Level 4, there'll be great fanfare, and you'll find yourself with a heap of treasure.

especially helpful to you at this point.

Game Over

Spelunker is a great game, and once you master each of the four levels (and that won't take as long as you might think), you'll be able to amaze your



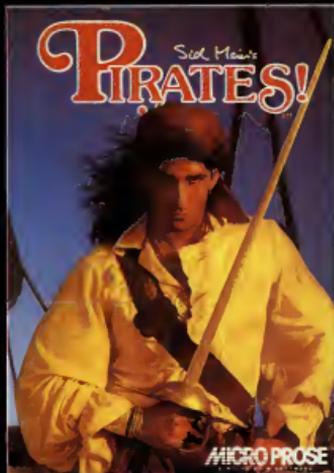
Watch out for traps. If you try to walk across this hole, you'll be in for a nasty surprise.

friends with your cleverness and skill as you nonchalantly run through the caves, grabbing up treasures by the bucketful.

And even though the higher levels are somewhat more difficult, Spelunker is really more a game of endurance than one of escalating difficulty. Each level hones your playing skills for the level to follow so that by the time you're ready to advance, you have the knowledge you need to be successful. If you've never been able to complete a video game before, this one may be the game you'll want to concentrate on. The journey isn't too long and the necessary skills are fairly easy to cultivate. With a little practice, it won't be too long before you'll be looking at the maps accompanying this article and saying, "Wow! I did all *that*?"



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CIRCLE #113 ON READER SERVICE CARD.



Software Goes International

By Arnie Katz

Writer, editor, lecturer and game designer Arnie Katz knows the field from every perspective. Each issue, his column will give readers an inside look at the world of video and computer gaming.

A video haunts my dreams. It was only a short promotional film, but one trenchant line still echoes through my nightmares.

I watched this mylar landmine at the Consumer Electronic Show, a venue seldom confused with the Cannes Film Festival. If you've never seen a promotional video, they are all pretty much alike. After some stirring music, a voice-over announcer extols the virtues of each of the company's new products. Flashy sequences depict the theme and, sometimes, the on-screen action.

I sat there, watching the hype roll by, when the commentator spoke the words now burned into my soul: "From Japan, where game design is an art, comes—." The blood roaring in my head kept me from hearing the name of the game.

If game design is an art in Japan, then by implication it is something else here. I can almost hear the same authoritative spokesman describing Subway Software's next game: "From the United States, where game design is a socially acceptable alternative to panhandling—."

I no longer cry into my pillow about it, at least not every night, but that video heightened my awareness of the internationalization of video and computer games. I think it's one of the most significant trends in the field and, by coincidence, the subject of this "Inside Gaming."

Everyone knows that the U.S. and Japan are battling for computer hardware supremacy, but few realize that software competition is just as fierce. As many as half of 1988's new games actually originated in other countries.

The roots of electronic gaming are sunk deep in American soil. Ralph Baer, of Sanders Associates, invented the home video game, and Nolan Bushnell introduced the first video coin-op (Pong).

Japan was quick to embrace the video-game craze, as it has so many other American fads, and produced landmark coin-ops in the late 1970s. *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong* led a parade of cute and playable quarter-snatchers.

But then the Americans got into gear. Thousands of talented people fell in love with the Apple II, Atari 800 and Commodore 64. Their games featured sophisticated themes and action. Electronic Arts introduced the "design team" concept, which improved sound, graphics, user interface and play-mechanics.

Then came the Great Video-Game Crash of 1984. Survival replaced growth as the major corporate imperative in the industry. Development budgets evaporated. More than one company elected to ride with its existing catalog and temporarily abandon new product activity.

Publishers in the United States, as well as in other nations turned inward during the mid-1980s. Japan demonstrated a fascination with computer golf games unmatched on this side of the Pacific. *Impossible Mission* left an indelible mark on the U.K. (and much of Europe). The British obsession with

jumping-and-climbing arcade adventures inspired hundreds of derivative programs.

The Marco Polo of entertainment software is Barry Friedman. The president of International Computer Group put together the field's first multi-system, multinational combine to market Bill Hogue's *Miner 2049er* worldwide. The game's success revolutionized gaming. It established the practice of blasting every new title across all systems, which paved the way for today's world software market.

American publishers' expansion into the U.K. in the mid-1980s met with a mixed reception. Although individual titles did very well, U.S. companies found it hard to adjust to a radically different market. The typical British computerist is a male teenager who owns a computer with a tape drive. Britons demand lots of cheap action games. It's a completely hit-driven business. Each game is like a rock-and-roll single, relegated to the "oldies" bin after a couple of weeks on the best-seller chart.

The computer and video-game renaissance caught many U.S. publishers by surprise. Several had dismantled in-house departments during the lean years of 1984-1986, and too many had been burned by independent programming houses.

American companies needed to fill the product pipeline until longer-range projects could be finished. They wanted solid, playable games, and they wanted them yesterday. Oh, and they wanted them cheap too. Who could tell if the sales jump was a trend or a fad?

The game-publishing mills of Great Britain were the perfect answer. The

young designers and programmers worked for peanuts, screen text was already in English, and there were a couple of thousand titles available. Companies like Mindscape, DataSoft and Firebird imported many entertainment programs from the United Kingdom.

When Sega and Nintendo revived video gaming in 1987, Japanese designs poured into the U.S. for the first time in years. Domestic cartridge-makers have become a factor in the Nintendo field, but most new video games still come from the Far East.

Other countries proved so adept at providing games that soon many publishers cut research and development in favor of ready-to-publish software from abroad. Foreign titles dominate midpriced and budget lines.

The abundance of acceptable games allowed publishers to cut their creative budgets. Stories about game designers who have a Mercedes for each day of the week refer to people who had hits in 1981-1983. In 1988, the average full-time game designer earns less than \$40,000—and there aren't all that many of them.

Frankly, it didn't do much for the quality of the product either. American programmers could hold coding clinics for their colleagues around the globe, and the designs were almost invariably unimaginative. Too often, each country's output falls into a predictable pattern. British designers couldn't let go of Mission Impossible, and Japanese game-makers were at least as mesmerized by *Mario Brothers*.

For a while, it looked like the American game designer would become an endangered species. It was a fight for survival among American designers for the shrinking number of new game projects.

What happened next is a powerful argument for a free-market economy. Publishers discovered that Americans won't pay top prices for "generic" foreign games. The outfits which sell disks off j-hook racks for under \$10 went on as usual, but companies which hoped to coax \$30-\$50 per game from computerists suddenly realized that most overseas software isn't good enough to compete with cutting-edge titles.

When major publishers focused on the cream of the international crop instead of buying anything that booted on a Commodore 64, the balance tipped in the opposite direction. Now the designers of the extraordinary games prospered most, as American publishers bid six figures for the most desirable properties.

At the same time, the smart U.S. game manufacturers went skill-intensive. Cinemaware transformed the design team into an ad hoc collection of specialists. Subway Software, the first successful design boutique, did for content what the programming houses of the early 1980s had accomplished for the technical side.

Instead of the first world software war, hand-in-hand cooperation is now the order of the day. The forthcoming *Superman's Worst Day* is a multinational project in which Americans (Subway Software) did the design while the British (TyneSoft) took charge of implementation and publication.

The Best Games of 1988 (see elsewhere in this issue) include notable entries from Russia, France, Japan and England. *Captain Blood* (Mindscape), *Tetris* (Spectrum Holobyte) and *MetroCross* (Epyx) may be the harbingers of a dawning Golden Age of international software.

Yet problems persist. The "gray market" practice of transshipment inhibits cooperation among European nations, fragmenting a sizable audience. The clone game glut has not abated, and a diet of these clinkers could throttle the U.S. boom by turning off customers.

The persistent popularity of relatively primitive computers in some countries is a more subtle difficulty. Publishers fund development only for games that are suitable for every brand of home computer. American players would get more state-of-the-art games for the Amiga and Macintosh if everything didn't have to run on a Commodore 64 or Spectrum.

These minor troubles are no more than fleecy clouds in a blue sky. In time, even the dreaded "from Japan, where game design is an art," may cease to infuriate me. I'll bet a few quick rounds of *Soko-Bar* will ease the pain.

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CIRCLE #116 ON READER SERVICE CARD.



Life Force

Konami

For the Nintendo Entertainment System (\$39.95)

Designed as a sequel to their popular *Gradius* cartridge, *Life Force* pits you against an evil Deltoid monster named Zelos. Obviously sporting a ravenous appetite, these critters have the ability to munch on entire planets, even galaxies, for lunch, and still have room left for dessert. Unfortunately, the Vic Viper (your battle cruiser) and, if you choose to play with two players, the Road British Space Destroyer, fit Zelos' bill as after-dinner mints.

To be successful in your mission against Zelos, you need to keep your craft at their peak. When you destroy certain enemy craft, power pods are released that let you upgrade your ship's capabilities with a tap on the "A" button. These "power-up" enhancements include better maneuverability, powerful lasers and protective shields.

Believe me, you'll need each and every enhancement you can get your hands on. The path you travel covers six different worlds, each with a bevy of dastardly attackers. Couple this constant, unceasing onslaught with a series of indestructible road blocks—such as floating space debris or quick-as-a-wink solar flares—and you'll have your hands full.

A positive feature is the two-



Life Force's dastardly attackers, explosions and unceasing onslaught of road blocks provide hours of entertaining play.

player mode. Rather than the "alternating play" situation that you'll find in many game cartridges, *Life Force* lets you team up on the mission in a cooperative strategy. This makes it easier for the struggling player to be assisted by his partner, who may be better off as far as weapons go. Aside from that, there's the lessening of the boredom for each player, as you don't have to sit idly by waiting for the first player to be killed off before playing yourself.

Each world ends with a "Mayor," the toughest obstacles

you will face, and each one varies from area to area. Defeating the area mayor will warp you to the next section for more of the same type of battle.

Konami is to be commended for making alterations to the graphic components, such as backgrounds and enemies, as well as alternating the playfield from horizontally-based to vertically-based, and back again. This not only keeps you on your toes from a control standpoint, but also prevents the game from getting stale.

This brings us up to an impor-

tant point, though: *Life Force* may just be *too* difficult for most gamers. For example, there is a segment of Level 4 where the game speeds up two or three times faster than the normal rate. Couple this with constricted corridors in which to maneuver, and your trek appears a nearly hopeless cause.

The only other major complaint I can make about *Life Force* has to do with the graphic enhancements I spoke of previously. With all the explosions, laser rays, aliens and whatnot dispersed across the screen, any extraneous distractions can be detrimental to successful game play and overall enjoyment. Unfortunately, for the most part, the colorful backgrounds become a distraction in many places.

On the whole, *Life Force* will provide lots of entertaining hours of play for you. Better yet, invite one of your joystick jockey friends over for a night of cooperative alien bashing. There's plenty of opportunity for that in this game.

—Andy Eddy

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LIFE FORCE

STRATEGY GUIDE



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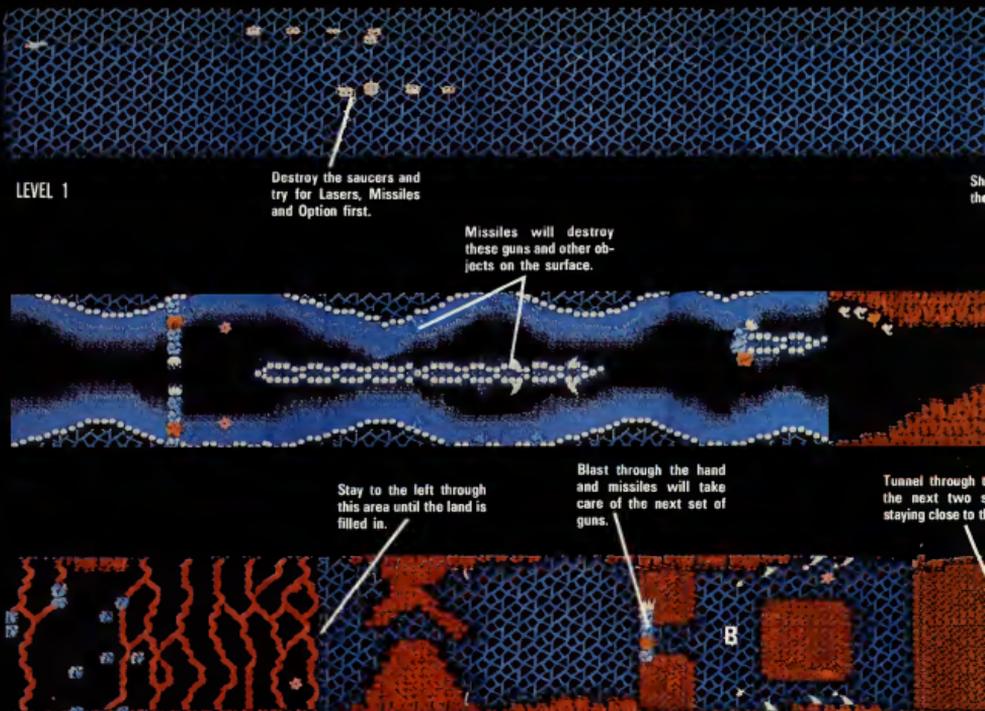


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CIRCLE #115 ON READER SERVICE CARD.



LEVEL 1

Destroy the saucers and try for Lasers, Missiles and Option first.

Missiles will destroy these guns and other objects on the surface.

Stay to the left through this area until the land is filled in.

Blast through the hand and missiles will take care of the next set of guns.

Tunnel through the next two staying close to the

LIFE FORCE STRATEGY GUIDE

by Lee Pappas
and Andy Eddy

This article will give you detailed maps and descriptions of the vital points in the first two levels of Life Force, a difficult yet winnable contest. In the next issue of VG&CE, we'll complete the Strategy Guide to cover maps and descriptions for the remaining levels.

Weaponry

Before we start tipping you off to improving your play in Life Force, we should familiarize you with the weapons you can get along the way. Certain enemies

(or groups of enemies) will, when destroyed, leave behind a power pod. Each pod (designated by a white star with a red center) you snatch up will increment your Power-up display at the bottom of the screen, which shows what weapon is available to you at that time. There are six types of enhancements you can get, which are:

Speed—This makes your craft more maneuverable. Starting off with the default will be fine, but certain sections of the game require you to move quickly. Speed can be added as many times as you wish, but be careful: Too many Speed additions will likely cause you to over-control your ship, particularly in thin cor-

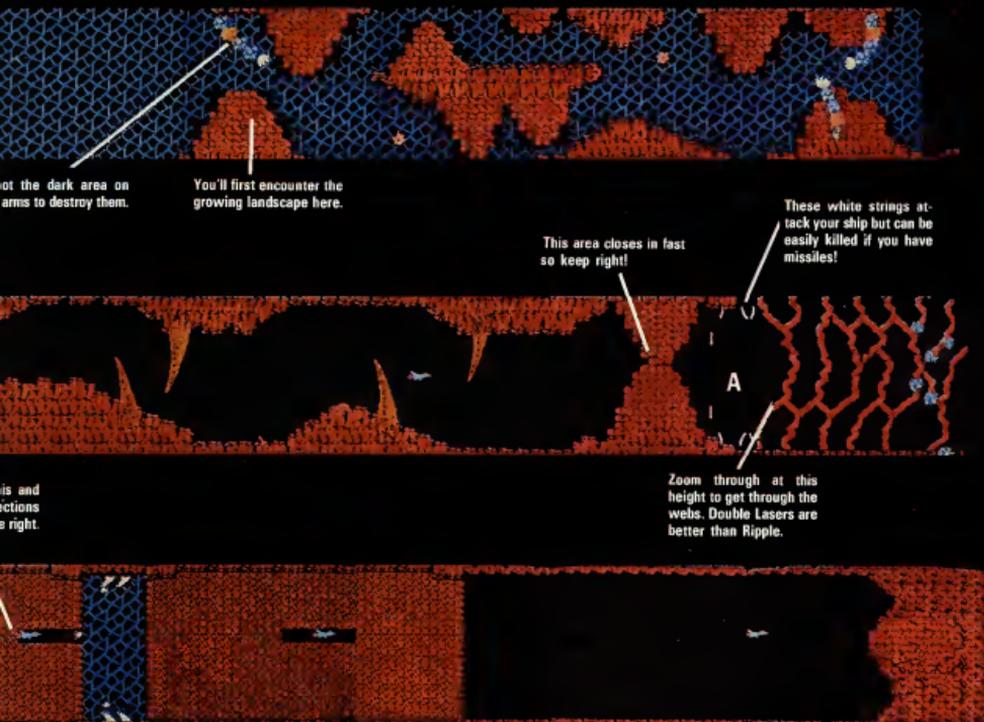
ridors where precise manipulation is needed.

Missile—When you select Missile, your craft will shoot projectiles out from the sides (one on each side) in addition to the normal firing out the front. The missiles are helpful in clearing out some of the "wall-hangers," objects that sit at the edges of the screen blasting bullets toward you. The missiles scan along the walls until they hit something or drop into a crevice. This power-up can be added a second time for missiles that move twice as fast.

Ripple—The "Ripple Laser" alters your firing pattern from standard bullets to expanding rings of laser fire. When you sit at the far left

in odd-numbered levels or at the bottom of the screen on even-numbered levels, the ripple will take out quite a sizable row of oncoming aliens. Ripple is very helpful if there is a lot in your path, in addition to being more powerful than the normal weapon you start with.

Laser—The "Plutonic Laser" that's added with this power-up will cut through most anything quicker than any other weapon. It also doesn't appear to stop once it hits something—a row of beings can be whipped with one single ray. Furthermore, the laser follows the movements of your ship, so you can pull the trigger and steer the beam across the playfield to wipe out a large



not the dark area on
arms to destroy them.

You'll first encounter the
growing landscape here.

This area closes in fast
so keep right!

These white strings at-
tack your ship but can be
easily killed if you have
missiles!

is and
actions
e right.

Zoom through at this
height to get through the
webs. Double Lasers are
better than Ripple.

path of enemy creatures. The Laser power-up can be selected twice for added power.

Option—At first the Option power-up will only seem to append a small, pulsing spot of light to the side of your ship—that is, until you hit the fire button. At that point you'll realize that a "Ghost Ship" of your craft's firing ability has been added to your ship. If you have Lasers, you'll now have two beams; if you have missiles, they'll be duplicated. This can be added twice, but if you are playing in two-player mode, a total of two Options can be added: either two for one of the players or one for each player.

Force—Last on the list is

a Force Field, offering protection to certain obstacles in your way. I've never put that much faith in Force's unpredictable shielding power, but instead use my power-ups to build up my weapon cache. In other words, you can't tell when you're safe and when you're not. Also, unlike Life Force's prequel, *Gradius*, you can't tell when your shields are on their last legs; Gradius would glow the shields red when they were able to take one more hit.

Weapons note: You can load up on weapons, to make an extremely powerful destroyer out of your rocket. Only two weapons are in conflict with each other: Ripple and Laser. If you pick one while using

the other, the last one chosen will be your weapon of choice.

One more tip: The "ghosts" that are given with Option have a curious quirk: When an Option-equipped ship is hit and destroyed, the little ghosts will cut loose and start moving back toward the screen edge you just came from (the left of the screen on odd levels; the bottom on even levels). If you (or your partner, in team play) intercept the ghosts, you'll reacquire that power-up even though the remainder of the weaponry will be lost by the ship's destruction. If they leave the screen before they are intercepted, you'll need to power-up with Option again to get them back.

Meet Your Neighbors— Level 1

I've learned one key to success that I'll pass on: *Don't get greedy.* Trying to make that last shot to give you another power-up is almost a sure way to run into something and lose a ship. The enemies that look like flying saucers at the start of the game are spaced so you'll try to get every set of saucers, and every single power-up you can. You should skip a power pod if there's the risk of losing a ship. In addition, you can only replace a ship at certain point intervals, where you can power-up all throughout the game. Safety comes first.

You'll find out that, as lit-
tle as they cost in power-

ups, missiles are incredibly valuable. A lot of the action takes place along the surface—either because the programmers placed annoying rocket launchers and such or as a location for power-ups—so the surface-strafting missiles will do a lot of the dirty work for you.

A good sample of the missile's effectiveness is the area marked "A." Here, just before the web, you'll face little white strings that move from the edges to the middle. If you have missiles, they will wipe the strings out before they have a chance to dislodge and threaten you. Otherwise you should move as close to the right as you can, making sure to keep the fire button down to cut a path through the web. This is because the strings can only move straight down or to the left, but not to the right! Safe havens are great when you can find them.

Here's a tip about the blue and white blobs that are stuck in the web: Initially it appears that they are indestructible, but multiple shots will dispose of them.

Following the webs, there will be another set of white strings, but you can't use the same strategy because of the expanding landscape that slows your progress. The best thing to do is hang back, staying close to the web, and blast the strings through the opening between the new peaks, then carefully wend your way through the space.

The last section of the first level is marked with an "B." After blasting the arm that blocks your path, you'll face a big square in the center, with paths to the top and bottom. It's dangerous to take the paths unless you still have a sizable cache of

weapons. Missiles will clear out the rocket launchers on the surface, and the starfish-shaped object will leave a power pod behind. There isn't much room for evasive action, so be careful.

If you opt to go through the square, you should stay as close to the right edge of the swatch you are cutting away as possible.

After you make it past the first block, the next two landmasses must be handled the same way, except that these cover the screen, top to bottom, and require you to shoot through them.

Last in this level is a weird brain-creature, which the makers of the game call Golem. It's the only thing that stands between you and Level 2. To defeat him/her/it, you need to shoot it in the eye many times. Unfortunately the eye isn't revealed right away, so you have to do some stalling first.



Wait for Golem to appear, then circle it once counter-clockwise. Aiming for the eye is the key!



It's a Blast—Level 2

Level 2 doesn't throw that much out of the ordinary at you, but it does keep you busy. There are so many things on the sidewalls that you'll have a hard time staying in one piece. For this reason, Missile power should be one of the first power-ups you get.

With Lasers or Ripple blast the top of the volcanoes to stop the boulders.

If you didn't have a powerful ship after Level 1, then the beginning of Level 2 should help you with its multiple power pods. Did I already say not to get too greedy? Well don't!

Level 2 will also introduce you to a different type of power pod, one with a blue center rather than a red one. The first pod of this sort shows up when you see two rows of saucers zig-zagging down the screen, noted on the maps as "C." The group on the left, when destroyed, will leave the blue pod. When you contact one of these pods, everything on the screen blows up. Wait as long as you can, until a bunch of enemies is on the screen, then touch the pod to wipe them out. If your timing is good, you'll be able to claim some power pods this way.

The main frustration you'll face in this level, aside from the constant pressure, is with the boulder launchers. There are a few of them, and they're marked as "D" on the map. To make things more difficult, this stone

Level 2 start.

This is a good chance to get shields and boost weapons. You won't need Speed until later.

shower curls in various directions, giving you a lot to keep your eyes on. You have two options here:

LEVEL 2

1) Try to time the cycles of when groups of boulders are spit out, then dance between/through/around them, blasting as many out of your path as possible, while you move to safety at the top of the screen; or,

2) Eliminate the flow of boulders by destroying the base that is tossing them out, while staying clear of any rocks that are curling your way.

Aside from keeping missiles as one of your weapons of choice, you should try to go for Ripple, as well as building up a few Speed levels. The main rea-

Take it slow through the asteroids. When some split up, ease on through.

sons for using Ripple has to do with its expanding beam clearing a bigger path in front of you, not only for most of Level 2, but also for the section labeled "E." This big block contains power-ups throughout various parts of it. Ripple, especially if your ship is enhanced with Option, lets you cut a large path out of the block, loosening up multiple power-ups. Take maximum care not to whomp into the wall created by your blasting, an easy mishap if you aren't concentrating on where your ship is. Remember: *Don't get greedy*, but you knew that, didn't you?

Missiles are crucial to survival, though, there is a chance of getting out alive if you clear one wall with bullets, then work on the other wall in the same manner. Watch out for the three rocket launchers on each wall.

The level 2 Boss, Intruder, can only be damaged by hit-

ting it at its core, the open row that leads up to the blue jewel in the center. What open row, you ask? Well, you need to poke through the three doors that block the jewel, then unleash a torrent of shots to the jewel itself.

Sounds easy, doesn't it? Forget easy, the Intruder moves around in a circle, making it hard to aim quality shots at its center. But the toughest part is avoiding the pinwheeling arms, which by the way, grow and speed up over time. If you didn't build up your weaponry or got killed in the marble room, it will take a long time to kill the Intruder. Lastly, if you didn't build up Speed levels, you'll have a hard time avoiding the arms also.

Shoot out each set of 3 shields, then the jewels. Lasers work best. You must also have 2 or 3 Speed ups by now.

The bottom left corner appears to be a safe place to hide for a few rotations—the arms can't reach you there until about the ninth rotation. The best way to get the most shots in is by following the rotation of the arms around the Intruder; if you can't because you don't have enough Speed, you'll definitely lose at least one ship, perhaps more, to its grasp. All you can do is plug away, and then it's on to Level 3.

After you cruise through another volcano set, you face fast moving meteors. Speed is helpful here.

Yes, we're going to keep you in suspense until the next issue, when VG&CE will complete the mapping and hints for finishing Life Force's last four levels.

Level 2 finish.

If you don't have sufficient Speed you'll never keep up with Intruder. Double Lasers will help destroy the ship with fewer passes.



The Year's Best Video And Computer Games: Our Editors Pick The Outstanding Cartridges And Disks Of 1988

By Arnie Katz and the Editors of VideoGames & Computer Entertainment



VG & CE
1988
AWARDS

The Mario character belongs to Nintendo of America, Inc.
RoboCop is a trademark of Orion Pictures Corp.

Illustration by Eric Peterson

America reaffirmed its love of video and computer games in 1987. The Crash of 1984 virtually eliminated the video-game industry and convinced publishers of computer games that entertainment's day had ended.

The anti-gaming backlash was so powerful that many home computer games already in development were released as educational or even productivity products. Overnight, "fun" had become a dirty word.

Some observers began to reevaluate the situation during 1986. The growth of the U.S. home computer market had slowed, while the video-game market boomed again in Japan. Putting a few games into development suddenly sounded like good business to a lot of companies. Christmas 1987 was the turning point. Nintendo and Sega proved that Americans were ready to play video games again, and recreational computer software scored double-digit sales gains.

Arnie Katz, Computer Entertainment Editor, chaired a panel of judges composed of VG&CE's writers and editors. This panel examined hundreds of video and computer games published for the first time between September 30, 1987 and October 1, 1988. This article presents their choice of the very best entertainment cartridges and disks.

There is no lack of worthy candidates. The judges could have selected twice as many winners and honorable mentions without sacrificing much quality. The judges hope that readers whose favorites didn't make this year's list, will be charitable about any seeming omissions. Few



Skate Or Die by Electronic Arts



Pure-Stat Football by Sports Simulations



Superstar Ice Hockey by Mindscape

games are so awful that they escape all criticism. Apologies also go to publishers whose programs arrived too late for consideration this year. They will be eligible for recognition in the "Best of 1989" competition a year from now.

Each category begins with the best new game of that type. The description of the winner is followed by a group of honorable mentions. Those are the ground rules. Now, let's get to those winners:

COMPUTER GAMING DIVISION

Game of the Year

The top game of 1988 exhibits most of the virtues which have made computer games such a popular form of home entertainment during the 1980s. Ed Ringle's *Superstar Ice Hockey* (Mindscape) blends joystick-activated action with strategy in a great-looking, easy-to-use format. The gamer can coach from the sidelines or take command of the skaters on the ice in this action simulation of major league hockey.

Excellent documentation and a smooth user interface make it equally simple to play one game or a whole season with *Superstar Ice Hockey*. While it's always fun to play an individual contest, it is the program's capacity for extended, multi-season play which earns it this year's top spot.

After joining the SportTime Hockey League (SHL), the players use a set of on-screen menus to name the new franchise, transfer it to another division, and choose team colors for the uniforms. These little touches may not sound important, but they make it a lot easier for the computer to identify with his squad.



Tetris by Spectrum Holobyte

The gamer's goal is to turn the expansion team into a SportTime Cup winner in nine seasons. The SHL's established clubs, some of which have a decade of winning behind them at the start of the nine-year campaign, fight the newcomer every stop of the way.

As the general manager, the gamer spends "trading points" to send his squad to training camp, recruit a rookie or trade for an established SHL star. A franchise starts with 250 trading points and earns more based on where it finishes at the end of each season: The last place team gets 1,000 trading points, while the winning club gains just 50.

Superstar Ice Hockey lets the player coach when the action shifts to the rink. The computerist can send in new lines and defensive pairings and designate a style of play for each unit. If watching helplessly from the sidelines grows too painful, the computerist can take direct control of the center and goaltender.

Few games can match this program's flexibility. The computerist can just coach, control a skater, or let the computer handle everything except the general manager's job.

The Main menu screen, which shows the current standings, lets the player look up the cumulative won-lost record of any team or the whole league, juggle on-ice lines, return the league to its original starting point, do things to improve the team, or play the next game on the schedule.

Even this lengthy description only hints at the depth of subtlety of *Superstar Ice Hockey*. It is unusual for the best game to also be the best value for the money, but the 1988 Game of the Year is the exception that proves the rule.



Rocket Ranger by Cinemaware



Neuromancer by Interplay

Best Computer Action Game

From its rollicking rock and roll soundtrack to its three excellent events, *Skate or Die* (Electronic Arts) is a blast. Michael Kosaka, Stephen Landrum, and David Bunch have created a skateboarding disk that even someone who wouldn't be caught dead on one of those contraptions can enjoy.

Skate or Die consists of three contests: a downhill race, a trick skating competition and a wheeled combat scenario. The players perform their stunts on a semi-circular skateboard ramp, and race through a city park under construction. The fight scene, the best of the three, takes place in the streets and alleys of the inner city. These events can be played individually or linked into a campaign.

This is a compelling gaming experience, embellished with outstanding audiovisual effects. More significantly, *Skate or Die* is lightning-quick fun.

Honorable Mentions:

The classic game formats never die, they just mutate. *Blockbuster* (Mindscape) takes Atari's *Breakout* right to the cutting edge of entertainment software. AudioGenic Sound Limited, a British design house, has added many features, including tokens which the competitor can redeem for special powers to help clear all those bricks off the multiple playfields.

The bark of automatic rifles and the hollow echo of boots on stone floors are the signature sounds of *Into the Eagle's Nest* (Mindscape). Successfully storming the multistory stronghold to rescue prisoners and steal secret plans requires quick shooting and on-the-fly strategizing. Each room is a real-time puzzle which the player can only solve with the right combination of fire and movement.

Oids (FTL) is an interstellar shoot-'em-up with a play-mechanic derived from such classic action contests as *Asteroids* and *Moon Lander*. The player goes from planet to planet, maneuvering around deadly fire from the hostile inhabitants, all the while trying to rescue hostages from the planet's surface.

Pinball Wizard (Accolade) is the year's best example of what has become an increasingly scarce type of game: the construction kit. The user selects features, like bumpers and spinners, from a parts bank, then positions them on the blank playfield to create customized computer pinball machines. The program has modules which allow the computerist to decorate a design and save it for future gaming sessions. *Pinball Wizard* boasts beautifully luminous graphics and authentic sounds of the bouncing silver ball.

Best Computer Sports Game

Superbowl Sunday (Avalon Hill), generally regarded as the best statistical football simula-



Test Drive by Accolade



The Fool's Errand by Miles Computing

tion, most yield its crown to this year's *Pure-Stat Football* (Sports Simulations). Both the champion and challenger have something in common besides quality; Ed Daniels and his team designed both of them.

It is clear that Daniels has learned valuable lessons from writing two earlier pigskin programs. *Pure-Stat Football* out-performs all existing simulations in just about everything from statistical accuracy to visual appeal.

The artificial intelligence for the robot coach is particularly impressive. Too often in sports simulations, an unimaginative zombie is in charge of the other side. There's nothing stupid about the compu-coach in *Pure-Stat Football*, though. It even analyzes the computerist's play-calling and adjusts the defense to counter the most damaging strategies.

Pure-Stat Football is the statistical simulation knowledgeable football fans have wanted for years.

Honorable Mentions:

Indoor Sports (Mindscape) is another hit from Ed Daniels' shop, this anthology of four semi-athletic events is virtually as good in its own way. *Bowling*, *Darts*, *Air Hockey*, and *Ping Pong* are all slick-looking and satisfying. A less value-minded company might have tried to sell a couple of these contests individually.

Charlie Hustle himself stands behind *Pete Rose Baseball* (Gamestar). It is the latest disk in a tradition that began with *Starleague Baseball* and continued in 1987 with *Championship Baseball*. This action title features field-level perspective, multiple views of the diamond, and an artificial-intelligence system which endows the on-screen athletes with abilities similar to those of real major leaguers.

Contrary to popular opinion, Epyx did not in-

vent the Olympic Games as an excuse to do action-sports disks, though it seems that way. *The Games* is the company's salute to the 1988 Winter Olympics, and it is certainly the best title in this series so far. *The Games* is packed with all the skating and skiing action any armchair athlete could want, and the graphics are actually an improvement over this company's usual excellent visuals.

Best Computer Simulator

Some games fulfill our dreams, while others challenge our expectations. *Test Drive* (Accolade) belongs in the latter classification. Just when gamers were beginning to think that driving games had reached a plateau, Distinctive Software has produced a new breed of racing contest.

The playfield screen for *Test Drive* depicts the car's instrument panel as well as a first-person view of the road. The dashboard is fully functional, including the gear stick. The computerist actually sees the driver's hands turn the steering wheel and slam the stick into the next highest gear. This graphic treatment conveys the driving experience better than any previous simulator.

The drawings of the cars on the selection screens capture their power and beauty in a way that makes the enthusiasm of motor sports fans instantly understandable. Each vehicle's handling on the winding mountain course accurately reflects its technical specifications.

Unlike race simulations in which the player needs little actual skill to control the car, *Test Drive* requires constant attention. It is impossible to record a respectable time unless the player shifts effectively and avoids the highway patrol's radar detectors.

Honorable Mentions:

F/A-18 Interceptor and *Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer* (both Electronic Arts) give computerists the chance to fly either a Navy F/A-18 Hornet or an Airforce F-16 Flying Falcon in a series of missions against airborne intruders. A variety of missions, including several practice modes, await the air warrior.

Steve Setzler, working in association with Bruce (*Flight Simulator II*, *Jet*) Artwick, wrote *Stealth Mission* (SubLogic) to satisfy computerists who want a detailed simulator that emphasizes modern jet combat. This flight simulator delivers the best artwork, especially the scenery and enemy planes, of any comparable product.

Tom Clancy's gripping best-seller inspired *Red Storm Rising* (MicroProse), designed by Sid Meier and Arnold Hendrick. The core of the program is a magnificently-detailed simulation that puts the computerist on the bridge of a modern nuclear submarine at the outbreak of a hypothetical World War III.

Best Computer Strategy Game

Many designers have created programs to bring the mental exercise of paper-and-pencil games to the home computer, but the two types of recreations seldom work harmoniously. The problem: It is tough to do anything with the computer to materially enhance or improve an anagram or crossword puzzle.

This year's top computer strategy program, *The Fool's Errand* (Miles Computing) is the most clever framework for an anthology of word games and puzzles ever devised. The player journeys through a fantasy land derived from the characters and images of the Tarot deck to collect pieces of the Map of the Sun. Assembling this puzzle allows the computerist to collect all the magical items and preserve the realm.

A series of scrolls tells the story that ties together the many elements of *The Fool's Errand*. Key portions of some passages are grayed out, however, and the computerist must successfully play a short game or solve a puzzle to obtain the missing words. The player solves anagrams, jigsaw puzzles, find-a-word squares, ciphers and several other species of puzzles to fill in all the blanks of the narrative.

The brainteasers are the main show in *Fool's Errand*, but author Cliff Johnson hasn't forgotten the visual component. Each of the conundrums is attractively presented, often embellished with evocative, stylized drawings. *The Fool's Errand* is not the most technically sophisticated program of the year, but few titles jam more intellectual stimulation into one package.

Honorable Mentions:

Programming a television network is one of those pie-in-the-sky fantasies, which only come true for most people in front of a computer screen. Dr. Mike Breggar, a podiatrist when he's not programming, shows a deft touch in simulating the TV. business in *Prime Time* (First Row). He portrays the situation accurately, but with enough humor to keep the player from developing an all-too-realistic ulcer. The solitaire game develops new shows, shuffles the sched-



Stealth Mission by SubLogic

ule and bids against other networks for specials to propel the network to the top of the weekly ratings.

Tanks rumble across the desert in *Rommel* (Strategic Studies Group), the best computer war game published last year and an honorable mention in the strategy category. Ian Trout and Roger Keating have authored an exhaustive simulation of the North African campaign of World War II. It is clearly the most thorough gaming treatment of this theater of operations ever attempted, but the menu-activated user interface keeps the rules structure from overwhelming armchair generals.

Brodie Lockard, who authored 1985's Game of the Year, *Shanghai*, returns as part of the three-man design team for *Solitaire Royale* (Spectrum HoloByte). It features eight different versions of solitaire, plus several children's games, complete with rules of play and strategy hints for each. It even recognizes the long tradition of cheating at solitaire by allowing the computerist to peek under a pile when legal plays fail to collect the whole deck.



F/A-18 Interceptor by Electronic Arts



Pete Rose Baseball by Gamestar



Pinball Wizard by Accolade

Ezra Sidran labored for over two years to complete *Universal Military Simulator* (Rainbird), and most war gamers will agree that his great effort was not in vain. It provides an easy-to-operate system for producing battle scenarios for any armed confrontation from the stone age to the space age. The unusual pseudo-3-D perspective visually separates *Universal Military Simulator* from all standard, top-down war games, and it is a refreshing change for veteran electronic commanders.

Best Action-Strategy Computer Game

The debut of *Tetris* (Spectrum HoloByte for computers; Tengen for Nintendo) indicates that the U.S.S.R. is catching up to the United States in more than international basketball. From Moscow's AcademySoft to a monitor near you, comes this game of spatial relationships in which the player fills a rectangle by jockeying the game pieces into place as they fall toward the bottom of the screen.

Russian music accelerates to keep pace with the game's increasing speed as the difficulty level gradually rises. The playfield actually occupies only the center third of the screen, leaving lots of room for well-drawn scenes which celebrate Soviet achievements in art, culture and science.

The addictiveness of Tetris cannot be overstated. There is something utterly compelling about the precision and simplicity of this game that makes computerists boot it again and again.

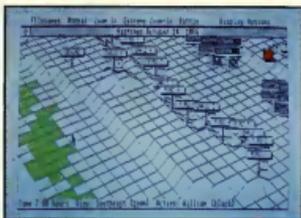
Honorable Mention:

Power Styx (DigiTek) is another example of a new game built on a time-tested concept. *Qix* introduced the territorial acquisition game to the coin-op and home markets in the early 1980s. *Power Styx* starts with the same basic goals as *Qix*, but it introduces some colorful frills. As in the classic coin-op, the participant scribes boxes on a playfield while creatures try to disrupt the drawing before the screen is filled.

Power Styx adds bonus and penalty objects, and rewards the completion of a level with a full-screen drawing in vivid color. It's good to see an old friend dressed up in such fancy, new clothes.



Oids by FTL



Universal Military Simulator by Firebird

Best Computer Adventure

William Gibson's strikingly different science fiction novel is the basis for *Neuromancer* (Interplay), the latest triumph from the folks who did the *Bard's Tale* series and *Wasteland*. The game play is similar to those earlier titles, but Brian Fargo's crew never rests on its laurels. *Neuromancer* includes many advances over previous Interplay titles, including a streamlined conversation system and vastly improved graphics.

This role-playing adventure thrusts the player into the wild world of 2058, where something strange is happening to the cyberspace cowboys. The player starts with a hangover in Chiba City, during which time he must unravel the mystery. This means obtaining a Cyber deck to tap directly into a computer-generated reality called Cyberspace.

Too often, the adventures with the best play-systems have the worst stories, and vice versa. *Neuromancer* earns "Best of the Year" recognition, because of its balance of form and content.



Blockbuster by Mindscape



Red Storm Rising by MicroProse

Honorable Mentions:

Thereon, the hero of *DungeonMaster* (FTL), can call upon the souls of departed champions to form a questing party. The adventurer is apt to need all the might of a full party of four heroes, to find the Firestaff in the depths of the forbidden dungeon. Doug Bell, Mike Newton and Dennis Walker have totally modernized the user interface used by a dozen previous role-playing adventures. Its icon-driven control system makes *DungeonMaster* especially easy and enjoyable to play without sacrificing any depth.

Paladin (Omnitrend Software), by Tom Carbone and Bill Leslie III, is a system for adventuring in the Age of Chivalry. The player guides



Chuck Yeager's Advanced Flight Trainer by Electronic Arts

Brandon, a would-be knight, and his band of nine characters through this dangerous Medieval world. Not only does Omnitrend plan to issue disks with more quests, but *Paladin's* Quest Builder can create unlimited original scenarios. Maurice Molyneux's graphics depict the world of *Paladin* in a vibrant overhead perspective.

Wasteland (Electronic Arts) is a science fiction role-playing adventure which takes place in the United States in the wake of a nuclear war. The player assembles a party of six characters, each with unique abilities and weaknesses, to explore this mutant-plagued countryside.

Best Computer Sound & Graphics

No game has more high-quality art and sound than *Rocket Ranger* (Cinemaware). The publish-



Wasteland by Electronic Arts



DungeonMaster by FTL

er prides itself on creating a movie-like, personal experience for gamers, and no Cinemaware title has met this goal more spectacularly than this evocation of Saturday morning serials.

Someday, a set of awards will honor specialists like Art Director Rob Landeros, Chief Graphic Artist Jeff Hilbers, and composer Bob Lindstrom. Until then, these incredibly talented folks must be satisfied with the gratitude of America's computer gamers. They have incalculably enriched this action-adventure with their unerring sense of taste and impeccable timing. Almost every scene has an extra touch that makes it practically perfect, like the RKO radio tower which broadcasts a plea for help, or the sequence in which the hero receives the jet pack and helmet of the Rocket Ranger.

Honorable Mentions:

A year after Software Toolworks stunned chessists with its *Chessmaster 2000*, Brian Fargo has raised the ante with *Battle Chess*. The



Paladin by Omnitrend



The Games by Epy



Into the Eagle's Nest by Mindscape

computerized opponent compares favorably with other pawn-pushing programs, but none rivals the sound and graphics of Battle Chess. Every piece exhibits a distinctive personality, and the animated capturing sequences run the gamut from cute to absolutely eye-popping. When the Castle opens its burning eyes, shambles up to the Queen and turns her into today's lunch, it's easy to see why Battle Chess has become a favorite demonstration program when showing off the capabilities of the family's home computer.

Jean-Michel Jarre's dramatic music for *Captain Blood* (Mindscape) combines with the unusual art style to produce a wholly unique science fiction epic. Key activities in the game, like hyperspace travel, have the most ambitious special visual effects ever included in a home computer game. The psychedelic interludes are hardly inferior to those which made audiences gasp at the premier of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.



Captain Blood by Mindscape

VIDEO GAMING DIVISION
Video Game of the Year

In this first year of the Video Game Revival, it is almost poetic that the top new game is an updating of one of the most famous video game hits from the first boom period seven years ago. Sega's optical technology allows *Super Zaxxon 3-D* to combine the best of the old and the new in one mega-cartridge.

The computerist directs the fast and maneuverable Zaxxon fighter in an assault against nine nearly impregnable Vargan sky fortresses. The well-equipped bases bristle with many types of weaponry, including everything from missiles to Vargan death fighters.



Super Zaxxon 3-D by Sega

Sega's special goggles make the images leap off the screen and seem to zoom right at the player. The system of lens shutters, similar to the device the NASA astronauts use, yields a much more realistic 3-D effect than the traditional red-and-green glasses.

Best Action Video Game

Piloting the blaster vehicle through the eight Caverns of Doom in *Blaster Master* (Sunsoft for Nintendo) takes a sure touch on the controller and a quick finger on the firing button. This blastathon keeps the video gamer glued to the screen as wave after wave of huge creatures rush to attack the intruder in their domain.

The blaster vehicle is a marvelous device, but the player needs all of its many powers to stay alive. It can hover, open doors, dive beneath the water, move along walls or even the ceiling, and blaze away at the monsters with its arsenal. The



Blaster Master by Sunsoft

player's craft has a guided missile, a magnetic wave called Thunder Break, multi-warhead missiles and a powerful gun. Only by picking up energy capsules can the gamer keep the blast vehicle's main gun functioning with its usual lethal effectiveness.

The graphics in *Blaster Master* are tremendous in all senses of the word. The creatures look impressively scary, and each one virtually fills the entire screen! Never has a video-game menace seemed so invincible.

Honorable Mentions:

Choplifter! (Sega) won many awards when it was first published for home computers. This completely redone video-game version proves



Choplifter! by Sega

that there's still plenty of juice in the concept of rescuing hostages and ferrying them to safety via helicopter. Sega's artists have completely redrawn the graphics to take full advantage of the Sega system's capabilities, and there's no question that *Choplifter!* has never looked, or played, better.

Cross the competitive thrills of an auto race with the strategy of an action-adventure contest, and the result is *R.C. Pro-Am* (Nintendo). The player zips along the course driving a radio-controlled dune buggy in a race against three rivals controlled by the NES. As a bonus, the racer collects assorted bombs, missiles and speed boosters.

Raid on Bungeling Bay (Broderbund for Nintendo) is additional evidence that the video-game companies don't have a lock on hot action. Like *Choplifter!*, Dan Gorlin's helicopter battle is a far better video game than it was a computer program. The sleek helicopter cruises



R.C. Pro-Am by Nintendo

above the scrolling playfield, an overhead view of the Bungeling Empire, and attacks the war factories on the ground. Speed is essential in this mission, because otherwise the Bungeling air force will blow your whirlybird out of the sky!

There is no video game like *Space Harrier* (Sega) when it comes to pure action. The hero, viewed from behind, shoots or dodges the boulders, trees and monsters as they head straight at the gamer. Shoot! Shoot! Shoot!

Best Sports Video Game

Bases Loaded (Jaleco for Nintendo) is a welcome exception to the disappointing run of team sports video games for both the Sega and Nintendo system. Finally, NES owners have a



Space Harrier by Sega



Pro Wrestling by Nintendo



Raid on Bungeling Bay by Broderbund

quality-action baseball game.

The year's top sports cartridge focuses on the core of our National Pastime, the showdown between the batter and the pitcher. Depending on whether the man at the plate is left- or right-handed, the screen shows the confrontation as the shortstop or second baseman would see it. If the batter hits the ball, a scrolling overhead view of the field replaces the original screen. The movement of the ballplayers, as they go through their paces on the diamond, is well animated.

Jaleco is a new publishing name in the U.S. market. If Bases Loaded is a fair example of its products, sports-minded video gamers are in for some treats in 1989.



Bases Loaded by Jaleco

Honorable Mentions:

Pro Wrestling (Nintendo) offers the same brand of mat action that has made this pseudo-sport one of America's top entertainment at-



10-Yard Fight by Nintendo

tractions. The colorful wrestlers realistically perform moves, like the piledriver, the clothesline and fancy flying off the top rope. *Pro Wrestling* even includes battling outside the ring. It's championship-quality grappling.

10-Yard Fight (Nintendo), an action football cartridge, has such finely detailed graphics that the coach can follow every move on the gridiron from kickoff to final whistle. There is a wide selection of offensive and defensive plays, and the vertically scrolling playfield gives the athletes room to block, tackle, run, pass and catch the football.



Side Pocket by Data East

Best Video Games Sound and Graphics

The incredible look and sound of video games is certainly one of the big reasons for their popularity. No cartridge looked or sounded better in 1988 than *Side Pocket* (Data East for Nintendo). Even with ordinary audiovisual effects,

Side Pocket would be a solid electronic version of billiard. Add the clack of the balls as they knock together, and details like the worn felt around the table's pockets, and you've got the best pool simulation for video game or computer systems.

Honorable Mentions:

Even without the physical feedback of the coin-op version, *Outrun* (Sega) pulls the player right into the excitement of big-time auto racing. The modified first-person perspective, though somewhat like earlier driving contests, puts the vantage point much closer to the level of the road. The track rises and falls, sometimes



Missile Defense 3-D by Sega

hiding the scenery ahead, to convey a convincing illusion of raw speed.

Missile Defense 3-D (Sega) combines two of the hottest pieces of video gaming technology to make it a breathtaking visual feast, and the light phasers insure maximum target-shooting action.

Best Adventure Video Game

The sequel is already out, but the honors in this category rightly belong to the cartridge that started the phenomenon: *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo). The publisher intended this light-hearted adventure to show that the video games can entertain the whole family, not just preteens. They were obviously right, because few electronic games have drawn such universal praise.

Honorable Mentions:

Deep in the jungles of Central America, according to *Aztec Adventure* (Sega), lies the fabulous Aztec Paradise. The video gamer becomes Nino, an intrepid explorer who yearns to see this legendary land. Twelve dangerous regions stand between the adventurer and his goal, and there's a boss demon guarding the exit of each playfield. Nino must collect and use objects like dynamite, lightning and water-walking boots to see the Aztec Paradise firsthand.

Action aces will need all their skill to help Samus Aran jump, run, and shoot his way through *Metroid* (Nintendo), an exciting action adven-

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In the Days of Legends, there was a young Paladin named Brandon. Brandon had heard that the King of a Far Kingdom was Bestowing Knighthood upon those Souls who Proved themselves Worthy of the Title. Resolute upon the Goal of Knighthood, Brandon gathered a Fine Band of Nine to accompany him. He took Mages, with their Arcane Magics and Strange Potions.  He called upon Swordsmen,  with their Sharp Blades. With him came Rangers and even a Chief who had Reformed His Ways. Their journey took them across Fierce Deserts and Swift Rivers,  through Steamy Jungles and into Caverns  that Descended to the Very Heart of the Earth. On their Long and Perilous Journey, they Did Battle Nasty Trolls  who carried Great Axes. Undead Zombies  Plagued them and Dragons  Burned Their Hides. Sorcerers  Exchanged Orbs of Fire with their Wise Mage and Cast Mind Stuns on the Unwary.

All of this happened with Fine Animation and the Battles Did Ring with Thrilling Digitized Sound (excluding IBM version). They found that the Program Includes Ten Challenging Quests. They also discovered that an additional Quest Disk with 16 Quests is Available. After a Time, when they wished to Change Their Fate, there was a Quest Bullseye Program which allowed them to Modify Existing Quests and Create New Ones to Please their Friends and Confound their Enemies. Even Valiant Warriors from the Far Future were not forgotten, for they could Import Breach Squad Leaders as Paladins.

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The Legend of Zelda by Nintendo

ture for one or two participants. The Federation Police want Samus Aran to retrieve Metroid, a lifeform with potentially vast power, which space pirates swiped from a research station. Getting it back is a challenging task that should keep blast brigadiers occupied for many hours.



Aztec Adventure by Sega

Best Strategy Video Game

The next time a complacent computerist claims that software for his machine is better than video-game cartridges, show him *Monopoly* (Sega). The world's favorite money game has never looked or played better than this cartridge edition, and that includes at least two attempts to translate it for home computers.

This version of *Monopoly* not only provides a robot opponent when human competition is not available, but it actually makes multi-player sessions more enjoyable. It's not only as good as the original board game, but some Sega system owners may think it's even better.

The screen shows the familiar board between



Monopoly by Sega



Metal Gear by Ultra

turns, but it switches to a modified side perspective shot when the cleverly animated tokens are moving around the board from property to property. Everything a *Monopoly* fiend could want is here, even those tumbling dice. Somewhere, Uncle Pennybags is smiling.

Honorable Mention:

Blazing combat drives *Metal Gear* (Ultra for Nintendo) to a fever pitch. Col. Vermon Calaffy has a super-weapon, called Metal Gear, and he intends to use it against the forces of truth and justice if someone doesn't stop him quickly. The commando, code named "Solid Snake," must find and neutralize Metal Gear to win. Equipment picked up along the way is the key to victory in this solitaire contest. This is one cartridge sure to delight fans of both action and adventure games.

COMBINED VIDEO/COMPUTER GAME DIVISION

Best Video/Computer Arcade Translation

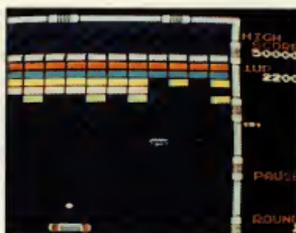
Arkanoid (Taito for Nintendo) raked in quarters by the millions as a coin-op, and now Taito has brought this sophisticated wall-bashing contest to the video-game audience for the first time. It would be an understatement to say that it was worth the wait. It is finally here, and it is everything even the most finicky home arcader could desire.

For those who don't frequent the nation's family amusement centers, *Arkanoid* adds lots of extra features to the play-mechanic of knocking out bricks by hitting a ball at them with a horizontally movable paddle. A quick tour of *Arkanoid*'s varied screens should convince anyone that Breakout is a long way in the past.

The most important new feature is the tokens which periodically float toward the bottom of the playfield. If captured with the paddle, they give special powers like a wider bat, multiple balls or a laser gun. *Arkanoid* has always been known as a habit-forming game, but now its many fans can play it to their heart's content without breaking the piggy bank.

Honorable Mentions:

It was great year for arcade translations in both the video and computer game fields.



Arkanoid by Taito

Among the very best in 1988 were: *Commando* (Capcom for computer and video games), *John Elway's Quarterback* (Arcadia for home computers; Tradewest for Nintendo), *Rampage* (Activision for Nintendo), and *Rockford* (Arcadia for home computers).

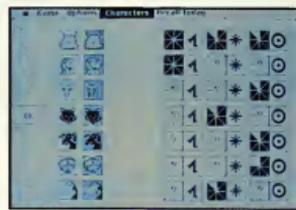
The home versions are all so faithful to the original coin-op machines that it would be redundant to describe them all at length. A particularly intriguing case is *Rockford*, because it represents a complete circle. The coin-op is based on a computer game called *Boulderdash* (First Star), and now the quarter-snatcher has inspired a home computer edition.



Commando by Capcom and Activision

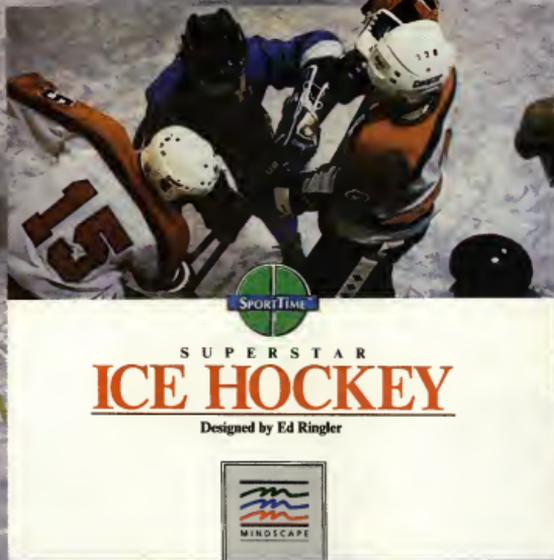
Most Innovative Video/Computer Game

Trust and Betrayal (Mindscape) shows that a game can be innovative in content as well as technology. Chris Crawford invented an entirely new language, Eeyal, just for this simulation of a seven-way struggle for leadership of an advanced alien society.



Trust and Betrayal by Mindscape

The puck stops here!



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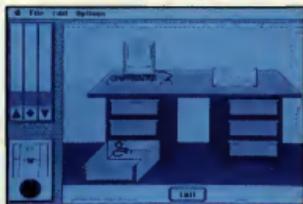
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The Colony by Mindscape

The entire game, which focuses on interaction with computer-controlled characters, is carried on in Eeyal. Crawford has done such a good job, however, that most players acquire competence in the unfamiliar tongue within the first few rounds.

Honorable Mentions:

The plot of *The Colony* (Mindscape for home computers) isn't revolutionary, but the user interface and graphics are unique. A new graphics system generates a 3-D environment that retains image integrity no matter which way the



Three Stooges by Cinemaware

Although *Infocomics* (Infocom for home computers) aren't actually games, since the user can't affect the plots, they could not be omitted in any survey of the most venturesome products of 1988. *Lane Mastadon* and the other titles in this series allow the computerist to change the view-point character at the tap of a button. The reader can skim forward and back in the comic to experience the same scene from several different angles.



Battle Chess by Interplay

A game about the exploits of the slapstick comedy team should be funny, and Robert and Phyllis Jacob's design team doesn't disappoint the gamers.

All the games included in this action-adventure are derived from famous scenes in *Three Stooges* movies. Highly detailed artwork combined with expressive animation give the game's Moe, Larry, and Curly all the zaniness of the real-life funny men.

Honorable Mentions:

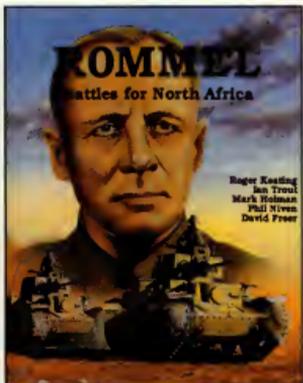
Crystal Quest (Casady and Greene, Inc. for home computers) seems like a normal, if en-



Infocomics by Infocom

character turns in a room. The mouse-activated movement scheme, which involves positioning a cursor relative to a directional cross in the center of the screen, walks the player through *The Colony* with effortless ease.

The Lipstik, a special controller packed with *Echelon* (Access for computers) earns this flight simulator an honorable mention. This device allows the computerist to bark orders to crew members in the heat of battle instead of entering commands solely with the joystick or keyboard. It is fun to use and does wonders for the program's realism.



Rommel by Strategic Studies

Most Humorous Video/Computer Game

Three Stooges (Cinemaware for computers) is a laugh riot from the second the hilariously irrelevant opening scene flashes onto the screen.



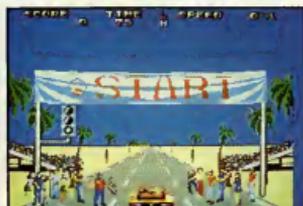
Crystal Quest by Casady and Greene, Inc.

tertaining, action game until it starts making those crazy sounds every time something interesting happens on the screen. The digitized speech and bizarre noise are guaranteed to put a smile on the face of even the most serious game player.

If you've ever laughed when Wile E. Coyote's latest plan blows up in his face, you can enjoy the same kind of humor in *Road Runner* (Mindscape for computers and video games). The



Solitaire Royale by Spectrum Holobyte



Outrun by Sega



Mixed-Up Mother Goose by Sierra

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Metroid by Nintendo

graphics and play action stick closely to the ambience of the cartoons, and Road Runner, the computer game, raises nearly as many chuckles as the animated films.

Best Educational Video/Computer Game

If your fingers turn into thumbs at the sight of a typewriter or computer keyboard, *Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing* (Software Toolworks) is a painless process for improving skills. It's an exceptionally well-conceived educational pro-

gram that uses gaming techniques to imprint its lessons on the user's brain.

The Road Racer game makes it fun to build up typing speed. The quicker the student transcribes the words as they appear on the screen, the faster the car roars down the track. Most games included in educational products look crude compared to purely recreational programs, but Road Racer's graphics are good enough to keep the typist working hard long after he or she might have quit a more conventional typing class.

The Queen of adventure gaming, Roberta Williams, turns her talents toward beginning readers in *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* (Sierra) in this delightful interactive fairy-tale set in Mother Goose Land. Experts agree that a child who is motivated to read will learn more easily, and that makes *Mixed-Up Mother Goose* at least one small step toward a more literate America.

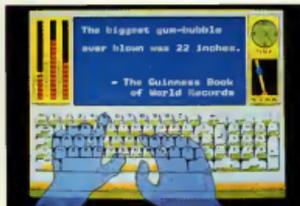
Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego (Sega) is an international detective game which somehow manages to teach players a lot of geography. The video sleuth searches the globe for the elusive villain and employs logic to assemble clues into an accurate dossier. The trail leads from country to country, and the video gamer can learn about each one during these visits. The lessons are low key, which makes them all the more effective.



Prime Time by First Row



Indoor Sports by Mindscape



Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing by Software Toolworks



Road Runner by Mindscape



Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego? by Sega



Meet Mr. Sports

A Conversation with Ed Ringler



By Bill Kunkel

Ed Ringler, founder and head honcho of DesignStar Consultants, creators of *Indoor Sports*, *Clubhouse Sports*, *Superstar Ice Hockey* and many others, has some funny ideas about the software business.

"Most of the people in this industry come from the record business and book publishing, and they know nothing about games," he says matter-of-factly. "They're in this business for the short run, and they're involved in a cycle of deal/cut/hurt and move on. We're looking to establish a name where the end user will find us. When that breakthrough point comes, we'll sell some games."

He not only uses the rhetoric of the industry ("You'll never get ripped off with our product. My philosophy is we work for our customers, not to kiss the industry's a—"), but actually means it ("We're in this for the long run, and in the long run, I'm gonna win. I love my products"). He happily discusses things like value-per-dollar for users ("Most of the publishers are thieves") and disdains the current trend toward opulent graphics and digitized music at the

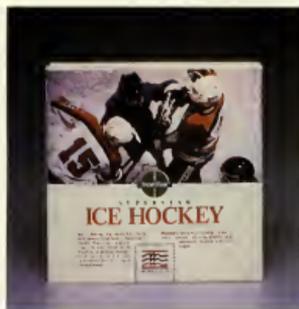
expense of solid game play ("If I want to hear music, I'll buy a CD," he says sardonically).

If you get the idea that Ed Ringler is a bit of a maverick and more than a little egotistical, well, he'd be the last person to deny it.

"Every time I put out a product, all the other publishers tear it apart, trying to find out what we did, and how we did it. The rest of the world is watching."

But the ego and self-righteous stance comes with an unassailable pedigree: Ed is one of this industry's true pioneers, a second-generation electronic entertainer with a collection of sports games to his credit that have revolutionized electronic gaming. His software offers users unprecedented value with products like *Indoor Sports* (Mindscape) featuring four game modules (air hockey, darts, bowling and ping pong), each of which was easily good enough to sell on its own.

"I have a history with video games," he says proudly, referring to the decade he spent toiling in the arcade vineyards before moving into the business of creating home



computer games.

His father was the co-creator of the *Musical Moments* coin-op "amusement" and he has both owned and operated arcades in the New York Tri-State area. "I spent a lot of time watching kids part with their quarters. I had the responsibility for purchasing these \$1,500-\$2,000 coin-ops and so I gave a great deal of thought to the question of what made one game addictive and another a dud."

He established one of the largest coin-op servicing operations in the Bronx (NY) and became involved in the creation of speed-up and enhancement kits to extend the life of machines. Ed soon found himself hooking up with other technicians, some of whom had begun to dabble at home on the then-new Atari 800.

"I saw [the computer software industry] trying to duplicate games like *Dig-Dug* and *Asteroids* in the home market, and I realized they were trying to simulate what we were doing everyday."

He took the actual plunge into design by helping out a technician friend on the creation of *Oil's Well* ("My dad named that game—it was originally a coin-op about an ant eater") for Sierra.

Ed then bought himself an Atari 800 and formally entered the game-design business. He started out with a multi-screen maze-chase game called *Moneyrun* and added some "Deathrace" overtones for a sequel, *Moneyrun 2000*, which he sold to Bill Stealey's newly formed MicroProse. "He had games like *Floyd of the Jungle*, so I was like a god to him," Ed explains with characteristic modesty.

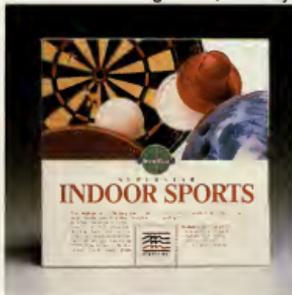
The games never reached the market, however. "I had spent a year in development and meanwhile the Commodore 64 had taken over the market." Undaunt-

ed, he sent copies of the programs to publishers, but there were no takers. What came back instead were job offers.

One of those offers was from Gamestar. Previously known as Arcade Plus, Gamestar had, under Scott Orr, evolved from a one-product publisher (*Ghost Hunter*, a *Pac-Man* clone) into a leading producer of action-strategy sports games like *StarLeague Baseball* and *Football*.

Ed was flown out to Santa Barbara, met with everyone, and agreed to come on board, despite the fact that this new job paid less than he had been making in the arcade end of the business.

The relationship between Ed and Scott Orr was a stormy one, professionally. "Scott was essentially the guy who went around taking credit," Ed says



bluntly. "Don't get me wrong; in many ways, I really liked Scott. He and I could spend hours and hours just sitting around, talking about games." Their business disagreements, however, were legion.

Still, the union was fruitful. Games like *On-Court Tennis* ("I was the first person to ever get billing over Scott. But when I left, they re-did the packaging"), *On-Track Racing* and *Star Rank Boxing* ("which I started") redefined the parameters of action-strategy sports games.

During his tenure at Gamestar, Ed also hired two programmers who would put their own imprints on the computer game-design field: Troy Lyndon and John Cutter. Lyndon was something of a boy wonder who created games like *Two-on-Two Basketball* for Gamestar before striking out on his own, while John Cutter ultimately joined forces with Bob Jacob to build Cinemaware (*Defender of the Crown*, *Three Stooges*, *Rocket*



Ranger), one of the hottest names in software publishing.

After the final split with Scott Orr, Ed founded DesignStar Consultants and signed a deal with Mindscape to publish and distribute his games under the "SportTime" banner. These games have been of two types: team sports simulations (*Superstar Ice Hockey*, *Superstar Soccer*, *MISL Indoor Soccer*) and theme-oriented game packages (*Indoor Sports*, *Clubhouse Sports*).

The Mindscape/DesignStar relationship, while very successful in many respects, has not been without its bumps. Ed immediately bridled at the mention of the ST version of *Superstar Ice Hockey*, for example.

"I want people to know that I have no attachment to the ST version. That was done entirely by Mindscape, unfortunately, and it's a straight clone of the CGA/IBM version! Now don't get me wrong, that was an excellent version for the IBM—in fact, IBM called us. They want to know how we did things like the palette changes. But not for the ST. I was disappointed that the conversion didn't take advantage of the ST's capabilities."

These team sports games have been significant not only in that they look and play remarkably well from an action perspective, but because of their astonishing strategic depth. In *Superstar Ice Hockey*, for example, users can compete against computer-guided opposition on up to three levels: on the ice as a player (the user can directly control a skater or goaltender), on the bench as coach (setting lines, dictating strategy and directing line changes) and behind the scenes, as General Manager (drafting and trading).

Ed developed a system in which users can play a simulated season within a division and then, if successful, compete against the other divisional kingpins in a

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playoff and championship series.

They didn't stop there, either. Teams can be improved during the off-season if the user/GM makes the right acquisitions and/or sends the team to a training camp to hone their skills. Players age and their talents decline, just as in real sports, and a sharp-eyed GM is always on the lookout for young talent.

"Most programmers and designers are lazy. The kind of stuff we do takes a year or longer. You can't just offer options, you've got to spend time thinking about things like the user interface and developing what I call 'intelligent randomness.' We take a game to the point where every other publisher in the business would release it and we sit down and play it for another two months."

When a successful innovation like Ice Hockey's season-to-season play system is made in a SportTime game, it's carried over to any future games where such a system would be viable. This gives the SportTime games a continuity and a brand recognition all too rare in the current marketplace. "The more you live with my products, the easier it gets," is how Ed puts it.

So far, he has intentionally shied away

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from "the biggies"—i.e. baseball and football—preferring to mine sports such as hockey and soccer which are less frequently reproduced.

"We're going to take our time before we do the biggies. I prefer to inch our way up to the big ones. But when I do a football game—" His voice trailed off for an instant as both interviewer and interviewee shared a short, silent reverie in contemplation of what an Ed Ringle football game might be like.

Ed is characteristically up-front in his disdain for the vast majority of his competitors in the sports game field. He scorns previous attempts at computer hockey like *Slap Shot* and *Hat Trick* as low-quality rip-offs. Even the critically exalted *Earl Weaver Baseball* fails to escape a withering evaluation.

"A wealthy company [Electronic Arts] with a license creates all this hype marketing a new baseball game, and most of the critics jump on the bandwagon. When I bought that game I was excited, but during my first game in the second inning, in Fenway Park, there's a ball hit to right. The center fielder falls into the bullpen, and the right fielder runs head on into the wall and does that thing you've seen in so many games where his legs keep pumping even though he can't move forward."

Ed's pride in his own product and low regard for the competition have even led him to become somewhat proprietary about the whole action-strategy sports genre. He is openly unhappy, for example, that ex-mate John Cutter is producing a series of team sports simulations under the "TV Sports" banner at Cinemaware, starting with *TV Sports Football*.

"Cinemaware wanted me. They weren't happy in their own niche, they had to move into my niche." One gets the feeling that Ed's unhappiness is partially based on his antipathy to the Cinemaware sensibility, with its strong emphasis on sound and graphics and occasional weaknesses in play. Although his own games are highly polished from a graphics standpoint, game play is clearly his top priority.

"I don't spend time on frills. If I want music, I'll buy a CD. It's gotten to the point where, in Europe, [reviewers will] destroy a game because they don't like the music! Make sense. [If something has to go] I'll always lose the bells and

whistles first."

DesignStar's theme-oriented game packages (*Indoor Sports* and *Clubhouse Sports*) have, in many ways, had an even greater impact on the entertainment software business than the team sports simulations. For one thing, while there are several publishers producing sports games, none are rushing to produce packages containing four or more individually saleable games for the price of one. Ringle maintains that the very existence of his products makes the industry's pricing system suspect.

"We have a different orientation than other publishers. We're looking to give players tremendous value as opposed to the illusion of value. Other publishers give you multiple 'events'; we give you full-fledged games!" he declares. Ringle feels he is showing up the rest of the industry one more time and he loves it.

Next up from DesignStar will be *International Team Sports*, a potential blockbuster that brings together the two types of SportTime products in a single package. "Epyx thinks they own this kind of game," he says in a tone that suggests Epyx is about to be rudely disabused of that notion.

International Team Sports will contain basketball, water polo, volleyball, soccer, 4 x 40 relay track and swimming modules, and Ed promises that each game will be fully up to SportTime standards.

He has also been getting back to his coin-op roots with the purchase, by Arcadia (a subdivision of Mastertronic), of his Indoor Sports modules. Bowling and darts, among others, have already appeared as individual coin-ops, bringing Ringle's career full circle.

Firebrand. Know-it-all. Genius. Egotist. Game lover. Call him what you will, but Ed Ringle, pre-eminent creator in his field, is also an optimist. "I believe very strongly that there is no such thing as a finished game. There will always be ways to make a game better. You just reach a level of satisfaction that makes sense. But until games offer holographic visuals, graphics haven't been 'done.' Until then, we [in the entertainment software business] should just be honorable people and cast out those who aren't."

Ed probably sums it up best, and most succinctly, when he tells you, straight from the heart, "I love my games."

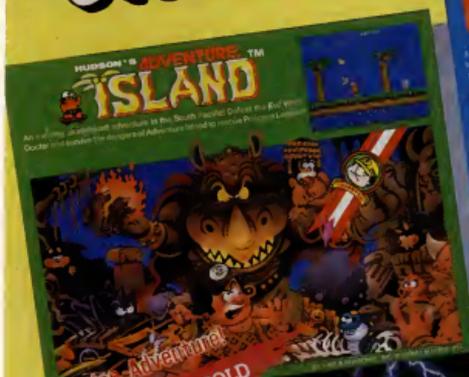
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Straight Dope From the Game Doc!

by The Game Doctor

Q: What's all this business about "digitizing"? What does it mean? If it's so great, how come more games don't use it? What is a "digitizer" and why would I want one?

Adam Aiello, Stonybrook

A: When you see a reference to a game containing digitized audio and/or video, it means that rather than re-creating a sound effect/song or a photographic/drawn image by attempting to imitate it, special equipment is used to break the original down into its digital components, which can be "reassembled" by the computer. This results in a much truer sound and/or image playback.

Examples of digitized audio include the "Stay a while—stay forever!" at the start of Epyx's *Impossible Mission* and the rock & roll theme song to Firebird's *Star-glider*.

Digitized video takes the original image and breaks it down into a pattern of dots which, when reassembled by the computer, resembles the original. (How much it resembles the original depends, of course, on the digitizer and computer.)

Examples of digitized video include the images in *Micro-League/WWF Wrestling*. Many games also use digitized artwork in their title screens.

The reason we don't see more

digitization in games is because it consumes massive amounts of memory. The price of optical scanners and digitizers has come way down, however, making them increasingly popular for home use.

Q: What has happened to the Atari ST? When I bought mine, it was supposed to be the state-of-the-art computer with tons of software on the way. Well, I can tell you that the new games just aren't appearing on the ST. What happened?

The Alanian, Saginaw, MI

A: It's not a pretty story, Atarian. The ST just never caught on in the U.S. marketplace, and the fact is, many publishers have intentionally stayed away from it.

Atari brought much of this on themselves by failing to provide users with service centers, then taking forever to provide repairmen the necessary replacement parts. One of the reasons that Tandy exploded into the computer market is because the public has confidence that if their computers break down, Radio Shack will fix them. Atari owners lack this sense of security.

The good news is that the ST has caught on in Europe where many game products are designed specifically for it. So when a U.S. publisher like Mindscape buys the American rights to a game that already exists in ST format, they release it here in that format as well.

Q: Why aren't there any state-based hockey games? My friends and I are sports nuts and play all the baseball and football replay games. Now there's even a basketball simulation but still no hockey! How come?

Steve Green, Buffalo

A: Basketball and hockey games are the toughest to simulate, and hockey games present the most difficulties of any major sport. Problems include:

1) Hockey is a continuous-play game, with constant passing and on-the-fly substitutions. Any statistical simulation would require almost continuous input from the user, which would tend to make the games very stop-and-start.

2) Hockey statistics are nowhere near as complete as, for example, baseball stats in painting a picture of each player.

3) Hockey is a regional sport. It has never really caught on in the warm-weather locales.

Nonetheless, SportTime's *Superstar Ice Hockey* (Mindscape), while not a stat-based game, does offer the user many strategic options (substitutions, play instructions, etc.) in addition to being a superior action game.

Got a question for the Doc? Send it to: **The Game Doctor**, P.O. Box 020541, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0012. See ya next issue!

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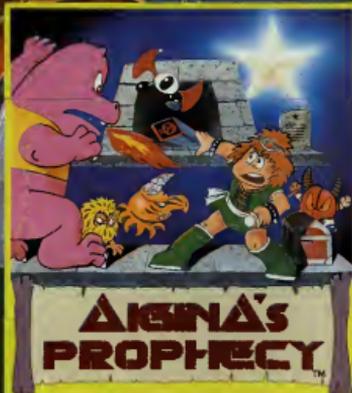


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WAGING WORLD WAR II

*Military Simulations for Computers
and Video Games*

by Arnie Katz



America's heart has a gigantic soft spot for World War II. The average American, even those born after VJ Day, gets misty-eyed over newsreels of Betty Grable entertaining the troops or GIs distributing freedom and chocolate bars to eager crowds lining liberated streets.





But the senseless killing, of course, is not celebrated. No sane person likes the thought of thousands of innocent young men bleeding away their lives in the muddy ditches of shell-smashed battlefields. The unglamorous, unlovely face of war is no one's treasured memory.

Yet a mystique clings to World War II unmatched by other armed conflicts, even the Revolutionary and the Civil Wars. Those who lived through the 1939-1946 period recall it as a time when everyone submerged petty, individual concerns and pulled together to achieve a lofty goal against terrifying odds. Parents and grandparents, the schools and the mass media, have communicated this image to those of us who weren't even born then.

Armchair commanders are no less intrigued by World War II than their non-gaming countrymen. More electronic and nonelectronic war games are based on World War II than all others combined.

The reasons for WW II's gaming popularity include, but go beyond, its image. By an odd coincidence, the war with the greatest emotional impact also has the most varied and interesting situations for strategists.

The second world war stands at a crossroads in military history. It was the first time tanks, carriers and air power dominated the battle-

field. These are the weapons which war gamers like best, because they offer the widest range of tactical options.

It was also the last war



Streamlined rules, a joystick interface and fast play highlight *Crusade in Europe* by MicroProse.

fought without the specter of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. World War II is the pinnacle of high-tech, non-nuclear military confrontation. It allows gamers to apply classic principals of warfare to game situations and play around with a lot of fancy gear.

Choosing a Computer War Game

VG&CE's war-gaming survey indicates that quality should be a relatively minor concern when choosing a military simulation. Most commercially available computer war games rate at least

seven on a one-to-ten scale. In fact, no software category has a higher average quality.

That leaves two factors to consider: the difficulty level and the subject. A program which simulates a battle of interest to the gamer with the right degree of challenge is almost certain to be money well spent.

D day

The Normandy Invasion, the largest amphibious landing in history, is a logical place to start. It is one of the most frequently simulated battles, despite the fact that

though moderately challenging, makes a good introduction for those who haven't had much previous experience with war games. The battle for the beaches is a real slugfest as the Allies attempt to force a breakout from Normandy before the time limit expires. The fluidity of Ed Bever and Sid Meier's game system makes *Crusade in Europe* livelier than those that use alternating turns

divided into sub-phases. *Patton vs. Rommel* (Electronic Arts) might be the best choice for the casual war gamer, because Chris Crawford's outstanding design work makes the detailed simulation surprisingly simple to learn and play. The computer can take either side in this D day recreation. Noted strategists George Patton and Erwin Rommel are ready to offer advice to temporarily confused commanders as they maneuver troops across the scrolling mapboard.

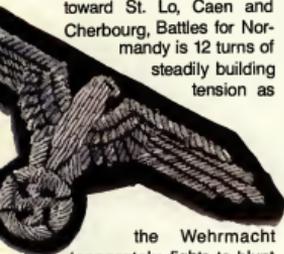
Battles for Normandy (Strategic Simulations) is a more conventional war game about the same battle. This



SCHER VOLK
WEHRMACHT

moderately complex game by Tactical Design Group, allows the computerist to restage D day on a video battlefield divided into hexagonal squares to regulate movement.

The computerist directs Allied divisions, regiments and brigades in the drive toward St. Lo, Caen and Cherbourg. Battles for Normandy is 12 turns of steadily building tension as



the Wehrmacht desperately fights to blunt the advance. *Battles in Normandy* (Strategic Studies Group) is easily the most sophisticated and demanding computer simulation of Normandy. The Australia-based design team, led by Roger Keating and Ian Trout, present eight com-



plete scenarios: Omaha, Utah, Sword, Cherbourg, Carentan, Villiers Bocade, Goodwood and Epsom. These individual battles can be linked into one continu-



Easy Company of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division is under the war-gamer's leadership in *Field of Fire* by Strategic Simulations.

ous campaign.

The construction module can be used with the scrolling map of the entire Normandy peninsula to generate some additional scenarios. The documentation suggests variant orders of battle to assist this effort.

Battles in Western Europe

Gary Grigsby's complex tactical armored game *Battle Group* (SSI) is perfect for highly experienced electronic generals. It covers engagements during 1943-1945 involving British, German and American forces, and includes just about every weapon type from that era, including tanks, assault guns, tank destroyers, machine guns, flamethrowers, antitank guns and bazookas.

The disk comes with four prepared scenarios, but the documentation exhorts computerists to develop their module included in the program.

Each unit on the map board represents a platoon, but Grigsby's program figures the hit probability separately for every man and weapon in each platoon.

Bismarck: The North Sea Chase (DataSoft) is the third computer game devoted to one of the most entertaining sidelights of World War II, the cat-and-mouse game between the British Fleet and the German pocket battleship *Bismarck*. The other two are now out of print, but Anthony Stoddard's effort nicely fills the gap left by their absence.

The player can recreate the entire story or one of five shorter scenarios. The computerist can either hunt down

puterists who don't habitually play war games; so most published programs are aimed at novice or lightly experienced commanders.

Decision in the Desert (MicroProse) is a joystick-activated treatment of the North African campaign. As in *Crusade in Europe*, its companion program, the players issue orders to their units, which execute them as game time passes. An excellent manual provides analysis of the individual battles and explains the basis for "what if?" variations.

Tobruk (DataSoft) by Steve R. Williams features a unique blend of conventional war-gaming and arcade-style combat action. Fighting



Decision in the Desert by MicroProse brings the North African campaign to your computer screen.

the German raider or try to decimate Allied shipping under the nose of the Union Jack.

Against the Desert Fox

Both the Allies and the Axis assigned a low priority to the desert war in North Africa during World War II, but today's war gamers can't seem to get enough of tanks rolling down roads, cut through sand dunes. This phase of the war also seems to fascinate even com-

grows heated as Rommel's Afrika Korps tries to starve and bludgeon Tobruk into submission, and the Allies defend tenaciously as they wait for reinforcements.

This one- or two-player contest permits players to add a first-person action game to the routine of play. Pressing the fire button on the controller allows the commander to climb into an armored fighting vehicle and personally attack the enemy. *Tobruk* may not be the most

meticulous simulation of this famous battle, but it gets top marks for playability and entertainment value.

Knights of the Desert (SSI) covers the whole North African campaign in 1941-42. It's a seesaw struggle as Allied and Axis forces battle for control of a strip of land 500 miles long and 150 miles wide on the scrolling, multi-screen map board. Supply, reinforcements and intelligence are the biggest headaches for participants in this one- or two-player contest.

Rommel (Strategic Studies Group), picked as one of 1988's outstanding strategy games by VG&CE, is the most complex simulation of this campaign available today. Thanks to its menu-driven user interface, however, it is probably easier to play than programs with half as much detail. The construction module is even easier to manipulate than in previous Trout and Keating productions.

Fighting Continues on the Eastern Front

The average American has little feel for the Eastern Front, primarily because the United States did not get directly involved in the action. For war gamers, however, the battles between Germany and Russia eclipse even D day.

The reason is simple: tanks. Gamers like armored fighting vehicles better than any other type of military hardware. They can't resist the combination of lightning movements and fantastic firepower. The Eastern Front is a laboratory for testing armor and infantry tactics isolated from naval and aerial influences. Would-be conquerors or defenders of Eastern Europe and Russia

can immerse themselves in a universe of tanks and rifles in its purest form.

War in Russia (SSI) is an awe-inspiring megagame that simulates the entire Russian campaign, 1941-1944, at the divisional level. Author Gary Grigsby gives players every unit on both sides that participated in this epic struggle.

Russia (Strategic Studies Group) is another mammoth simulation of the entire Eastern Front. In this Ian Trout and Roger Keating title, the player controls either side in this clash of 20 million men in uniform. Those who decide that a full campaign game of Russia is too much of a project can reflight the crucial battles of Kursk, Leningrad or Stalingrad in approximately two to three hours.

The joystick-actuated, order entry system makes *Guderian* (Avalon Hill), named for the celebrated German tank commander, one of the most accessible tactical-level games on the market. It simulates armored battles in central Russia on a scrolling map of the region.

The German drive on Moscow furnishes an incredible array of opportunities to develop strategies (on the fly) as these two mighty armies exchange hammer blows. The computerist can play either side against another human competitor or a computer-directed army.

Road to Moscow (Game Designers Workshop) covers the entire Russian campaign, but the scale of the units is slightly smaller than

the two previous titles mentioned. This corps-level campaign game allows the player to take either side against computerized opposition at any of ten skill levels. The flexible control system allows players to enter orders with either the joystick or the keyboard.

Panzer Grenadier (Strategic Simulations) puts the gamer in command of a regi-



Guderian from Avalon Hill scrolls you through armored battles in central Russia.



Panzer Grenadier by Strategic Simulations has you commanding a regiment of Hitler's elite troops against computer-controlled Russian forces.

ment of Hitler's elite mechanized troops. The Russians, commanded by the computer, provide spirited opposition in this introductory level contest by author Roger Damon.

Kampfgruppe (Strategic Simulations) is a companion title to *Battle Group*. The main difference is that *Kampfgruppe* deals with the Eastern Front. Other than that, they are almost identical in approach, complexity and quality.

A great program to introduce beginners to the fun of war-gaming is *Panzer-Jagd* (Avalon Hill), which

means tank hunt in German. It's a fitting name because *Panzer-Jagd* features nothing but armored fighting vehicles.

The solitary player hears the rumble of heavy treads as the tanks prow the varied terrain, and he sees the flash as these mobile behemoths blast each other into scrap metal. There's plenty of strategy in *Panzer-Jagd*, too, but few war games dress it up in such a charming package.

Pacifying the Pacific

The Pacific Theater is the stepchild of the computer war-gaming field. No one



Strategic Simulations' *Kampfgruppe* leads you to battle on the Eastern Front.

has adequately explained the phenomenon, but games with a nautical theme sell worse, as a group, than games about any other topic. It's even true for non-war games!



the original engagement. The graphics are a little drab in this somewhat older program, but advanced players will appreciate its thoroughness.

Also recommended for skilled strategists is *Carriers at War 1941-1945* (Strategic Studies Group)

Authors Ian Trout and Roger

Keating provide

the player with over 400 aircraft and 246 ships for the computerist to maneuver over a scale three million square miles of ocean.

The game includes six ready-to-play battles: Pearl Harbor, Coral Sea, Midway, Eastern Solomons, Santa Cruz and Philippine Sea. The construction kit allows the user to modify any of these situations or compile new ones. Limited intelligence, extensive rules for weather and a combat system which incorporates individual ship and plane data, give *Carriers at War 1941-1945* the authentic ambience of conflict in the Far East.

Warship (Strategic Simulations) covers sea battles between the Allied (U.S., U.K., and The Netherlands) and Japanese fleets in 1941-1945. Although there are four prepared scenarios (Guadalcanal I and II, Empress Augusta Bay and San Bernardino), the construction kit is the main show. The computerist can recreate any historical battle or put together "what if?" scenarios. There's a choice

of 79 ship types, and actions can include up to 20 vessels on each side.

Warship is surprisingly easy to play despite the many set-up options. The computer does a fair job of playing either side, and beginners can handicap the mechanical foe by 10% until he or she gains an understanding of fighting on the high seas.

War in the South Pacific (Strategic Simulations) is the latest word from the ubiquitous Gary Grigsby on the Pacific Theatre. It has three advanced scenarios, including a provocative hypothetical attack by Japan upon Australia. Unlike some naval warfare simulations which focus only on the ships, *War in the South Pacific* integrates land, sea and air operations.

Halls of Montezuma (Strategic Studies Group) is Trout and Keating's celebration of the fighting tradition of the United States Marine Corps. The prepared scenarios span the entire history of this service branch, but the Iwo Jima and Okinawa games are excellent Pacific Theater land combat simulations.

Fights in the Sky

Aerial combat is the hardest phase of warfare for civilians to grasp. There are no neat lines of armored battalions or static defensive positions. Instead, the air commander grapples with constantly changing situations, enemies that strike rapidly from a distance and severe restrictions imposed by chronic shortages of planes and pilots.

War gamers frequently

complain about how much record-keeping air-war board games require. It probably accounts for the fact that non-electronic air-oriented titles are even more scarce than naval ones.

The microprocessor's data-crunching capabilities



Warship by Strategic Simulations focuses on sea battles, and includes a scenario construction kit to supplement the pre-packaged historical conflicts.

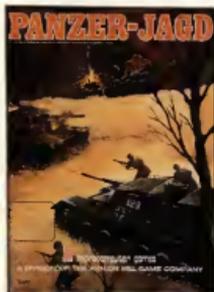
have rescued this branch of war-gaming. The computer handles most of the book-keeping associated with air-war programs, so players are free to revel in the huge number of strategic possibilities found in many of these titles.

Europe Ablaze (Strategic Studies Group) is a comprehensive simulation of the air war over England and Germany, 1939-1945. As Commander-in-Chief, the player directs all air operations. Lesser officers supervise crew allocation and target selection, while the gamer plans bomber attacks and defensive screens.

Three scenarios are included on the *Europe Ablaze* disk: *Their Finest Hour*, *Enemy Coast Ahead* and *Piercing the Reich*. A construction kit with 37 plane types and 255 precisely rated squadrons extends playability into new scenarios.

Gary Grigsby's *USAAF* (Strategic Simulations) narrows the focus to the daylight bombing raids on European industrial targets by the U.S. Army Air Force. It demands

Publishers know this and limit the number of sea games in their catalogues. Since naval warfare figures prominently in most of the major actions in the Pacific, there are few published games about that phase of WWII. Fortunately, generally high-quality compensates partially for the relative scarcity. It should also be noted, however, that Pacific Theater war games are generally aimed at the inveterate military strategist and often push



A good introductory war game is *Panzer-Jagd* from Avalon Hill, whose theme is armored-vehicle conflicts.

the upper limits of computer wargame complexity.

Carrier Force (Strategic Simulations) simulates four naval battles involving the U.S. and Japan in exhaustive detail. Author Gary Grigsby has included every ship and plane which participated in



The player heads up aerial bombing raids on European targets in SSI's *USSAAF*.

only slightly less war-gaming skill than *Europe Ablaze*, however, because the player must handle all phases of strategy, instead of leaving the particulars to subordinates.

Multi-Front Simulations

Battlefront (Strategic Studies Group) introduced the game system Roger Keating and Ian Trout have since used with such virtuosity in several award-winning programs. It allows the computerist to assume command of an infantry corps consisting of up to sixty battalions.

Battlefront has a construction kit, but the disk also has four prepared scenarios to get gamers playing quickly. The menu-based user interface organizes the numerous decisions which face the commander into a logical and comprehensible structure. The designers have improved the game system since *Battlefront* appeared in 1987, but it wears its age well. Few games of this scope are as easy to understand and play.

Easy Company of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, fought ferociously in most of the major battles in the European Theater of World War II. Roger Damon helps the computerist restage eight of their most significant engagements in *Field of Fire* (Strategic Simulations). The player can conduct any of the individual battles, which

are set in Western Europe and North Africa, or string them together into a combat campaign.

A wide variety of battlefield terrain gives *Field of Fire* pleasing diversity. The short scenarios make *Field of Fire* a fairly good introduction to computer war games, though there's enough meat to satisfy veteran war gamers, too.

Panzer Strike (SSI), another Gary Grigsby design, is a more detailed simulation of small unit tactics with an emphasis on tanks. It contains scenarios for the Eastern Front and North Africa as well as the Western Front. A campaign game lets the computerist fight through all seven years of World War II. Players can also create new battles or adjust the composition of forces of existing ones.

Each unit stands for one vehicle or gun on the square-gridded map. One turn in the game equals a minute of real-time. *Panzer Strike* takes considerable study and analysis, but hardcore war gamers will find the time well spent.

Typhoon of Steel (Strategic Simulations) is Gary Grigsby's sequel to *Panzer Strike*. It presents battles from the European, Asian and Pacific Theaters of the war and includes almost all weapons used in these regions.

The construction module is especially welcome, because it offers the chance to match Japanese forces against American, Russian and British troops. *Typhoon of Steel* gives the gray matter plenty of exercise, whether the computerist plays a single battle or confronts the computerized

commander in the campaign



scenario.

The scale of battle can't get any smaller than in *Computer Ambush* (Strategic Simulations). It concentrates on the activities of individual soldiers rather than the clash of regiments, divisions or even whole armies. Each counter symbolizes a single trooper, including his special abilities, equipment and possible weaknesses.

Designers Ed Williger and



An optional map-making utility for *Avalon Hill's Under Fire* (shown on the Apple II) lets you create scenarios unlike the three that come with the game.

John Lyon put World War II combat under the microscope in a dozen scenarios. The players issue orders to each of their men, and then see the results unfold on the overhead perspective map.

"Roll Your Own" WW II Games

Gamers who still can't find

their favorite battle in game form can remedy the lack with one of the construction sets for military simulations described in this section. Although these products are designed to replicate conflicts throughout history, none neglects the World War II gaming enthusiast.

The Ancient Art of War and The Ancient Art of War at Sea (both Broderbund) have been described as "war games for people who don't like war games." Both offer strategists the chance to test their ability to control armies and navies without the wealth of detail which can daunt anyone who isn't a confirmed war gamer. Great





generals and admirals from the pages of history provide the opposition in the games' numerous scenarios.

Games crafted with Ezra Sidran's *Universal Military Simulator* (Rainbird) are quite different than the typical computer war game. The unique pseudo-3-D perspective and superb on-screen graphics unleash a totally new war gaming experience. Even non-war gamers will



The *Ancient Art of War* offers war game strategists the chance to test their ability to control armies.

enjoy the smooth-playing scenarios which can be assembled with this outstanding program.

Roger Damon's *Wargame Construction Set* (Strategic Simulations) has a few prepared scenarios, including several from World War II, but the construction set can generate additional ones. Each side is limited to 31 units, so the would-be game inventor can't put together a complete Russian Front campaign or the like, but *Wargame Construction Set* does a wonderful job on smaller battles.



Under Fire (Avalon Hill) is especially good for creating scenarios for squad-level infantry and armor engagements. The mapmaking utility, available for separate purchase, produces original maps for situations which do not readily adapt to the three included with the game. Ralph H. Bosson's flexible game-authoring system produces home-grown scenarios which are as sophisticated as many commercially published products.

Coming Over The Horizon

What's next for World War II military simulations? More and better games are just over the next hill.

So far, few designs take advantage of the increased data processing and graphics power of 16-bit machines like the Amiga, Macintosh and Atari ST. This will change in 1989. Gamers can look for more programs



which feature virtually transparent user interfaces and striking graphics. Software companies want to capitalize on the widespread interest in military history and enlarge the audience for brain-busting strategy contests by making them easier for the computer owner to play and enjoy.

—Arnie Katz



Arcade-game lovers will relish these action-oriented war games for home computers and video consoles; shown above (clockwise from top) are *Dam Busters* by Accolade, *Commando* on the 2600 by Activision; computer and other game console versions by Capcom) and *B-24* by SSI.

World War II Action Games

Sometimes, painstakingly moving all those little units on electronic maps grows wearisome to even the most dedicated war gamer. Try these action video and computer games, all with World War II themes, to jolt yourself out of the simulation rut.

The Train and Dam Busters (both Accolade) turn fictional accounts of World War II adventure into stunning action programs. The former challenges the computerist to drive a train loaded with art treasures, stolen by the Nazis, to safety in war-torn 1944 Europe. The latter is based on the popular movie of 30 years ago in which a valiant pilot must brave deadly ground and air defenses to knock out a crucial dam in the heart of the Third Reich.

B-24 (Strategic Simulations) is basically an air-combat simulator, but the actions of the player's Liberator bomber also guide the entire 40-plane squadron. If the gamer can successfully bomb the oil refinery at Ploesti, Romania, in John Gray's program, it could

hasten the end of the war and save untold thousands of lives.

Most military action games for the NES and Sega systems are based on current or future situations, but Capcom publishes a trio of titles—*1942*, *1943* and *Commando*—of interest to WW II enthusiasts. The three cartridges, all home translations of hit coin-ops, deliver frenetic battle action.

Bombing Nazi Germany is the theme of *1942* and *1943*. In both contests, the player roars over scrolling playfields and rains death upon military bases and industrial centers.

Commando spotlights individual heroism. The player advances up the scrolling terrain map, dodging fire and shooting his way through an incredible number of enemy soldiers. It's more like a war comic book than a realistic depiction of battle, but it is also a rousing good time for any joystick jockey. (Activision publishes a 2600 version of *Commando*, also.)

—AK



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Accolade

Versions available: Amiga, Atari ST, Commodore 64

As a pair of veteran passengers, your authors have come to laugh at the folks who make a big deal out of race-car driving. Ha! This stuff is easy! All you have to do is watch the RPMs while accelerating, then shift into next gear before the motor blows up. Also, in terms of the road, it's a good idea to avoid hitting things or driving off into the abyss. Otherwise, Distinctive Software's excellent *Test Drive* is a virtual milk run!

The only two cars that are even worth driving in this game are the Ferrari Testarossa (with a top speed of 185 mph, you may find yourself pulling back on the stick in hopes of becoming airborne!) and the Lamborghini Countach (which tops out at 173 mph). None of the other three (Porsche, Lotus Turbo Spirit and—snicker—Chevy Corvette) do more than 154 mph, so why even take them out of the garage? I mean, are we driving sports cars or is this the Soapbox Derby?

Still for the completists, let's go over the strengths and weaknesses of each of the available autos:

—The Porsche 911 Turbo is the fastest starter of the bunch, going from 0-to-60 mph in just five seconds. Beyond 60 mph, however, the Porsche is nothing special, taking almost 14 seconds to get up to 100 mph. Top speed is 153 mph.

—The Ferrari Testarossa is only a little slower out of the gate, going from 0-60 in 5.3 seconds. But she's only getting started at 60, and bogies on up to 100 mph in an astonishing 10.9 seconds with a top speed of 185 mph!

—The Lamborghini Countach is a stylish-looking buggy that accelerates from 0-60 in 5.2 seconds and from 60-100 in 12 seconds flat. Top speed is an impressive 173 mph.

—The Chevy Corvette is a patriot's only choice taking 5.8 seconds to get from 0-60 and a sluggish 16.2 seconds to reach 100. She maxes out at 154 mph.

—The Lotus Turbo Spirit boasts classic styling but a top speed of only 152 mph. Even worse, it goes from 0-60 in an average 5.6 seconds, but takes 14.6 seconds to hit 100 mph.

Now I know a lot of this is going to seem awfully basic to fellow drivers out there, but for the benefit of fellow pedestrians, here is the vital equip-

ment you'll find in every vehicle:

Speedometer—Obviously, this measures speed. RPMs—Stands for Revolutions Per Minute. When the needle moves into the danger zone, it's time to upshift to next gear (see Stickshift). For those who don't want to take their eyes off the road, you can gauge the RPMs by sound. The pitch of the engine whine getting higher means the RPMs are rising. When the needle hits the danger zone the engine whine will reach a level where

Model	Year	Approximate Price
Engine type	Turbo Diesel (I4-16)	\$59,888
Displacement	3270cc	
Compression ratio	7.8:1	4-10 mph
0-60 ft. time, 0-60 sec.	3.02 # 3388	4-10 mph
0-100 ft. time, 0-100 sec.	2.78 # 4000	1.4 mile
Transmission	4 or manual	8 1/2 mph
0-100 ft. time	3.02 ft.	Top speed
0-100 ft. time	3.02 ft.	11.4
0-100 ft. time	3.02 ft.	11.4
0-100 ft. time	3.02 ft.	11.4

any dogs in the area will probably be going nuts. You'll hopefully notice, too.

Stickshift—Pressing the joystick action button brings up the stickshift. To shift into a higher gear (upshift), move the joystick up; to shift into a lower gear (downshift), move the joystick down.

Fuzzbuster or radar detector—When this baby starts to beep, your car is being tracked by radar. Slow down to the speed limit until it stops beeping, or you'll get a ticket.

Rearview Mirror—For those drivers who like to know what's behind them only.

The biggest technical challenge faced by the Test Drive is gear shifting. We recommended starting out on a car with a slotted, rather than a round, stick-shift casing, since it's much easier to keep visual track of what gear you're in.

Remember, there are highway police out there, so keep an eye on the radar detector (Fuzzbuster) and slow down when being tracked. Once you hear the sirens, however, and a police car becomes visible in the rearview mirror, a "You'll-never-take-me-

alive-coppers!" attitude is recommended. Make like a bakery truck and haul buns to the next gas station. But if the police car gets in front of you, stop. If you hit a cop car, the game ends with an automatic score of "zero."

Points are awarded for maintaining a high average speed. The higher the average speed, the better the score for that round. The trip up the mountain is broken into five rounds by gas station pit stops.

The first round is fairly straightforward. There's little traffic and the sharp turns are kept to a minimum. The second round sends the player up against a series of sharp turns, one after the other, in different directions. In Round 3, the other vehicles start to become a real hassle. They'll even try to sandwich you: After passing a truck and a car, you come out of the turn and discover your vehicle is grill-to-grill with an oncoming truck. Round 4 mixes more turns and more vehicles, and the last leg of the trip starts off with a killer left turn, then gets tougher! Stick with it, though, and the dealer may be impressed enough to let you keep the car when you reach the dealership atop the mountain.

Now for a few general tips:

—Don't sweat the small stuff—pigeon poop, potholes and puddles. After dozens of trips we have yet to experience any negative impact from any of those above. Heck, there's no reason to watch out for potholes, as the game constantly advises, since you can't see them until they're right in front of you anyway.

—Make note of the speed limit each time you pass a sign. If the Fuzzbuster starts buzzing, you'll want to know what speed to drop down to.

—If you don't think you're going to be able to make a turn, slow down for heaven's sake!

—Trust your Fuzzbuster; it's your best friend.

—After braking, downshift if you're in high gear. Otherwise, it will take too long to get the RPMs back up to speed.

—Slow on curves or at the bottom of hills or anywhere you can't see oncoming traffic.

—When behind the wheel, minimize turns and keep your eye fixed on the white (or, in this case, yellow) line. Don't worry about the scenery. Just follow the lines to the top of the mountain!

—Bill Kunkel & Arnie Katz

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Score Big at Blockbuster

Mindscape

Versions: Amiga, Atari ST, Commodore 64/128, IBM

Blockbuster is a state-of-the-art variant on the old "breakout" games, similar to *Arkanoid*, with a brilliant twist: Certain bricks contain tokens which, if caught by the player's paddle, can be exchanged for power icons. There are nine such power icons:

#1—Slows down the ball(s) in play, and may be used repeatedly. This power should be immediately invoked at the start of play. If a ball isn't slowed down, it will continue to gain momentum, and a speeding ball not only requires greater skill to catch, but cuts down on the player's free time, which is the time not spent catching the ball. Free time is used to catch falling tokens.

After cashing in tokens to buy a power, the player should invoke this icon with the next available token.

#2—Magnetizes the paddle so that it traps and briefly captures the ball instead of deflecting it. This is perfect for sharpshooting (eliminating the BONUS bricks in the correct order or taking out hard-to-hit bricks). It also extends the available free time since the player can hold the ball while collecting any falling tokens.

#3—Turns one ball into three. This power should be invoked when the ball is trapped in a corner by a clump of bricks and the two newly created balls are unlikely to escape. This way, when the balls eventually do escape, it will be one at a time.

In case you were wondering: no, it's not possible to invoke this power when there is more than one ball on the screen. Three balls at a time is the maximum.

#4—Increases paddle size. A basic power, valuable for screens with low-lying bricks.

#5—Makes invisible bricks appear. This should be used very selectively and almost

never on the first 15 to 20 levels. On some of the higher screens, however, the playfield is littered with invisible, indestructible bricks which simply must be illuminated lest they make the ball's trajectory impossible to track.

#6—Turns paddle into a machine gun. The best of the mid-level powers. The more bricks remaining on the screen when this power is invoked the better, since this is the power for quick, mass elimination of bricks. But beware of indestructible bricks; they deflect machine-gun fire back the way it came!



#7—Turns paddle into a cannonball. This should be used very selectively and is great for taking out that final cluster of bricks. The player invokes the power, and then waits for the right moment to hit the detonator.

#8—Turns paddle into a rocket launcher. Three rockets travel straight up and will eliminate any bricks they touch. Obviously, when there are three vertical columns of bricks waiting to be obliterated, this is the baby that can do it!

#9—Turns the ball into a Superball that cuts through bricks rather than bouncing off them. The ultimate weapon!

Knowing where and when to invoke powers is the crux of this game, but hand/eye coordination is also required. The ST and Amiga versions play the best because the mouse

is a much more compatible control device than a joystick, which doesn't work well on paddle games (in fact, the old Atari 2600 VCS used to come with both joysticks and paddle controllers because of this). The mouse lets users precisely position the paddle and take advantage of its multidirectional deflecting surface.

Most of the basics from past wall-bashing games apply here as well. The player should try to penetrate the wall from the left or right side of the screen. (I suspect the player's choice depends on whether they are left- or right-side brain dominant; right handers mostly play to the right.) The object is for the ball to rattle around the top of the screen after clearing a path through the wall. Of course, in a game with over 50 different screens, there are exceptions to every rule.

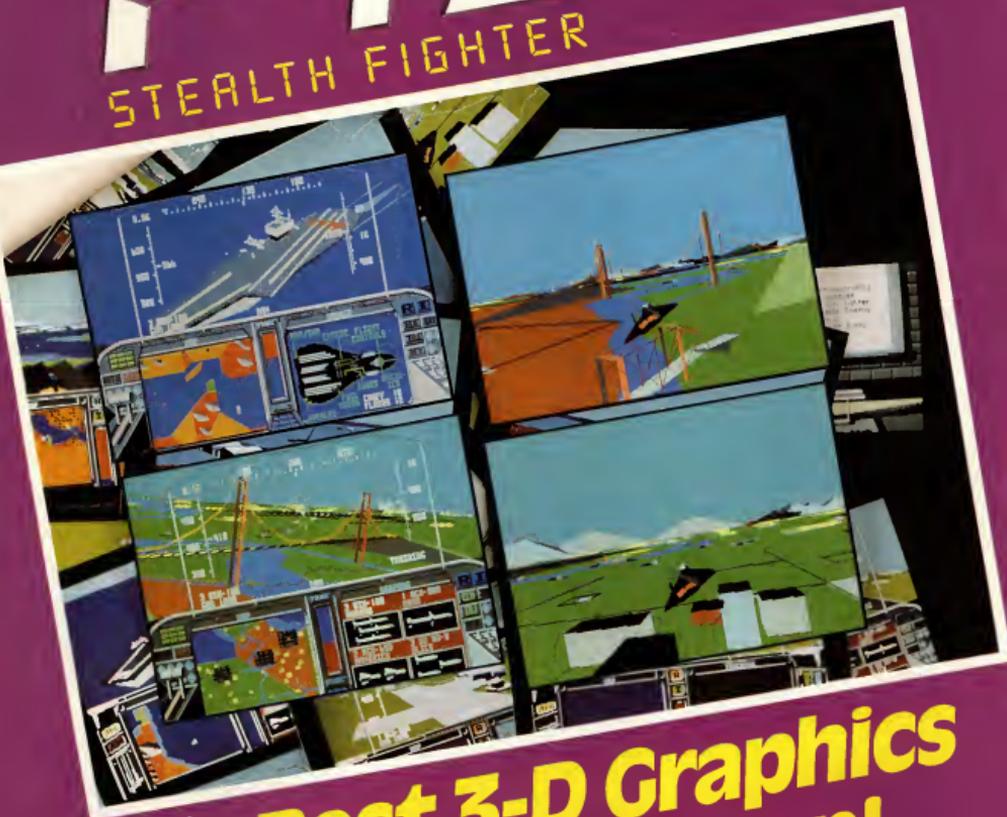
The player can gain bonus balls on certain screens by eliminating the bricks with the letters B-O-N-U-S in the appropriate order. There are screens, however, where these bricks have been placed so diabolically that the player should abandon all hope of ever picking off the bricks in the right combination. (Screen 23 is a perfect example of this. We have won bonus balls on this rack, but never when we were trying to.)

Blockbuster employs a series of passwords to allow skilled players access to the higher screens. When a player works through ten screens, he is rewarded with the first of seven passwords, with subsequent passwords awarded as the player progresses. Since very few of you will ever play well enough to cheat by all these honestly, we thought we'd come and reveal them to you here: GOLD, FISH, WALL, PLUS, HEAD, FORK and ROAD.

—by Bill Kunkel and Arnie Katz

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Rocket Ranger

Cinemaware

Versions: Amiga (\$49.95), Commodore 64 (\$34.95), IBM PC (\$49.95), Apple IIGS (\$49.95)

The year is 1940, and Nazi Germany is marching across Europe. Suddenly, a rocket pack, radium pistol, and a bullet-shaped metal helmet materialize on your desk. A letter explains that the equipment is a gift from rebels who live in a future in which the victorious Nazi Reich grinds humanity into the dust. You must use this marvelous device to thwart Hitler's foul plans! You are now—the *Rocket Ranger!*

In Cinemaware's latest action-adventure, the player becomes the hero in the flying suit who searches for pieces of a rocket capable of reaching the moon, as well as caches of Lunarium to power the rocket and its rocket suit. Located at Ft. Dix, Rocket Ranger's U.S. headquarters, is the laboratory for assembling the rocket ship which ultimately takes the Rocket Ranger to the moon to stop the nefarious goose-steppers.

It is impossible to use the suit without the Secret Decoder Wheel. The player finds his or her current location on the circumference of the wheel and looks in the window to determine the number of units of Lunarium needed to fly between the two points. The player must transfer the exact amount needed to make the journey to the

A rocket pack, radium pistol and a helmet are all that protect *Rocket Ranger* in his quest to thwart Hitler's dastardly doings.



rocket suit. Loading the wrong amount of fuel causes the Rocket Ranger to either go to the wrong country or crash when the fuel tank reads "empty."

The Secret Decoder Wheel doubles as the anti-piracy shield, since it cannot be photocopied. Cinemaware deserves credit for developing a copy protection system that does the job without torturing disk drives or compromising the spirit of the game itself. What could be more appropriate than a Secret Decoder Wheel in an adventure serial?

The action games embedded in *Rocket Ranger* are beautifully illustrated and, as in previous Cinemaware titles, moderately easy to learn. Unfortunately, most are also a little on the simple side by current standards. Once the player figures out the basic strategy, the challenge ebbs quickly.

The fist-fighting contest, one of *Rocket Ranger's* best, shows both the strengths and limitations of this Kellyn Beck creation. The animation and artwork set new standards for hand-to-hand battling, and the sounds of

the struggle are frighteningly realistic. It is hard to see how these aspects could be any better than they already are, in light of hardware capabilities.

Unfortunately, there isn't much strategy. The *Rocket Ranger* can punch to the head or the body, but that's about it. Executive Producers Bob and Phyllis Jacob should consider including a smaller number of more sophisticated actions in future Cinemaware titles to address this shortcoming.

Rob Landeros, the Art Director, deftly manipulates movie serial images to create a believable and appropriate setting for the derring-do. The strategic movement screen is particularly noteworthy. A close-up of a flying *Rocket Ranger* floats above a drawing of a globe. A line of flags on the map traces the hero's actual route. A dozen movies have used this gimmick, but no one else had thought to use it in a computer game.

Despite the minor criticisms, *Rocket Ranger* belongs on the "must buy" list. Only you can prevent the Thousand Year Reich.

—Arnie Katz

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World Class Leader Board

Access Software

Versions: Amiga (\$49.95), Apple II (\$39.95), Atari ST (\$49.95), Commodore64 (\$39.95), IBM (\$49.95)

You may have noticed that golf simulations are almost as plentiful on software shelves these days as role-playing adventures, combat flight simulators and greeting card makers. It's tough to stand out in such a crowd, but Bruce and Roger Carver's *World Class Leader Board* manages to do just that. While there may be prettier and/or more sophisticated golf programs, none are easier to play or more likely to appeal to the typical computerist.

WCLB comes with four courses: St. Andrews, Doral, Cypress Creek and the non-existent Gauntlet Country Club (the ultimate test for the computer golf fanatic), in addition to a Course Editor which allows users to fashion their own. After selecting a course (Cypress Creek being the default entry), the user enters the number of players (one to four), types their names, sets the difficulty level, chooses a club and starts swinging.

The three difficulty settings are Professional, Amateur and Kids. On the Pro level the simulation includes hooking and slicing, as well as wind effects. The wind is eliminated as a factor on



the Amateur level, while on the Kids setting all three factors are missing.

WCLB breaks up the play-mechanic of the swing (except on putts) into aim, power and snap. The user aims the ball by positioning a small cursor located a few yards in front of the on-screen hacker. Pressing the action button, or the corresponding keyboard entry, initiates the swing with successive presses determining the swing's power and snap. A pair of bar-style gauges monitor the power of the swing and its snap—the point at which the golfer breaks



The essence of golfing is captured in Access Software's *World Class Leader Board*; version shown is the Atari ST.

his wrists—causing the ball to hook (veer left) or slice (veer right).

Once the ball reaches the green, the program automatically selects the putter and an alternative play-mechanic is used. A straight power indicator replaces the power/snap gauges and an on-screen slope indicator appears, showing the green's tilt, or break. A similar device is employed in Professional level games to show wind direction.

WCLB has great visual appeal. The user's surrogate golfer stands in the foreground in a series of realistically portrayed

course graphics. Each new position is speedily redrawn from background to foreground with the hole seen first and any obstacles between the golfer and that hole filled in afterwards. No matter how heavily obscured by obstacles, the user always knows exactly where the hole is and what the ball must pass through, or over, in order to get there.

World Class Leader Board captures the essence of the golfing experience without confusing non-golfers. The excellent instruction booklet helps keep things simple with easy-to-understand explanations of everything from disk loading to strategy. The game is streamlined without giving short shrift to any element of the golfing experience.

WCLB Tournament Disks containing additional courses are also scheduled, for computer duffers with wanderlust.

—Bill Kunkel

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Battle Chess

Interplay Productions

Versions: Amiga (\$49.95), IBM (\$49.95)

It takes guts to publish another computer chess program, barely a year after *Chessmaster 2000* (Software Toolworks) revolutionized the market. Brian Fargo, president of Interplay Productions, must have the nerve of a riverboat gambler. He not only decided to issue *Battle Chess*, but he made it the first title under his new label, a Mediagenic affiliate.

Interplay figures to collect a big payoff on this bet, because *Battle Chess* is the next step beyond all existing chess programs. It has everything chess players want, with art and audio beyond their wildest dreams; and it honors all the official rules of chess to the letter, so it is perfectly interchangeable with any existing computer or conventional chess set. The presentation makes a world of difference.

People always say that "chess is like a 64-square war." *Battle Chess* is the first computer program that turns this imagery into vivid reality. Each piece is expressively animated, so that even the lowly pawns exude personality. The Queen undulates seductively as she glides to the destination square. Similarly, the Rook turns into a rock



monster—not unlike Marvel Comics' Thing, from the *Fantastic Four* comic—who advances toward the new position with tremendous, thumping steps.

If the movement routines are impressive, the capture sequences are mind-blasting. When one piece conquers another, a canned animation shows the confrontation. The pieces move to opposite corners of the square under contention, and then the winner expunges the loser in some appropriate flashy way. The Knight uses his weapon, the Queen summons eldritch magic, and the Rook crushes foes in his stony



Battle Chess lets you display the board in 2-D format (top left), but the contest can be spiced up when shown in 3-D mode (bottom). Control of the squares follows standard chess rules but adds excitement with lively combat sequences (top right).

embrace.

It is important to note that the outcome of a fight is completely dependent on which piece is supposed to take the square. Unlike *Archon* (Electronic Arts), the battle is not interactive. The animations in *Battle Chess* illustrate the results of a move, but do not affect it in any way.

Todd J. Camasta and Bruce Schlickbernd drew the detailed pieces and the board, all seen in two-thirds perspective to give the illusion of depth. If the graphics become too distracting, a menu choice substitutes a two-dimensional rendering from straight overhead.

The illustrations are so spectacular that it is possible to overlook Kurt Heiden's aural effects: *Battle Chess* has more than 200K of sound. The heavy audio track gives the pieces on the board a solidity they could never approach if they moved and fought in silence.

As previously mentioned, *Battle Chess* has all the options and features of a top-drawer computer chess program. It allows the user to set up specific board positions, take back moves, get strategic advice and even play another human player over a modem. And when there are no human opponents available, the program can direct the other side at any of nine skill levels.

A totally committed chess fanatic might find all the audiovisual hoopla too distracting, but *Battle Chess* is the best choice for the casual player. It's also the perfect program to show people who've given up chess because "nothing happens."

—Joyce Worley & Bill Kunkel

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Heroes of the Lance

Strategic Simulations

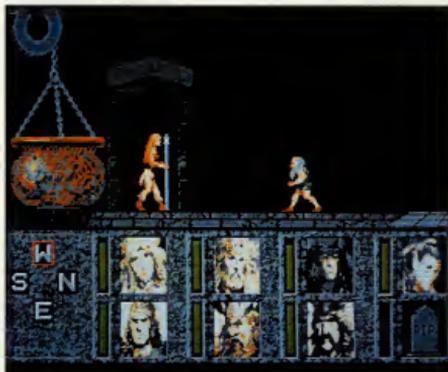
Versions: Apple II (\$39.95), Amiga (\$49.95), Atari ST (\$49.95), Commodore 64 (\$39.95), IBM (\$49.95)

The package for SSI's *Heroes of the Lance* contains no fewer than three trademarked names. Trumpets blare the fact that this is an "Official Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Computer Product" and part of the biggest licensing tie-in of the year. Then there's the title, which you already know. Finally, we are told this is "A Dragonlance (TM) Action Game." Got all that?

The Dragonlance (TM) games theoretically stress the action and, specifically, the combat elements of the AD&D universe. The concept for this series was developed by the SSI braintrust, as were all the AD&D games, and then farmed out to independent contractors like U.S. Gold (which is, ironically, a British company), who produced this game under the direction of Laurence H. Miller.

Heroes of the Lance uses the standard trappings of fantasy role-playing games, but subordinates everything to combat and spellcasting. As a result, you get one of the most uninspired action games this side of *Super Mario Brothers* (TM).

The party blunders about in the ruins of the temple called "Xak Tsaroth" in order to retrieve "the precious Disks of Mishakal" and accumulate "experience



First-rate graphics are the high point of Strategic Simulations' *Heroes of the Lance*, whose eight party members are shown at the screen bottom.

points," otherwise known as a good score. Although there are eight members in the party, only one is seen on-screen at a time. All eight are depicted in a series of small windows beneath the main display. When a character buys the farm, their picture is replaced by a tombstone.

Heroes of the Lance uses a straight side view of the action with characters directed by joystick or keyboard. The player's party contains eight members, each one rated for strength,

intelligence, wisdom, constitution, dexterity, and charisma. Now perhaps I'm dense, but what difference does a character's charisma make in an action game? Does an Undead back away from a character because, well gosh, he's just so darn likeable?

Heroes of the Lance must ultimately stand or fall based on its combat and, unfortunately, it falls. The combat (whether engaged via joystick or keyboard) is stiff, inadequately depicted and ultimately boring. The adven-

turers don't respond sharply to commands and when a blow is struck, it is difficult to tell if it even landed since most monsters show no signs of having been wounded until they actually succumb. The creators would have done much better to check out how the swordfighting was accomplished in Cinemaware's *Defender of the Crown*, which has a much more satisfying action-game feel.

The graphics are first-rate, however, even if the play values aren't. Each of the eight adventurers is distinctively delineated as are the numerous hostiles the party encounters, including zombies, giant spiders, trolls, wraiths and several fire-breathing dragons.

The real problem here seems to be SSI's traditional unfamiliarity with the action-game genre. One gets the feeling the publisher didn't really want a full-blooded action game.

So instead, they mucked up what should have been a slickly animated combat game by bogging it down with magic, sleep spells and charisma ratings.

—Bill Kunkel

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Infocomics

Lane Mastadon vs. The Blubbermen
Gamma Force in Pit of a Thousand Screams
ZorkQuest—Assault on Egreth Castle

Infocom

Versions: Apple II (\$12.00), Commodore 64 (\$12.00), IBM (\$12.00)

Infocomics, a joint project by Tom (*Make Millions*) Snyder and Infocom, is a new kind of computer entertainment. At first blush, the tag "computer comic book" leaps to mind, but Infocomics are really more like interactive mini-movies.

Whatever they are, and despite the confusing presence of *Zorkquest* as one of the titles, these surely are not games. There is no "player" here. Instead, there is a reader/viewer, who watches a story unfold on what amounts to a super-sophisticated VCR which not only fast-forwards and rewinds on command, but also allows the user some choice in which plotlines he or she wishes to follow.

Infocomics employ simple, yet effective, artwork and computer trickery to produce clever animations and cinematic camera perspectives to visually invigorate the stories. In *Lane Mastadon vs. The Blubberman*, for example, the "camera" moves in tight on a planet, then pulls back to reveal that the planet is now part of a picture on the front page of a newspaper being held in a character's hands.

Infocomics were designed to be accessible to users in a way that computer software has never been before. There are no complicated instructions; there

Infocom puts you in control of the characters in *Infocomics*, a computerized, interactive comic book.



Lane Mastadon vs. The Blubberman (left) and *Zorkquest* (above) as they appear on the IBM PC.

are barely any instructions at all, in fact, just a single sheet listing the same ten commands which operate all Infocomics on all computers. Users can advance a frame, fast-forward, rewind, pause, set running speed, insert a bookmark or restart the story at any time. At certain pivotal points in the program, the user is offered the option of following an alternative plotline. This interface is absolutely brilliant and, with solid stories and interesting characters, Infocomics could be a real breakthrough product.

The only weaknesses are the stories themselves. While not awful, they are so insignificant that they are barely worth the time it takes to view them, except for the novelty of the experience. This idea won't fly unless Infocom can sell them like comics, with new stories and continuing characters.

Both *Lane Mastadon* and *Pit of a Thousand Screams* are science-fiction, or at least the kind of SF most non-fans assume comprises the bulk of the comic-book universe. Everything is

campy and the villains are all made to look ridiculous rather than frightening.

This kind of silliness will only insult comic-book fans, who will see little resemblance between Infocomics and the real thing. An aged King is zapped back to robust youth by his adventurer daughter, for example, in *Pit of a Thousand Screams*. She says something about the Powers of Balance giving her new powers all the time and, shucks, it sure looks like this is one of them. "Thank you, daughter," responds the King, rather underplaying the significance of the event.

Lane Mastadon is the worst of the three initial entries and *Pit of a Thousand Screams* isn't much better. *Zorkquest*, though a terrible title since it only further confuses the is-it-a-game? issue, is the most traditional as well as the strongest of the three in terms of plot, characterization and artwork.

Infocomics is a wonderful concept. Let's hope that Snyder and Infocom get their act together, though, before that concept is buried under a pile of unpurchased disks.—Bill Kunkel

Infocom
125 Cambridge Park Dr.
Cambridge, MA 02140
(617) 492-6000



Jet

SubLogic

Versions: Atari ST (\$49.95), Amiga (\$49.95), Apple II (\$39.95), Commodore 64 (\$39.95), IBM (\$49.95)

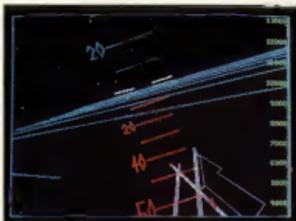
Although the IBM version of *Jet* by Charles Guy has been available since 1985, SubLogic has just gotten around to releasing this air-combat simulator on the 68000-based home computers. These Amiga and ST versions, designed by Chris Green, and developed by Matt Toschlog, Bruce Artwick, Mika Kulas and Green, use elements from the 68000 versions of *Flight Simulator 2* as well as some innovations created for *Radar Raiders*, a never-released Amiga product.

Jet offers workstation-based pilots one of the cleanest, simplest and most attractive jet combat programs around. Users can fly either an F16, which takes off from a standard runway, or an F18, which is launched from a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, on any of eight missions. The program also offers a fascinating option which SubLogic introduced on the 68000 versions of FS2: two-player dogfighting, by modem.

The heart of any flight simulator's control system is its Heads Up Display (HUD), and SubLogic has worked at streamlining the on-screen composition of the HUD since its earliest simulators. The visual display dominates the screen, as it should, with the altimeter, weapons information and instru-

ment controls laid around the edges of the playfield. Jet's system is simplicity itself and should serve as a model for future programs.

The left side of the screen contains the airspeed indicator, a vertically-scrolling gauge that indicates speed in Mach (the speed of sound). Weapons, fuel, throttle, thrust, compass and clock fill the bottom of the screen while the right side of the frame contains the ADF (Automatic Direction Finder), DME



(Distance Measuring Equipment), yoke position and altimeter. The top of the screen features a series of seven warning lights, relating to landing gear, danger indicators and missile targeting.

Jet uses your computer's function keys to invoke a series of secondary visual displays (maps, radar, etc.) which are brought up in overlapping windows. The keyboard is used, in FS2 tradition, to call up alternative viewpoints (cockpit, spotter plane, control tower, tracking and the ever-

popular missile's-eye view).

The user's aircraft is easily flown using the keyboard, mouse and/or joystick in FS2 fashion.

Jet offers an impressive array of weaponry. For dogfights, there are short-range AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles, medium-range AIM-7 Sparrows and old faithful, the M61 machine gun. The AGM-65 Maverick is an air-to-ground missile used in target strikes while the MK-82 Smart Bomb is just that, a bomb, with no propulsion system, limited accuracy but a large hit radius.

Visually, this 68000 version of Jet is the slickest air-combat simulator this reviewer has ever seen, an obvious improvement over even the ST/Amiga versions of FS2. Terrain and ground objects are realistically detailed and shaded, though there are far too few of them.

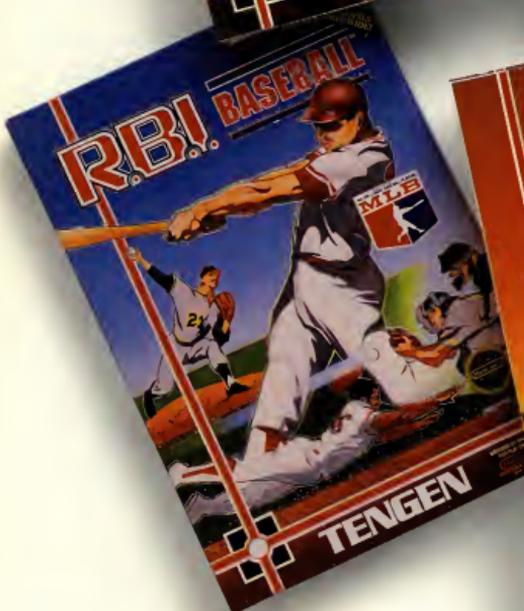
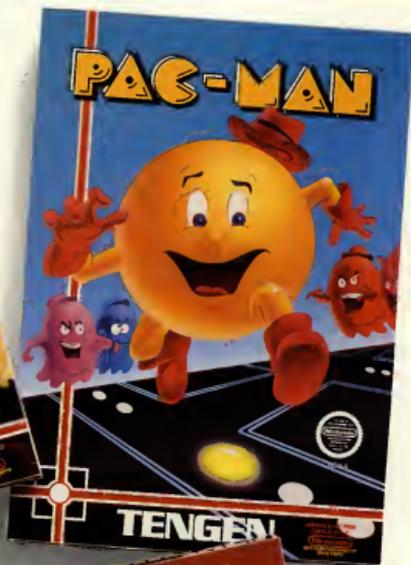
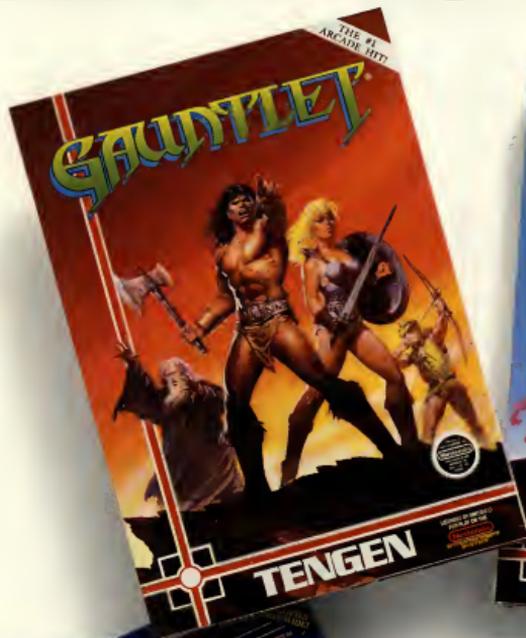
More good news: there are none of those annoying freeze points where the on-screen image goes into gridlock while the next area is loaded into memory.

Jet will interface with all available Scenery Disks, whenever SubLogic produces them for the 68000-based systems.

—Bill Kunkel

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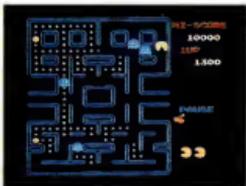
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