

Big Kyle -- LIL PACMAN

by Kyle Snyder

Photos by Craig Pell

A few weeks ago, I was stuck in traffic on the way home. Myself and all the other hapless commuters were trapped in a barely moving train of vehicles, where speeds of 10 mph felt like the Indianapolis 500. I was nearing a shopping center with a K-mart, and desperate for some relief from the futility of the highway, I pulled into the parking lot.

I grabbed the few things I needed for the house (nothing that couldn't have waited a few more days, but hell, at least I wasn't stuck in traffic anymore), and then I head back to the toy section. I guess I never broke out of the little kid mindset that you must check the toy section lest something awesome pass you by. Occasionally, I'll pick up something like my Todd McFarlane designed "Jason Voorhees" figure. Nothing brings out the subtle charms of the Friday the 13th slasher like this work of art, let me tell you.

Anyway, I was wandering through the girl's aisle, and I stopped to chuckle at the Britney Spears dolls. I was envisioning one laying down in horror in front of my

Jason figure. Red food coloring, strange exacto-knife induced gashes, that sort of thing... when my eye caught sight of something that wiped my mind clean of any display of toy violence.

A blue triangular package, with the letters "PAC" in a familiar early 80s font. I grab it, and discover... "From Playskool: **Lil' Pac-Man**. A preschooler's first pretend ELECTRONIC hand-held game." (It says so right on the box!) It has a copyright date of 2000, but despite its recent pedigree, this thing is cool as hell! Basically, it's a bright yellow mock-up of something like a Game Boy, right down to a blue **Pac-Man** "cartridge" sticking up out of the top of it. (The cartridge is not a separate piece, and does not unplug from the unit

The game "screen" is a three by four grid of LEDs. The lowest row of three are yellow lights, all the rest are green. An "overlay" is placed... well... over, these lamps. The green lamps all have pictures of "energized" ghosts (okay, so they light up green instead of blue, I can forgive that), and the yellow lamps have pictures of Pac-Man, mouth facing upwards. The only controls are two oversized blue arrow buttons, one for left, one for right. Pushing either of them when the game is off turns the game on and starts it.

The game actually plays much like an overly simplified **Kaboom!** You control Pac-Man, sliding left and right, to catch the green monsters in his mouth. The monsters "drop" towards Pac-Man from the top row, by consecutively lighting one light after another. If you don't catch a ghost, you lose a turn. Three lost turns and the game is over. There is no scoring, nor do the monsters drop faster as you get better (as least as far as I can tell...) but it features digitized sound effects from the actual coin-op!

When you start a game, the light grid flashes off and on, and plays the start up jingle from the arcade game! Moving Pac from one position to another gives a short second long clip of the "wacka wacka" sound. If you move Pac to one side, (the outline of the maze walls are drawn on the overlay as a frame) and keep pressing the arrow button towards that side, the wacka wacka sound is constant. Catching a ghost gives you the ghost-got-gobbled sound effect, and missing a ghost gives the famous Pac-Man death whimper. The best surprise is when a game is over, all



the ghost lights spaz out, on and off, and it plays the music from the intermission.

I knew I had to have it. It obviously was not in the right spot in the store, so I wandered over the preschool stuff, and never found where it belonged. It also didn't have a price tag on it. But when I brought it up to the register, it rang in at \$7.00(?) That's right, not \$6.99, but \$7.00. Seems to me that K-mart sometimes gives things "double zero" prices when they are on clearance.

The really odd thing, is I can't find this thing on the net anywhere. Nowhere on eBay or Yahoo! auctions, none of the major search engines is producing a picture, not even the Playskool website. It's like it doesn't really exist.

Of course, hen I started to think if other classics could be modified to use the same simple system. Perhaps a **Frogger**, where you hop the green frog back and forth between three positions, to avoid being hit by the red cars driving towards him. Or maybe a Marble Madness style game, where you move a red marble back and forth, away from the advancing blue "marble munchers." The possibilities are endless.

So, comb those K-marts in your home town, and bring **Lil' Pac-Man** home for your young one (or for yourself!). I promise I won't tell, as long as you don't make fun of me for that Jason Voorhees/Britney Spears thing. Sometimes my mind reverts to that of a ten year old (being trapped in traffic does it to me every time!).

