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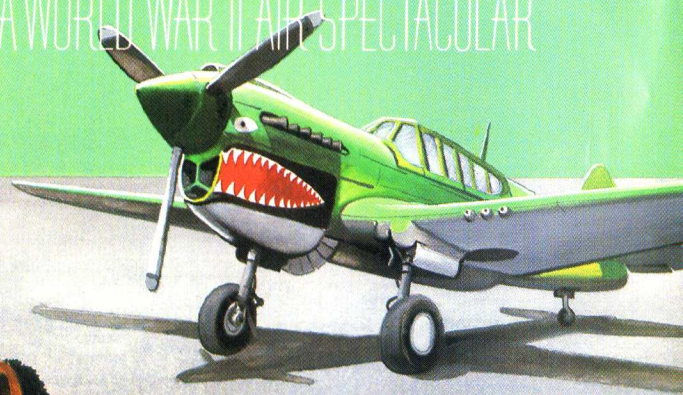
WIN

ATARI'S NEWEST GAME SYSTEM: THE 7800

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VIDEO GAMES

FEATURES

SPECIAL SECTION

DEPARTMENTS

HYPERSPACE

With the recent, but not unexpected, change in ownership of Atari from Warner Communications to Jack Tramiel, the man who brought the world the VIC-20 and Commodore 64, it wasn't a surprise that things would immediately change regarding the company's home video game products and personal computers. The shock, however, was in the announcement, seen in the July 23rd issue of BusinessWeek, that the newly unveiled 7800 ProSystem would be killed before it even had a chance to succeed in the marketplace.

What this means is that the company which gained its fame and fortune on the strength of video games would no longer be an active member of the rapidly depleting home market. (Atari coin-op, by the way, wasn't affected by the sale and remains a part of Warner Communications. For how long this relationship will exist is anyone's guess.)

Obviously, with the Atari exit as well as the demise of Vectrex, not to mention the uncertainty of Intellivision and whether it will ever again reappear, along with Coleco's move to making a go of Adam, the home video game system may have run its course. The fact that no new hardware introductions are envisioned for the future leaves us with a situation where equipment will only get old and worn. What the remaining game cartridge manufacturers will decide to do in the coming months becomes that much more critical for diehard fans.
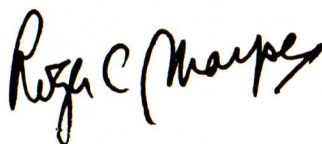
A glimmer of hope does lurk in these shadows of doom. Nintendo, better known for its success in the coin-op world, has an exceptional home game system which currently enjoys about 80% of the marketplace in Japan. Whether the company has any plans to release the system on these shores, is still not known. However, for an idea of the graphics and play action available, just look at Nintendo's Vs. Tennis and the latest, Vs. Baseball, since these arcade machines are based on the home game system technology.

But the forecast isn't total gloom for those seeking some electronic fun. After a brief vacation, Video Games is back with a behind-the-scenes look at this summer's exciting film about video games and battles in outer space, ''The Last Starfighter'' on page 40. In addition, you'll read about Atari's 7800 ProSystem and what might have been, beginning on page 26.

Nolan Bushnell, a legendary force in the coin-op industry, was away from the action for a number of years, until he returned with an innovative game design concept. Last issue we brought you an interview with Bushnell to get his views and visions of arcade games today and tomorrow. This time around, having been purchased by Bally, we report on Sente (page 44) and the potential impact it might have on our leisure time entertainment.

Also in this edition of Video Games, discover who was the best Track & Field player in the United States and which of our readers is the proud owner of a Track & Field arcade game awarded in VG's Going For The Gold Contest. And for those of you who wouldn't mind winning your very own coin-op video game or pinball machine, now's your chance.

The latest video game creation from Mylstar Electronics, The Three Stooges, and Game Plan's newest pinball machine, Attila the Hun (they're worth over $5,000), are the grand prizes in our special double-play trivia contests. There's all this and much more inside Video Games, so enjoy and good luck until next time.

Roger C. Sharpe

Which player is winging his way to victory?

When Joust* flies into your living room you might think you're in the arcade. Because, just like the arcade, this Joust is a duel to the finish. But remember that some jousts are worth more than others. The knight on the right, for example, is about to score 500 points for lancing a red Bounder. But the knight on the left will score three times as many for skewering a blue Shadow Lord. That ought to needle his opponent.

You can spear yourself a lot more points. Especially in the Egg Wave. Pick up as many eggs as you can before they hatch. The first egg's worth 250 points, the second 500, the third 750, and the fourth 1,000 points.

Only Atari makes Joust for the ATARI® 2600™ Game, Sears Video Arcade⁺ systems, and versions exclusively for the ATARI 5200™ SuperSystem and all ATARI Home Computers.

So mount your ostrich and descend on your nearest store. For Joust.

ATARI

Ⓦ A Warner Communications Company

Video Games Take Off Into Outer Space
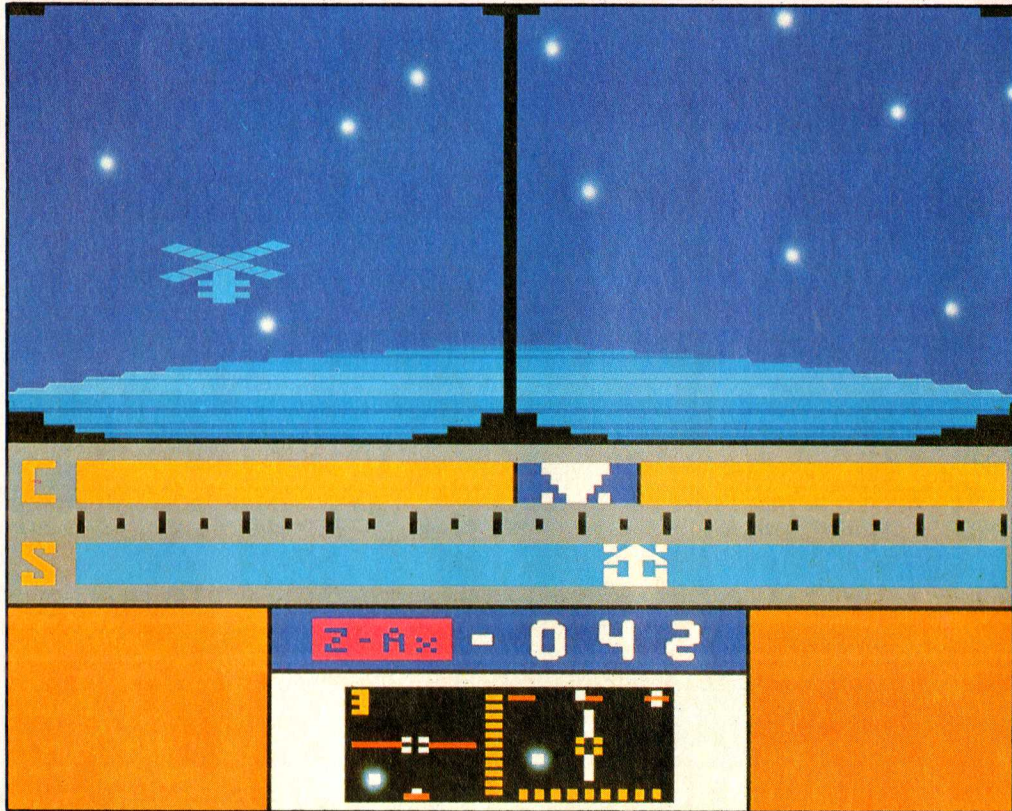
If you're thinking that video games are a mere modern-day wasteland with nothing more to offer than cube-hopping, maze-chasing antics then think again. Because as NASA embarks on a ten-year program to build a manned space station, nearly 750 students from seven San Jose, California schools have already launched on a journey of their very own.

Created by Activision (and developed in association with, and approved by NASA) the educational project about space travel reinforces traditional book learning with hands-on use of the computer. During this two-week course, students learn to "fly" an actual space shuttle mission on the computer using a computer simulation called *Space Shuttle: A Journey into Space*™. The program is designed to familiarize students with all aspects of an orbit in a Space Shuttle. By operating the game and then discusssing it, students are learning about the elements of America's space program.

The simulation, designed by Steve Kitchen for Activision after consultation with NASA recreates a NASA shuttle mission from Florida lift-off to orbit to satellite rendezvous, re-entry and final California landing. "You have to be almost as expert as an astronaut to fly this mission," says Kitchen. Many aspects of an actual shuttle flight are adapted into this format. The student must launch, achieve orbit, rendezvous and dock with satellites, negotiate re-entry and land on the proper glidescope at Edwards Air Force Base. The student must also handle airspeed, pitch and yaw, retro burns and loss of signal at reentry. Rocket boosters fall away with a flash. Cargo-bay doors open and close. Times are scaled down accurately.

Kitchen explains that, "*Space Shuttle* takes space technology out of the stratosphere....That's what I wanted to do, more than anything. To make NASA somehow more personal, more accessible to the average person."

He's certainly achieved that and alot more. This project is succeeding in making learning both creative and fun at the same time, and combines two areas of interest for the young (and young at heart)—computers and space.

—*Patricia Canole*

Tape Measures

Having already achieved a reputation for high quality audio and video cassettes, JVC has turned its attention to the recording and storage needs of computer owners. Under the Dynafile label, the company has introduced two types of cassette data tapes. The DF-10 format offers five minutes per side, while the DF-15 delivers 7½ minutes per side. Both feature high mechanical precision shells which provide positive support to the tape and assures stable tape/head contact for more reliable data transfer. Either can also be used in specialized data recorders or ordinary portable cassette recorders, depending upon your needs and equipment.

—Ellen Cammeyer

Sittin' Pretty

It wasn't that long ago that earth shoes temporarily changed the almost universal notion of what people should wear on their feet. Now, with the computer revolution in full swing, HAG USA is hoping that their Balans Chair might find a receptive audience as well. The eye-catching design features a forward-slanting seat and supportive knee cushion that distributes body weight naturally while helping to align the spine in an ideal sitting position which can reduce pressure on the lower lumbar region.

Interestingly, the concept behind the Balans Chair is one that was conceived by a Norwegian task force of orthopedic surgeons, physical therapists and designers. So, if the chair you've been using to work at your computer has been a pain in the neck (or back), contact HAG USA for more information on their creation at 1052 The Merchandise Mart, Chicago, Ill. 60654, 312-222-1166.

—Ellen Cammeyer
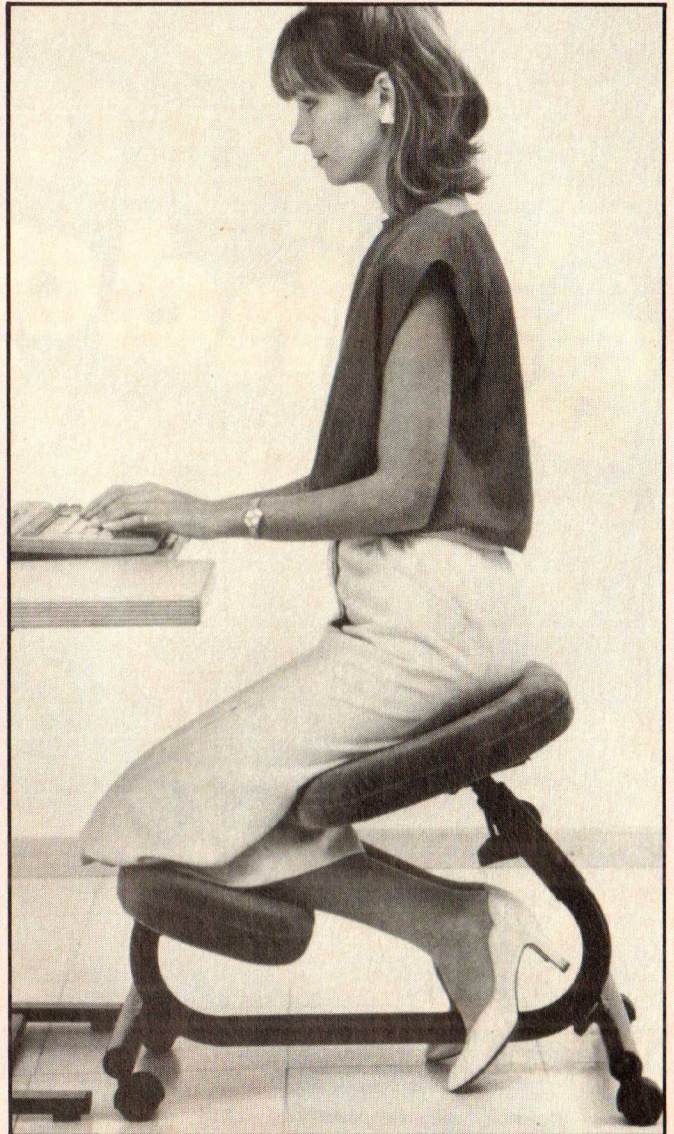
Going Through Changes

Fans of the Atari 5200 have always contended that the system offers great graphics and an impressive library of hit video games. It was with the joysticks that many had problems. Well, now Electra Concepts International, makers of the Triga Command joystick, have come to the rescue with their new Masterplay 5200 Interface.

The handy plug-in unit allows 5200 owners to replace the system's analog joystick with any number of 2600-compatible, digital joysticks. In addition, the Interface features a slide switch so that a digital joystick can be used in either a remote *start* mode or a *fire* model depending upon the game. A second slide switch lets you keep the unit permanently connected to the console so that the analog controller functions, including the use of the keyboard portion by itself, can be accomplished simply and easily. The Masterplay 5200 Interface costs about $20.

—Ellen Cammeyer
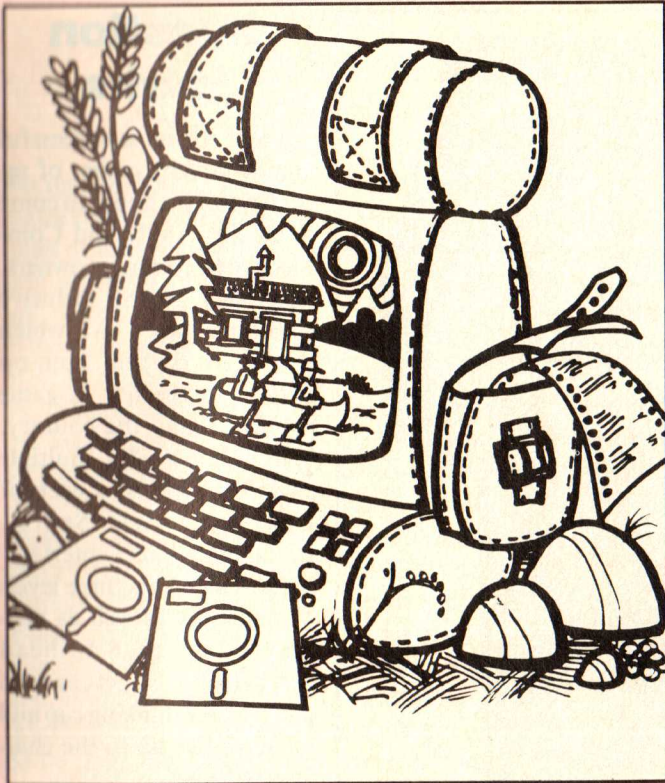
Camping Out

With summer just around the corner, the decision about which camp to go to grows near. For those who want to combine the great outdoors with some computer training, help is on the way in the form of an up-to-date listing of more than 100 different facilities. Verbatim Corporation, in cooperation with the American Camping Association, is now offering a free reference guide entitled, *Camps 'n Computers—A Directory of Summer Computer Camp Instruction in the United States.*

In an effort to make the selection process that much easier, the directory divides the camps into six regions: New England, Middle Atlantic, South, Midwest, Southwest and West. Each entry includes the camp contact, address and telephone number, tuition, length of the sessions and recreational facilities. Also provided are the number and types of computers each camp uses, as well as the computer programs taught and the number of daily hours set aside for instruction.

To get a copy of this handy guide just send a check for $1 (to cover postage and handling) payable to Verbatim, at "Camps 'n Computers," Suite 228, 4966 El Camino Real, Los Altos, CA 94022.

—*Ellen Cammeyer*

"Classical" Club for Animation Addicts

Fans of Dragon's Lair and Space Ace and/or anyone who has an interest in animation can now join the Don Bluth Animation Fan Club and subscribe to a quarterly newsletter, Exposure Sheet. Bluth, of course, is the former animator for Walt Disney Studios, and creator of the animated feature, *The Secret of NIMH*, who rocked the coin-op world last year as the talent behind Dirk the Daring.

Members of the club receive a membership card, strip of 25mm film from *The Secret of NIMH*, an autographed photo of Bluth and fellow animators Gary Goldman and John Pomeroy, an 8x10 still from a Don Bluth production, and a one-year subscription to *Exposure Sheet*. The full-color newsletter contains articles on animation techniques, history, and other features.

Bluth is a proponent of so-called "classical" animation, a painstakingly slow and expensive form of animation having a depth and richness of movement, color, and background art not found in Saturday morning television. Bluth, Goldman, and Pomeroy are currently working on their third game for Cinematronics/Magicom, a sequel to Dragon's Lair called, appropriately enough, Dragon's Lair II.

A one-year membership in the Club costs $10. To join, or for additional information contact the Don Bluth Animation Fan Club at Post Office Box 398, Tarzana, California 91356.

—*Jim Gorzelany*

Question Marks

One of the most successful arcade novelty games of recent vintage is about to come home for Apple and Commodore 64 computer owners. Epyx has gained exclusive rights to Exidy's Fax, which has been putting coin-op players to the test in game rooms around the country. With almost 900 multiple choice questions in each of four categories: Sports, trivia, history and entertainment, Fax offers three levels of difficulty as well as one-player or head-to-head competition. So get ready to put on your thinking cap and see if you're up to the challenge of Fax.

—Ellen Cammeyer

Dialing For Dollars

Radio stations all over the United States will soon be featuring a new type of radio program, which will be combining live interaction and participation via the telephone into a continuous series of games. It's *GameRadio, America's Audio Arcade,* which has already premiered in Akron, Ohio on WNIR radio. *GameRadio*'s format is similar to a TV game show in that people compete against each other in games for prizes. as many as six people at once can participate. the unique part is that contestants never have to leave their home ot join in the fun. Just pick up the phone and dial into the local radio station carrying *GameRadio*.

Featured on this show are a variety of unique and everyday games which have been modified for play over the radio. The four main categories of games are: 1) Word games (definitions, spelling), 2) Card games, 3) Fact (information) questions, and 4) Games of luck (such as slot machine games). These games are rotated in different sequences throughout the show so that each is different and the listener never knows what game will be next. As for prizes, they range from dinner for two to computer equipment and more.

Presently, *GameRadio* is broadcast daily in five hour shows in Akron, Ohio, but its expansion to a 24 hour show is planned for the future. Market research performed by WNIR shows an immediate audience acceptance accompanied by a substantial increase in listeners since its debut in February. Bill Klaus, National Marketing Director of Media-Com, Inc. feels, "*GameRadio, America's*

Audio Arcade is the answer to many AM and FM programming needs, especially for AM stations who have been abandoned for their FM music counterparts. The vicarious involvement of listeners makes *GameRadio, America's Audio Arcade* a foreground format with all the positive benefits of attentive listenership."

For more information call Bill Klaus, (216) 673-2323

—Melinda Glass

GAMERADIO™
AMERICA'S AUDIO ARCADE

Back In The Picture

At one time Mattel played a major role in shaping the fortunes of the hand-held explosion which rapidly led to the toy company's involvement in the still infant development of a home video game industry. Although lagging behind the introduction of Atari's VCS and other early systems, Intellivision, when it was released, was heralded for its exceptional graphics and challenging sports' cartridges. But an attempt to launch a master keyboard unit, which would have added revolutionary computing power at the time to the basic game system, never materialized and Intellivision suffered a substantial setback in terms of product development and direction.

Then ColecoVision arrived on the scene and with it came the recognition that adaptations of arcade games could have an appreciable impact in the already glutted marketplace. Unfortunately, Mattel and Intellivision failed to take advantage of this available resource and, instead, served up an array of titles which didn't have instantly familiar identities or names.

This factor alone tended to diminish the response to an updated Intellivision II, which was really too little, too late. Even the many third party software manufacturer, except for Imagic, turned their creative energies elsewhere as Mattel tried to regroup and salvage some piece of the video game pie. There was the premature announcement of an Intellivision III which, wisely, never made it beyond a trade convention display. And then came the ill-fated Aquarius personal computer that plunged Mattel into even greater turmoil.

The rise and subsequent fall of Mattel Electronics offers some telling insights into the brief, and turbulent, history of the home video game phenomenon. It is a story filled with missed opportunities and a business philosophy that never really grasped the essence of what the public wanted or needed at any time.

But still and all, just as video games have managed to survive, so too has Intellivision risen from the ashes with new leadership and a commitment to the future. Terrence E. Valeski, a former Mattel marketing executive, and a group of New York investors have purchased all of the company's video game inventory, including parts, as well as the rights to all new games still in development.

The game plan for the recently formed Intellivision, Inc. is to release Hover Force 3-D, a bomber mission cart that uses special 3-D glasses and World Series Major League Baseball. The company is also readying games for the 2600 and 5200 systems as well as software for Apple and IBM computers. In addition, Intellivision IIs will continue to be available along wih a companion keyboard that enables the system to be used as a full-fledged computer.

—*Roger C. Sharpe*

Getting Graphic

More and more computer operation is moving away from the rigid confines of conventional keyboard control. Instead, a new generation of peripherals have begun to appear including light pens, touch screens, mice and graphic tablets. One of the latest entries is the Animation Station from Suncom.

A touch sensitive graphics tablet computer cursor controller, the new model features side mounted dual left or right hand function buttons and an ergonometrically designed housing. The result is a touch sensor surface that has been built to the same rectangular proportions as a standard home television set.

Packaged with its own graphics utility program, the Animation Station is available for use with the IBM PCjr, Commodore 64, Apple, Atari and Coleco ADAM personal computer systems. In addition, Suncom is currently developing a full line of entertainment and applications software to take advantage of the graphic tablet's capabilities.

—*Ellen Cammeyer*

Double Speak

A Matter of Opinion

I am writing to protest some of the incorrect statements and claims made in your recent highly inflammatory review of the Coleco ADAM. I realize that your report is based on an early production unit and that the stated problems may have been a reality at that time.

The most amazing thing was the load time for the Buck Rogers SuperGame. I did own an early ADAM which had some problems (not connected with the data drive) and even that one had nothing near the load time of the computer you tested. I timed the load time just prior to typing this letter, and from reset to menu selections took 51 seconds, a far cry from the 3 minute actual to 6 minute over-reaction times stated in your article. In documented tests by a leading consumer magazine, the data drives performed within Coleco's claims; they are slower than a disk drive, but considerably faster and more convenient than a conventional tape drive.

As far as the digital data packs themselves are concerned, I feel that it is extremely unfair to criticize Coleco for not allowing the use of conventional cassette tapes. The data packs are specially designed for their intended use; they are certified error-free and are designed to run *and* transfer data at a much higher rate of speed than a conventional tape. While you're at it, why don't you criticize other computers for requiring expensive floppy diskettes when mass data could be achieved by using cheaper conventional cassettes? The same misguided logic would apply.

Concerning your criticisms of the Adam as a gaming machine, how can what is basically a ColecoVision unit with vastly expanded memory storage be a poor gaming machine? The author's comments indicate that he is not a ColecoVision fan; nonetheless, many would agree that the ColecoVision (hence, the ADAM) is one of the best home game units available. To dismiss the ADAM as a poor gaming machine simply because you dislike one game seems to me to be quite irresponsible.

Finally, I refer to your criticisms of the printer. Indeed, the SmartWRITER printer is slow—by comparison to poorer quality dot matrix printers, or to office-type letter-quality printers costing as much or more than the entire ADAM system. Compare it instead to something more in striking distance as far as price is concerned. One of the few letter-quality printers costing less than the ADAM is an Atari for about $300. It has a printing speed of about 12 cps, and in timed tests on the same letter, it took slightly longer than the ADAM's, due to a lack of bidirectional printing ability. I have seen the output of this Atari printer; the lines are so uneven that reading something printed by it could get you seasick. Within the price parameters the ADAM falls into, the SmartWRITER printer is quite competitive.

Further criticisms of the printer involved the transport cable. It is really no different than what I've seen in most inexpensive and some more expensive printers. And finally, the noise tirade. Yes, the printer is noisy. This is a common complaint issued by magazine reviewers, whoa re experienced with high-priced office machines. The unjaded ADAM owner adapts to the noise quickly. You really showed your misguided point of view with your comments about an office full of deaf people. This is really a ridiculous comparison, since the ADAM was in no way designed or intended for office use. You keep striving to compare the ADAM to systems far more expensive than it is; do the same to a comparably priced Commodore or Atari system, and it too will earn your unwarranted scorn.

I admit that it took 2 returns to get a bug-free ADAM. Fortunately, the manager of the store told me that the latest shipment of ADAMs has had all the bugs corrected. He also stated that his store also has a high rate of exchange on the Commodore 64, so Coleco and the ADAM should not be singled out for early production problems. These problems were very quickly rectified, which reassures me of Coleco's commitment to the ADAM.

In closing, let me say that, in my opinion, the ADAM stacks up very well when compared to other computer systems in its price range. It is no IBM PC or Macintosh; it was not intended to be, nor does it cost even a third what a comparably equipped system for either of these mega-buck wonders would. Some journalists seem to have decided to crucify the ADAM based on early production problems; my later production unit performs flawlessly and it has improved documentation. I only hope that your premature condemnation doesn't scare too many potential customers away from what could be the perfect computer for them. I would hate for Coleco to be forced to discontinue this versatile system.

Douglas S. Raeburn
Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin

Boy, you really did a job on Coleco's ADAM!

Tell your reviewer, Mark Brownstein, that Coleco will fix his computer and pay the shipping costs both ways. The machine has problems, granted, but it seems Mr. Brownstein missed them all. As one case in point, I do underline on mine *all* the time.

What does he expect for $750?

I've had mine for months and it has never missed a beat. Centering a line is easy but you have to be smarter than the machine.

I'm a graduate student using ADAM for my research writing. I don't know what I though I was doing when I bought a copy of your magazine. You don't get your facts straight, so I won't make the same mistake again. I will, however, use your magazine as a topic in one of my classes. Also, buy your reviewer a stopwatch.

Harry L. McDonald
Charleston, Illinois

First, let me congratulate you for having the good fortune of getting a working ADAM. If you've been a regular reader of this magazine, you would know that few other writers were as encouraged as I was by the announced ADAM system.

At Video Games *we would like you to be among the first to know of a good system, and also among the first to know when one isn't. For this reason we chose to review early production units of ADAM. Since the review was written, Coleco has made some changes to its ADAM. First, the ability to underline is now a part of the operating system. An optional disk drive and CP/M are also on the drawing boards.*

However, a number of what I feel are potential weaknesses still persist—the rejection rate of the ADAM computers is high. Second, the data drives are still too slow. And the printer remains slow and noisy—although the printer obviously works, we still question its reliability, high noise level, and the wisdom of requiring that you turn the printer on in order to play a ColecoVision game.

It would have been much simpler to say that all was well with ADAM, but early experience (by dealers and distributors) has shown otherwise. I'm pleased that your unit works well for you, and that you don't consider the weaknesses mentioned as being disadvantages. However, at this point you are probably

in the clear Minority.

—*Mark Brownstein*

As the happy owner of a ColecoVision ADAM Expansion Module, I take exception to some of the statements Mark Brownstein made in his "review" of the system, including a number of gross inaccuracies.

First, he claims that it took three to four minutes to load Buck Rogers (but "seemed like eight or ten"). I clocked the actual load time at 50 seconds before the title screen came up.

Second, while the printer is indeed noisy, it is no slower than the letter-quality printer Atari offers with their 800XL. In fact, *Consumer Reports* found the ADAM printer was faster. Best of all, the printer truly does work; a number of friends to whom I've shown a sample of the printout were impressed at the quality of the letter and spacing.

Third, you most certainly *can* underline with ADAM.

Finally, he didn't find Buck Rogers Planet of Zoom impressive, stating it had "typical Coleco graphics." Well, I don't know how the rest of us Coleco-Visionaries feel, but I've always found Coleco's graphics pretty spectacular; they're the reason I chose the Coleco-Vision over the Atari 5200 in the first place. And indeed, spectacular they are in Buck Rogers, as is the game play.

In conclusion, Mr. Brownstein admits that the ADAM he reviewed was an early production model; I can't otherwise explain why he had such a tough time storing and retrieving information from the data packs. I will add that I too encountered four or five minor glitches in the work processing program. I called Coleco, and Honeywell replaced the CPU under warranty—in one day! Now ADAM works perfectly!

What disturbs me most of all is that you would run this review even though the author admits he based it on "only a few hours use of the computer, and a far from thorough review of its instruction booklets." I'm sure your readers will agree that this is far from sufficient experience with the machine to be able to write an accurate and impartial appraisal of what looks to me, at any rate, like one hell of a system for $500.

To paraphrase Mr. Brownstein himself, I think that ADAM review was

"something of a mistake." And one I hope you won't repeat if you expect anyone to take your publication seriously.

Jerry Sanzig
New York, New York

Still Number 1!

I'm very glad to see that *Video Games* Magazine is not going the route of other video publications and continues to have a good amount of home cartridge reviews.

It seems as of a fad has swept up everyone else. Sure analysts say that home carts are dead and we'll have to go all home computer if we want to survive.

I believe just the opposite! I've had subscriptions to many other video game magazines that have all gone the 80-90% computer route and as a result my subscriptions to them have been cancelled immediately. I now just browse through the very few cart reviews on the newsstand without buying the copy!

I know that I am not alone in feeling this way. Thank you very much for not abandoning the many thousands of people who still depend on your magazine for valuable information on home cartridges.

Maurice Pennington
Upland, CA

Thanks, you've saved me alot of money. Through the many issues of *Video Games,* your software reviews have helped me distinguish between the hits and misses.

I personally own a variety of "game" systems, including the Atari 2600, Intellivision, ColecoVision, Atari 800 (with tape player and disk drive), VIC-20 and Commodore 64. With the ever-growing availability of software for these machines, I find myself constantly flipping to Computer Corner and Soft Spot for advice.

Again, thanks for magazine and keep up the good work!

Mark Cotone
Farmingdale, New York

Teaching An Old VIC New Tricks

By Perry Greenberg, Lenny Nelson and Dan Persons

At last, a break in the drought of VIC-20 software. There was a time when I despaired of ever seeing another VIC game. Now I'm up to my neck in them. I'll be wading through them in the next few months and giving you glances at the best and worst of the lot.

By now it's no big secret that Commodore has ceased production of the VIC. With the price of a 64 now going for less than VIC's original list price (and rumours afoot that it will drop to $100 by mid-year), trailblazer VIC has been superseded in both price and performance. But there are still a lot of VICs out there, and many more being snapped up at bargain-basement prices that software vendors will not quickly give up releasing titles for it, lest they also give up a sizable chunk of the market. So, if you own a VIC, don't panic, software will be coming for it for quite a while still.

Strangely enough, the VIC finds itself in much the same position as the old Atari 2600 game system. While the industry and many consumers consider it an antique, new innovative software is giving this modest machine a second wind, and letting it do things that few dreamed it was capable of. This is especially true in the first releases of big-guns Atarisoft and Parker Brothers, while smaller independent vendors such as Human Engineered Software and Nufekop continue to make clever use of the VIC's capabilities with original and, more often than not, economical game entries. None of these games, of course, have the graphic and sound qualities of an Atari computer or the 64, but they are so good that the sting of not owning a more powerful machine is considerably reduced.
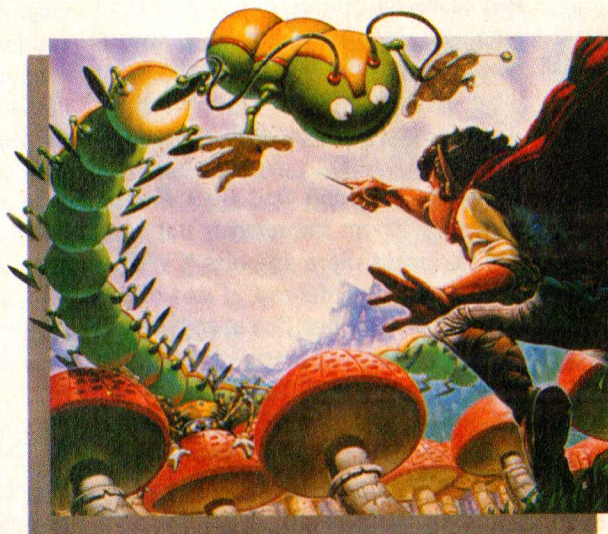
The VIC won't last forever. In this business, memory is strength and the VIC, at 5K, is the proverbial 98 pound weakling. But you need not toss yours out if you cannot afford something better. As we shall see in the following months, this old dog is still capable of a few new tricks. —*Dan Persons*

CENTIPEDE

(Atari Soft/Commodore 64)

Centipede from Atarisoft for the Commodore 64 has to be the quintes-sential example of the old axiom "if you can't beat 'em join 'em." How ironic that it was less than two years ago that Atari was engaged in a lawsuit against Activision when it became the first out-side company to manufacture software for the old 2600. Now it finds itself ambitious-ly involved in the manufac-ture of software for a host of competing companies in-cluding arch rival Com-modore. Atari's decision is a wise one. Considering the ter-rific arcade games they've licensed they'd be nuts not to take ad-vantage of these titles for other systems. And besides, owners of machines other than Atari computers are the benefi-ciaries of their decision.

The Commodore 64 is a terrific game playing machine and what better way to prove this than have one of the best, if not the best, arcade game ever created for it. True Commodore may be slight-ly inferior to the Atari 800 XL's game playing capabilities but this version of Centipede proves it's a close second.

Centipede happens to be my favorite arcade game. So in reviewing this game my job is not so much reporting on the merits of the game, but on the transla-tion of it to the 64. My job is comparable to that of a drama critic reviewing Shakespeare's Hamlet. No critic would ever derogate the play but would have no qualms about commenting on a par-

ticular production.

This particular production of Centipede is a good one comparable to that of the 5200 and miles ahead of the version produced for the 2600. Mushrooms look like mushrooms, spiders look like spiders and scorpions look like scorpions; at least they look like the ones we come to know and love in the arcade version. Centipede was made to play with a track ball and when I received this assignment I joyfully hooked up my Wico Command Control trackball and lo and behold it worked beautifully. In fact my scores were consistently higher than on the 5200. And the higher resolution afforded by the 1702 monitor gave the game a clarity that was superior to that of the 5200 where you're stuck using a TV. There's even a pause mode which can be activated by hitting the space bar. Strategy should be similar to that used in other versions. Which means for higher scores try to create narrow verticle corridors of mushrooms that will force the centipede to be trapped there when it descends. Then position your shooter there and just keep firing—you'll wipe out the critter in an instant.

To sum up this game: it's an excellent translation of the arcade classic and a must for 64 owners who love the game but want to hold on to their quarter!

—P.G.

DONKEY KONG

(Atari Soft/VIC-20 Cart)

It isn't healthy to rile a giant. That's pretty much what Coleco did when they stole Atari's thunder by introducing their ColecoVision game system at the same time as the Atari 5200 and then adding insult to injury by including the exceedingly popular **Donkey Kong** as the "gimme" cart. Now, you know Atari wasn't going to take that lying down. Not only did they obtain the computer rights for Donkey Kong, including the VIC-20 compatible ROM cart that we had a look at, but they took a slap at the much vaunted, "arcade quality" ColecoVision, which could manage only a bare-bones adaption of DK with three screens, by managing to cram into the VIC's meager 5K of memory all four screens, plus an attract mode and all the music and connecting sequences of the original.

You know about Mario the Carpenter, don't you? About how he set out the rescue his girlfriend from the clutches of the giant ape, Donkey Kong, who has carried her up the structure of an unfinished skyscraper. Using your joystick, you must guide Mario across the girders and up the ladders of the building to reach the platform upon which his girl is stranded. The action button is used both to jump over the barrels, firefoxes, and cement piles that Kong uses to prevent you progress, and to leap onto the platforms, elevators and conveyor belts that form the various boards.

The first screen is a simple zig-zag course across a series of girders while dodging barrels that roll back and forth the incliners and down the ladders. Make it to the top and the next screen requires you to collapse the building by running over rivets that are placed in each girder, all the while avoiding the firefoxes that wander at random throughout the structure. A third screen presents you with the challenge of leaping from platforms to elevators and back again, while trying to dodge the firefoxes and the swift, hopping springese sent to do you in. A fourth plunks several cement-carrying conveyors belts within the structure to further complicate your task.

A bonus clock ticks off in the upper right corner, with the remaining points awarded at the end of the round. You start off with three Marios, and get an extra Mario at 7,000 points. You can also use the F5 button to skip ahead to other difficulty levels, but you always have to start with the barrel screen.

When I say that Atari has captured everything from the Nintendo game I wasn't joking around. I mean *everything*. From the "How High Can You Get?" screen to the barrel that's turned into a firefox on the barrel board, to the return of the original screen progression, barrel, rivets, barrel, elevator, rivets, and so on, it's all here. And given the limitations of the VIC-20, its a mighty impressive package. Oh yeah, the graphics are a bit blocky and not as detailed as the original. But that's nothing in comparison with what the designers at Atari have been able to achieve. The joystick control is precise and responsive. The graphics are so good that you can read the fair damsel's cries for help and see Kong's diabolical grin. And game play is remarkably close to the arcade original, although I think Atari may have made the lower levels a bit too easy. Getting through the earlier screens is a breeze, which is nice at first, but a drag later on. Fortunately, the select op-

STAR WARS:

Atari 5200 graphics shown.
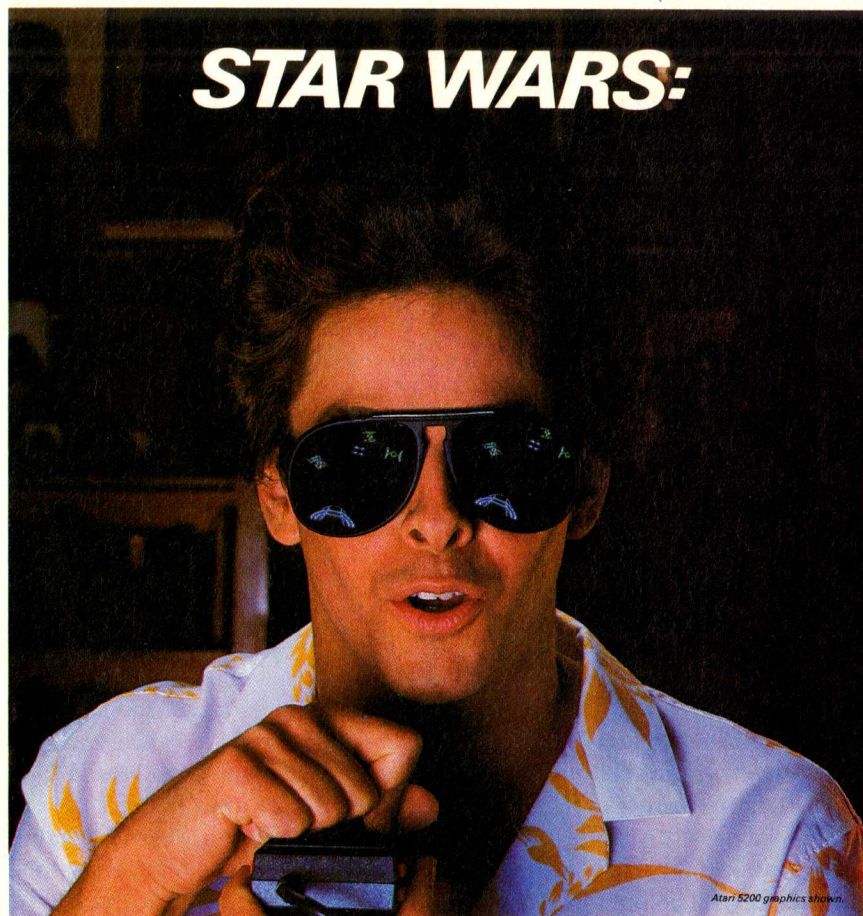
tion lets you start off at a more challenging level. About the only other problem with this Donkey Kong is one that is borrowed from the coin-op original: The most difficult screen, the elevators, is the third board to be played, making the following conveyor screen something of an anti-climax.
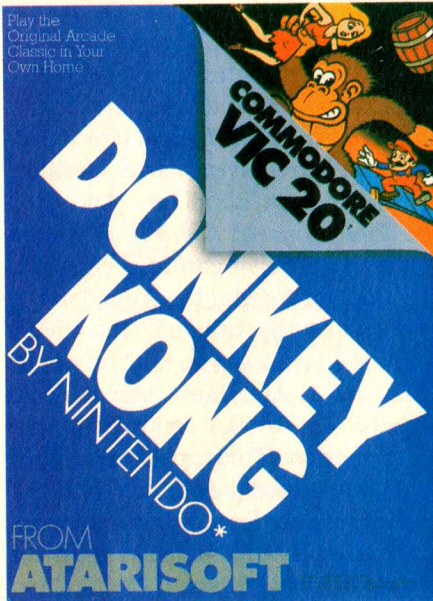
I don't know how Atari did it, but I'm sure glad they did. This elaborate adaptation is probably the most authentic arcade translation available for the VIC. Fans of Donkey Kong who also happen to own Commodore's popular home computer will not be at all disappointed with this version. In fact, this is one time when owners of the VIC can consider themselves ten times luckier than ColecoVision owners. —D.P.

NIGHT MISSION PINBALL
(SubLogic/Atari Disk)

There's a certain amount of artistry that goes into the design of a good pinball machine. To attract a player's attention, and keep the person coming back for more, a pinball game has to be a skillful combination of color, sound, and motion, a fine balance of aesthetics and physics. Under that definition, **Night Mission Pinball**, SubLogic's disk-based simulation for Atari computers, could satisfy the most demanding pinball fanatic.

Night Mision is so accurate, in fact, that I wonder why my editor didn't call Zelmo to give it the once over. I'll give it a try, anyway. Night Mission divides the screen into thirds. The right side serves as the backflash, the colored glass plate on

a real pinball machine that's mean to catch your eye and lure you in. This side also contains the slot into which you drop your "quarters" (I told you it was accurate) by pressing the Q key. To the left are the score counters (up to four can compete at once), along with credit and ball indicators, all of which imitate the look of LED digital displays.

In the center of the screen is the pin table itself. Proportioned to about the same dimensions as a real pinball machine, it contains about all the features any pin fiend could ever want, all skillfully and expertly laid out. At the top right is a bank of five rollovers, labeled N-I-G-H and T. These lead down to the grouping of five large and small thumper bumpers, with a spinner to their left. At the upper left of the board is a U-shaped horseshoe channel that contains another spinner at the left and a kicker at the right. To the left of the horseshoe is a vertical channel with a series of rollovers at the bottom and a set of in-line drop targets up top that are activated by eliminating all of the Night rollovers.

At the bottom right, in a vertical channel just to left of the plunger that starts your ball on its journey, is a kick out hole aimed so that, as the ball emerges from the channel, it will hit the two A-B drop targets just above. When these two targets are hit, along with the two C-D targets that are positioned between the openings of the horseshoe, the bonus multiplier is advanced. A pair of triangular slingshots lead down to the flippers. On the outside of these slingshots are sets of rollovers, one for the right slingshot, three for the left, with a fourth rollover that leads directly to the drain.

Flippers can be activated by using either the action buttons of two joysticks or the Shift and Start keys. The plunger can be adjusted with either the joystick or the keys that represent the less than and greater than signs, and then released by hitting the flipper buttons. You can even nudge the board to either the left or right by hitting any other key on the left or right side of the keyboard. Don't try to beat the daylights out of the machine, though, because the Tilt mechanism of this game is extremely sensitive. You start off with five balls (when was the last time you saw that in an arcade?). No bonus balls are awarded, but there are ample opportunities to earn free games.

I've always enjoyed watching pinball machines. Unfortunately, I'm also one

of those people who has developed the fine skill of shooting the ball off the plunger so that it arcs gracefully across the top of the board, and then plunges straight down the middle of the machine, neatly avoiding any contact with bumpers, kickers, flippers, and etcetera, until it disappears untouched down the drain.
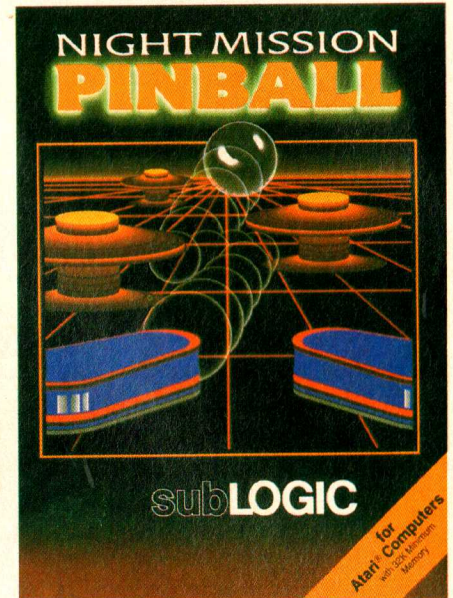
For this I have the privilege of shelling out twenty-five cents? That doesn't happen with Night Mission. On top of ten present skill levels that range from merciful to don't blink, you can also customize the boards to suit your own taste, adjusting a list of 31 parameters that range all the way from the effects of gravity to how long it takes for a new ball to be dispensed, and then save these versions on disk. Even without that, there's a number of beautiful shots available off the flippers, including those in-line drop targets and outside spinner, and even a few chances for miracle saves.

And when you're not busy impressing your friends with your skills at the flippers, you can admire how close designer Bruce Artwick has come to capturing the look, the sound, and the very feel of a modern pinball machine. Were it not for the TV screen, you could swear that this was a real table. The ball moves and rebounds off targets with a convincing reality, while the soundtrack is filled with the raucous explosions, hums and abstract effects favored by pinball gourmets. Mr. Artwick has even gone reality one better by programming in a strobe effect for the ball, so that quick movement of the orb leaves a visible trail behind it. This effect not only makes tracking the ball simpler, but also em-

phasizes the kinetic qualities of the game, making it a lot more fascinating to watch.

There are a couple of kinks in this game, however, both of which pertain to joystick play. The most telling is if you are playing with sticks, nudging the machine requires you to, in normal circumstances, move your hand a considerable distance from the flipper buttons. In a game where reaction time is all, not only does this mean that by the time you reach the keyboard it is usually too late to do anything, but also if you decide to go for the nudge, you had better be sure that you have time enough to let go of the stick, hit the keyboard, and then pick the stick back up off the floor after it has slid off your lap. The instances where there is that much time is, to say the least, few and far between.

The other problem lies in the fact that SubLogic allows you to adjust background and foreground colors by moving the joysticks in various directions. That wouldn't seem to be any trouble, except that the feature remains active during the game. If you happen to be playing with sticks that have the action button built into their handles, it's all too easy in the midst of a game to apply a little body language that starts the colors shifting. More than once I've seen people lose a ball because, in the heat of play, they accidentally changed colors so that foreground and background match, thereby effectively blanking out the screen. All things considered, this may be the first game where keyboard control is actually more convenient than a joystick.

Pinball is coming back. So say the experts. For me, it's hard to tell because, in the arcades that I frequent, the managers still tend to begrudge us at most one or two tables stuck away in a dark and distant corner. But whether or not you've ever set eyes on a pin game, Night Mission provides all the delights of a well designed machine in a package that's a lot easier to fit in your living room. Seasoned pin players may miss the sheer physicality of wrapping one's hands around a cabinet and applying the muscle power needed to nudge yourself to a free game, but in all other respects this is an impressive simulation, colorful, loud, aggressive, and just plain beautiful to watch. A fantastic game.

—D.P.

TURMOIL
(Sirius/Atari ROM Cart)

The idea behind **Turmoil** this one-player game from Sirius Software for the Atari is simplicity itself. The screen has been divided into seven horizontal channels, each of which has some sort of target travelling across it. Using your joystick, you must maneuver your ship up and down a vertical alley that cuts across all seven channels, swinging your ship left and right to blast the targets while avoiding collisions. The targets are defenseless, but they travel at different speeds, some so fast that one is hard pressed to blast them before they hit.

There are a few tricky guys in this setup: Arrows occasionally show up. If these targets make it all the way across the screen, they turn into Tanks that can only be destroyed from behind. Every now and then a stationary Prize, which looks like a pulsating donut, turns up in one or more of the channels. If you can't reach the prize with your ship in time (the only instance where you're permitted to travel horizontally), it turns into a Supersonic Cannon Ball, a fast moving target that bounces back and forth across the screen. If you do grab the prize, you must hasten to return to the vertical alley before an indestructible Ghost Ship can trap you in the channel and collide with you.

Clear out all the targets and you get to move on to the next difficulty level, where things get faster and more and more prizes can appear at one time. You start out with five ships, and gain a bonus ship every time you complete a level. Hitting the select key lets you pick which difficulty level to start with.

The trick to Turmoil is not to bother with aiming. Your ship moves in seven discreet steps, and your lasers are rapid fire, so the idea is to lean on the action button, and keep moving up and down, while changing directions, in order to zap the targets before they ever have the chance to cross your vertical alley. Don't pause to think. Any attempt to do so usually results in either a collision or a lost opportunity to grab a prize. Whiz kid designer Mark Turmell has seen to it that, even at the simplest difficulty levels, things move way too fast to permit any opportunity for reflection. Perversely, the slow moving ships can be just as deadly as the fast ones. Since these slowpokes tend to hang around your

THE ARCADE GAME
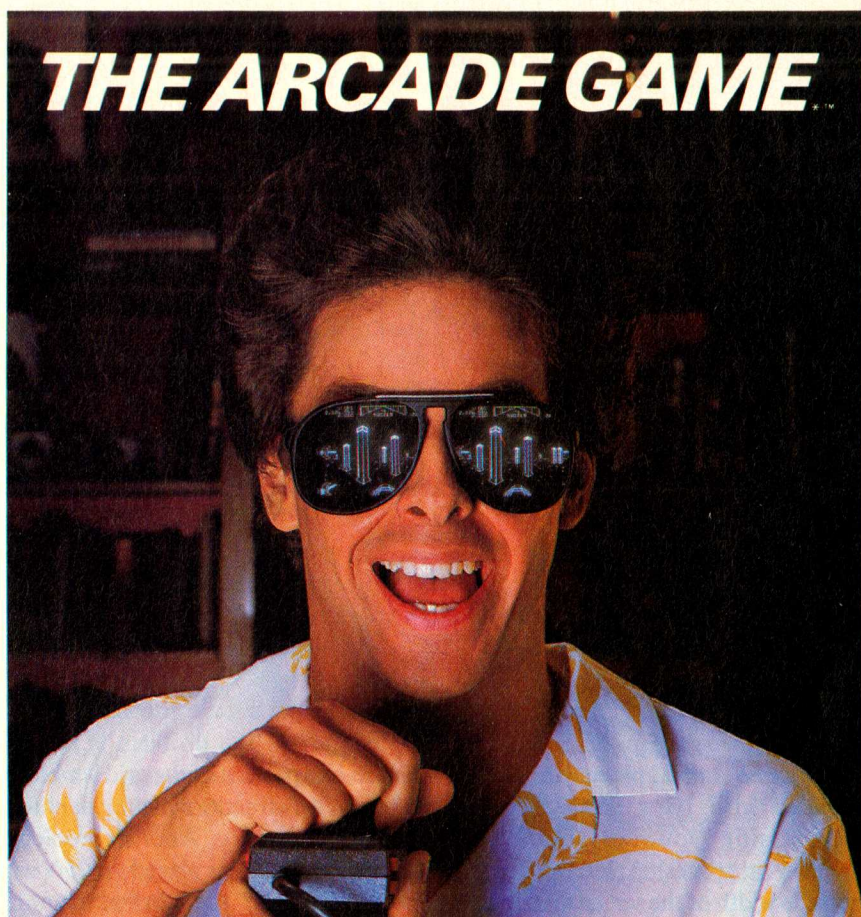
alley for several seconds, it's all too easy to plow into them if you're not careful.

Turmoil betrays its roots as a game originally designed for the Atari 2600 in its graphics and sound. The visuals are sparse, but in a fast action game like this that doesn't turn out to be such a liability. The sound effects emphasize the aggresiveness of the game play. They're loud and abstract, and the game closes with a series of rapid scales that can very easily get on one's nerves if heard too often. With the exception of a colorful screen that announces each new skill level, this game goes light on the frills, giving you very few distractions from the non-nonsense shoot'em-up scenario.

Turmoil is not a deep think-type of game. What it has to offer is there on the
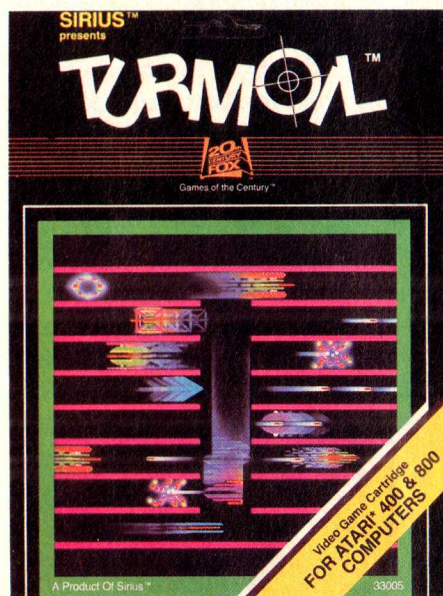
screen, in tough, straightforward visuals, and mean, mind-dizzying game play. It won't win any awards for depth, but for fast, addictive action, it is very hard to top.
—D.P.

GRIDRUNNER
(HESWare/Atari ROM Cart)

What, another Centipede knock-off? We've seen it before, particularly in Atari's own excellent adaptations for various game and computer systems. Do we really need Human Engineered Software's ROM cart game **Gridrunner** for Atari computers? Maybe.

No enchanted gardens here. This one player game takes place on an illuminated grid lying somewhere in space. Using your joystick, you maneuver a spaceship left and right across the width of the screen and up and

down the bottom third while trying to wipe out an infestation of "Gridsearch Squads." These are lines of linked ships that travel across the grid, making U-turns and descending one level whenever they encounter either an obstruction or the edge of the grid.

Your spaceship is equipped with a plasma cannon, which can be fired by pressing the action button. Hitting the leader ship destroys it and turns the ship immediately behind it into a leader. Hitting a squad anywhere else splits it into two independent squads at the point of contact with the destroyed segment being turned into a glowing pod. Pods lodge in the grid and undergo a steady metamorphosis, eventually hurling themselves with deadly force towards the bottom of the screen. Hitting the pod repeatedly with your plasma beam will reverse the evolution, until it disappears completely.

On top of avoiding collisions with roving squads and kamikazee pods, you must also keep track of the X-Y zappers. These two guns move across the left and bottom edges of the grid, which puts them out of the reach of your cannon. The X-zapper periodically fires a plasma pulse across the grid while the Y-zapper simultaneously sends a steady plasma beam up the grid. If neither hits your ship, the pulse will turn into a pod at the point it hits the beam.

Knock out all the squads on a grid, and you enter a new grid with more, longer squads and more frequent cycles for the X-Y zappers. If you can't wait to see what's coming up, you can easily select any of thirty-one difficulty levels available (otherwise known as the Baskin-Robbins option). You start out with five Gridrunners and gain an extra for each grid cleared.

In spirit, this is about as un-Centipede a game as possible. Designer Jeff Minter has infused Gridrunner with a solid sci-fi atmosphere. The grid glows with power, as does all your enemies. Your gridrunner materializes, Tron-like, at the beginning of each round. And even at the lowest play levels, game play is quite hard.

In fact, its a little too hard for my taste. Part of the problem is that the lattice-like pattern of the grid is a bit too much of a distraction, making it hard to focus on the targets. Another problem is that Mr. Minter has placed the X-Y zappers outside of the normal scanning

range of one's eyes. It becomes a chore to keep tracking the squads while also consulting the bottom and left sides of the screen for the positions of the zappers. Strangely enough, the problem probably could have been solved by placing one of the cannons at the top of the grid, an area where it seems more convenient for the eye to look.

That might not matter if you're attracted to Centipede's game play, but not so hot on its insect theme. Gridrunner is a class-act, especially in the graphics department. If you always liked Centipede, then you don't have to worry about missing something if you pass this one by. However, if Atari's original doesn't captivate, then Gridrunner might be more your speed.
—D.P.

LAZER ZONE
(HESWare/VIC-20 Cart)

You can make any game a loud game: Just turn up the volume on the TV. But there are only a few games that were born to be loud, the type that beg you to clamp on the headphones and crank up the sound to the level of your average Who concert. Such is Human Engineered Software's **Lazer Zone,** a heavy metal ROM cart shoot 'em up for the VIC-20.

This is a one-player slide-and-shoot with a difference. Once again your under attack by aliens from outer space, in this case hypergalactic skulls and bats that travel both horizontal and vertical paths across the screen. You defend yourself by blasting the badguys to smithereens with your two lazers. No, that's not a

misprint. Through a unique control setup that lets you manipulate one gun along a horizontal axis and another along a vertical axis with the same joystick, you actually have double the firepower of other slide-and-shoots. One gun ranges across the bottom of the screen, and is controlled by left and right movements on the stick. The other gun is positioned at the right edge and maneuvered with up and down movements. The guns can be moved simultaneously by using the stick's diagonal.

The action button activates both guns rapid fire lazers (don't blame me, that's the way HES spells it), but only if they're aligned with one of the tick marks that are arranged along each gun's base line. Should the badguys make it past your barrages and land on your base line, they immediately take off after your lazer. Even in this situation, you still have a couple of ways of defending yourself. One is by holding down the action button and moving the stick to either the upper right or the lower left. This causes each lazer to aim at the others base line, which allows you to blast a grounded alien. However, considerable skill is required to hit an alien in this fashion, and you have to be careful not to hit your own lazer in the process. Much safer are the Electro Bolts, smart bomb type devices that are activated by hitting the F7 key. These will destroy any alien that's on the base line but, as always, their supply is limited, so they should only be used in extreme emergencies.

Later waves add Pods to your list of enemies. These diamond-shaped objects appear at random on the board, hang around for a few uneasy seconds, and then hurl themselves uncontrollably at either base line. You start off with five lives and three electro bolts, and get an extra electro-bolt for each round completed. You can start off at any of the 31 different waves which vary in the speed and number of your attackers, by using the F1 key.

There's nothing elaborate about Lazer Zone. It's a shoot'em-up, unencumbered by plot lines or multiple screens. That's a disadvantage in one way, especially since the attack pattern of your enemies doesn't vary from one wave to another. Sure, there are more of them and they get faster as the game progresses, but they all stick to travelling a straight course from one end of the screen to the other. It would have been nice if designer Jeff Minter had thrown in some zig-zag patterns, or at least a few different aliens beside the skulls and bats that you encounter, over and over. Sorry, some other time, maybe?

On the other hand, what Lazer Zone does, it does exceedingly well. The simple, but ingenious, graphics combine with the percussive soundtrack to create a clean, addictive game. The feel is somewhat abstract, with a stylized representation of explosions onscreen, and an emphasis on sound effects that are very reminiscent of those you find in a pinball machine. Allowing a person to control two guns at once is not only an appealing feature (who, after all, can resist a game that lets you prove to the world that you can do the work of two), but increases the challenge considerably by forcing you to divide your attention and concern between two powerful, and vulnerable, weapons.

Despite the somewhat repetitious attack patterns, Lazer Zone's fast, tough game play makes it extremely appealing. This is a cart for those who can't have their games challenging, aggressive or loud enough. That's the hardcore gamer, and Lazer Zone is the game for them.

—D.P.

COHEN'S TOWERS
(Datamost/Atari)

In the last six months or so, there has been a growing crop of humorous games. BC's Quest for Tires was one; to some extent Lunar Leeper may be considered another; if you have a very sick sense of humor, Demon Driver may be another. But one of the best has got to be **Cohen's Towers**.

The game starts with a typed memo from The Boss (Mr. Cohen), assigning his nephew a job in the mailroom. His task is to pick up the letters from floor to floor, and deposit them into mail drops.

The game screen is an x-ray view of the building. In the middle, floors are built, one on top of the other, brick walls creating dead-ends on many of the floors.

There are four different screens although getting past the second takes a better player than I am. You can skip the title screen by pressing the fire button.

If you are looking for a fun, whimsical "elevator" game, Cohen's Towers is a very good bet. It's frustrating, but not really maddening.

—M.B.

JUST FOR THE FUN OF IT
Mylstar Is Still Going Strong As A Coin-Op Giant

By Roger C. Sharpe

The history of the game industry is a saga made rich by the accomplishments of a unique group of individuals. Surprisingly, none ever imagined that their legacy would endure for more than 50 years. But it has and, although radically different compared to the rather simplistic initial efforts, the end goal has continued to be putting some fun into people's lives. ·

In the beginning penny arcades were just gaining popularity, with the majority featuring such novelty attractions as fortune-telling machines, mutoscopes (mechanical peep shows), and games that tested your strength or told your age. By the late 1920s other inventions had begun to appear, setting the foundation for the introduction of a totally new entertainment form.

It was left to men like David Gottlieb to lead the way. Only 5'6" tall and still in his early twenties, Gottlieb was operating punch boards in the oil fields of East Texas. These little wooden slabs had hundreds of holes drilled through them and in each hole was a tightly coiled slip of paper. On these slips were listed prizes of cash or merchandise and, for a few coins per chance, the wildcatters and cowpokes would punch the paper out of the board with a toothpick in the hope that they might win something of value.

Gottlieb traveled from town to town, usually going wherever the railroads headed. However, the young man wasn't content to rely on the fortunes of this one business and quickly shifted gears when a new opportunity arose. Moving pictures were the fad and Gottlieb, along with one of his brothers, toured Texas in a Model T Ford. Together they would set up a movie projector in the local town halls and show such films as D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* and *Intolerance*.

But destiny had something more in store for David Gottlieb when he eventually moved back to Chicago and began to manufacture various arcade novelty machines. In 1927, D. Gottlieb & Company released its first product, the Husky-Grip Tester and followed this with the Majestic Moving Target. Then, in the autumn of 1931, David Gottlieb produced a machine that turned his company into the first financially successful manufacturer of pin games.

The name of this landmark pinball machine was Baffle Ball and its immediate success would help establish a new industry into the American mainstream. Interestingly, Baffle Ball, and the imitators it immediately inspired, held very little resemblance to today's electronic wonders. The first games were nothing more than little countertop wooden boxes where a plunger would shoot up ball bearings or marbles onto a playfield of pins (nails) which were laid out in such a way as to make certain scoring areas more difficult to reach than others.

From this beginning, D. Gottlieb & Company became a major force in the amusement game business. And, as the technology evolved along with public tastes regarding leisure time entertainment, Gottlieb always seemed to be ready with the next great leap ahead. In fact, in 1947 the company would be responsible for forever changing the face, as well as the challenge, of pinball machines.

Humpty Dumpty was the name of the game, and when it was released, players were treated to a very different pinball

experience due to a new invention originally called 'flipper bumpers'. The work of Gottlieb designer, Harry Mabs, these ingenious little devices were activated by control buttons on the side of the cabinet. And, although the first flippers were nothing more than rubber-ringed arms which supplied far less power than today's version, they were a positive step in reaffirming the need for some additional learned skills in playing pinball.

"Flippers had been around for years," Alvin Gottlieb, son of David Gottlieb and long an active member of the industry, recalls, "but they were on baseball arcade machines. However, they were operated by a button on the front of the machine that gave the player one whack at a time. The discovery of pinball flippers was really quite accidental. Harry Mabs was working in the shop, and had pulled two wires out from the side of a machine to see which was making contact. He rolled a ball down the playfield, touched the two wires together and suddenly he got the idea. He put buttons on the side of the cabinet and we built the first flipper game in a matter of days."

By the mid-seventies, with the coin-machine industry in general, and pinball in particular, enjoying a noticeable rebirth of sorts, D. Gottlieb & Company was riding the wave of popularity. The old electro-mechanical tooling had given way to the brave new world of solid-state electronics, and what had been a family-owned company for 49 years suddenly reflected just how important the games had become.

In 1976, in a transaction involving millions of dollars, D. Gottlieb & Company became a division of Columbia Pictures Industries. However, while the industry had expanded to include video games, Gottlieb remained faithful to pinball machines until it became apparent that in order to survive, the company would have to increase its product line. By 1980, still a leader in pinball design, Gottlieb was also showing off its newest member of the family—video games.

Two short years later the company would enjoy the type of impact it regularly created during the glory days of pinball with the introduction of Q*bert. This novel video game swept across arcades and fun centers and firmly

established the Gottlieb name in the world of video. But there was more to come.

With the development of laser disc technology as a viable resource for further game design, Gottlieb broke away from its past not only in terms of name

(Mylstar Electronics replaced the family name which had endured for so long), but also in the form of the first live-action footage disc-based game—M.A.C.H. 3.

The enormous success of Mylstar, nee Gottlieb, over the years was due to this

ability of expertly meeting new challenges which offered the game playing public true entertainment value. Currently, this can be seen by the company's commitment to a total product line of pinball machines, conventional video games and the promise of laser.

Following on the heels of M.A.C.H. 3 comes the latest laser game attraction, Us Vs. Them. Featuring live actors, special effects, full orchestral score and fast-paced action, this summer release is a wild sci-fi adventure unlike any other. With a dazzling array of screens and missions, players must fly their jet through wave after wave of alien ships, beginning over the city skyline of Chicago and moving across America's heartland, through forests and mountains, the streets of San Francisco and, finally, deep inside the alien mothership.

Also hitting the streets is another original effort from Mylstar, The Three Stooges, commemorating the legendary comedy team's 50th anniversary. A three-joystick game, for anywhere from one to three players, The Three Stooges brings the zaniness of Curly, Moe and Larry to life complete with superior computer-generated sounds and dialogue as well as some excellent graphics.

Titled "Brides Is Brides", the game features 28 rounds of action as the Stooges try to rescue their three brides, Nora, Dora and Cora, from the clutches of a mad doctor, I.M. Acad, who is holding them prisoner. Along the way, the Stooges race from one room to the next, delivering slaps, throwing pies and breaking furniture in their quest to avoid a full cast of villains and other obstacles.

Mylstar has additionally kept on the ball with the recent release of two pinball machines. Alien Star is a nicely balanced game with a full complement of features as well as potential multi-ball play, while The Games successfully translate the flavor of the Olympics via the use of a vari-target, dual captive ball channel and spinner. There are seven track and field events incorporated into The Games and Mylstar has tied in a medal winning idea with a special pinball tournament promotion taking place around the country. Prizes include 10-speed bicycles, tennis racquets, binoculars, medals and The Games arcade pinball machine. For more information on this competition, check with your local arcade or game room. ▲
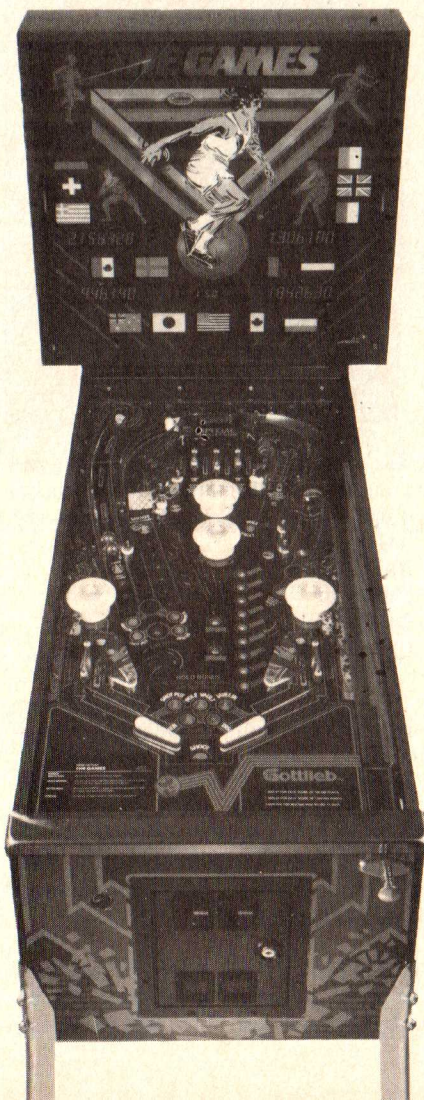
THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF THE THREE STOOGES AND MYLSTAR ELECTRONICS

Long a force in the amusement game industry, Mylstar Electronics continues to bring players an exciting world of fun and games. This year is no different, with one of the highlights being the recently released arcade video game hit, The Three Stooges. In celebration of the Golden Anniversary of one of America's greatest, and most popular, comedy teams *Video Games* Magazine is pleased to present a very special trivia contest.

Video Games, in cooperation with Mylstar Electronics, is ready to test your knowledge of The Three Stooges as well as some arcade game facts with a Just For The Fun Of It Trivia Contest. The grand prize? Your very own full-size Three Stooges arcade game, worth $3,000.

All you have to do is answer correctly all of the questions in our Just For The Fun Of It Trivia Contest. Just fill out the form on the following page, or use a blank piece of paper and mail your answers to Just For The Fun Of It Contest, *Video Games* Magazine, Suite 6204, 350 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10118. Employees of Pumpkin Press, Mylstar Electronics, Columbia Pictures Industries, Coca-Cola Company, their subsidiaries or affiliated companies, advertising agencies, and their immediate family members are ineligible to participate. Contestants with all the correct answers and the earliest postmark will be eligible for the grand prize. In case of ties, the decision of *Video Games* Magazine judges and editors will be final.

1. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Three Stooges, although in 1930 the comedy team, along with Ted Healy, appeared in their first film. What was the name of this movie?

2. During their 25-year tenure with Columbia Pictures The Three Stooges made 190 'shorts' (movies that were less than 20 minutes in length). What was the title of their first Columbia two-reeler?

3. What year was it released?
A) 1931
B) 1932
C) 1933
D) 1934
E) none of the above

4. Q*bert really turned Gottlieb/Mylstar's video game fortunes around when it was previewed at the industry's 1982 AMOA Show in Chicago. We all know that Q*bert had to jump around a pyramid changing the colors of the blocks, but how many blocks were there?
A) 21
B) 28
C) 36
D) A & B only

5. Besides Coily the snake, Q*bert had some other enemies to contend with. Two of them were little purple guys. What were their names?

6. At the end of 1980, while still known as Gottlieb, the company introduced its first video game, which had been licensed from another manufacturer? What was the name of this memorable game?

7. Curly, Shemp and Moe were brothers.
TRUE
FALSE

8. We all know that Groucho Marx's real first name was Julius, but what was Curly's real first name.
A) Jerome
B) Charles
C) Harold
D) Michael
E) none of the above

9. The Three Stooges were in an Oscar nominated short in 1934 that was a take-off on a Clark Gable hit called *Men in White*. What was the title of this short?

10. When Columbia Pictures released *Krull* last summer, Gottlieb/Mylstar tied a video game into the movie. What was the name of the movie/game's hero?

11. This princely individual from Krull was after his fair princess who was being held captive by the evil Beast. What was her name?

12. In 1982 Gottlieb revolutionized the amusement game business by introducing the first pinball/video hybrid machine. What was the prehistoric name of this historic game?

13. In this same game, once you left the pinball playfield and entered into the video portion of play there were how many dinosaurs that you initially had to kill?
A) 1
B) 3
C) 5
D) 7
E) none

14. Speaking about firsts, Mylstar's airborne adventure, laser game, M.A.C.H. 3 is a machine many of us are familiar with. But what did the initials M.A.C.H. stand for?

15. In 1934 The Three Stooges appeared in their first feature film. What was its title?

16. When ill health no longer permitted Curly to continue with the other Stooges, Shemp stepped in as the third. What was the title of the first two-reeler that Shemp appeared in?

17. Joe Besser joined up with Moe and Larry in 1957 and appeared in what film as part of the The Three Stooges?

18. In 1959 Joe Besser's reign as the third Stooge came to an end when he was replaced by Curly Joe. What was Curly Joe's last name?

19. And what was the name of the first film for the new Three Stooges in 1959?

20. Released in 1931, what was the name of Gottlieb's first commercially successful pinball machine which almost singlehandedly established the coin-operated, amusement game industry?

Just For The Fun Of It Trivia Contest Entry Form

Name_____ Age_____

Address_____

City _____ State _____ Zip_____

	7. _____	
	8. _____	
1. _____	9. _____	15. _____
2. _____	10. _____	16. _____
3. _____	11. _____	17. _____
4. _____	12. _____	18. _____
5. _____	13. _____	19. _____
6. _____	14. _____	20. _____

The Championship Season

By Roger C. Sharpe

From April 30th to May 19th, across the country, almost a million players ventured to their local participating National Convenience Store (Hot Stop, Stop n Go, Shop n Go and Colonial stores) and Bally's Aladdin's Castles. The reason for all the action was The March of Dimes International Konami/Centuri Track & Field Challenge.

Truly major competitions have been few and far between in the coin-op industry, but Konami/Centuri, with the acknowledged hit of 1984, managed to put together a spectacle that won't soon be forgotten. For a three week period players attempted to qualify for the national finals which were held on May 26th in Houston. In the process, every coin that was put in official Track & Field tournament games, during the qualifying hours, was donated to the March of Dimes to help fight this health organization's work against birth defects and related diseases.

As the official magazine of the tournament, Video Games was there every step of the way, lending support and guidance as the weekly winners from more than 700 locations were tabulated. Finally, on May 20th, with qualifying over, it was time to determine the top Track & Field players according to the same regional breakdowns used by the March of Dimes and its various chapters.

Fourteen players would be flown to Houston to face-off in a competition coordinated and planned by VG editor Roger Sharpe, who was also serving as tournament judge. The format proved to be not only a test of skill, but also endurance as Mike Levin, Chuck Coss, Harold Caines, Ian Brown, Andy Vaughn, Mike Mallory, David Norton, Eric Hebbeln, Brad Daily, Gary West, C.A. Cooper, Dan Colazzo, John Philip Britt and Norris Thompson

stepped up to the eight Track & Field machines.

At 10:00 AM the first round began with the players competing for a seeding and position. Each played two games, with the higher score being used to determine who would play who in the second round. The #1 scorer faced off against the #14, #2 against #13 and so on in a best two out of three series.

After this portion of the finals the field was reduced in half leaving the top seven players. Based on average score, the top player, John Philip Britt of California, earned a bye while the remaining six once again played a best two out of three series.

When round three was over, the competition had been going on for almost four hours as the best four Track & Field players were given a brief rest. Although an impressive list of prizes had already been won, these players were going after something more than just the title of best Track & Field player. The top three (gold, silver and bronze medalist) would have a chance to represent the United States in the *international* portion of the tournament.

Awaiting them were the top three Track & Field players from Japan and a one week, all expenses paid trip to this country, culminating with the U.S.A.

going up against the Japanese. In addition, if that weren't enough, the top national champion was in line for an American Motors Jeep CJ, an Atari 800XL computer, a Thunder Bay pool table by Ebonite, Andiamo sport luggage and a Track & Field arcade game.

And so it was that John Philip Britt went against Norris Thompson and Mike Mallory took on Gary West in a best two out of three series. In some of the most exciting play ever seen in the world of video games, Mallory and West went the limit of three games with the greatest margin of victory being only about 1,000 points and the least being an unbelievable 10 points. When all was said and done, Gary West of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma prevailed and met John Philip Britt for the championship. Mike Mallory of Dayton, Ohio was up against Norris Thompson to determine who would get the last place and a chance to go to Tokyo.

In the end, saving the best game for last, West beat Britt to take the championship, while Mallory gained third place. Tokyo was next, but the three top Track & Field players in the US had been found, after more than seven hours of competition. And, for the moment, video games were back in the spotlight. ▲

Video Games editor Roger Sharpe is flanked on the left by Gary West, national Track & Field champion, on the right are second place finisher John Philip Britt and Mike Mallory who came in third.

ATARI 7800 PROSYSTEM

By Roger C. Sharpe

Nolan Bushnell and Atari have become synonomous with video game entertainment since it burst upon the coin-op scene in 1972. However, there were also other developments happening at the same time to expand the influence of video games. In fact, in the same year, Magnavox introduced its dedicated home system called Odyssey.

By 1974, Atari had entered this market with a Pong home game, as the field expanded to include Coleco's Telstar system. What these first entries shared in common was their own limitations regarding game play. What one basically bought was some equipment which normally only allowed one game to be played, or, at best, maybe two or three different variations on the same theme.

This would all change when the Fairchild Video Entertainment System Channel F system was introduced. The unit featured an array of buttons on the console for selecting games and degrees of difficulty, but the real breakthrough was the fact that Channel F was the first programmable game system. Besides two games — tennis and hockey—Fairchild offered a library of game cartridges.

Following on the heels of Channel F, RCA brought out Studio II, another programmable game system which enjoyed a rather short life. However, even with the limited amount of public attention directed at this new wave entertainment

medium, Magnavox struck back with the next Odyssey model which included screen overlays of plastic film, used to provide some extra visual appeal.

In 1977 the concept of programmable game systems was in full swing as Atari introduced its VCS and another coin-op competitor, Bally, decided to test the waters of the consumer marketplace with not only a very different game system, the Bally Arcade, but also a line of scaled-down pinball machines. Magnavox, meanwhile, had released an improved Odyssey^2 system and long-time toy maker Mattel further increased the field with its Intellivision system.

But it was Atari, on the strength of many game titles inspired by arcade hits
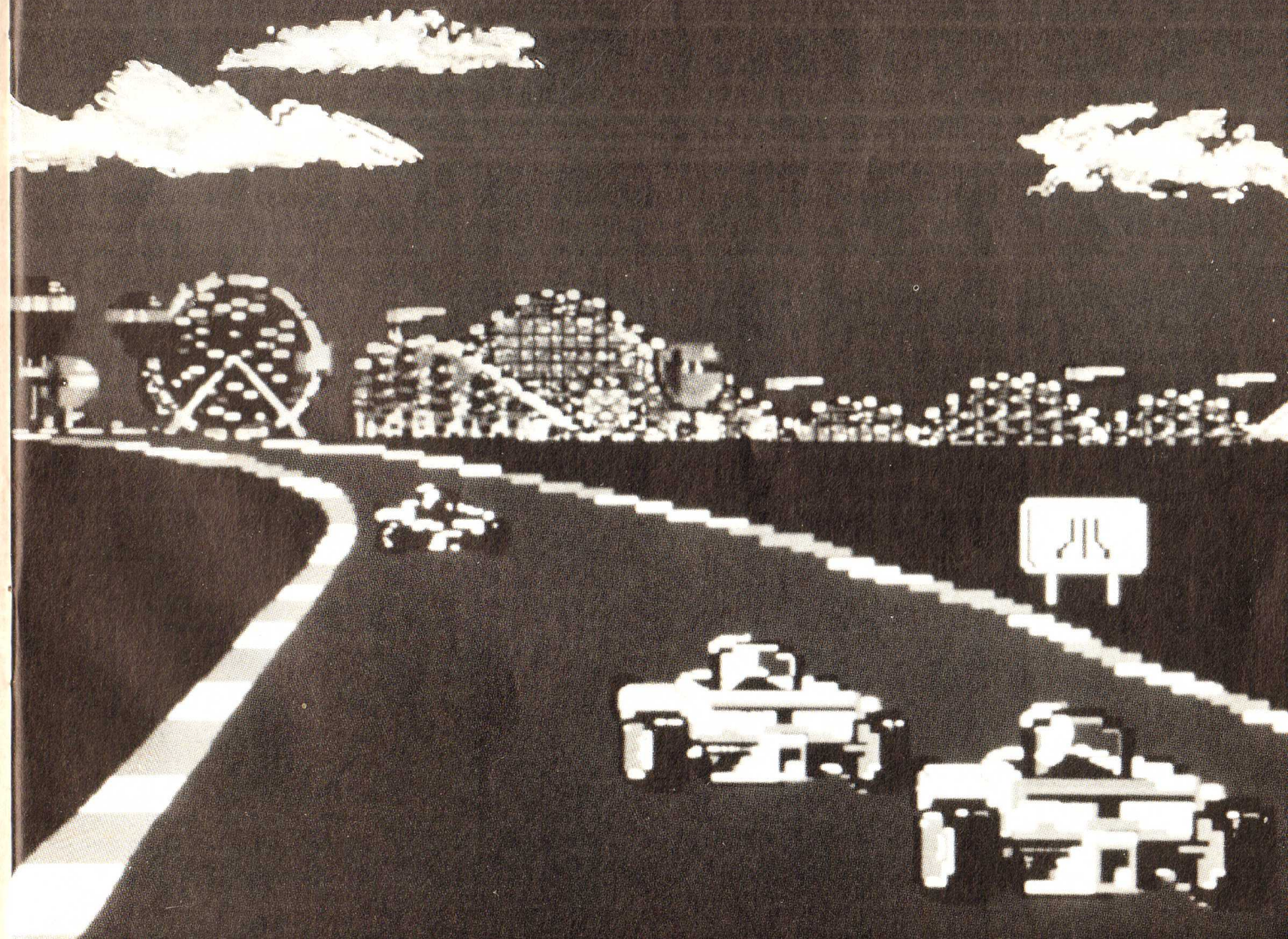
of the past, who prevailed from the very beginning. The VCS proved to be a strong machine, at a good price point, and Atari thrived on yet another success in the entertainment field.

When the video game industry began to explode and the resulting media hype added fuels to the fires, Atari's leadership position became increasingly apparent. A new generation of software producers, such as Activision, began to appear on the scene, focusing their attentions and product development toward the VCS. It wasn't until Coleco entered into the fray that Atari really began to feel pressure.

ColecoVision offered exceptional graphics and some of the most faithful renditions of the most popular arcade game hits. During the 1982 Christmas season, the venerable VCS suffered a substantial decline and showed its age compared to such a formidable foe.

Atari watched as ColecoVision became the dominant game system at the expense of Mattel's Intellivision and an updated Intellivision II, Magnavox's Odyssey and an ill-fated Odyssey[3], not to mention the proliferation of inexpensive personal computers capable of playing many of the same game titles and other more sophisticated entertainment software.

To remedy the situation and hopefully retrench, Atari introduced a more powerful 5200 game system, but the lack of an insufficient library initially, as well as the reluctance of third party software producers to create games all doomed the

new unit from the beginning. In addition, the climate regarding video game entertainment had begun to change as an incredible slump befell the industry.

In the home market the problems were magnified only because the general quality of products hadn't improved at a realistic rate. Instead, we were faced with an abundance of game cartridges that only repeated familiar themes and play action. Companies, who had entered into the business with great expectations, quickly fell from view and out of sight due to the lack of original designs.

In terms of Atari the concern was directed more at the advancing age of the VCS and the noticeable weaknesses of the 5200. Unfortunately, it took until 1984 for the long time video game giant to finally bring out a system which would prove to be too much, too late. The announced 7800 ProSystem had all the trappings of a truly evolutionary home system for whatever audience still remained to support such a venture.

After all, here was an undertaking that, on the surface at least, ran totally counter to what everyone was saying and feeling about the viability of home video game systems. For almost a year things had been strangely quiet regarding software, let alone hardware. True, there were those infrequent releases of cartridges being churned out, but the major focal point was the demise of Vectrex, Intellivision fading from sight even with the announcement of new financial backing, and Coleco having its hands

full with Adam and Cabbage Patch dolls.

Instead, the attention had turned to personal computers, feeding and nurturing new and next generation machines in a market also beset by problems. Most considered pure game systems to be a thing of the past, since many of the most popular computers (Commodore 64 being the best example), could not only play games but also do a variety of other functions.

And here was Atari bringing out a new game system. For some, who never abandoned game playing, the promise was for a truly advanced unit which would feature the most advanced color graphics of any other system currently available (and that included not only the other game systems, but also any of the personal computers to date).

An Inside Look At The ProSystem 7800

Having learned from their own mistakes as well as those by the competition, Atari was going to break out with a 7800 machine capable of playing an entirely new line of game/cartridge titles along with the whole library of efforts designed for use on the 2600. In addition, the plan called for the ProSystem to be expandable via an upcoming full-stroke keyboard. It might have been reminiscent of the long forgotten Graduate project for upgrading the 2600, but this time there appeared to be a total commitment behind the selling and support of the 7800.

At the heart of the system was a custom semiconductor chip designed by Atari's software engineers. Nicknamed the ''Maria'' chip, its unique transistor circuitry helped create arcade-like graphics that previously required a circuit board 10 times larger to produce. In fact, with the ''Maria'' chip it was possible to have 256 color shadings, brilliant resolution and more complex as well as sharper defined action on screen, along with the potential of displaying over 100 objects on-screen at any given time.

If this weren't enough, the 7800 ProSystem featured newly styled ProLine Controllers with self-centering joysticks and independent firing buttons that only served to enhance the smaller and more streamlined shape. There was also another touch, however, which tended to show just how complete the planning had been regarding the game system.

Atari was going to have available a special Hi-Score cartridge which would have enabled players to permanently record their best scores. The cartridge allowed for the storing of up to six scores at each level of skill for up to 65 different 7800 ProSystem games.

And speaking of games, besides the ability to play the almost 400 title library designed for the 2600, the ProSystem was also going to have its own start up selection of 13 new cartridges specially created to take full advantage of the 7800's unique capabilities. Much of the excitement and anticipation in this area was directed at the first two releases from the Atari/Lucasfilm relationship announced with such fanfare last year.

"Rescue on Fractalus" was a three-dimensional space/action game with a first person perspective and a fairly solid story line. Basically, the objective was to maneuver a craft to this alien planet in order to pick up stranded pilots, while also avoiding enemy fire. The need to precisely navigate over mountain ranges and through valleys was further aided by an on-screen instrumentation panel that added to the total effect.

In "Ballblazer" the Atari/Lucasfilm tandem managed to successfully create a futuristic and extremely original sports competition that brought into play split-screen images and a sense of control, as well as depth of field and very realistic effects unlike anything that has ever been available before for home game players.

And there was still more for the envisioned owners of the 7800, beginning with the fact that the unit had, built right in, Pole Position II—all four race courses faithfully reproduced from the company's coin-op hit—which appeared on screen the moment the system was turned on. Other titles included a novel variation on the Zaxxon theme called Desert Falcon, 3-D Asteroids, Food Fight, Galaga, Xevious, Robotron 2084, Ms. Pac-Man, Dig Dug, Joust and Centipede. All in all not a bad start for a new system, with more scheduled to be released at regular intervals.

But this was just the tip of the iceberg for the 7800 ProSystem. Atari wanted to cover all bases in terms of the eventual place and positioning of the model. From conception, research and development had been costly and detailed. In-depth focus group testing was implemented to complement the design parameters and features the unit would

finally have as it reached closer to its unveiling at the summer CES trade show.

Sensing that a game system, even one with definite advantages over the competition, wasn't enough in this day and age, Atari announced the rest of its 7800 ProSystem game plan. Simply stated, it was going to be expandable into a fully programmable home computer for beginning users. A 62-key, full-stroke keyboard would offer 4 kilobytes of Random Access Memory (RAM) and the ability to increase this to 20K with an optional memory cartridge.

Utilizing a new line of computer programs, including word processing, education and personal development software, the system was to be compatible with all Atari printers, most storage devices and other peripherals used with the company's home computers. Here suddenly was going to be a machine that offered the best of two worlds and at a price for the main unit alone tentatively set at under $150.

Although countless opportunities had been missed in the past, Atari seemed to have finally put a product introduction all together. But, as fate would have it, the 7800 ProSystem, despite its promise and potential, was not to be. Other forces would intervene to seal the system's doom as a project that was too much and too late.

Throughout this overview of the 7800 ProSystem we have referred to the subject matter in the past tense. Originally,

this was going to be an announcement heralding a very worthy system and a preview of products scheduled to be released throughout the fall. Instead, the story is something more of a eulogy to good intentions and the dreaming of what might have been. And, even though the 7800 will never make it to store shelves, you were entitled to the information so you could make your own judgements.

The reason the 7800 ProSystem was dead at its birth is that Atari's home game/computer division was sold by parent company Warner Communications to Jack Tramiel. In some fancy financial maneuvering and closed door dealing, the Atari of tomorrow is destined to be different than the one you've known over the years. If the name Tramiel isn't readily familiar to you, he is the individual who brought Commodore into the computer field and then masterminded and coordinated its entry into the personal computer market with the extraordinary VIC-20 and Commodore 64.

In mid-July this legendary figure in electronics had taken control of Atari, promising that the company would have some surprises in the next six months. One of those surprises will not be the 7800 ProSystem or any other game-oriented hardware. So say hello and goodbye to this truly spectacular machine which might have brought some of the excitement and interest back to video. Now we'll never know. ▲
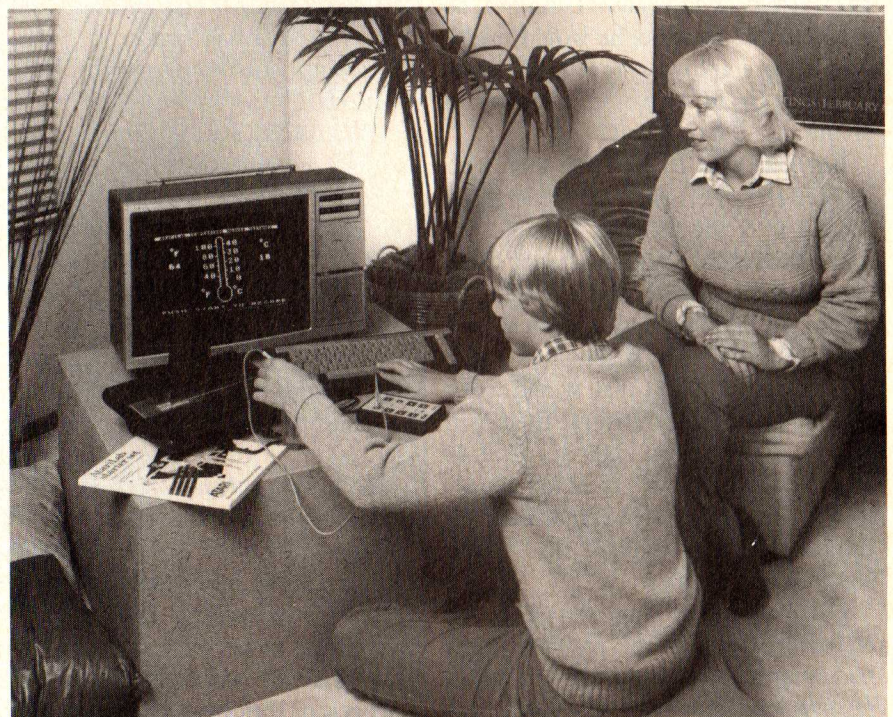
WALTER DAY

A Look At The King Of The Video Capital

By Mike Shaw

One morning last summer, Walter Day awoke from an uncomfortable sleep. Searching for a cause for his restlessness, he arrived at the dilemma dominating his life. More than two years of an all-consuming effort to develop his brainchild, a clearinghouse for the world's highest video game scores, had drained him, left him near penniless and emotionally spent.

The irony was, he struggled to put it in perspective, he had intended in insure wealth for his Ottumwa, Iowa Twin Galaxies arcade through this giant public relations ploy; but while the world grew more aware of the International Scoreboard, Ottumwans grew less enthralled with Walter Day's video games.

So in a burst of decisiveness, he resolved to give up.

As he made his way across the clean swept streets of his beloved Ottumwa, he prepared the remarks he would use to dismiss his employees. It was a wonderful effort by all, he would say, a grand dream, but it had failed.

But Day was to find the kids who worked at Twin Galaxies still energetic, excited over the fame of the International Scoreboard and confident of an even greater potential. Their dream—the dream he had convinced them would come true—was just beginning to take on some reality, and they would work without pay, even contribute their own money to keep Twin Galaxies alive. It was already the world's most famous arcade and hadn't it been responsible for getting their city dubbed the "video game capital of the world?"

Filled with the significance of his endeavor, Day threw off another night's bad dreams and another morning's firm resolve, and embraced the spirit of his workers. He put up his car and the arcade's ice cream machine to borrow enough money to pay another month's bills and set about with renewed vigor to cement his plans to make the International Scoreboard a profitable venture.

"I'm just wild about Harry;
Harry's wild about me!"

Walter Day was playing and lecturing on the ragtime piano circuit, when he noticed the world was becoming wild about video games.Like other idea men at the turn of the decade, he perceived the road to fortune travelled right through the aisles of an arcade. But unlike many others he was determined to accomplish his fortune through an ambitious, though circuitous route. He would secure his place in the industry by establishing an Ottumwa arcade as the center of video game competition through the development of an International Scoreboard. There was certain to be, he reasoned, a growing coterie of accomplished video game players, and his Scoreboard would serve as their reference for excellence, the inspiration to greater accomplishments.

Walter Day has done that. He has developed a national reputed focal point for the video athlete. His Scoreboard is the nation's authoritarian source of the best of video performance, a place to look for the most prominent examples of excellence that have come out of this newest of our national pastimes.

The 1st North American Video Game Olympics, battled out in front of the cameras of ABC's *That's Incredible,* and Ben Gold of Dallas achieves required scores on three games just seconds ahead of both Darren Olson and Todd Walker for an exciting victory. On the heels of the event, in a ceremony in Iowa, Governor Terry Bradstad praises the Scoreboard for "enhancing the national image of the state of Iowa." Video game manufacturers are there to applaud and even President Reagan sends his congratulations. Later, *Life* Magazine picks up the event, reminding the world Ottumwa is the "Video Game Capital of the World."

The 1984 Guinness Book of World Records is released with, for the first time ever, a section devoted to video game high scores, verified by the Twin Galaxies International Scoreboard.

Day announces he will compose a national team of video superstars to challenge the world...and the world responds. Canada, Italy, Japan indicate they will compete, providing the Scoreboard with true international significance.

The trouble with Day's successes is that behind them is a stream of disappointments. Like too many men with grand ideas, Day seems to have little agility at running them together toward a profitable end. He seems to have an unlimited supply of great ideas but a total lack of understanding of how to accomplish them. As a result, his successes are scattered, represent lateral movement, and are separated by an abundance of failures.

Buoyed by the fame the International Scoreboard derived from the airing of its "Olympic" competition, Day gathered his best players together for the beginnings of what was to be a profitable venture, a pro tour of sorts, where his "pros" would barnstorm the nation challenging local video heroes to beat the best.

Day thought he had found the vehicle to carry his tour in the Electronic Circus,

an endeavor put together by a group of Eastern investors, a travelling video game bigtop scheduled to dazzle folks in the best halls in 50 of the nation's largest cities. The Electronic Circus, its Boston promoter promised, would play to hundreds of thousands of amazed video fanatics in each city.

Naively conceived and underfinanced, the bigtop tumbled on ringleader Day and his superstars just five days after it opened. Only 1600 Bostonians cared enough to spend $9 to gawk at tents filled with video games, and prognosticators determined that, unimpressive as this greatest video show on earth was proving to be, there was not much hope crowds would increase.

So the "tour" was relegated to a bus load of games and players, and, on its first jaunt of the summer of '83, just outside its Iowa neighborhood, it suffered the kind of indignity reserved for a scene in a bad movie about a minor league baseball team. The bus broke down in Portage, Wisconsin. Day had not budgeted a bus repair fund and for a time it appeared there was no way out of this tiny, dusty town for this bus load of players and video games.

That was not Day's first night of uncomfortable sleep, but coming as it did on the sweaty, plastic seat of an old, broken down bus, it must have been one of his worst. When morning came with no help in sight, it was the first time Day and his players realized their dream of national stardom was completely their own.

"We couldn't even get any help from the manufacturers of the games we were carrying around with us," explained Bill Mitchell, an Orlando, Florida player Day counts as his top star. "We were promoting the games they had selected for us to play on—you know, the ones that they had on the market, the games they were trying to sell. But we couldn't get any interest from them in helping us out of our jam."

Later, with a different bus and renewed hope, the tour headed east. Day and the team met appointments along the Atlantic coast on their way to Washington, D.C., where he had planned to issue written challenges for his international competition to the foreign embassies of Italy and Japan.

"Sometimes we were so low on money we didn't eat for a whole day," Day explained, like an explorer venturing into uncharted territory.

The unscheduled nature of the trip led to a particularly embarrassing scene at the Japanese embassy.

"They wouldn't let me see anybody at first," Day said. "And when I did, they all started waving their arms at me in protest. They thought we wanted to challenge *them,* the embassy staff, right then and there."

Fortunately, the embassy eventually came to the realization that Day's request was for Japanese video game players to compete, at a later date, with the U.S. players, and they politely agreed to pass Day's offer along to the "appropriate authorities."

To build a team of players to compete for the world championships, Day envisioned a series of state playoffs to be held in a designated arcade in each state. The first series of competitions went off without a relative hitch, as arcades in eight states held state team tournaments late in August. But by the time the second round was to be played—during the last weekend in October—the declining arcade economy caused 25 of the 30 arcades that had committed to host tournament competitions to withdraw. "They couldn't afford the promotion," Day bemoaned. He couldn't be blamed for an entire industry's decline, Day reasoned with himself, but, again, things just weren't working out.

The very concept of the International Scoreboard has brought troublesome entanglements. Day has realized that substantiating high scores is, realistically, impossible.

Day's most noted player through the early days of the Scoreboard effort has confessed to bogus scores, and, when other suspect high scores are checked out, the scorers often fail to get beyond the simplest levels of the games they have supposedly mastered.

"On our way to Washington, D.C., we stopped in Maryland to investigate four high score reports we had gotten from there recently," Day explained. "All four turned out to be lies."

Most debilitating of all, Day has been unable to make his effort anything but a nonprofit organization. He seems not only particularly lacking in profit acumen himself, but has a knack of doing business with people who hurt rather than help him.

Originally, Day opened Twin Galax-

ies with a partner to share the expense and the struggle. But his partner came to see little future in the effort and by the summer of '82, he fled the arcade, Ottumwa, and the mainland, to take a job in Alaska selling Oriental furniture.

Nor did the making of Ottumwa something other than the mythical home of the mythical M.A.S.H. character Walter O'Reilly do as much as Day thought to ingratiate him with his town's business community. Far from inviting him to preside over the Elks, Day's fellow Ottumwans surrounded the Twin Galaxies with six other better financed arcades. Three are closed now, victims of a general decline in the interest of video games as well as of local oversaturation, but, according to Day, the three that remain deleted his 1983 income to 1/5 of what it was in 1982.

Day's national repute did not serve him well in nearby Kirksville, Missouri either. An arcade he opened there as the International Scoreboard was first gaining fame was forced to shut down this October. Hopes for another Twin Galaxies branch to be—in Macomb, Illinois—were dashed when what Day thought to be a sincere financial commitment from a partner in the venture turned out to be a drunken promise. Unfortunately, Day was already $12,000 in debt when he realized he had misjudged the man's intentions.

The International Scoreboard has also failed to excite the industry it was designed, at least in part, to serve as a public relations tool. Day contends that since Scoreboard helps establish the competitive aspect of playing video games, it should be supported by the companies that make the games. He has been given three games by one manufacturer, and loaned several games by two others, but beyond such gifts there has been little support, he complains.

"I thought they would want to help us make the Scoreboard work to the benefit of the entire industry. But I really think now they don't care. There are people who would rather see me fail."

Walter Day's superstars agree, and more vehemently. They wanted to picket the annual industry trade show in New Orleans in October, but Day talked them out of it. Showing support for the industry would improve his rapport with the industry moneychangers.

It may have worked better for the players than for Day. Bill Mitchell, who promotes a "good image" stance for players will endorse one home game manufacturer's product, including appearing in the company's ads.

But the offer hasn't tamed Mitchell's feelings about the video game industry's lack of support for the Scoreboard.

"It doesn't seem like the manufacturers care about the players at all," he said. "Even though Walter has given the industry a lot of good publicity, especially at times when people were saying that video games were bad for their kids, he has received almost no help at all.

"If we are a drop in the bucket compared to what the manufacturers of the games do to promote, then why can't they take a drop out of their bucket to help us out?"

Day's problems with his contemporaries are far from over. The supplier of most of the games in Twin Galaxies will pull them from the arcade on December 10. Ten of the remaining 17 are on loan from Williams Electronics and must be returned soon.

On a November morning, Day awakens on the mattress he has pulled onto the floor of Twin Galaxies. He looks across the floor to the few games he will soon have left. He has lived off the profits of his Coke machine once before, but with so few games, he won't be selling many Cokes either.

"It is just irresponsible to continue doing something that isn't making it." He is cold and sick, and $20,000 in debt, and his ideas are confused. "But I'll just keep promoting. Hopefully, if we get famous enough, some aspect of society will recognize us." ▲

Arcade Games
Playing
Tips and Strategies

TRACK & FIELD

By Steve Harris

Several months ago Sega Electronics (who has since been purchased by Bally/Midway) released the final game under their logo. It was Champion Baseball, and it combined every aspect of America's favorite pastime. Data East, meanwhile, recently produced another adaptation of a somewhat less popular sport, bowling, in their game Pro Bowling.

Well, Centuri and Konami have collaborated once again and created their own sports game. Rather than sticking with one theme, however, Centuri has opted to go with a multi-screen format with an Olympics overtone.

Track & Field combines 6 different decathalon events and wraps them up into a beautifully executed game. The object is to run fast enough, or jump and throw far or high enough to qualify for each event. If you succeed, you proceed to the next, more difficult competition. Failure, however, immediately ends the game.

The controls are simple and straightforward. A jump/throw button is flanked by two 'run' buttons. To qualify for each challenge you must reach the highest speed possible (by pressing the appropriate buttons), and then hit the jump/throw button at just the right time(s) to make the correct movements.

The first event, the 100-meter dash, is a pure sprint. Here you must attain as great a speed (readable in the lower portion of the screen) as possible in an effort to beat the posted qualifying time which is adjustable by the operator.

The second and third events, the long jump and javelin throw, combine both the run, as well as the jump and throw mechanisms. You must once again depress the buttons rapidly enough to
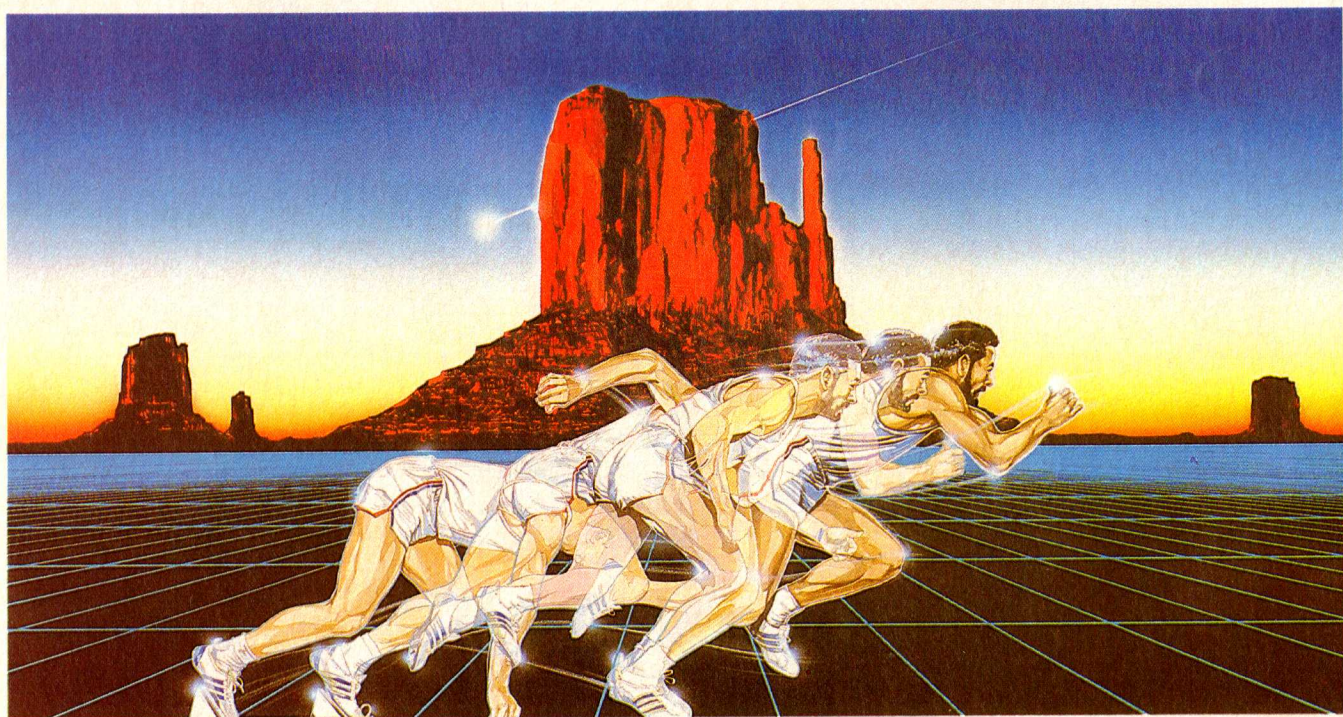
gain sufficient speed. Then, when the foul line is reached, you must tap the other button to become airborne. The

jump/throw button can be held down to increase the angle of your movement. On both the long jump and javelin you're given three tries in which to better your distance in order to qualify.

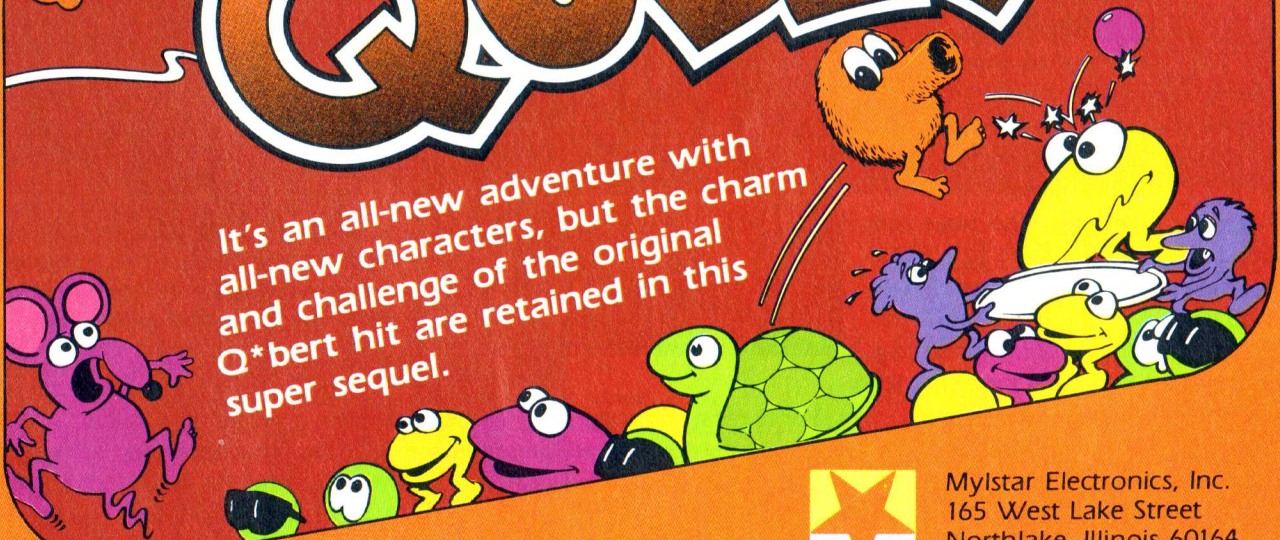The 110-meter hurdles, the fourth event, also combines both controls but requires you to be more precise in your jumping, and faster at running.

The hammer throw begins with your figure inside a pen, with only one correct direction in which to toss the heavy object. If you get the hammer out of the pen, it must still stay in-bounds before coming to rest further down the field. You are given three chances to qualify for this event.

The final competition, the high jump, starts by running up to the bar itself. When it is reached you must hit the jump button once to get into the air, then push it several more times to correct your angle. The bar continues to rise until 3 fouls are made.

After the high jump, the game will either end or return to the first event depending upon the generosity of your arcade owner. In the latter case, succeeding rounds increase the qualifying measurements making it much harder to best the posted measurement.

Strategy: Track & Field is largely a game of speed. In the first four events, the faster you run, the easier it is to qualify and attain higher records for each different round.

The best way to pick up speed is to

alternately hit *both* run buttons. Although this can be accomplished by tapping or pounding the buttons, there is a simple technique that, with practice, will help you to gain the needed speed without getting you kicked out of the arcade for abusing the machines.

Commonly known as the 'double-flap' it involves the use of both the fore- and middle fingers. It is accomplished by striking a run button with first one, and then the other finger. Done in a rapid succession, with both hands on both buttons, you can easily achieve all the speed required in a very short time. And, even though it does take practice, it should be attempted in all running events.

The only other consideration that needs to be taken concerns the jump/throw button. Used in every competition except the first (100-meter dash), this button is really a two-way device. When it is initially pressed, it will make your figure jump or release an object. If the button is held down for any period of time, the angle of the jump or throw will increase from 20° to 80° or from 90° to 20° in the high jump. Being able to manipulate the angle (knowing how long to depress the button to achieve the optimum ascent) is the second key to success at Track & Field.
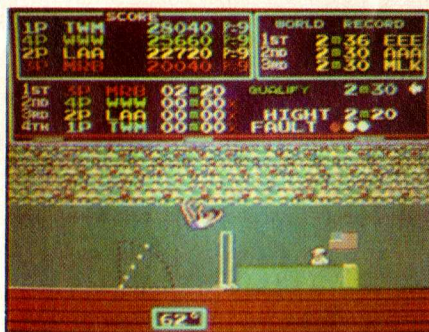
For the first field event, the 100-meter dash, use the double-flap (or your own technique) from start to finish. Ignore the other runner, you only need to qualify, not beat the competition.

The long jump uses both buttons. Pick up as much speed as you can before

you reach the foul line. Try to get as close as possible to the line before pressing 'jump.' The best angle spread is between 44 and 46 degrees, or holding the button about half a second.

Qualifying for the long jump takes you to the javelin throw. Almost identical to the previous event, you must attain a high velocity and throw the javelin before reaching the foul line. The best angle is between 40 and 45 degrees. Speed must be stressed in this round. It is very important that you exceed 1300

cm/second to have a good throw.

The next event, 110-meter hurdles, combine both speed and timing. It is most important to gain as much momentum as possible before going over the first hurdle. Take a few steps, then, when the next obstacle approaches, jump again. You'll find that your jumps are quite long, don't take the chance of running into a hurdle, simply hit the jump button a second or two after leaping over a previous impass.

The hammer throw gives many people problems. Press the 'run' button to get your man going. Slowly, he'll build up momentum. Watch the speed bar in the lower portion of the screen, when it begins to go faster (three squares for the end), get ready. When the yellow of the graph enters the last section, hit the 'throw' button. Since your on-screen athlete is spinning rapidly when the speed monitor enters the last box, he'll almost always be facing outward when you release the hammer, making a successful throw. The angle in this round increases quickly, but the appropriate elevation is 45°.

The final event is the most complicated as well. The high jump starts by pushing the 'run' button. Now, count the steps your character takes. When the count reaches 10 you will be near the bar. Quickly strike the jump button once to get into the air. Next, tap the button to nudge your man to the right. You need to get his waist over the bar. Once you make his upper body clear the bar, push the button down to swing the rest of his body over. This takes some practice, but is easy to accomplish after a few tries.

Depending on the machine you're playing, the game will either end or return to the previous events with more difficult qualifying times at this point. In the case of the latter, use the previous strategies, but try to accelerate even more.

Another point of interest is the 'secret bonuses' scattered throughout different parts of the game. Each secret item is worth 1000 points if discovered, and while some are achieved through pure chance, others can be earned quite easily every time.

The first bonus is located in the beginning event. If you tie with your opponent, the explorer from an earlier Konami game, Tutankham, will prance by with a key and award you the 1000 points.

The second secret object is located in round 3, the javelin throw. By building up a speed of at least 1200 cm/second and releasing the javelin at an 80° angle (done by pushing, and holding the 'throw' button) will make the spear ascend to the top of the board where it will hit a duck and fall to the ground. This is the only trick that can be done more than once.

The final bonus is located in the high jump event. By faulting twice, then qualifying, a moose-head will appear and give you the bonus points.

Sports-oriented themes seem to be a new trend for the arcades, and Centuri/ Konami's latest, Track & Field, will in no means hamper their progression. Hopefully, the next few months will see further use of this theme.
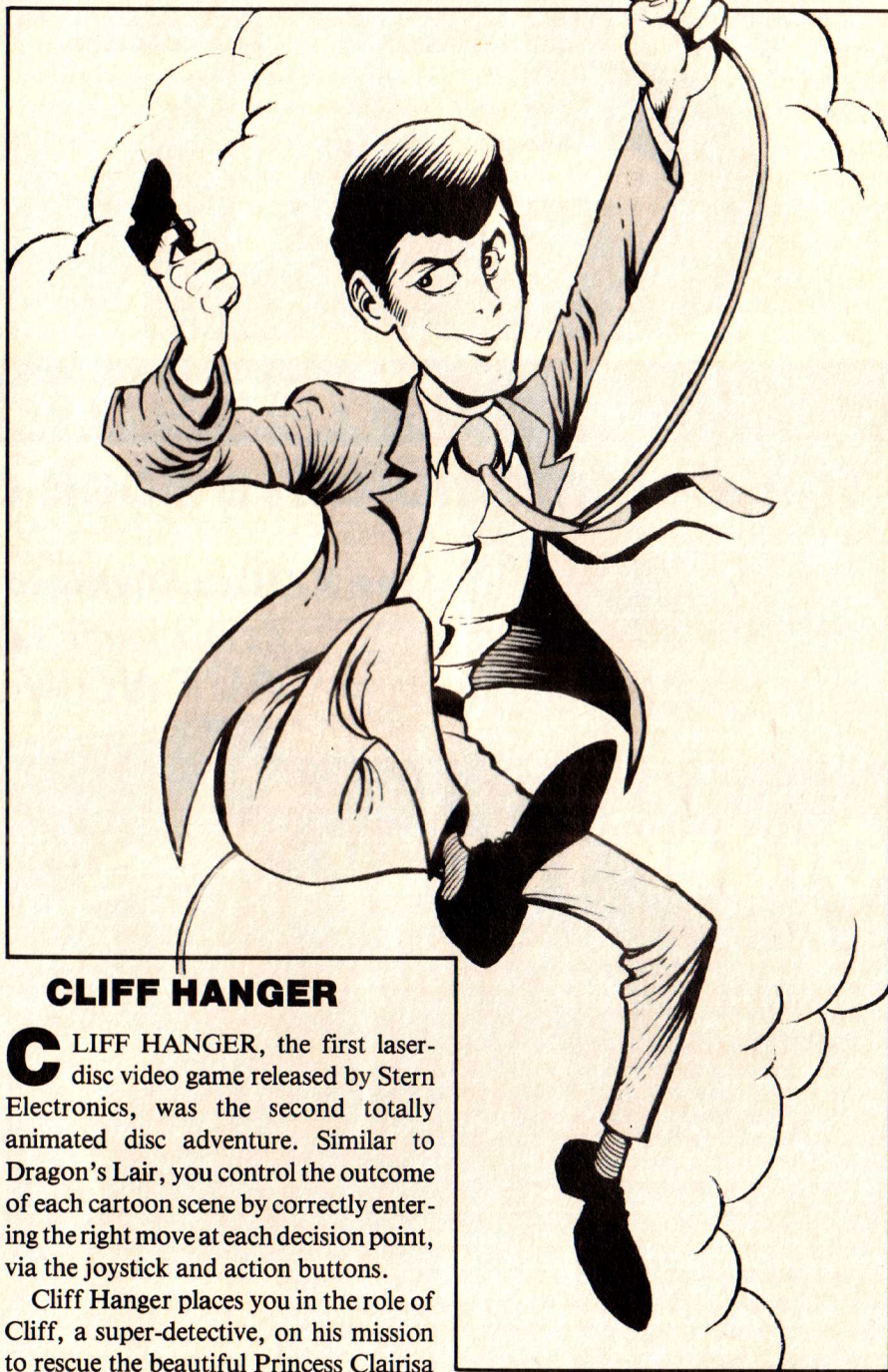
CLIFF HANGER

CLIFF HANGER, the first laser-disc video game released by Stern Electronics, was the second totally animated disc adventure. Similar to Dragon's Lair, you control the outcome of each cartoon scene by correctly entering the right move at each decision point, via the joystick and action buttons.

Cliff Hanger places you in the role of Cliff, a super-detective, on his mission to rescue the beautiful Princess Clairisa from the clutches of the evil Count Dreyco. Along the way, Cliff comes upon various dangers, from merely keeping his car on the road, to fierce hand-to-hand combat with Ninja warriors. As long as you move the joystick and push the buttons in the correct sequences, the cartoon will continue, presenting ever-further danger to Cliff.

Strategy: It is very similar to that in Dragon's Lair. There is only one correct path through the game, if an incorrect move is entered at any time during game play, the cartoon will momentarily stop and you lose a life.

Success at Cliff Hanger is easily achieved by memorizing the patterns used to lead Cliff through each scene. Once you can remember the correct joy-

stick and button sequences for each phase, you will always be able to rescue Clairisa. These patterns are shown in order below. Follow each move by pressing the stick or buttons, listening for a 'beep.' Once you hear the tone, go to next move.

Scene One/Casino: Cliff, after just robbing a Monte Carlo casino, will be fleeing a gang of thugs at the beginning of this round. Push the "foot" button twice to get over the casino fences, then push the hand button and move the stick forward to leave the scene. Next, you must speed through heavy traffic. Move left, right, down, then left and right once more. After this, push the hand button to end the scene with a spectacular car crash.

Scene Two/Car Chase: Here, Cliff gets his first glimpse of Clairisa, being pursued by another group of shady characters working for the count.

Start off by pushing the stick down. Next, press the hand button and move left to begin the chase. Tap the stick to the right twice, then to the left, to keep from crashing out of control. Go right, then down, to avoid the truck. The next three moves are to the left, out of the way of the grenades being thrown by the Count's handymen. Press the hand button, then drive up the side of the cliff. Move right, then left, then down to catch up to the princess. Press 'hand' once again, then push the foot button three times. Turn to the right to avoid the parked steamroller. Slowly, your car will slip over the cliff, use your hand three times to throw a grappling hook, and lower yourself and the princess to safety.

Scene Three/Helicopter Attack: Cliff's next danger occurs at lunch time. A helicopter, armed with machine guns, will try to kill Cliff and his friends. Immediately move left after the bottle breaks and quickly press the foot button after that. Next, turn right, then left. Push the stick forward, then twice to enter the alley. When the chopper cuts you off, push the hand button and move the stick down to switch to reverse. Glide

the stick to the right, left, and forward to run away fom the helicopter. The next moves are down, left, down, right, and forward, and must be done in rapid succession. In the sewers, you must escape the copter by moving forward, then alternating between left and right. Once Samurai stops the enemy helicopter, drive to the right to escape the explosion and end the round.

Scene Four/Ninja: This phase begins with a group of Ninja assassins attempting to slash Cliff. Press the hand button and tap the stick to the right at the same time. Continue this combined attack until three of the Ninja jump out of the roof. Your next move will be up. Return to the strategy of hitting the stick and button simultaneously. After two more of the assassins exit, push forward again. Depress both the foot and hand buttons until Cliff drops his flash bomb, crosses the tops of the buildings and lands in the awaiting car. The Ninja will continue their attack. Move left twice, then to the right once, to kill the remaining Ninja and drive away safely.

Scene Five/Scuba Diving: In this scene Cliff must begin his attack against Dreyco by entering the castle through the water. Use your hand twice to get into the water system. Cliff will then get caught in the current. Swim left, use the foot button, then move right, down, left, and use the hand button. Your final

move is forward through the trap door and into the castle grounds.

Scene Six/Castle: This round begins with Cliff scaling the side of the castle. Depress both the foot and hand buttons four times. Move left, then press both action buttons twice more. Go up, then press both buttons once again. Move left twice, use both buttons, press the stick up. Push the action buttons and move up to get to the top of the castle. Press both buttons once more to catch your rocket and move down to retrieve it from the side of the building. Cliff will succumb to gravity and the momentum will take him into the air, across the castle towers. Continue to press the buttons until Cliff makes it to the left column and attempts to hold on. Again, press both buttons then climb upward. Repeat the last two moves to get into the castle and rescue the princess. Use the buttons to break in the window and get Clairisa. Just when you think you've got it made, the Count will show up and shoot Cliff in the head.

Scene Seven/Wedding: With Cliff injured, it seems inevitable that Dreyco will marry Clairisa against her will. Suddenly, Cliff will appear! Move up to escape the Count and his men.

Scene Eight/Clock: The final round takes place in the clock tower. Here Cliff confronts Count Dreyco in the hands and gears of the enormous time piece. Start by going up, then combine both buttons for 3 moves before fleeing to the right. The remaining moves inside the clock (approximately 30) can be overcome by pressing the buttons together. When the scene shifts to the exterior of the clock, move left to avoid the Count's missiles, then push the buttons to hold onto the face of the clock. The Count meanwhile will throw Clairisa off the structure.

To save her, you must use the action buttons for all remaining moves. With Cliff victorious, and the Count crushed between the hands of the clock, the game ends with a touching scene of our hero and the princess kissing in the sunset. ▲

FLIPPING OUT OVER PINBALL
Game Plan Keeps Going At Full Tilt
By Roger C. Sharpe

Although it has always been the accomplishments of the major coin-op manufacturers that has captured our attention over the years, the contributions of smaller companies cannot be minimized. In fact, many of the lesser known firms have had considerable impact on game design and development.

One of the best examples was the re-emergence of Cinematronics, from the brink of bankruptcy, to the spotlight when it introduced Dragon's Lair, the first animated laser disc arcade game. Another company you might not be instantly familiar with is Game Plan, which has enjoyed a fair share of success on the strength of its pinball machines.

In the mid-to-late Seventies when flipper games were in their heyday, the four largest manufacturers (Bally, Gottlieb, Williams and Chicago Coin/Stern Electronics) were suddenly joined by a number of newcomers on the scene hoping to cash in on the public's growing demand for pinball. Almost every entrant into the sweepstakes had a chance to survive and thrive, although most rapidly disappeared from view.

It was an exciting time for pinball when many of the conventional standards regarding design were thrown out the window. Atari, which had already made its presence felt in video game development, brought out the first of its abbreviated line of flipper games in 1976. The Atarians (as it was called) introduced a new, wider shape to what had been basic pinball playfields and cabinetry. Others soon followed this lead, while more novel configurations were also being tried and tested.

A major direction that received much attention was the cocktail table/sit down pin ball machine. And it was here that Game Plan stepped in with such innovative models as Foxy Lady and Vegas. However, by 1979, the company had bigger plans when it decided to test the waters with a full-size pinball machine. The result was Sharpshooter (designed by *Video Games* editor Roger Sharpe), which introduced seven digit

scoring for the first time in the solid-state era. In addition, the game broke new ground with a theme (the wild west) that was outstandingly embellished with sound effects which ranged from gun shots to galloping hoof beats.

Game Plan had scored on the strength of the game's enormous popularity, but then couldn't recapture the same heights with such follow up machines as Coney Island, Pinball Lizard or an effort that featured hockey great Mike Bossy on the backglass. By this point in time the shift to video was an established fact and Game Plan had no alternative but to do likewise. The company left behind its visions of pinball glory and entered the video wars with games that included Intruder, Killer Comet, Megatack and Kaos.

The important thing was that Game Plan managed to survive through the periods of feast and famine. Then, as *Video Games* has chronicled over the past year, the mood began to swing back to older arcade favorites, previously thought to be dead and forever gone. Pinball rose to the top of the revival movement and Game Plan was ready to tool up once again based on the demand for a possible re-release of an updated Sharpshooter.

At the end of 1983, Sharpshooter II surfaced to a receptive audience of distributors, operators and, most importantly, players. Game Plan was

back. There is still a long way to go as the coin-op industry continues to make strides out of its protracted slump, and with players now open to trying a variety of amusement game entertainment, companies like Game Plan have a much brighter future than they once did.

In fact, as a way of saying that the game has just started, this Addison, Illinois-based manufacturer is in the midst of releasing its latest pinball creation, Attila the Hun, which promises to keep the ball rolling for both Game Plan and flipper fans everywhere. Although video has managed to make the transition from the arcade to the living room via home game systems and personal computers, part of the special appeal of pinball machines is that it's a unique entertainment form. And players all over the world are discovering that the challenge and enjoyment of a flipper game is timeless.

Well, now *Video Games* Magazine, in cooperation with Game Plan, is giving you a chance to win your very own pinball machine. Just beginning to appear in game rooms, Attila the Hun is yours for the taking if you know some basic facts about pinball and this game's lead character. It's a fully loaded pinball machine with all the sights and sounds that make pinball what it is, and it's worth more than $2,000.

All you have to do is answer correctly all of the questions in our Pinball Wizard's Special When Lit Trivia Contest. Just fill out the entry form on the following page, or use a blank piece of paper and mail your answers to Pinball Wizard's Contest, *Video Games* Magazine, Suite 6204, 350 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10118. Employees of Pumpkin Press, Game Plan, their subsidiaries or affiliated companies, advertising agencies, and their immediate family members are ineligible to participate. Contestants with all the correct answers and the earliest postmark will be eligible for the grand prize. In case of ties, the decision of *Video Games* Magazine judges and editors will be final.

PINBALL WIZARD'S
SPECIAL WHEN LIT TRIVIA CONTEST

1. Born during The Great Depression, pinball began its exceptional rise in popularity based on the strength of the first commercially successful machine introduced in 1931. What was the name of this landmark game?

2. One year later the silent marvels were forever transformed by a pinball machine that featured not only sound, but also the first mechanical action on a playfield. What was the name of this breakthrough effort?

3. Who was the legendary designer responsible for this game?

4. On Game Plan's Sharpshooter II there's a lane on the left side, about midway down the playfield, that's worth a special increased point value. How many points is it worth?

   A) 10,000
   B) 20,000
   C) 30,000
   D) 40,000
   E) 50,000
   F) 75,000

5. Although Pac-Man is normally associated with video games, Bally/Midway did take advantage of this incredibly successful character when they spun-off two distinctive pinball machines based on the Pac-clan. What were they called?

6. Stern Electronics, formerly known as Chicago Coin, had a long and glorious pinball history until the company decided to bow out of the flipper wars. Their last machine, released in the spring of 1982 was notable because pinball had always featured a flat, slightly inclined playfield. This one offered a molded surface with hills and valleys. What was it called?

7. Game Plan's newest pinball machine features Attila the Hun on its backglass and playfield graphics. Well, Attila's reputation normally preceded him when he went on his merry conquest way, but where was his kingdom roughly based?
   A) Germany
   B) Italy
   C) Austria
   D) Hungary
   E) Mongolia

8. Although Attila received more press, he did have a brother who ruled jointly with him until Attila had enough and killed him. What was his name?

9. Attila finally met with his own demise on the night of his marriage to a German princess. In what year did the world bid adieu to the incredible Hun?

10. It may be a surprise to some but pinball machines didn't always have flippers. In fact, the first game to feature them wasn't introduced until 1947. The rest, as they say, is history. But what was the name of this historic pinball machine?

11. While players might have been content with single-level pinball machines, manufacturers weren't when they unleashed double-level playfield designs on the pinball public. The game which started the trend was called?

12. Bells, flashing lights and other effects had always been a part of the pinball playing experience, but even this would change at the end of 1979 when arcades and game rooms around the world welcomed the first talking pinball machine. And the name of this vocal attraction?

13. Although their contributions to the development and evolution of video game entertainment remains the prime legacy, Atari did have some limited success with pinball machines, especially one that featured a super hero. Name the hero and you name the game.
    A) Spiderman
    B) Superman
    C) The Incredible Hulk
    D) Batman

14. While everyone else was building up to create double-level pinball machines, Gottlieb broke new ground when they introduced a game that featured a playfield *underneath* a playfield. This was back in 1981 and the game was called?

15. Patented in May of 1871, by a Cincinnati man named Montague Redgrave, pinball machines are generally conceded to have been inspired by this invention, although its game play and design might be better suited within the ancestry of billiards. What did Mr. Redgrave call his original game?

PINBALL WIZARD'S SPECIAL WHEN LIT TRIVIA CONTEST

Name_____ Age_____

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City_____ State_____ Zip_____

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SCREEN GEM

Will *The Last Starfighter* Be Summer '84s Blockbuster Hit?

By Richard Goodwin

Imagine being so good at a particular video game that you're asked to travel to another world and use your unique skills.

Imagine finding yourself in a car that suddenly leaves the road and then the atmosphere.

Imagine being a would-be screenwriter and finding your movie being made at Universal Studios with a cast including Robert Preston and making history by using a Cray Computer for all the special effects.

All of which brings us to this summer's *The Last Starfighter*, a $16 million co-production between Universal and Lorimar Productions, written by newcomer Jonathan Betuel and directed by Nick Castle, Jr. According to Betuel, it all began in a video arcade, long since gone, located in midtown Manhattan.

"It was a sleazy place you go to during your lunch hour," he says from his office in Los Angeles. "It had old pool tables, pinball machines and the new video games. This was before things really got big, before Pac-Man. I guess Space Invaders had just made it big. The video games were bringing in kids and giving the arcade a facelift. To me, it was all something exciting but before then, my knowledge of video games remained to be Pong.

"Well, one day there was a cluster of people around Space Invaders and I noticed a young man having an argument with an old man about who had the next turn. I thought, 'My goodness, there's really something here.' It took a while to figure out how to incorporate it into a story."

Betuel had wanted to be a screenwriter for a long time and had spent the second half of the 1970's trying to write scripts and break into the movies. Meanwhile, he worked as an advertising copywriter for J. Walter Thompson and Benton & Bowles.

"I found myself spending more and more time at these parlors," Betuel continues. "My favorite game became Battlezone. I wondered what it could be used for, then I heard a larger version of Battlezone was being used for training tank crews. The price tag on the game was like $15,000 to $20,000 and the only one who had one was Steven Spielberg. If the Pentagon was training people with video games, and since so many of the themes were outer space, suppose aliens used them to recruit and train soldiers. That became the pebble that rolled down the snowbank."

Betuel proceeded to spend the next three months refining his ideas into a screenplay. "I was revising, editing, second-guessing," he admits. Finally, his agent at William Morris sent it to Brigette Potter at Lorimar Productions. She liked the script enough to send it up the ladder to producer Gary Adelson.

"Two months later I met Gary," Betuel explains, "and we both wanted to keep the every kid aspect of the script, which would have been so easy to lose in the hardware."

At roughly the same time, Lorimar made a co-production deal with Universe for three pictures, including *The Last Starfighter*, and the studio selected Nick Castle to direct.

Castle, a soft-spoken, pleasant man, has been in the field for years having done almost everything. He may be best remembered, although unseen, as the man under the sheet who slashed baby-sitters in John Carpenter's chilling *Halloween*. Castle grew up in a show business atmosphere since his father was a choreographer at MGM. While a student at USC, Castle struck up a friendship with Carpenter which lasts today. Together, with fellow students, they made a documentary, *The Resurrection of Bronco Billy*, which won an Academy Award.

After *Halloween*, Castle turned to writing and co-scripted Carpenter's *Escape from New York*. He finally got a chance behind the camera as he made his directorial debut with *T.A.G—The Assassination Game*. Based on the then-popular college game of make-believe cloak and dagger activity, the movie received spotty distribution until it premiered on HBO this past February.

"Lorimar saw *T.A.G.* and asked me in to talk about *Starfighter*," Castle recalls. "I told them where I thought the script should go and they said I was their boy. I'm not a science fiction buff and I didn't consider myself a science fiction director. I think that's part of the reason why Lorimar wanted me. They didn't want anyone who was only good with technology and throw away the human relationships, which can happen in these movies. That's what they liked when they saw *T.A.G.,* they liked the relationships."

Betuel and Castle spent six months together, refining the screenplay while Castle immersed himself in the world of video games, which, by the summer of 1981, had grown to mammoth proportions. "In terms of research, I went to the arcades, bought a system and my kids love the games. I got to like it, particularly Phoenix. In the course of investigating what people liked about the games, I saw how people looked, the stance they took, the look of concentration. I could then impart this information to the actors."

Betuel explains that the work they did together was a matter of refining, "character shadings, tonal nuances, tightening the action. The characters are the same, the action is the same, the notion that video games are used as a recruiter is the same. Now everything is well motivated."

The finished story focuses on Alex, a lonely young man who divides his time between going to school and helping his mother maintain a trailer park. His only time to relax is when he plays Starfighter, a complex video game in the park's office. When he turns over the machine, he is greeted by Centauri, who turns out to be a recruiting agent from an inter-planetary group called the Star League. The game was actually a test for potential starfighters, needed to protect the League from an invasion by the vicious Ko-Dan. Alex is taken to Rylos, homeworld of the League, while an android called Beta is left behind so no one notices Alex's absence.

When Alex learns the extent of the danger, he decides he'd rather be back on Earth but upon his return, he discovers that Ko-Dan killers were after him in their efforts to remove any potential threats to their plans for conquest. Alex also discovers that Beta had made a shambles of his relationship with his girlfriend. A sneak attack wipes out the other starfights and Alex, the last starfighter, must decide whether or not to save not only the League but his own life.

Castle began casting in the spring of 1983 and Betuel asked to sit in. "What I discovered was, you could sit there for days, see lots of actors and actresses, all of whom are excellent, but there's that moment when one of them walks into the room and you just feel it in your gut. It's interesting to see if we all got that feeling together and ultimately that held true. When the right person does a scene, it's sort of like *deja vu*!"

In the end, they selected Lance Guest (*Halloween II*) as Alex, Dan O'Herlihy, now a regular on *Whiz Kids* as Grig the alien co-pilot, Catherine Mary Stewart as Alex's girlfriend and Barbara Bosson, Fay Furillo on *Hill Street Blues*, as Alex's mother. But the pivotal role of Centauri was filled by the one and only actor Betuel considered, Robert Preston. "I really wanted an actor who can do a salesman's job on the kid, the kind of lovable scalawag that you know is trying to put something over on you. Preston does it so well, with an air of joviality that you love to hear the words, they mesmerize you. Preston's type of delivery allows him to say three lines in the space of time it takes another actor to say one.

"We talked about casting and I suggested we get Preston although I knew it was unlikely. They thought it would be great but it's the kind of thing that drifted away but it drifted back the more we talked about it. I couldn't believe he agreed to do it."

As casting was underway, Castle went about putting together a production crew. He picked Ron Cobb to help design both the sets and the aliens. They both worked on John Carpenter's first film, the now-classic *Dark Star*, although they never met. Cobb is best known for his work on *Star Wars, Close Encounters of the Third Kind, ALIEN* and *Conan the Barbarian*. "He invented the ships, alien make-up designs; all the hardware; it was a real tour-de-force for him and art director Jim Bissell.

In thinking about the movie, before beginning the 40 days of production last summer, Castle says he saw it as a light-hearted movie, not too far away from *Wizard of Oz*. "It has room to be entertaining instead of convincing like *2001*. We wanted to be more light-hearted than that. The film itself is not dependent on the video game. It's a real nice hook, the twister in *Oz*.. They both get you from one land to another. Even if you never touch a game, you should like this movie.

Betuel was invited by Castle to be on the set during rehearsals and principal photography, something most writers never get to do. "Nick said I should really be here," Betuel recalls. "Nick, as a writer, had gone through the same thing. He said what you learn is no substitute for being on the spot. It helps a writer's perspective on his own work. It teaches

you how to be ruthless to yourself—it's better to be ruthless to yourself than to be edited.'' On the set, Betuel was called upon to discuss changes in dialogue or story points and observes, ''It's the kind of pressure no one should live under, that's for sure.''

Being his first special effects film, Castle had to get used to filming incomplete scenes, quite often vastly incomplete. ''It's kind of difficult,'' he admits, ''but it stretches your imagination. Shooting things three-quarters of a year ago that have to be composited with things that looked a certain way was a particular challenge. By the time you get to it, there are certain limitations . . . certain compromises you have to make. That's the disconcerting side of it, but it's also fun because you have to come up with new solutions, new angles to solve problems. It's something every special effects director has to face, and it was certainly new to me.''

What most of the other press will concentrate on is the Cray-created special effects. Computer-generated effects were fresh when introduced in *Tron* but people have wondered how well they can be integrated into live-action. Last year Walt Disney tried it with *Something Wicked This Way Comes* but was ultimately discarded. Now, every special effect in the film, some 20 minutes in all, is being done on the Cray. The supercomputer, frequently featured on *Entertainment Tonight,* has been used by Digital Effects to provide *Starfighter* with a special look.

''I'm sitting about 10 yards from it right now,'' Castle says. ''It's pretty amazing. It should revolutionize the industry. We are putting together images that have never been seen on a computer, especially for movies. The effects are interspersed within the film although the last quarter uses the most effects. In tone, it's not a special effects movie, it has a lot of charm, fun and humor. It's not a burden, it enhances the picture.''

Betuel agrees, adding, ''They are doing things at Digital that will blow stop-motion control out of the water. I think, visually it's stunning. There are limitations with motion control that have done away with on *Starfighter.* There's a greater mobility and a different look.''

He thinks there may be too much attention paid to the effects and not the story. ''Does the tail begin to wag the dog? I think we molded the story to the effects. There is no jarring explosion of effects that will put you out of the story. It's been a real happy marriage and one we've been conscious about. Audiences will be seeing these effects for the first time and you'll see how each enhances the other.''

Audiences may have already seen some early effects work in the trailer, which began playing in hundreds of theaters last January. The film has a lot of competition this summer, notably two movies preceeding *Starfighter: Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock.* Both Castle and Betuel agree it will be stiff competition but their hopes remain high.

''I think it's a good film and would have a good run whenever you put it in release.'' Castle announces. Betuel adds, ''What I've heard is that summers like this do nothing but help the collective box office and stimulate interest in going to the movies. I really can't wait to see all the movies. I watched a trailer for *Indiana Jones* and it got cheered and I saw the trailer for our film and that too was cheered. We all have high hopes for this movie.''

Also coming this summer are an assortment of *Starfighter*-related items including a Marvel Comics adaptation, novelization by Alan Dean Foster and games from Atari.

Castle says he worked with people from Atari to make the game interesting but challenging. ''The game itself is not

Photo courtesy of Universal Studios

revolutionary like Dragon's Lair. It's not breaking any new ground but I think it will combine some of the best things that are out at the moment. In the movie we wanted the game to be fairly recognizable to your average video game. We also wanted it to be complicated and fairly hard to do so no one could just walk up there and be a master at it. It's a real formidable game, somewhat like Defender—it has a certain complexity. You can move the cursor on the one hand and move the whole field of view on the other. There's a lot of dexterity involved in making you a good player. I think it will be a challenge to video game players. Atari will be using some of the same advanced technology and equipment as they used in Star Wars, another game I like. It won't just be vectors, there will be more complicated images. The game is a combination, fairly close to the game in the movie and they embellish it with more of the action from the *real* movie.''

Unfortunately, players won't be able to run out of the theater and into the lobby and immediately try their luck. Atari announced in February that the arcade version won't be released until September. Castle adds the 2600 version will be released over the summer.

Betuel, who finds it hard to believe there will be a game based on his movie, is even more amazed to find Alan Dean Foster, master of the novelization, penning the book version of *Starfighter*. The $2.95 paperback will be released in June from Berkely. ''The novelization was something I didn't have time for because I wanted to get into another script I'm working on with Gary and Nick. First of all, when I heard it was going to be Alan Dean Foster, I thought, 'Who am *I* to get into *his* way?' I love his work. I've always been a fan of science fiction and when I was in New York, I haunted Forbidden Planet, the largest sci-fi bookstore. Sci-fi is a genre that was really overlooked until *Star Wars*. You rarely see sci-fi books get reviewed in the New York Review of Books yet there are these great authors like Isaac Asimov.

''Also, after spending so many years at this—you watch yourself getting old—I didn't just want to change the tense and turn the script into a novelization. I didn't want to do a hackneyed job of it. I thought a fresh perspective would help make it more than it was and Foster has done a really good job on it.''

As the June 22 release date approaches, Castle is busily overseeing the completion of special effects. The film has been cut together and each completed effect is being added in. Craig Safen, who scored Castle's *T.A.G.*, is composing the music. Universal is gearing up it's vast publicity machine and already industry talk is high on the film.

Betuel is busily writing a screenplay about two kingdoms, monsters and someone being placed in this unusual situation. ''If *Starfighter* is Sci-Fi,'' he says, ''this one is a fantasy. Imagine one of the kingdoms as New York but I can't let the cat out of the bag.''

Castle says happily that he has other projects in the works. In addition to the one Betuel is writing, he has another genre project in mind with producer Adelson and another writer. Then he talks of a third fantasy called *Blue Suede Shoes*. ''Word on *Starfighter* is good,'' he says, ''so I'm starting to get some calls. It's a good movie and we're really proud of it.''

No one is prouder—or more amazed—then Betuel. ''I know this sounds like hype but this film was really a series of happy accidents. It was both exhausting and exhilirating...and an education. You realize that getting as far as shooting is really a string of lucky coincidences. You hear horror stories about creative differences but this was as smooth as silk so I fully expect to have horrible experiences from this point on.'' ▲
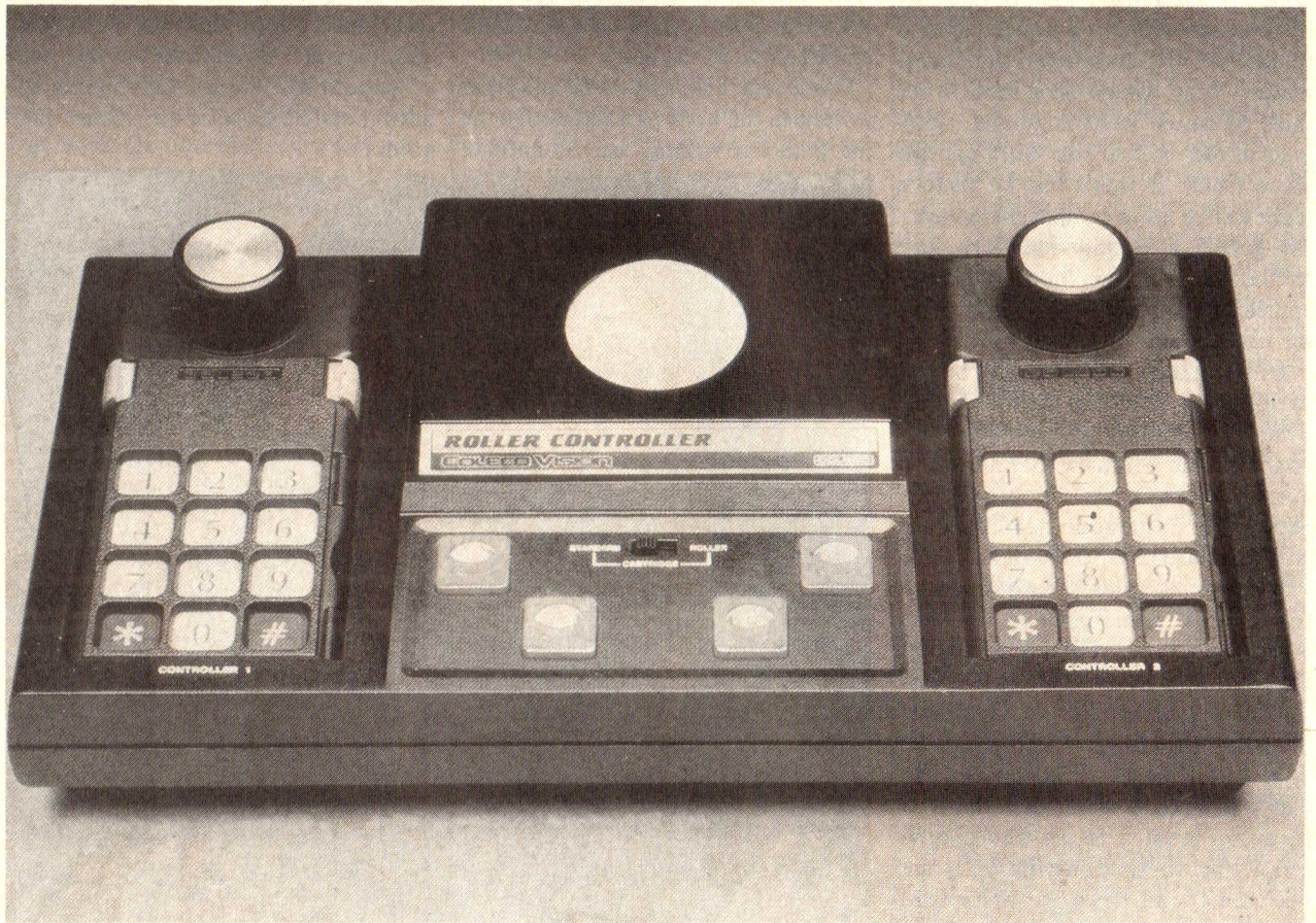
Taking Coleco's Roller Controller For A Spin

By Mark Brownstein and Mike Sittnick

Now that the long-awaited Coleco-Vision peripherals are finally rolling into the store shelves, Coleco has begun a major advertising campaign to support them. Their main advertisement depicts the ColecoVision owner enjoying Super Action Controllers, Driving Module; the expansion module for Atari games and the ADAM computer expansion module. The missing peripheral from the ad is the new Coleco Roller Controller. Perhaps part of the reason that the Roller Controller (a tracball) has been relatively ignored in most of the ads is because the ads compare Coleco-Vision to the competitive Atari 5200.

Atari already has a trakball for the 5200, so mentioning the Roller Controller would not be showing off one of the peripherals that ColecoVision has that Atari doesn't. On the other hand, the Atari 2600 adapter is also available for 5200 owners as well as ColecoVision owners, but Coleco referred to their Atari expansion module anyway. Is there yet another reason why the Roller Controller is not being promoted as much as other peripherals? The truth is that the Roller Controller is not a vital controller for the ColecoVision owner to have.

The reason that it is not as important

for a ColecoVision owner to own a trak-ball device is because of the games available. Slither, a modest arcade hit similar to Centipede, which comes free with the controller, is the only *real* trakball style game that Coleco makes. All of the other Coleco arcade titles, which make up the great bulk of available games, were controlled either by joysticks (Space Panic, Mr. Do!, Donkey Kong, Jr., etc.), buttons (Space Fury, Carnival), paddle controllers (Omega Race, Victory) or steering wheel (Turbo). Coleco had decided to package Omega Race as a Roller Controller recommended game and Victory as a Roller

Controller only game. Both of these games are really paddle games. They would be just as well controlled, maybe even better controlled, by the speed roller on the Super Action Controller or the joystick (which is possible on Omega Race). Coleco has also recommended in one of their few Roller Controller ads, that Cosmic Avenger and Pepper II are more fun with the Roller Controller. Not true! These are joystick games and are played best with a joystick. So, is there any reason for the fanatic ColecoVision owner to buy a Roller Controller?

Yes, but the reasons are not immediately obvious from Coleco's marketing. First, there are Coleco games that *do* play well with a ball controller even though they did not use a ball in the arcade. They are Gorf and Space Fury. Sub-Roc, Carnival, and Time Pilot are other games that are not terribly hampered by the control. Coleco's best games, their climbing games, are virtually impossible to play with the controller. There is good news for ball control fans, however. War Room, North American Phillip's (Odyssey) first and last game for ColecoVision, which offers Missile Command and Killer Bees type of play with oodles of strategy, challenge, and humor, is a perfect roller controller game. Moreover, Atari will be releasing the magnificent Centipede for Coleco-Vision. As Atari makes more games for ColecoVision, there will undoubtedly be more tracball games, since Atari, who invented that tracball, has made the most, and the best, ball control games. Another reason why the ColecoVision roller controller might be worth the money is because it works on Expansion Module #1, the Atari 2600 adapter! Although it says so nowhere in the controller's manual, the roller controller works perfectly when plugged into Expansion #1. Some games, particularly those written by Gary Kitchen (Keystone Kapers, Pressure Cooker, and 2600 Donkey Kong), require that the second (right) action button be continuously pressed to enable the roller controller to work. This can be done easily by folding a piece of paper in half and jamming the button down with it by sliding it through the crack between the button and the controller. This does not hamper game play since all 2600 games have only one action button anyway. It will not harm

the controller or the game system either. So, CV owners with an expansion module 1 may find nine or ten games to play with the roller controller instead of two or three, depending on their library.

There are other features of the roller controller that make it worth considering. The controller also acts as a mount for the two ColecoVision joystick controllers. It is difficult to fit all the cord into the compartment, particularly for people who own well used sticks with stretched cords. But once it is done, the controllers become part of the unit. Because of the configuration, games could be designed for ColecoVision (or the ADAM computer, which the roller controller works perfectly on) that employ up to four action buttons, 24 keypad buttons (!!), two joysticks, and a ball controller. This allows players to change controllers in multi-themed games instantly. Having two joysticks could also be a boon for games like
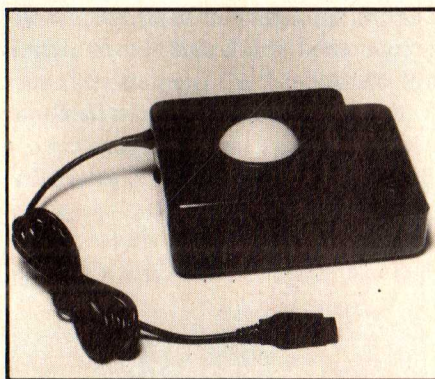
Crazy Climber, Tutankham, and Robotron if Atari and Parker Brothers, who have rights to the games will be releasing them for ColecoVision-type systems, configure the game so that two joysticks can be employed. Other games, Wacko for instance, use a ball controller and a joystick in the coin-op version. If this game is ever adapted for home (doubtful), the roller controller console would be perfect. Moreover, other Coleco games that are not released yet (FrontLine, Wild Western) utilize unconventional click-stop controllers that a joystick/tracball combo might be an adequate substitute for. Even if the controller never catches on and these potentialities are never realized, many will find it handy to be able to convert their handheld controller into a console, just like on coin-op machines. In fact, scores may increase on games like Donkey Kong and Popeye because the hands won't fatigue so quickly from us-

ing the action button. Moreover, the console, which has suction cups for secure mounting, help insure against players losing track of the direction they are holding their joystick in, causing a misdirection of the stick. The console is also useful for young children whose small hands may not be able to handle the entire ColecoVision controller. Also, two player games allow one of the players to use a joystick—if he wishes —an option not available with some other tracballs.

Why Coleco hasn't recommended any of these uses for the roller controller is a mystery. Although few Coleco-Vision games themselves currently lend themselves to the controller, the console itself, with the promise of more tracball style games and maybe even *more* complicated configurations, is extremely well designed, perhaps "accidentally." Since ColecoVision itself is pretty compatible with other formats, perhaps the Controller has those same attributes as a matter of course.

The "roller ball" responds almost as well as its arcade brother, though it is noisier, and the fire buttons are a little small but are easily pressed. The lower fire buttons sometimes get stuck however. Overall, the design is excellent. If the Coleco sticks themselves were better, and the action buttons larger and raised higher, this would indeed be the ultimate console. The unit is also very sturdy and physically comfortable. The ball part is raised and at a slant so that violent hands do not hit the joysticks. The keypads are also very easily accessed and make strategy games (like War Room, the perfect roller controller game) that much easier for lefties and righties. The only other physical defect, as mentioned before is the difficulty in getting the controllers in the slots snugly in the first place. This could be an inconvenience for players who like to remove the controllers for hand use frequently. Of course, the controller works fine without the sticks in it, so despite the sloppy look, an owner can just keep them out. Incidentally, the unit was originally going to get its power from batteries (groan!). Coleco wisely changed the configuration and designed a piggy-back connector that plugs into the ColecoVision power slot. The power supply plugs into the other side of the connector. A special adapter is included to allow ADAM owners to plug the con-

troller into the printer power supply. More physical features of the console include its sturdy black casing, which nicely matches the ColecoVision (it does not come in white for the ADAM).

For those with a large library of Atari 2600-type games, Slither and Centipede freaks, and people who desire to mount their CV controller, this is the device. Others may want to wait to see how the enormous potential of the roller controller is utlized; its future may be great, particularly if Coleco sees what an excellent and versatile machine they have.

—*Mike Sittnick*

Atari calls theirs a "Trakball"—they have the right to—they invented it. At Coleco, it's called "Roller Controller," and it works extremely well. The Coleco unit is a plastic box with what looks like a billard ball in the middle. Below, and to either side of the ball, are two buttons, mounted diagonally from each other. Between the buttons is a switch for selecting Roller Controller or Coleco Controller.

At either side of the ball and switches is a receptacle/controller storage area. You can't use the roller controller without the joysticks hooked in, because you need the numeric keypad to start the game.

Hookup is very simple: Just connect the power supply for your ColecoVision to the back of the Roller Controller and plug the other end into the Coleco-Vision. *Then* unplug the two joysticks from the ColecoVision, replace them with the numbered Roller Controller plugs, and finally, plug the joysticks into the appropriate area of the Roller Controller. The last step is, perhaps, the most difficult step of the whole procedure, since the area is designed to fit tight. The hookup sounds more difficult than it really is—in a few minutes, you could be playing Slither, which is included with the Roller Controller.

The worst thing about the entire hookup is this: What do you do with the connector for hooking to ADAM? This connector is designed to relay power and signal from the controllers, ADAM, and the memory device, but has no function in the ColecoVision set-up. The connector is a unique design (you can't get anything like it at, say, Radio Shack), without it, you can't hook the unit to the

ADAM, and it looks exactly like the kind of thing that disappears as soon as you get it out of the box. I tried to somehow fit it under one of the controller holder slots (it works, but the controller doesn't exactly fit), so you might find a *safe* place, in case you ever expect to expand your ColecoVision to an ADAM.

Once the Controller is hooked up, it probably won't ever have to be unhooked (maybe you can tape that adapter to the entry controller storage slot on your ColecoVision?). The Turbo adapter can be hooked up through the Roller Controller. If you plan to get a Roller Controller, plan on leaving it hooked up all the time.

Coleco doesn't tell you this, but you can, conceivably, play the joystick controlled games with the controllers plugged into the storage slots. The top left button is the controller 1 left fire button, bottom left is controller 1 right fire button, top right button is the controller 2 right fire button, and bottom right is the controller 2 left fire button. Armed with this knowledge, if you set the Roller Controller's suction cup base onto a

smooth surface, you can use it as a firm controller support (one hand on the joystick, the other firing two handed)—try it, you may even improve your score on other games.

The power and control cords are long enough to let you leave the ColecoVision hooked up near the TV set, and set the Roller Controller on a coffee table or wherever. It's a well designed device.

I would have had reservations in recommending the investment of seventy bucks for the Turbo adapter, and experience would have proven right, since only one game has been produced that uses that game. Last month, I praised the Super Game Controller—they work well, and there were already two good games designed for that system (plus the fact the controllers could be used to play most games). Although the Roller Controller, at under seventy dollars, is a lot of money, you get a lot—a superior game control device/controller holder, rapid fire built into the controller, a very well functioning tracball device, and Slither, which, on its own merits, should sell a lot of Roller Controllers. ▲

—*Mark Brownstein*

COIN-OP SHOP

High Drama In The Arcade World

By Jim Gorzelany

The coin-op industry is taking on the dimensions of high drama lately, with rumors of takeovers, sellouts, and corporate chicanery circulating as never before. Though the business as a whole is not likely to go under, the success or failure of key products during the summer months will likely determine which manufacturers will be in and which will be out of the market by year's end. The industry, as they say, is on the edge. Many of the new games being introduced this spring represent, if not make or break efforts for their manufacturers, something very close to it.

Take big-name Atari, for example. Although the struggling division of Warner Communications will certainly not go broke if its long-awaited laserdisc game, Firefox, is less than a hit, the company could stand to lose a great deal of money if the game fails. Further, if Warner intends to sell Atari as is occasionally rumored, the asking price, at least from the coin-op end, may have to be less than expected if the company carries the albatross of a monumental flop around its neck.

Also under scrutiny is Cinematronics/ Magicom/Don Bluth Animation, the designers and manufacturers of last year's wildly successful cartoon laser game, Dragon's Lair. Many eyes are on the once nearly-bankrupt company to see if it can repeat this triumph with its newest effort, Space Ace.

Most of the same sets of eyes are also on Nolan Bushnell of Pong fame, generally regarded as the "father of coin-operated video games." Enjoined from participating in the video game business for several years through an agreement with Atari (dating back to when the company he founded was gobbled up by Warner), Bushnell is back in the game rooms with the Sente System of interchangeable games. Whether he is a true videogame genius, or someone who just got lucky in the first place remains to be dictated by the marketplace.

Zaccaria is a small Italian manufacturer who has been trying for the last year or so to get wide distribution for its video and pinball games on American soil. If its latest video entry, Jackrabbit, goes nowhere, the inventive company may just decide to stay close to home in the future.

Data East's future may or may not hang in the balance of its newest releases, Tag-Team Wrestling and Boomer Rang'r (although you never know these days), although this company and others share a common concern of trying to break through the general public apathy which prevails.

ATARI'S FIREFOX

After many months of development Atari finally unleashed its first laserdisc game, Firefox, at this spring's Amusement Showcase International in Chicago. At this point in time (Atari is one of the last of the major manufacturers to produce a laser game), releasing a product of this nature runs a higher-than-usual risk of failure. Even at their most basic level, disc machines are expensive to produce, and even more expensive to sell. Because of this, there is a growing resistance to disc games in the marketplace from operators who have already sunk many thousands of dollars in such games, and are still waiting to show a return on their investment.

Still, Atari has bravely chosen to throw caution to the wind and bet the farm on taking Firefox to market after
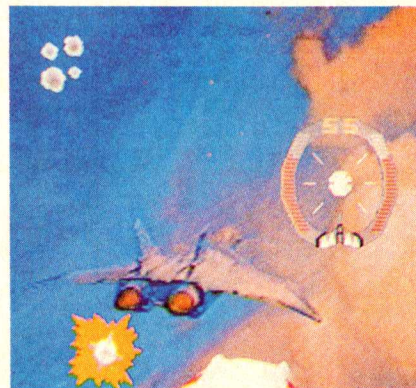
dropping what must have been a bundle to develop this cockpit-perspective fly-and-shoot laser contest. Based, as you might imagine, on last year's adventure film starring Clint Eastwood, the game uses actual movie footage to simulate flying the famed Firefox fighter over treacherous ice fields, through billowing clouds, and in narrow crevasses. From the high-tech cabinet designs (both upright and cockpit) to its rousing original music score; from the smooth disc-operating system to its effective meld of filmed and computer-generated graphics, Atari has created one of the more technically-impressive laser games to date.

The storyline is fairly simple. You've just stolen Firefox, "the fastest, most sophisticated warplane on the face of this earth" from Russia and must fly out from behind the Iron Curtain with your life, and ship, intact. Along the way, you must avoid detection by Russki infra-red tracking systems, while searching for refueling points that will enable you to go the distance. You must also avoid and/or destroy a host of MIG fighters and other Firefox prototypes that, needless to say, are there to see that you don't make it out alive. You can choose to fly one of four different escape routes, depending on how many quarters or tokens you're willing to part with. Four bits allows you to take on either a 3,000-mile (easy) or 6,000 (moderate) mission; six bits allows you to participate in either a 9,000-mile (hard) mission or one of unlimited length. The game is over when you either complete your mission or run out of fuel.

The game is operated by means of a two-handed Star Wars-type controller, equipped with cannon-firing trigger switches and missile-launching thumb buttons. What you control here is not the ship itself—one presumes it's on automatic pilot—but the on-screen cursor used to aim your weaponry. One nice feature here is that the cursor displays information regarding your fuel level and available missiles, eliminating the need to shift your eyes away from the action at any time. One bad feature is that at no time do you feel like you're actually in control of the Firefox ship.

At the onset of a mission, you must fire at the radar vortexes that appear onscreen before they turn red. Once a radar vortex has turned red, this means that the Russians have detected you and will send every aircraft this side of Siberia to shoot you down. You'll earn points for shooting everything you see: radar vortexes, MIGs, other Fireforxes, and enemy fire. If you're hit by enemy fire, you won't lose a life, but you will lose part of your fuel supply.

If you make it to certain checkpoints along the way undetected by Russki radar, you'll earn bonus points. At each of these checkpoints, you'll be given the option to either fly near the ground or up in the clouds. High-altitude flying uses less fuel, but makes you more vulnerable to enemy detection. Low-altitude flying uses more fuel, but gives better cover (either way, it's a trade-off—I suggest flying low because the scenery is better).

Unfortunately, for all the technical wizardry Atari has demonstrated in creating Firefox, and for all the creativity the company has shown in adapting the movie storyline for video game use, all they've really come up with here is an elaborate target-shooting game. The early radar blasting stage of each part of the game is nothing more than an exer-cise in reaction—as soon as a target pops up on the screen, you must shoot it immediately to avoid detection. Since this is the basic premise of the game (remember, you earn bonus points only by remaining undetected), all a really skilled Firefox player will ever do is shoot at radar targets, which is certainly not the most exciting part of the contest.

The game gets truly blistering if and when you are detected, as the skies become filled with enemy ships and shells. Again, it's just an excercise in target-shooting, but at least this time the targets move toward you, away from you, and across the screen, so there's more variety to it. The computer graphics are nicely done here, and blend well into the spectacular disc-based backgrounds. However, since the skies often get filled up with planes and explosions, you get little opportunity to see the sights. The game also gets quick at this point, and can often end before you know what hit you. If you're good enough, and if your mission is long enough, the game will eventually go into darkness. Personally, in my 20 or so plays of the machine, I've never so much as found a refueling station, let alone flown the Firefox into darkness.

Again, the game is good-looking, and offers some nice touches, such as Clint Eastwood's digitized voice, a variable game volume control, and other features. However, from a game play standpoint, I'd rate Firefox about average, just a notch above M.A.C.H. 3 and Galaxy Ranger, and a notch below Star Rider (which was a better "sensory" game). Atari has built a terrific laser-based machine here; let's hope that next time they build a better laser-based game.

For years, Stern has been trying with all its might to establish a secure foothold in the video games business. The manufacturer has yet to match the success of it's first hit, Berzerk, and its sequel, Frenzy. While Stern has a history of developing imaginative games such as Cliff Hanger, they always seem to run into the bad luck of releasing them in direct competition with other companies' slightly superior creations like Dragon's Lair.

Such is the case with Goal to Go, Stern's interactive laserdisc football

STERN'S GOAL TO GO

machine. Had I not already played and enjoyed Bally/Midway's NFL Football, I might have been slightly impressed with Goal to Go. Unfortunately, this gridiron contest pales by comparison in almost every aspect.

Goal to Go plays much like Stern's other laser-disc creation, Cliff Hanger. After selecting a play on offense and seeing a diagram of the play, you are shown laserdisc footage of the play's execution. Using a four-position joystick, a "hands" and a "foot" button, you must anticipate and mimic key actions of the quarterback and receiver or ball carrier. For example, if you've called a rollout pass, you must, on cue, pull the joystick down as the quarterback gets the snap and fades back, push the stick to the right as he rolls-out, push the "hands" button as he releases the pass, push the "hands" button again as the receiver reaches for the ball, and then push the joystick in the direction away from the

defensive players involved in the pass coverage. If at any time you miss a cue, the laserdisc immediately cuts to footage of a sack, deflected pass, tackle, or whatever. The "foot" button is used, as you might imagine, for kicking field goals.

The game continues for as long as you continue to make first downs; the contest ends with a loss of the ball on downs (however, play can be extended with the deposit of an additional quarter). Scoring is based on both points scored and yards gained.

To its credit, Goal to Go is, in its own way, more participatory than is NFL Football. It also makes use of kickoff returns and penalties for jumping offsides, which Bally's counterpart does not. However, as with Cliff Hanger, I don't find the mimicry aspect of the game play to be much fun. You're not controlling the action of the players as much as you're anticipating their preset movements. Also, the strategic play-calling element seems to be scaled-down here. If executed correctly, one play seems to work as well as another. In two-player games, opponents take turns on offense—there is no interactive defen-

sive in Goal to Go.

Worse, the audio/visual effects of Goal to Go aren't up to those displayed in NFL Football. For example, the computer graphics used to illustrate play formations merely show an overhead diagram of X's and O's; there is no play-by-play commentary and crowd roar; worse there are no cheerleaders.

The generally uninspired laserdisc footage was shot on a Suburban Chicago practice field using two local semi-professional football teams. This is appropriate for a game that, in just about every respect, is a step below the pros. Perhaps a more suitable title, given the competition, would have been "USFL Football."

CINEMATRONICS/ MAGICOM/ DON BLUTH'S SPACE ACE

Don Bluth is back! After personally rescuing Cinematronics from Chapter 11 bankruptcy and generally rousing the coin-op industry from its slumber last year with the much-heralded laserdisc game, Dragon's Lair, the former Disney animator shows his stuff again in another lavishly-produced cartoon-adventure game, Space Ace.

Designed to work as either a dedicated game or a Dragon's Lair conversion, Space Ace follows the adventures of Ace and his girlfriend Kimberly as they battle the evil villain Borf in a battle to regain control of the earth. As in Dragon's Lair, Bluth's stunningly-detailed disc-based "classical" animation steals the show here. A veteran of the legendary Walt Disney Studios animation crew, Bluth is one of the few animators today who, as John Houseman might say, still makes cartoons "the old-fashioned

way," one frame at a time. Anyone whose ever seen a Saturday morning cartoon program and its herky-jerky animation techniques can appreciate the care and skill that goes into any of Bluth's productions.

The plot in Space Ace is a bit more defined for Ace than it was for Dirk the Daring in Dragon's Lair. Here, Ace is attacked by the evil Borf, who transforms the macho hero into a whiny runt named Dexter by means of a sinister weapons called the Inferno Ray. Borf kidnaps Kimberly (the only way this guy could ever get a date), whisks her off into outer space, and the game begins. Borf's grand plan is to take over the earth by changing everyone into babies. Dexter's mission is to: 1) save the planet 2) rescue the heroine and 3) regain his manhood (talk about your male prepubescent fantasies!).

As in Bluth's previous game, you either move a joystick in one of eight directions or press a console-mounted button in response to what is happening on the screen when the game gives you a visual and/or aural prompt. For example, if Borf, or one of his robot henchmen, is shooting at Dexter's feet, blasting away at the cliff beneath him, you must slam the joystick in the proper

direction to allow him to leap away to safety. The weapons/energizer button is used when Dexter/Ace is forced to draw and fire his laser gun, or when you are allowed to "energize" Dexter back into Ace for periods of time during the game. As an energized Ace, you'll have a harder go of it, but you'll earn more points; only as Ace can you battle Borf in the game's final confrontation over the earth's fate. If you repeatedly make the correct moves at the proper times, the game will continue uninterrupted. However, if you flub a move, you'll be treated to one of the game's many imaginative (and, to the game's credit, relatively non-violent) death scenes and you'll also lose one of your five lives.

To be honest, I love the way this game looks and sounds, but hate the way it plays. The animation is superb and the rich stereo soundtrack contributes much to the fast pace of the game. To the credit of RDI, the firm who engineered the project, the annoying "blanking out" that plagued the scene changes in Dragon's Lair has been minimalized (though not totally eliminated). The storyline is entertaining and amusing, and the cartoon in its entirety (a good player can complete the adventure in about eight minutes) would make a great

short-subject for the theatres. However, as with Dragon's Lair, there's really not much of a game to be reckoned with here. All the contest involves is memorizing an exact sequence of moves that will achieve a desired result. Even "pattern" games such s Pac-Man and Donkey Kong give you the opportunity to freelance your moves if you either don't know the pattern or don't feel like following it. Space Ace gives you no such chance—you either follow the pattern exactly as programmed or you're dead.

Personally, I prefer a more interactive, involving video game for my money. However, hundreds of thousands of players across the country didn't seem to mind this type of machine much when they made Dragon's Lair a smash hit last summer, which only proves once again that my preferences are rarely shared by everyone. But even if you're like me and would rather spend your quarters elsewhere, be sure to watch somebody else play Space Ace just so you can see what real animation —as opposed to that Saturday morning garbage—is all about. If Bluth's company ever figures out how to use his animation techniques in a more interactive type of game—watch out!

Not so very long ago the typical game room was stocked with mechanical target-shooting games of assorted sizes, shapes, and firepower. These standbys of the arcades almost always featured full-scale reproductions of the weaponry used in the subject contest: pistol, rifle, or whatever. However, as video games began their massive assault on the arcades in the mid-1970's, the mechanical artillery disappeared in favor of sleeker, more sophisticated weaponry such as joystick-and-fire-button-controlled lasers, smart bombs, and atomic missiles. However, with the current trend toward both a more "physical," hands-on approach to video gaming, shooting-gallery contests are beginning to appear on the arcade floors once again.

The latest entry in this field is Great Guns from Stern, which, like Exidy's Crossbow updates the classic mechanical shooting-gallery game concept to reflect the sophisticated video tech-

STERN'S GREAT GUNS

nology of the times.

In Great Guns you grip, aim, and fire a full-scale woodstock rifle at animated targets for points in each of nine different scenes. The game features two cabinet-mounted rifles and allows for simultaneous action by two players. Not only does Great Guns allow for head-to-head action, it outright encourages it, offering additional bullets for each participant at the start of a two-player game. Extra bullets are then awarded at fixed point intervals.

Each of the target screens (or "racks" as they are referred to here) features a wide variety of amusing and unusual targets to align with your rifle's crosshairs. Each target is marked by a white cross; most targets move about the screen or

otherwise pop in and out of the picture at random. In the game's opening scene, the "Carnival Rack," a nicely-detailed assortment of targets appear for your shooting pleasure. A merry-go-round spins, a ferris wheel turns, parachute riders rise and fall, balloons float up toward the sky, ghosts pop in and out of windows in a haunted house, and so forth. After completing this rack, the carnival atmosphere continues to prevail in the second screen, the "Clown Rack." Here, you shoot at a large clown face; from time-to-time targets appear in the clown's eyes, out of his ears, from under his hat, and in his mouth.

The third screen, the "Castle Rack" transports you to the front of a large, colorful, heavily-guarded medieval castle, resplendent with colorful target-bearing flags and banners. Hit the proper target and the drawbridge will drop to allow a legion of marching, targeted soldiers to leave the castle and exit screen

left. Other bullseyes in this rack are carried by guards, vikings, drifting clouds, and even the king and queen (no respect for the monarchy here). Later screens include the "Catapult Rack," where you fire at catapulted rocks, hot air balloons, and a sea serpent; the "Prehistoric Rack," featuring cavemen, dinosaurs, and other assorted B.C. targets; and the "Sorcerer Rack," where you aim and fire at puffs of smoke that emanate from the sorcerer's hand.

The graphics featured in each of Great Guns' nine racks is amusingly-detailed, and the targets move nicely throughout each screen, though generally in predictable patterns. The woodstock guns operate efficiently enough, but they can be difficult to aim with a reliable degree of accuracy at first (I suppose the same could be said for aiming and firing a real rifle). If you hit a target, you'll hear a bell clang. If you miss, a small puff of smoke will appear where your shot landed. You must be relatively quick on the trigger here. If you do not fire your weapon for any five-second period, the machine will deduct five bullets from your ammo supply. One nice touch with regard to the rifles is that they're rigged to give a slight recoil when you pull the trigger, enhancing the "physical" aspect of the game.

Don't hold your breath looking for it, but a special option accessory allows a benevolent arcade operator to equip Great Guns with a "skill return" feature that will refund the player's quarter or token upon reaching a preset score.

Overall, Great Guns is really little more than a traditional shooting gallery game that features video, rather than mechanical targets. Compared to Crossbow, which involves players in a fantasy storyline, Great Guns is painfully single-minded. However, even with the inherent limitations in the game, Stern has done a nice job, especially in allowing for head-to-head competition between two players. Simply put, Great Guns is a good, but not necessarily great, target-shooting game.

ARCADE WATCH

Bally/Midway has decided to "soften" the image of its street-location Budweiser Beer-drinking game, Tapper (reviewed last issue), for general release to the arcades. New title will be "Root Beer Tapper," and all references to the King of Beers will be eliminated...A fantasy baseball game from Williams entitled "Play Ball" is being readied for release. A natural tie-in with the Great Summer Game, Play Ball reportedly features a popcorn vendor who throws, among other items, bowling balls at the baseball players. I'm sure we've all had similar fantasies...Look for a possible Star Trek sequel game from Sega/Bally-Midway to coincide with the release of the film "In Search of Spock," later this year...My1star is in final development stages of a new Tim Skelly-designed game tentatively named "Screw Loose," in which you control a comical, three-handed character named "ROBOP the Robot." Skelly, you may recall is the designer of games such as Rip-Off, Star Castle, and Reactor.

SOFT SPOT

A Mixed Bag Of Video Cart Attractions

By Dan Persons and Mike Sittnick

I'm not the type who regularly uses a club newsletter as a source of wisdom, but there may be more going on at the Atari Club than readily meets the eye. You can see what I mean by taking a look at page nine of the November '83/February '84 issue of *Atari Age*, the Club's slickly produced newsletter. There under the title "The Casebook of R. Cade," somebody may be attempting to imbue a seemingly innocent entertainment feature with a little redeeming social value.

R. Cade is a combination teenage sleuth and all-around video game whiz kid, sort of an Encyclopedia Brown with joysticks. Normally his cases revolve around the subject of games, in particular Atari games, with his nemesis usually being a chap named Henry Cadwallader. This particular installment, entitled "The Case of the EPROM Connection," is no exception. Seems that Cadwallader is wandering around school with an Atari 2600 cart marked only with the words CONFIDENTIAL EXPERIMENTAL EPROM. EPROMs are what game companies use to program their prototypes games onto, and Cadwallader has offered to sell this top secret cart off to the highest bidder. R. Cade's classmates, gullible fools that they are, have fallen for this story hook, line and sinker. Only Cade remains skeptical. He corners Cadwallader in the school cafeteria and demands further information on the game that Caddy calls "Battle on Planet X."

Caddy's description is, to say the least, intriguing. "The aliens from Planet X have four floating space stations. You've got to disable all of them
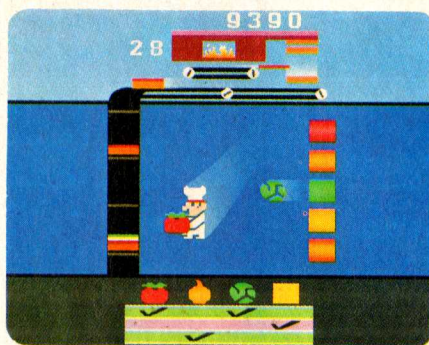
by landing on each and setting your Cosmic Crushers in place in the sectors on the surface. The Crushers only become operational when they're lined up to complete a circuit. Of course, the X aliens aren't defenseless. They have Positronic Pulverizers, and they get planted on the planet's surface too. If they complete their forcefield circuit before you do, you're wasted."

By this time Cade's classmates are almost forcing their money on Caddy, but Cade remains unsold. Grabbing a pencil and paper, he dashes off a quick rendition of the screen for that old Atari chestnut 3-D Tic Tac Toe, and shows it to the crowd. Seems that all Caddy did was pick up the cartridge in some bargain bin for pin money, stripped off the label, and applied his own Confidential sticker. Caddy knows when he's been caught dead-to-rights and, cur that he is, crawls off into a corner to lick his wounds.

Case closed, the end. Or is it? Okay, maybe the uncredited writer of this story meant it to be just a bit of entertaining fluff. The writing is a clever updating of the "tough-guy" school of whodunnits,

complete with a hilarious description of a school cafeteria as Phillip Marlow might have seen it, and these types of stories never seemed to have a message more important than "keep your nose clean and don't shoot anybody today."

But take a close look at Caddy's crime. On a small scale, it resembles a practice that's all too prevalent in the video game biz, that of taking a warmed-over game, tacking on a plot line that has little to do with what the game is actually about, and then attempting to foist the package off on a public that has no way of determining what's inside.

But if Atari has started taking on a more-honest-than-thou attitude, they had better do a bit of housecleaning first. There are more than a few gamers out there smarting from the bite taken out of their wallets by Raiders of the Lost Ark and E.T., two carts where more effort was put into hype than into the game itself. And an impending release from Atari, Taz, does the same thing all over again, in attempting to associate a very generic game with a very specific Looney Tunes character.

Meanwhile, Atari has cleaned up its act significantly. With only a few lapses such as Taz, the carts coming out of Sunnyvale, CA, live up to their publicity in every way possible.

—Dan Persons

PRESSURE COOKER

(Activision/2600)

Activision's new game for the Atari 2600, **Pressure Cooker**, casts the player as a short-order cook. Although the theme is similar to BurgerTime, Pressure Cooker is not a derivative in any way

whatsoever, unlike Activision's recent hits Enduro and Robotank (which are very similar in play to Pole Position and Battlezone). Pressure Cooker's chef is not being chased like his BurgerTime counterpart. Pressure Cooker's action, in fact, is much more realistic. The hero is the only cook in the busy hamburger joint, and orders are pouring in quickly. If the player cannot grab the right condiments and place them on the hamburger before it pops off the conveyor belt, precious points are lost. He must then take the hamburger onto a second screen and drop it down the correct chute quickly, because the hamburgers are rolling the conveyor belt out of view while the player is dealing with this second screen.

What makes the pace of this game even more frantic than it would have been are the topping dispensers. They are constantly throwing the wrong topping at the chef. If he does not press the reject button and run so that the food bounces off his chest, it will splash against him or against the wall behind him, causing him to lose points for wasting food. If he accidentally "catches" the food without hitting the reject button, he can only get rid of it by putting it on a hamburger that doesn't need it, and pray that an order for such a hamburger comes on the screen before the incorrectly accoutured meat rolls off the belt. The game ends when the cook loses his 50 quality points of wasting food and messing up orders.

Although this game is more of a test of reflect and recognition than anything, it really feels different than other Atari 2600 carts. The paunchy little chef has very short legs. The legs move very quickly but the body does not go far very fast because the legs are so short. This makes the feel of the game more frantic than it is. It also creates the illusion of a larger screen.

What really makes the game different is that the player really has to anticipate his reaction to every possible situation. He must be able to either memorize the three orders on the screen and respond or just look down very quickly as the food is propelled at him, but to do well he must know beforehand what he will do if the food dispenser throws him a tomato slice.

The play is not only multi-faceted, but different styles of play are called for simultaneously. Catching or rejecting a topping is very "Pong-like" but memorizing what to catch and what to reject is rather like Blueprint or Ladybug.

Graphically, Activision has scored again. Because they do not actually license arcade titles, all of their games can be tailored to the Atari 2600's capabilities. The screen is filled with color, including effective shading, and the shades used are squared off so that they look good on the 2600. Add a soundtrack with a lot of zip, and the result is Pressure Cooker, a superior home cartridge with a difference.

—M.S.

AIR RAIDERS
(Mattel Electronics/2600)

Air Raiders from Mattel Electronics for the Atari 2600 is a first-person World War II-style air battle. Your mission: To shoot down as many enemy airplanes as possible given your limited amount of ammunition and fuel. Your screen gives you the view from the plane's cockpit. At the bottom of the screen is both an altitude meter and a meter showing how much ammunition you have left. At the start of the game, you're given 99 shots.

This would seem more than sufficient, until you realize that your machine guns fire at a rate of about six rounds a second. Using the stick to climb, dive and bank, you must search out the enemy, who fly in formations of three airplanes apiece. Take out one plane in a formation, and the other two split up (a wise move on their part). If you aren't thorough or quick enough in cleaning up the squadron, your screen will soon become littered with individual planes, all going their own separate ways.

The enemy's planes don't fire back at you, but there must be somebody on the ground doing it, because the screen occasionally fills with flak, which shows up as a small black dot accompanied by a burst of light. If the flak hits your crosshairs, you lose altitude. This is not serious unless you happen to be too close to the ground to begin with, in which case your plane will crash, bringing the game to an abrupt end.

You must land to reload and refuel, but you can do so only if you have shot down at least ten planes. A horizontal bar with a moving vertical indicator located at the very bottom of the screen helps you to locate your airstrip. Once landed, you will receive a full tank of fuel, but you will only get an amount of bullets equal to the number of planes that you shot down in your first round. The challenge of subsequent missions is to knock off as many planes as possible with your constantly dwindling supply of ammo.

In spite of the first person nature of the game, Air Raiders doesn't really capture the three dimensional feel of airborne combat the way a game like Star Raiders does. In fact, Air Raiders has more of the feel of one of those early Seventies games where color transparencies were projected on a screen to represent the targets you were shooting at. The enemy planes are viewed in profile, and are limited to horizontal, vertical, and diagonal movements. There is no attempt made to depict them drawing towards or moving away from you.

Yet, even with this limitation, Air Raiders is still a satisfyingly realistic experience. The maneuverability of your plane bears a close resemblance to what it would be in real life. The effect is heightened by the sight of the horizon rising, falling and tilting as your craft dives, climbs and banks. The soundtrack is very well conceived. Your propellers purr softly and your machine guns have been given a believable metallic twang.
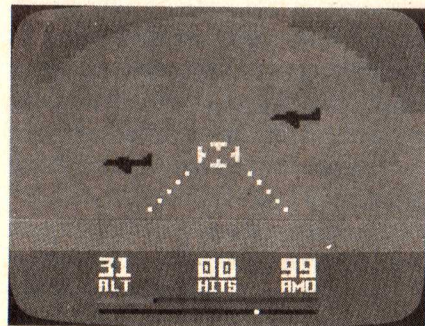
Happily, this sense of realism is carried over into the game play. Elements such as the altimeter and the fuel meter have not been added on just for show or as a way to force you to shoot something in order to stay airborne. Instead, these devices reflect their true functions in the real world. If you blunder too close to the ground you will definitely crash while, no matter how many planes you shoot, you will still lose fuel at a steady rate. And the fact that you must actually land in order to bring this game to a conclusion not only means that this is one of the few games that has an actual ending, but also gives the player a nice sense of "mission accomplished."

—D.P.

BUCK ROGERS: PLANET OF ZOOM
(Sega/2600)

Based upon Sega's successful arcade game, Sega's **Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom** is a semi-first person shoot'em-up. In the foreground (the bottom of the screen) is your spaceship, viewed as if you were behind and just slightly above the craft. It is maneuvered left and right with your joystick, while moving the stick forward and back increases or decreases your speed. Pressing the action button activates your laser, which can be used rapid-fire for a short distance, or
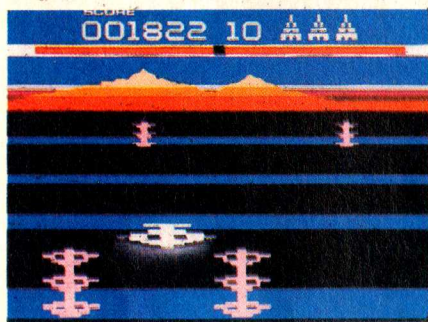
can pull off individual shots for a greater distance. At the top of the screen is a horizontal fuel meter which, in addition to the vertical needle that shows your exact fuel supply, also changes color from green to yellow to red to give you a quick indication of the state of your tanks. Paradoxically, you can economize on fuel consumption by traveling at a higher speed, at the risk, of course, of crashing into one of the many obstacles that you'll encounter. Slower is safer, but it also uses up fuel like crazy.

In the first screen of this two-screen game, you must escape from the surface of Planet Zoom. As the planet's surface rushes underneath your ship, you must run a gauntlet of "Electron Posts," pairs of posts that form gates that you must guide your ship through. About halfway through the course, stationary saucers and erratically moving Space Hoppers begin turning up. Each gate you maneuver through and each enemy you zap reduces the goal counter at the top of the screen.

When you have reached your goal (twenty Electron Posts or enemies in the first level), you are advanced to the second screen, which takes place in the depths of space. Here, squads of flying saucers rise up from behind your ship (the bottom of the screen), zoom into the distance, and then swoop around for a

frontal assault. When you have destroyed fifteen saucers, you then get to take on the Mother Ship, a large white craft that requires two shots, one each to its left and right sides, in order to be destroyed.

Eliminating the Mother Ship will award you bonus points and start you off at the next level, which features more saucers and hoppers and higher goals on the planet's surface. You begin with five lives and are awarded a bonus life for each 100,000 points scored.

If your are well-acquainted with the arcade game, you must be just a bit disappointed with this decidedly stripped down version. One of the original's best features, the Star Wars-style trench battle, is totally missing, and, in the second screen, the inky blackness of space is perhaps a bit too inky: The designers at Sega haven't seen fit to program in any sort of moving star background. But, for those who are not such sticklers on accuracy, Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom could be a good, fast, shoot'em-up. The graphics, though simplified, have a reasonably good 3-D effect to them, particularly in deep space, where saucers swoop and dive in realistic perspective. Game play, while basically a slide and shoot, is quick and challenging enough to inspire many repeat plays.

Buck Rogers is definitely a good game, but I would give Imagic's very similar Moonsweeper the edge both in terms of graphics and the depth of its game play. The problem, of course, is that Imagic is no more, and its games may be a bit hard to find. If you do have the choice between Moonsweeper and Buck Rogers, then go for the Imagic game. If not, then Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom is not a bad second choice.

—D.P.

KEN USTON BLACKJACK/ POKER
(Coleco/ColecoVision)

Ken Uston Blackjack/Poker is a one to four player game that may be the first ColecoVision game not to use either joysticks or fire buttons. Instead, all instructions are entered via the two keypads on the two controllers, which means that if three or more people are playing, they have to double-up on the controllers. A plastic overlay containing all commands for both games is included for insertion

into the keypads. (That's right, they've finally come up with an excuse for that overlay storage slot on the back of the ColecoVision game cart).

Both games attempt to simulate casino rules as closely as possible. After selecting your game and the number of players, you enter your pot (the total amount of money you can gamble with), which can be as high as $99,999. The dealer then appears at the top of the screen, and the game begins. In blackjack, your goal is to get a hand that totals higher than the dealer's hand without going over 21. After entering your bet, which can range from $1 to $499, both you and the dealer are dealt two cards. The dealer then "asks" you, with the phrase "HIT?", if you'd like to be dealt another card. If you don't feel your hand is strong enough, you can receive another card by pressing either the YES or the HIT key. When you are satisfied with your total, pressing NO or STAND will pass control to the next player. When all players have completed their hands, the dealer then draws his standing when his total reaches seventeen or over. Those who have beat the dealer receive their winnings, those who lost or "busted" (went over 21) lose their bets.
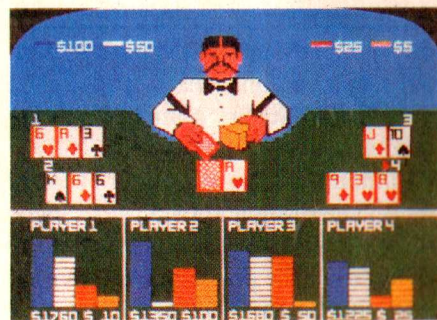
For neophytes who have trouble determining whether to hit or stand, Coleco has included a HELP key. Pressing this key will give you Ken Uston's opinion on what you should do. The HELP key will also inform you when is the best time to SPLIT or DOUBLE down, moves which in the right circumstances can increase your earnings.

The ColecoVision version of poker is considerably different from the version that most people know. This variation of the game is based on the video poker machines of Las Vegas, where all players compete against the dealer only, rather than against each other. After anteing up your initial bet, the dealer deals each

player two cards, one face down, one face up. Each player gets a chance to look at his/her cards (pressing the HOLE key reveals the value of the face-down card), and then responds to the dealer's prompt to "FOLD?", based on a comparison of his/her hand to the hand the dealer is holding (the element of chance is increased by the fact that the dealer also has one face-down card). If the answer is YES, then the player loses all cards and all money wagered to that point. Answer NO, and the dealer prompts for an additional bet, anywhere from one dollar to two times your initial ante. Enter your bet, and the dealer deals you an additional card, and then passes control to the next player.

After all players have registered their choices, the dealer deals himself a card, and then prompts the first player again for his/her next decision. If a player decides to stay for the full and of five cards, the dealer asks for a final bet. After all of these bets are entered, the dealer reveals his full hand and compares it to the other players. Winners are determined according to traditional poker rules: Royal flush beats a straight flush, straight flush beats four of a kind, and so on. If you need the advice of an expert during the game, sorry, pressing the HELP key will yield you nothing. Ken Uston may be a whiz at blackjack, but he is apparently stymied by poker.

Never mind. If the poker game lacks any sort of help mode, that's about the only thing missing from this comprehensive cartridge. And Coleco has wrapped it in a package that includes jaunty soundtrack music that makes the game sound more like it's taking place in Mississippi riverboat than a climate-controlled Vegas casino, as well as a suitably poker-faced dealer (although I don't understand why he smiles when he loses and smirks when he wins. It really should be the other way around). The Ken Uston help mode is a clever gimmick, although players should be aware that, although Ken may reside within the same cartridge as the rest of the program, he apparently cannot foresee the dealer's hand any better than you can. His advice should thus be considered as an educated guess, which might reduce the probability of losing, but is no guarantee of success. As for the poker game, those who are infatuated with the video gaming machines of the casinos may enjoy this version. Others who

relish the human interplay of a good round of poker will probably find the Coleco version lacking. After all, how can you bluff a computer?

What would have been nice is if the instruction booklet had included a section of hints written by Ken Uston. That way, one would get the impression that Mr. Uston had more involvement with the design of the game than just licensing his name to Coleco. Instead, all you get is Coleco's standard "Fun of Discovery" rap, not the most helpful thing for the player wishing to hone his/her gambling skills.

There really isn't all that much that can be done when translating card games to a video cart. You can add a few frills, such as crisp graphics or a help mode, but the game remains the same from system to system (the sole exception may be Artworx's Strip Poker, but there, poker takes a back seat to the game's more, uhh...*graphic* elements).

I would tend to think that video gamers and card players are two different audiences, with little crossover from one group to another. If you happen to be a little of both, and are looking for a good adaptation of casino blackjack, then Ken Uston Blackjack/Poker will do quite nicely. If it's a game of poker you're after, then you'd probably do better to get ahold of three friends and a deck of cards.

—D.P.

BOING!
(First Star Software/2600)

To this point, First Star Software has built its reputation on Astro Chase, a high-res space shoot 'em-up for computers designed by the first winner of the Atari Star award, Fernando Herrera. Now they have decided to take the plunge and release games for the Atari 2600.

Their initial entry is called **Boing!** Where your joystick maneuvers a shimmering bubble up, down, left and right across a six-by-six grid of square arranged to look like raked steps. Landing the bubble on a square fills it in, and it's your goal to "turn on" all thirty-six squares in this manner.

There's no point in ignoring it. Boing! is a knock-off of Q*bert, pure and simple. But if it's not original, it also happens to be a better playing version of a cube-hopping game than

Parker Brothers' own translation of Q*bert for the 2600. Not being encumbered by the need to adhere to the rules of a licensed game, designers Alex Leavens and Shirley Russell had the freedom to program Boing! to fit the 2600's particular limitations. Thus the raked steps have a more three dimensional feel to them, character animation, including the bouncing the gelatonous bubble and the movement of your enemies, is reasonably detailed, and the music track is more elaborate.

Joystick control is responsible and logical. Character movement is non-stop, although with only two enemies

onscreen at any time, the hazards are far from overwhelming. You never run the risk of falling off the edge of the grid but, as compensation, your bubble moves so fast that, unless you are really paying attention, you can easily find yourself blundering underneath a Pin or on top of a Bubble Eater. As in Q*bert, your best strategy is to operate the stick with a flick/release motion, rather than a continuous pressure that can lead you into deep trouble.

Given the mediocre quality of Parker Brothers' Q*bert, it's nice to have some sort of cube-hopping game that provides a reasonable amount of entertainment.

—D.P.

VICTORY
(Coleco/ColecoVision)

Exidy's unique combination of Cosmic Avenger, Bosconian, and Victory did not exactly have people lining up to play it. That does not mean it was not a great game. Victory, with its complicated four-button plus paddle controller combination was enough to scare off Defender-jocks as well as mainstream players and arcade owners. Like Looping and Space Panic, Victory has been given a new lease on life in the form of a ColecoVision home cartridge by Coleco.

Victory is a scrolling shootout with numerous twists that make the game require complete attention. The player can rotate his ship a full 360° and the screen rotates both vertically and horizontally. There are numerous gauges on screen, including a defender-like radar screen, and gauges showing the amount of fuel, shields, and doomsday devices remaining. Fuel runs out quickly, and the player must dock with a fuel base to replenish his supply. Shields protect the ship from harm when engaged, but they are in limited supply. Doomsday devices are the same as smart bombs, they destroy everything on the screen. Unlike Defender, and most of the other games in this category, Victory does not have a variable speed control. If thrust is pressed, the ship goes at a rather slow, unchangeable pace. If the thrust button is pressed again, the ship halt .

This is not just another shoot 'em-up affair like Cosmic Avenger, however. In fact, the "goal" of the game is almost the opposite of Defender, where players must try to stop ships from picking up humanoids from the planets surface. In Victory, bombers and shuttles drop paratroopers. The player's job is to shoot the paratrooper before he reaches the ground, or a deadly quark will be released. These are the equivalent of "baiters" in Defender, they are very aggressive.
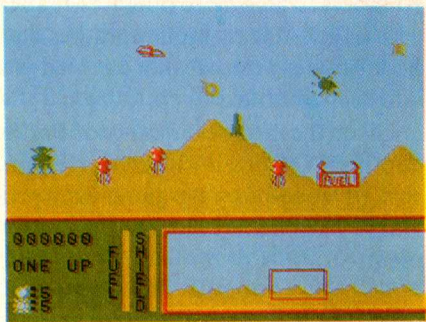
Victory lends itself extremely well to translation on ColecoVision. The original arcade game also had a widescreen, and the arcade Victory player will have to really hunt to find even minor differences from the look of the coin-op original. Coleco has kept all of the enemies, controls, and special effects of the original. The radar screen is very well detailed, and the scrolling is smoother than on past attempts like Cosmic Avenger and Turbo. The special effects are great. When the ship is hit, it turns into multi-colored rings. It looks as if

someone exploded an Olympics banner. Unfortunately, there are a couple of problems with the game that will disappoint fans of the original coin-op. Like many other Coleco games for ColecoVision, even the hardest skill level is not as hard as the arcade. Wrong! Donkey Kong, Looping, Mr. Do! and many of the games in between are not nearly as challenging as the arcade even at the hardest skill level. Victory is no exception. The other problem with the game is that it can only be used with the Roller Controller. This was not, and was not meant to be a roller controller-type of game. All the ball controls is the rotation of the ship. A paddle controller would do a much better job, and a joystick would do an adequate one. Even though the game requires four different action-buttons, there is no reason why the game could not be adapted to play on the Super Action Contoller, or even the keypad on the standard controller. Victory is really a great game, it is really too bad that Coleco has limited this potential top ten hit to the elite crowd who own roller controllers.

Victory is a top-notch, strategic, shoot 'em-up. It is better than 95% of games in its genre. ColecoVision owners with a roller controller are urged to get it if they like space games at all. Owners without a roller controller are urged to write Coleco; ask that Coleco either come out with an inexpensive paddle with four action buttons, or that the game be adapted for use with the Super Action Controller. Victory is great, but it is not worth shelling out $70 for the added control, especially when Coleco only has one true "ball-controller" type game for it, Slither. Victory is an excellent cartridge nonetheless, even though the controller limitation will probably insure that it never gets the credit it deserves.

—M.S.

MINER 2049ER
(MicroFun/ColecoVision)

Miner 2049er for ColecoVision is another excellent rendition of this popular game and MicroFun has managed to beat 12 or so other companies to market with the first ColecoVision compatible cartridge. In addition, there are many differences from the Atari/400/800/5200 original.

This version has eleven screens; the last is a bonus round where Bob the miner can pick up oodles of prizes. The transporter screen on the original version has been replaced with an elevator screen. The transporters were much
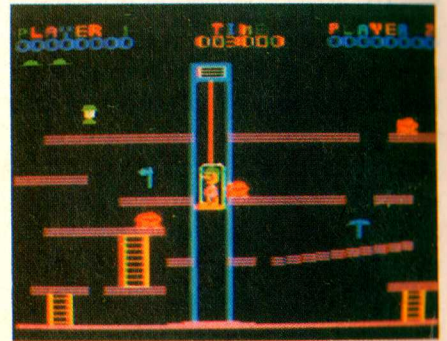
more original and fun to watch. The layout and patterns of each of the screens is entirely different as well. Those who have already mastered the Atari version will find entirely new challenges in the ColecoVision version.

Game play as well is entirely different in this version. Control of Bob is a bit more precise, but that is more because of the superior ColecoVision joystick. The big difference is that Bob moves faster and his jumps have a different arc to them. In fact, the easiest level of the ColecoVision version of the game is decidedly harder than the Atari version. If play gets too hectic, however, there *is* a pause button, something ColecoVision owners will see on almost all ColecoVision games in the future.

Besides game play, the ColecoVision rendition of the game looks quite different. Bob's face is a ruddy but sickly orange. The creatues are even *less* detailed than the 5200 version, and the excellent title screen on the 5200 version of the game is replaced with more standard fare. ColecoVision owners may be happy to know that there is no 12 second wait for the game to begin.

Although this version of Miner 2049er is not as good as the Atari 400/800/5200 version, it is still one of the best games for ColecoVision, a system that is already rich in ladder climbing games. This game has enough different types of action and challenges to keep the fussiest vidoe game player content for a long time. This game is a real breakthrough, and it is among the best of the tidal wave of video game cartridges coming for ColecoVision from other companies.

—M.S. ▲

A SIGHT TO BEHOLD
Exidy Brings On Crossbow, The Big Brain Game

By Mary Claire Blakeman

To Pete Kauffman, the new mass memory game Crossbow represents a technological breakthrough comparable to the introduction to Pong ten years ago.

As President of Exidy, the California company which manufactures Crossbow, Kauffman is naturally a little biased. But he also has the authority to make that comparison since he was right there in Silicon Valley when Pong became more than a gleam in Nolan Bushnell's eye.

The precise technological significance of Crossbow in the history of video entertainment can be debated; but it is undeniable that the effort marks a turning point in the capabilities of the games. Its importance rests in the fact that Crossbow has a mass memory capacity of 500,000 bytes of information.

For comparison, a typical arcade game has a memory of 16K (or 16,000) bytes. The Atari 2600 has 4K and Coleco games usually have between 16K and 32K.

Of course, Exidy is not the only company producing games with big brains. Bouncer a game from Entertainment Sciences also has a similar mass memory capacity. Exidy, however, has ten years of experience in the business, a string of past hits and, thus far, a continuing commitment to original research and development. Further, Crossbow features a specially-developed digital audio system and a sophisticated optical scanner in the playing mechanism, that is the "gun" which the player points at the screen during game play.

The advent of mass memory games does mark a leap in technology but it does not fundamentally alter the game's design or programming. But since designers do not have to cram all the information for game play onto a few chips, the mass memory does allow them to stretch out and explore new possibilities. Most notably in Crossbow, the mass memory provides for high resolution graphics and a greater degree of interaction between the player and screen.

Game "interaction" has become somewhat of a manufacturer's buzzword at least since Atari introduced Xevious last year. The sophistication of the game's computer means that it can respond, or interact, at a more immediate level with the player. For instance, in Xevious, the better the player, the faster the action on the screen while, for less adept players, the computer would send up obstacles at a slower pace.

"The interaction on Crossbow is the same, per se, as a solid state video game," explains Paul Jacobs, Exidy's executive vice president. "But it's not like the laserdisc games where you have to wait while it searches the memory. In Crossbow, the interaction is instantaneous."

Howell Ivy, vice president of engineering has been with Exidy almost from the beginning and has overseen the production of such games as Circus, Venture and Pepper II. He contends that while laserdiscs make pretty pictures, they do not always make for hot games. "Interaction is more important than graphics," he says. "The screen has to look good for the initial reaction but then it breaks down to the basics: it's got to be a good game."

"Video discs allow for nice graphics," he adds, "but the player can't interact as much. Everything on the screen of Crossbow is dynamic and it's all controlled by the computer."

The reference to laserdisc game is important, since at Exidy lasers represent the road not taken. (In fact, in one advertised jibe at animated laser games, the company promoted Crossbow by stating: "If you want to watch cartoons, stay at home.")

"We decided not to go with the laser disc specifically because of its drawbacks in track to track access time," president Kauffman says. "Digital solid state has the advantage of total interaction."

It was two years ago at a Consumer Electronics Show that Kauffman and Ivy made the choice to emphasize mass memory over the laserdisc which swept the industry and the public this past fall with the introduction of Dragon's Lair.

"We'd rather put the money we'd have spent on a video disc into a technology that's just coming to the market," Kauffman says. "Once you play the disc games you get bored because the feedback you get is too slow."

Kauffman says executives at Bally

and Atari have praised his decision and agree with him that mass memory—not lasers—is the way of the future for video games. "Everyone will have to go this way," he says. Then, with a smile Kauffman adds: "But we'll have a nine-month jump on them. Crossbow is a leader and in the future many companies will be trying to catch up with Exidy."

While Crossbow does not have the full classical animation style of Don Bluth's work on Dragon's Lair, it does have cartoon figures which move across the screen. For now, this kind of animation is comparable to the "Saturday morning television" style of slightly stilted movement for characters. But Howell Ivy says the quality of mass memory graphics will one day equal that found on laser games.

And, even though the company is not moving to develop them, Kauffman admits that Exidy could manufacture its own laser game in the future. With typical bravado he adds, "You can bet that when Exidy does make a laser game it will be a damn good one."

One trait Crossbow does share with its laser competitors is a feature increasingly popping up in many action games: strategy. "This is more than just a gun game," Paul Jacobs says. "It is really an adventure shooting game where a whole story is being told. It's patterned on the home computer games where players have to make choices. Memorization of which way to go enhances the action but one scene doesn't automatically follow another."

This "action-strategy" approach is similar to the game categories created by Epyx, the company to whom Exidy has licensed its question and answer game Fax. Epyx also holds the license to such Exidy games as Starfire and Fire One while Coleco has Pepper II, Venture and Victory and CBS Video holds rights to Targ.

The strategy for Crossbow begins when a player selects the level of difficul-

ty which ranges from Easy and Normal to Hard and Most Difficult. During play, two or three paths, usually marked green or blue, are offered for maneuvering the Robin Hood-like main character around the screen. A total of eight scenes (plus a hidden ninth scene for successful players) are presented and they include the Desert, Village, Cave, Jungle, Volcano, Bridge, Castle Exterior and Castle Interior.

After successfully getting through any one area, the player must then decide which direction to take next. "And the shortest route does not get you the most points," Ivy says. On two of the scenes, two color-coded paths are offered while on the other six, there are three paths.

As the main character continues through the adventure, he picks up several new friends. The object of the

game is to protect those friends and get through all the levels with them. Since the player is constantly shooting at objects, however, the innocent bystander sometimes gets hit too. If the player hits one of the characters in the party, the screen flashes with the message, "Don't shoot your friends." The first time one of them is hit, they slow down, but the second shot kills them.

Some of the threats to the player include deadly scorpions and snakes in the Desert and the abominable snowman in the Cave. Then there is everything from molten lava, man-eating plants, flying coconuts, swamp rats and alligators in the other scenes. Part of the challenge of the game is to knock out these flying and

rolling objects while also protecting the party of characters. To do that, the player must take a broader view of the screen than the usual concentrated focus on one area.

"If you concentrate on one moving object, you can't see the other moving objects coming at you," Ivy says. "It tests your skills in a different way because you are concentrating on the whole screen and not just trying to protect your one player. Things can happen on any area of the screen."

Ivy says the player's reaction skills are tested and pushed to new levels since there is more action in the total screen. "Because of that, after the good players get the hang of the game they don't use the sight on the shooting mechanism."

Kauffman emphasizes that players also need strategy skills for the game. "All the stuff about 'hand-eye coordination' is passe, and I don't care if I never hear about it again," Kauffman says. "It is one of the skills you need to play, but kids already have it and they don't need a game to help them do it. We're educating players to think for themselves because this is a strategy game and certain sequences can be learned through experience only. The person who plays Crossbow has to think and use logic, memory and recall."

Part of the logic includes knowing which direction to travel amongst the scenes. "If you take the wrong path, it will take you back to where you've been before," Ivy says. "And if you pick the wrong path, you can't get inside the castle, only to the outside of it."

Also, unlike Bega's Battle and other games, the player cannot pick up where he left off if he is knocked out of the game. "It takes quite a bit of skill to get to the ninth screen where the main wizard is," Ivy says. "If you could just put in another quarter and start up where you left off it wouldn't be that much of a challenge."

Besides the mass memory, Crossbow

also features an optical scanner in the barrel of the shooting mechanism which replaces the standard joystick for play. A miniature pc (printed circuit) board resets inside the gun casing and a photo detector lens caps the end of it.

The optical system is calibrated to the game screen which it scans and then feeds the information to the logic board which in turn triggers coordinates in the
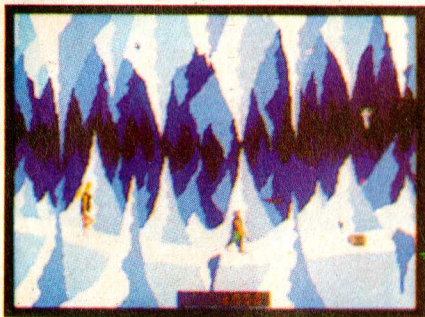
memory. "The lens in front of the gun picks up optical signals by scanning the television tube," Ivy says. "It does not really work like a joystick and it is similar to a technology used seven or eight years ago in a game called Quack."

"Perhaps the conventional joystick idea had been worked to death," adds Paul Jacobs.

To prepare the firing mechanism on the game, Ivy actually puchased more than a dozen crossbows and he and the staff practiced firing them in back of the company's Sunnyvale plant. (In another bit of game research, Kauffman adds that he and Ivy spent Thanksgiving in Ivy's helicopter taking aerial video shots. "We were doing experiment in his helicopter but it didn't work out," Kauffman says. "We ended up landing in the middle of a herd of deer.)

The audio system in Crossbow also distinguishes it from other games. It includes more than 100 separate sound effects ranging from animal calls to volcano rumbles and bongos. Some of the sounds are reminiscent of Exidy's non-video skee-ball type game Whirly Bucket. For that game, sounds such as women's voices were recorded then distorted through a digital system. Crossbow takes that idea and greatly expands it, Kauffman says.

"We used a similar audio technology from Whirly Bucket but it is much more sophisticated on Crossbow," he says. "We can take almost any sound that can be generated and then digitize it with a special Exidy system. It is software-generated so we can do reverberation ef-

fects, echoes and it's all in stereo. The system is capable of doing quadraphonic sound too."

All this advanced technology offers the player more challenge but it also means higher costs too. Most arcades put a 50 cent per play price tag on Crossbow, and some players estimate it takes about $25 in quarters to learn the game.

"All the laser games costs 50 cents," ivy says. "And the more sophisticated the machine gets, the more it will cost the player. Solid state memory of this capacity is about as expensive as the laser disc."

"A half a megabyte of memory is very expensive," Kauffman adds.

But the mass memory games do have some features which could hold costs down. For one, maintenance may be easier because, as Ivy explains, "Laser discs have moving parts but in solid state, we have total interaction without moving parts."

Further, Exidy plans to make its mass memory games convertible. As players may or may not realize, manufacturers are beginning to push software kits that can turn one game into another simply by exchanging pc boards and graphics. Nolan Bushnell has taken this concept to its next level and his Sente system is basically a convertible game approach. (see this issue's feature on Sente.)

Since Crossbow features a unique playing mechanism in the gun, it gives a hint as to the type of game Exidy will of-

fer next as a conversion. Cheyenne was previewed at both the ASI and AOE conventions this spring and features a wild western theme.

Players will also get a chance at Crossbow in a home version, possibly by next Christmas. "But it will only be available in the computer version," Kauffman says. "One scene of Crossbow could be played on a computer but in the cartridge system, there would be a requirement to re-write all the software."

Whatever game Exidy develops next, it is certain that the company will call on its experience as an innovative force in the industry. Because it has remained small, Exidy is one of the last, privately-held coin-operated game companies in Silicon Valley.

"Being small and privately held means that decisions don't take a meeting of the board of directors," Ivy

says. "Decisions can be made on the fly."

"Yes, Paul and Howell and I can sit together at lunch and change the total direction of the company," Kauffman adds. "We can spend half a million dollars quicker than you can bat an eye."

"The direction of our industry is like the movie industry," he says. "It's here today and gone tomorrow. Without a quick reaction time, you better not be in the business."

The size of the company is only one part of Exidy's survival and strength. the other main ingredient is one Kauffman takes great pride in—the engineering staff. "I'd put our team of 11 engineers up against Atari's 300 any day," he says. "They are very bright people who know what they're doing and they're dedicated to what they're doing. They play the games and evaluate the market."

As an engineer himself, Kauffman appreciates the need for technological developments. "Many people don't consider games high tech but, actually, games are the highest technology we have available in Silicon Valley," he says. "There are four or five computers interested within a coin-operated game. The people who design games are really the best in the industry."

In this cutting edge business, Kauffman says he is dedicated to keeping Exidy out of the sharp point of the blade, ahead of the rest.

As he is fond of saying lately, "We license games to Japan—not the other way around." ▲

GOING FOR THE GOLD!

Well, Video Games' own Track & Field Trivia Go For The Gold Contest is now history and for the thousands of you who entered we would like to say thank you for making the contest such a great success. A special congratulations from us at Video Games, as well as the folks at Konami and Centuri goes to the Track & Field winner **John Gagnon of Sandusky, Ohio**. John is now the proud owner of a Track & Field arcade game, the standout coin-op video of 1984.

And for those who are interested in keeping score, below are the answers to Video Games' Track & Field Trivia Go For The Gold Contest.

I 100 Meter Dash (1 point each)
1. Harold Abrahams
2. (B) 1924
3. (C) 10.6
4. (B) twice
5. Bob Hayes

II The Long Jump (2 points each)
1. True
2. Mexico City, Mexico
3. Ralph Boston
4. (B) twice
5. (B) James Cleveland (Jesse) Owens

III The Javelin (3 points each)
1. Cyrus Young
2. (C) five times
3. Miklos Nemeth

IV 110 Meter Hurdles (4 points each)
1. (D) fifteen times
2. (D) eight times
3. Lee Calhoun
4. (B) 1972

V The Hammer Throw (5 points each)
1. (A) one time
2. (C) three times
3. True
4. (D) sixteen pounds

VI The High Jump (6 points each)
1. (E) twelve times
2. (B) twice
3. Richard Fosbury
4. False

Total for all correct answers = 84 points.

GRAND CHAMPION
John Gagnon of Sandusky, Ohio

The editors of Video Games would like to list those readers who were able to answer all of our trivia contest questions correctly and let them know that they will be receiving a Video Games cap for their efforts. Nice try and better luck next time!

Scott Ballingall
Regina, Saskatchewan Canada

William Dunlap
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Todd Scott
Newtown, Connecticut

Martin Garber
Bartlesville, Oklahoma

Nick Manganaris
Coram, New York

Mike Miller
East Helena, Montana

Randy Scott
Fremont, California

Gilbert Bautista
Sunnyvale, California

Lyja Bautista
Sunnyvale, California

Anthony Vanderplaats
Fort Frances, Ontario Canada

Jason Friedt
Yakima, Washington

Trevor Gould
Swift Current, Saskatchewan Canada

George Wilson
Woodbury Heights, New Jersey

Sal Campana
Woodbury Heights, New Jersey

Manfred Lam
North York, Ontario Canada

John Crary
Canton, New York

Craig Simpson
Phoenix, Arizona

Craig Romero
Houston, Texas