

Arcade Alley

A Critical Look at Video Cartridge Games & Programs

by Bill Kunkel & Arnie Katz



The Imagic Show

No newcomer to the video-game software scene has received more advance publicity than Imagic. Deservedly so, in the opinion of "Arcade Alley." Formed by some of the leading lights from Mattel and Atari, this newcomer has looked like the best of all the new game producers.

But the promises and ballyhoo are over. Imagic has published a trio of elegantly packaged games for the popular Atari VCS system. Now it's up to the electronic-gaming public to decide whether Imagic will pull off its trick or just get caught in the act.

Considering the fantastic graphics found in many recently introduced VCS programs, it isn't easy to single out one game as the best. Our nomination: **Demon Attack** (Imagic/Atari VCS). This action game by Rob Fulop, best known for the VCS version of "Missile Command," is flat-out top-of-the-line. (And yes, the secret message on the "Missile Command" cartridge is Rob's initials.)

The scenario recalls Centuri's coin-op hit "Phoenix." Players control horizontally mobile cannons that move across the bottom of the screen, directing fire at three strata of flying alien invaders. The initial attack waves are fairly tame. As play progresses, intriguing challenges come into play—guided missiles and aliens that, when hit, break off into a pair of smaller but no less lethal invaders.

All in all, there are over 30 different types of invaders. There are bat-like beasts, spinning yellow cyclopes, horrendous creatures with big oval mouths that

open and close, and an entire hoard of eye-popping predators. These rogues also drop bombs in their own unique styles. Some drop explosives scattershot, others in straight fang-like projectiles.

The monsters on each level are reincarnated a specific number of times, but only the creatures on the lowest levels actually drop bombs. Whenever possible, therefore, eliminate the invaders closer to the top of the screen so as not to create any more weapon-carriers than necessary. Also keep in mind that these grotesqueries are not above going after you in kamikaze raids once they've split into pairs of smaller entities.

When an alien divides, only one of the two resulting creatures actually fires bombs. Try to take out the defenseless one first. After the first of the fission-generated space moths dies, the survivor immediately drops toward the defender's position. The best tactic is to fire twice at the invader *before* it splits, aiming at a wing. This gives you a good chance of destroying not only the original beastie, but one of its offspring as well.

Keep moving and avoid corners. Once an invader actually starts a dive at your cannon, however, don't move a muscle. Wait for the alien to fly to your position. A diving space moth will weave back and forth as it heads down the screen, invariably passing right across your gunsight at least once.

If all else fails, get out of its way. That doesn't score any bonus points, but at least you'll have cleared the board. Sweeping the board clean without sac-

rificing a cannon earns the player an extra "life."

"Demon Attack" is, quite simply, excellent. This true coin-op-level program is probably the best debut Imagic could possibly have made.

While **Trickshot** (Imagic/Atari VCS) doesn't quite possess "Demon Attack's" obvious appeal, it is definitely a game that belongs in every cartridge library. It's the finest electronic pool table available for a "standard" (low-resolution) or "senior" (high-resolution) programmable video-game system.

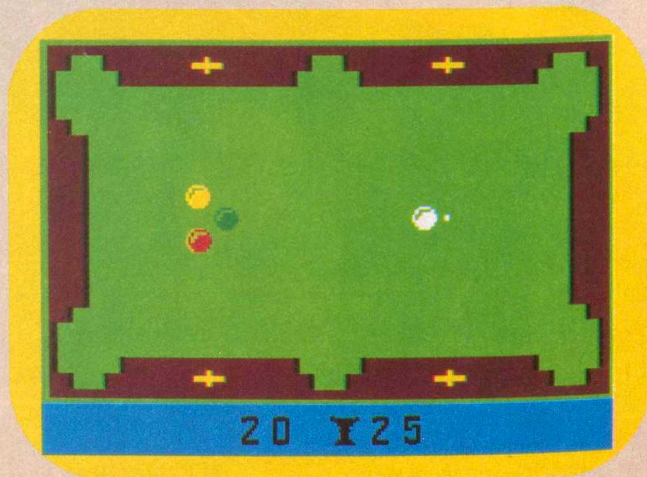
The program itself is not what arcaders might expect, however. While a version of eight-ball is included, the idea is to make the kind of one-ball-sinks-three shots that Willie Mosconi and Minnesota Fats made famous. There are plenty of fancy setups, and they can all be mastered. It just takes the right angle and, as they say in the low-cal beer commercials, "practice."

The major problem here is the low screen RAM possessed by the VCS. "Screen RAM" is a term that refers to the number of objects that can be moved simultaneously on-screen. As a result, the eight-ball contest is played with a cue and three balls, and even they blink as the microprocessor constantly refreshes the image. The game is also a trifle slow, but that's not too critical.

Overall, this is a 7½ out of 10 compared to, say, "Demon Attack's" 9½. It is nonetheless an excellent game with perfect audio and ideally suited graphics. It also tested *extremely* well with lady arcaders. Check this one out too. ▼



'Demon Attack': the best debut Imagic could have made.



'Trickshot': 7½ out of 10.