Arcade Alley

A Critical Look at Video Games

by Bill Kunkel & Arnie Katz

The 1984 Arcade Awards, Part II

This month's "Arcade Alley" is devoted to announcing the 1984 Arcade Award winners in the Computer Game and Video-Game/Computer-Game divisions. For the past five years Reese Communications has sponsored these awards to salute and promote achievement in the design of electronic games. The Arkie and Certificate of Merit winners were selected by more than 5000 game lovers who returned the official ballot printed in an issue of VIDEO's sister publication, *Electronic Games*. The first envelope, please.

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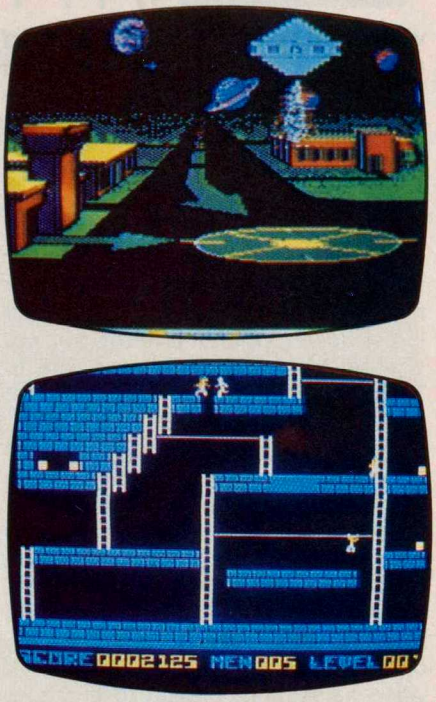
Computer-Game Division

☐ **1984 Computer Game of the Year: Lode Runner** (Broderbund/Apple II, Atari computers, Commodore 64). An outstanding design by rookie Doug Smith, "Lode Runner" celebrates the current trend of mixing strategy with play action. "Lode Runner" is *the* thinking player's climbing contest because it takes solid strategic planning as well as a quick hand to conquer the disk's 150 (count 'em) playfields. For those of you who manage to achieve this goal, the program provides a simple system that allows you to design your own customized "Lode Runner" screens. This solitaire hunt for hidden gold is fascinating, combining a few play elements into an irresistible mixture that truly challenges both mind and body.

Certificates of Merit: "Repton" (Sirius/Apple II, Ataris); "Shamus, Case II" (Synapse/Ataris).

☐ **1984 Best Science Fiction/Fantasy Computer Game: Astro Chase** (First Star-Parker Brothers/Ataris). This slam-bang space battle is the first action hit for Fernando Herrera, who had won acclaim as the creator of Atari's educational "My First Alphabet." "Astro Chase" is a slick program that shows the same flair characterized in Herrera's earlier effort. The animated intermissions are especially impressive. The goal is to eliminate the enemy mines and fighters which are flying through the multi-screen playfield toward a defenseless Earth. A radically new fire-and-movement system lets you move the craft in one direction while firing in any other.



In defense of Earth with the Atari-compatible 'Astro Chase' (above); Broderbund's 'Lode Runner' took top honors.

Certificates of Merit: "Caverns of Frietag" (Muse/Apple II); "Star-Maze" (Sir-Tech/Apple II); "Suspended" (Infocom/most computers).

☐ **1984 Best Computer Adventure: Witness** (Infocom/most computers). If you think text adventures are passe, you should know that Infocom's prose programs have run away with the Arcade Award in this category for two years in a row. It seems many computerists prefer to conjure up their own mental pictures—perhaps aided by the lavish documentation Infocom supplies with each of its titles in addition to the relatively simple illustrations found in pictorial quest games. As the super sleuth, you must solve this 1930s-era mystery before the time limit elapses. This includes questioning suspects, sifting clues, and using deductive reasoning to close a murder case that begins before the detective's eyes.

Certificates of Merit: "Aztec" (Data Most/Apple); "Dark Crystal" (Sierra On-Line/Apple, Ataris); "Knight of Diamonds" (Sir-Tech/Apple).

☐ **1984 Best Computer Sports Game: Starbowl Football** (Gamestar/Ataris). This is the second straight year that a football game for the Atari family of computers has won this award. As good as last year's "Cypher Bowl" was, this one is even better. "Starbowl Football" features a comprehensive simulation of gridiron action in a format that allows human coaches to work on-field miracles with a few flicks of the joystick. Its advantage over other football programs is that it can be played solitaire against the computer. In fact, you'll have to execute like a Super Bowl champion to have any chance of beating the machine's team.

Certificates of Merit: "Baja Buggies" (Gamestar/Ataris); "Knockout!" (Avalon Hill/Ataris); "International Soccer" (Commodore/Commodore 64).

☐ **1984 Best Computer Action Game: Centipede** (Atari/Ataris). "Centipede" 's rock 'em sock 'em approach to gardening has made this game popular in all available formats—some veteran bug-blasters even insist that this Atari cartridge is the best home-arcade edition you can buy. The player uses a joystick or trackball to move the shooter horizontally and (to some extent) vertically around the lower portion of the playfield. The object is to shoot the multi-segmented centipedes that wriggle down the screen between rows of mushrooms, all the while avoiding deadly contact with the garden's other denizens. "Centipede" packs a real roundhouse punch.

Certificates of Merit: "Jumpman" (Epyx/Ataris); "River Raid" (Activision/Ataris); "Sea Fox" (Broderbund/Apple, Ataris).

☐ **1984 Best Computer Game Audio-Visual Effects: Gorf** (Roklan/Ataris). This home edition of Bally-Midway's coin-op amassed one of the largest vote totals in the 1984 competition. It out-polled the other excellent versions of Gorf, including those by Coleco (for ColecoVision) and Commodore (Commodore 64). The varied action—even with the omission of the original's "Galaxian"-like phase—is what keeps players coming back again and again, and the sequence where alien attackers swirl out of a hyperspace warp is visually riveting as well as tough to master.

Certificates of Merit: "Old Ironsides" (Xerox/Apple); "Transylvania" (Penguin/Apple II).

Video-Game/Computer-Game Division

☐ **1984 Most Humorous Video Game/Computer Game: Oink!** (Activision/Atari 2600). Remember the fairytale about the three little piggies and the big bad wolf? It's back, this time as the plot for Mike Lorenzen's creation. The wolf tries to huff and puff and blow down the houses of straw, wood, and brick inhabited by the pint-size porkers. The pigs, meanwhile, must frantically pull building material from the roof and shove it into the gaps in the walls made by the attacking wolf. The player gets points for every packet of bricks, wood, or straw the pigs place in a wall—but if the wolf succeeds in pulling a pig through a gap, the little critter runs all the way home to the jeers of its tormentor.

Certificates of Merit: "Free Fall" (Sirius/Apple); "K.C.'s Krazy Chase" (Odyssey/Odyssey²); "Preppie! II" (Adventure International/Ataris).

☐ **1984 Best Arcade-to-Home Video Game/Computer Game Translation: Kangaroo** (Atari/Atari 5200). Making a translation *look* right in the home is still the biggest challenge designers face—especially since coin-op manufacturers stress graphics so heavily. No problem for the anonymous programmer of "Kangaroo," who seems to be fully in command of his or her art. This is a virtual duplicate of the climbing game which raked in so many quarters during 1983. As you guide the mama kangaroo on her rescue mission, almost all aspects of the game look and play the way they do on the coin-op. A translation needs no further or higher praise.

Certificates of Merit: "Frogger" (Parker Brothers/Ataris); "Kick-Man" (Commodore/Commodore 64); "Turtles" (Odyssey/Odyssey²).

☐ **1984 Best Multi-Player Video Game/Computer Game: M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts/Ataris, Commodore 64). The settling of a virgin planet and development of its founding colony are the main subjects of this one-to four-player strategy contest. The computerist becomes a representative of one of eight sentient races and must out-earn fellow colonists through timely trading of key commodities. "M.U.L.E." is a unique blend of boardgame strategy and computer-game pacing. Since its release, "M.U.L.E." has gained an intense cult following. Invest a couple of hours and you'll find out why.

Certificates of Merit: "Dungeon!" (TSR/Apple II); "Oil Baron" (Epyx/IBM, Apple); "Wizard of Wor" (Roklan/Ataris).

☐ **1984 Most Innovative Video Game/Computer Game: Archon** (Electronic Arts/Ataris). Few games make better use of a computer's special capabilities than "Archon," an epic struggle between light and darkness which takes place on an eight-by-eight chess-like board and includes elements that would be too cumbersome without a CPU's data-crunching talent. Some of the board's squares, for example, cycle through a range of colors instead of staying static, while the changes affect the power of the beings which may attack or defend that particular square during the current turn.

Certificates of Merit: "Galactic Gladiators" (Strategic Simulations/Apple); "Pinball Construction Set" (Electronic Arts/Apple, Ataris).

☐ **1984 Best Educational Video Game/Computer Game: Learning with Leeper** (Sierra On-Line/Apple II). This disk is divided into four segments and presents a painless way for youngsters to learn such tricky concepts as counting and shape recognition. Children too young to read will have a fine time with this entertaining and educational game, and the free artistic expression in the "Painting" segment should be a spur to youthful creativity.

Certificates of Merit: "Alphabet Arcade" (PDI/Ataris); "Snooper Troops, Case II" (Spinnaker/Ataris).

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