
Arcade Alley

A Critical Look at Video Cartridge Games & Programs

by Bill Kunkel & Frank Laney

Atari's "Adventure"

A Game of Heroic Proportions

The publications of the first United States paperback edition of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy in the mid-1960s ignited a nationwide passion for tales of fantastic adventures that still burns more intensely than ever today. Epic accounts of individual derring-do set against a fantasy or science-fiction backdrop have proven popular in virtually every medium, ranging from Conan in Marvel comic books to *Star Wars* on the silver screen.

Until recently, the manufacturers of home-arcade systems have generally steered wide of this craze. Science-fiction video games abound, especially those simulating outer space combat, but the same cannot be said for contests featuring a single on-screen hero. With the exception of quick-draw shoot-outs modeled on Old West gun fights, like Atari's *Outlaw*, this brand of software has simply not become available to the home-video arcader.

The reason for this is quite simple. Given the current state of electronic-game technology and the limitations of today's programmable systems, it has just been a lot easier to create other types of cartridges. Therefore, heroic adventure gaming has remained the province of those lucky enough to have access to really big computers, and of the folks who enjoy the nonelectronic role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*.

But now, Atari, which has introduced so many innovations to the home-arcade hobby, has scored yet another major design breakthrough. Building on concepts first developed for its best-selling Superman cartridge, the manufacturer has produced the field's first—and so far only—heroic fantasy video game.

Adventure sends the arcader on a perilous quest through a fanciful realm filled with magic, monsters, and mayhem. An evil magician has stolen an enchanted chalice from the lord of the golden castle

and hidden it somewhere in the kingdom. The hero must locate the chalice's secret resting place and return the eldritch artifact to its rightful owner.

And if performing this task were as simple and straightforward as the preceding explanation sounds, there would be no need for a hero. The way to the chalice and back again is fraught with danger.

First, the geography of the kingdom itself is convoluted enough to tax the ingenuity and stamina of even the most skilled player. There are the bewildering blue labyrinth, several catacombs and dungeons in which the hero has only a limited view of the passageways ahead and behind, and three castles that must be unlocked with magic keys if they are to yield up their secrets to the adventurer.

Then there are the three dragons—Yorgle (yellow), Grindle (green), and Rhindle (red)—that the vile wizard has conjured up to guard his ill-gotten treasure. They seldom allow the player to attain any

of his objectives without a fight, and have the strength and speed to chomp the unwary hero in half.

Finally, those worthies seeking the chalice must contend with the bat. This roving monster often swoops down upon a player to carry off a prized possession just when the hero needs it most.

On the other hand, several magic items to help the player complete the quest are scattered about the land. Besides the previously mentioned magic keys, there is a sword for slaying the dragons, a portable bridge that creates an instant passage through a blocking wall, and a magnet capable of attracting the other magical paraphernalia. The latter is especially useful for dislodging valuable items imprisoned in one of the solid rock walls.

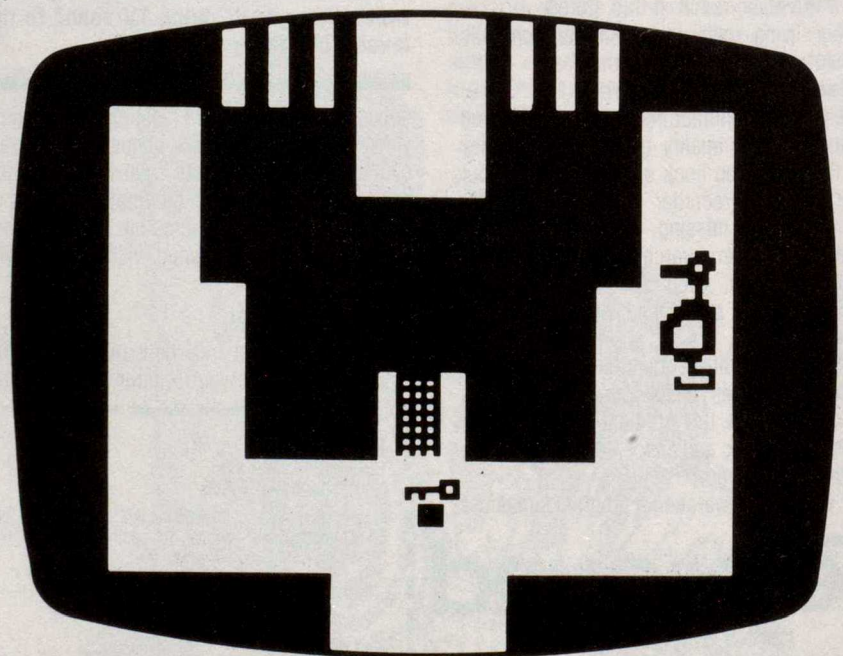
Unfortunately, the hero can only tote one magic item at a time. Having the right device at hand to deal with each crisis is crucial to completing the quest successfully.

Adventure shatters several video-game conventions. You will never see a commercial-arcade version of this solitaire contest, because it has no scoring system and no time limit. The only thing that counts is getting the chalice back, no matter how long it takes. The cartridge includes three variants of increasing complexity, progressively expanding the size of the magic kingdom and adding variables such as random placement of monsters and treasures.

The same strategy won't work every time, especially in game #3, but finding the sword and slaying the three dragons always makes a promising start. Then locate the helpful magic items and keep them within easy reach while slowly working toward the chalice.

Because *Adventure* is so much more ambitious than the usual home-arcade

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cartridge, Atari designers have had to cut a few corners. This is particularly evident in the on-screen graphics. The hero is depicted only as a small rectangle rather than an actual figure, and many of the magic devices can be oriented only in one specific direction. Still, it is unfair to compare this excellent game to complicated software developed for powerful computers.

Adventure is a bold departure from the usual video game. It's one cartridge that every Atari owner will certainly want to add to his library.

Night Driver (CX2633) offers video gamers a completely different, but hardly less thrilling type of action. You race along a twisting, treacherous two-lane blacktop, with the short, luminous pylons spaced yards apart along both sides of the road as your only guide through the inky night. Just before you succumb to the hypnotic thrall of white-line fever, a blaring horn sounds from out of the darkness ahead. Suddenly, you see a car racing toward you at top speed! You swerve to avoid the head-on collision and, instead, plow through the pylons with a thunderous ka-rash!

Arcaders who love driving games — or who've always wanted to become long-haul truckers—will be glued to the wheel for this home version of the long-time commercial-arcade favorite. *Night Driver* demands lightning reflexes, total concentration, and real intensity.

The ingeniously simple, yet effective graphics use pylons of varying size to create the illusion of a tortuously winding road. Trees and buildings dot the landscape to lend an additional touch of realism.

The object is to travel the greatest distance in the least amount of time. Both distances and time are logged on the screen near the top of the playfield.

As is generally the case with Atari, game variations are plentiful. There are three levels of difficulty, a randomly generated course that is different every time, and an unlocked version, as well as the standard game. *Night Driver* uses the paddle controller, employing the knob as the steering wheel and the button as the accelerator. The car responds to every minute turn of the wheel, so beginners will have to acquire a light touch or get used to cracking up every few seconds.

We also suggest trying a few games at the basic speed before moving up to the more challenging variations. A score of 50 in the standard game indicates that your driving skill is ready to challenge the tougher and faster courses included in the cartridge.

Happy motoring!

