

Arcade Alley

A Critical Look at Video Cartridge Games & Programs

by Bill Kunkel & Frank T. Laney II

The 1st Annual Arcade Awards

These days, giving out awards is part of American culture. Not to be outdone, we have decided to bestow a series of "Arkies" to honor excellence in home video games.

Although we consulted a cross-section of arcade enthusiasts, we made the final selections ourselves. Therefore, as might be expected, our choices reflect the personal tastes and preferences that have by now become familiar to most regular readers of this column.

Remember, when looking over the roll call of winners, that it is only possible to single out a handful of games for special recognition; we often found ourselves forced to choose among a great number of worthy possibilities. Really, most video game manufacturers are doing a solid job of providing arcade addicts with excellent hardware and software.

Since this is the first go-round for the Arkies, it seemed somehow unfair to ignore noble efforts just because they didn't fall neatly within the confines of calendar year 1979. Accordingly, this first set of Arkies covers everything available in the home arcade field as of January 1, 1980. Next year at this time we'll award Arkies to products newly available in 1980.

So, with an appropriate *beep-beep-be-boop* electronic fanfare, here are this year's Arcade Award winners.

★ Best Hardware Magnavox Odyssey²

The games themselves are probably the most important part of any home arcade system, but well-designed components certainly add to players' enjoyment. The Odyssey² console, which features a full monoplane keyboard, is very attractive—yet rugged enough to stand up under regular play.



Accepting the "Best Hardware Award—1979" is Magnavox's system. The sleek keyboard and joystick controls won the swimsuit competition in a walk, but the unit offers performance, too.

The Odyssey² joystick controllers are, quite simply, the best available. They require less hand strength to manipulate, too, which comes in mighty handy when playing games that call for a lot of manual dexterity.

★ Best Audio & Visual Effects Bally

It beeps, it bangs, it jingles, it chimes—and the games explode off the screen in a rainbow of colors. Nothing creates that delightful arcade atmosphere like superior sound and visual effects, and the Bally system is the undisputed champ in this regard.

Decades of dominance in the pinball machine business have made Bally conscious of the fact that a truly complete game must sound and look right in addition to playing well. Their games are a symphony of fluid animation, vibrant color, and tasteful sound effects. It's "window dressing" like this that elevates an excellent game like Bally Football to the level of a home arcade masterpiece.

★ Best Games Atari

"The play's the thing," quoth William



Shakespeare, and some of the Bard's spiritual descendants must be working in Atari's design department. The folks who started it all with Pong now offer an un-

matched array of the most competitive and exciting game cartridges available to the home arcade addict.

Atari's line of 20 game cartridges (embodying over 1300 distinct variations) literally has something to suit every taste. Whether the gamer's choice is the continuous action of Basketball or the more leisurely and subtle Miniature Golf, Atari is ready to satisfy. The company's games excel because they are simply without being simple-minded, easy to play without being boringly easy to master.

★ Best Pong Variant Volleyball (Atari "Video Olympics")

For those weary of regulation Pong, Atari has created something at least as much fun by turning it on its side. Two players, each controlling a horizontal paddle, bounce the ball back and forth over the net to score points.

A unique "spiking" feature allows players to leap for the ball and then smash it down into their rival's end of the court. The game reproduces the flavor of real volleyball by making the ball arc higher each time a player hits it more than once in a row. A four-player version on the same cartridge is also highly recommended.

★ Best Sports Game Football (Bally)

This game provides arcade lovers with an amazing amount of pigskin action—including inside and outside running, pass interceptions, quarterback sacks, razzle-dazzle plays, and even a "mad dog" linebacker on defense! Would-be quarterbacks can select from a wide range of plays, with the available choices altering to reflect current field position.

The best part is that Bally wisely decided not to squeeze the whole gridiron

"The software's the thing," the Bard might have said. If so, Atari scoops the competition with its assortment of over 1300 video games.

on the screen at the same time. Instead of squinting at a tiny full-size field, players luxuriate in the detailed presentation of the 40-yard segment that is actually the focus of the action. When a play goes for an unusually long gain, the next 40-yard section automatically fills the screen.

★ Best Target Game Air-Sea Battle (Atari)

Whether you prefer firing anti-aircraft
(continued on page 75)

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Arcade Alley

continued from page 18

bursts, torpedoes, or depth charges, this is video war at its finest. In the anti-aircraft and torpedo games, an assortment of juicy targets zip across the top two-thirds of the playfield, shooting-gallery fashion, while players vie to see how many they can blast out of existence. Torpedo, our personal favorite, is especially lively when played with guided missiles.

Another Air-Sea Battle variation, Polaris vs. Bomber, is not for the fainthearted. One player's airplane drops depth charges over the other player's sub, which answers with nuclear missiles of its own. It takes a steady hand, indeed, to fire accurately while dodging destruction.

★ *Best Science Fiction Game*

Cosmic Conflict (Magnavox)

The incredible success of *Star Wars* has boosted the popularity of science fiction to new heights in recent years. Video game makers, responding to this upswing in consumer demand, have jumped on the bandwagon, filling home screens with enough spaceships, stars, and planets to satisfy any s.f. fan.

The best among the many excellent space games is Cosmic Conflict. This solitaire triumph casts the player in the role of defender of freedom in the galaxy, pledged to stop the invading fleet from destroying our corner of the universe. The use of two different types of targets—defenseless transports and deadly starfighters—keeps things lively throughout this fast-paced shootout in space.

★ *Best Solitaire Game*

Golf (Magnavox)

Since arcade game opponents aren't always available when you want to play, dedicated gamers should have solitaire entertainments like Golf in their collections.

A tiny on-screen golfer drives and putts around nine holes distinguished by such expected links obstacles as water and rough. Once he reaches the green, a marvelous thing happens—the playfield shifts from an overview of the entire hole to a close-up of the green.

The little golfer can blast down the fairway with the best, but he has very little patience. After a particularly inept shot, he'll bash his club up and down on the ground in a raging fury. (Does this sound like anyone *you* know?)

★ *Most Innovative Game*

Basketball (Atari)

Most video basketball games offer only two-dimensional play, but Atari wins this Arkie for adding the vital ingredient of court depth. Since the court is presented

as a trapezoid, players can move from side to side as well as up and down between the hoops. This unique concept opens up the game, introducing elements of defense and position play never before available in an arcade basketball game.

Atari builds on this excellent foundation by introducing shot blocking for defensive players and an excellent solitaire version for those lonely evenings at courtside.

★ *Best Commercial Arcade Game*
Space Invaders (Bally)

The most popular new arcade attraction since electronic games began Space Invaders first caught on in Japan; schoolchildren in that country cut classes *en masse* in order to feed their yen to this ingenious machine. Bally purchased the U.S. rights, reworked the design into a more conventional upright format, and immediately found that Americans love it too.

Players maneuver a laser cannon horizontally along the bottom of the playfield while five columns of space monsters march down the screen, firing their weapons as they come. Players have the extra advantage of four protective bunkers, but these are gradually disintegrated by incoming and outgoing fire. The game gives three rounds of play for 25¢, a round ending whenever the invaders successfully blast the player's cannon.

And there you have them, the 10 winners of VIDEO's first annual Arcade Awards. We invite you to write us, in care of the magazine, with *your* thoughts and opinions about the home video arcade scene.

