

Arcade Alley

A Critical Look at Video Games

by Bill Kunkel & Arnie Katz



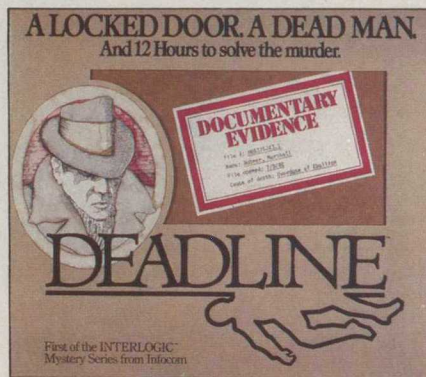
The Best Computer Games

As promised last month, this time we'll review computer programs that walk off with the statuettes in the 1983 Arcade Awards competition. Though more Arkies are in this year's computer-software division than in any previous year, expansion in the field made it more difficult than ever to win. The quality and diversity of current microcomputer games is amazing, especially to those of us who still remember when video tennis was a revelation.

□ Computer Game of the Year: **David's Midnight Magic** (Broderbund/Apple II). Video pinball has been one of those ideas that sound great but don't work out well—until now. David Snider has created a program that is both an exciting video game and a fairly faithful evocation of pinball mystique. The two-level playfield provides plenty of varied action, and the features include a bonus multiplier and the possibility of multi-ball play. Certificates of Merit: **Bandits** (Sirius Software/Apple II), **Castle Wolfenstein** (Muse/Apple II).

□ Best Computer Adventure: **Deadline** (Infocom/all popular systems). Did Mr. Rubner commit suicide or, as some fear, was he the victim of foul play in his own home? As detective in charge of the case in this text-only adventure, you have only 12 hours to ferret out the truth and bring the murderer to justice. Though it lacks illustrations of any kind, "Deadline" is still one of the most advanced adventure programs published last year. For instance, the player can communicate in full sentences, not just the telegraphic verb-noun phrases other such disks generally employ. This gives the dialogue a richness and realism seldom encountered in other similar programs. Certificates of Merit: **Time Zone** (On-Line/Apple II), **Kabul Spy** (Sirius/Apple II).

□ Best Science Fiction/Fantasy Computer Game: **Star Warrior** (Automated Simulations/Apple II, Atari 400, 800). This action adventure casts the player as a member of the Furies, an intergalactic force committed to helping the weak obtain retributive justice. The specific mission here is either to assassinate the tyrannical governor of the planet Fornax or to provide a diversion so that another Fury can dispatch the despot. The player



A dead man. A neat game.

has a lot of equipment choices, including a battle suit; the disk version allows the computerist to design a custom suit of armor. Even the instruction book is a cut above the rest. Certificates of Merit: **Empire I** (Edu-Ware/Apple II), **Caverns of Mars** (Atari/Atari 400, 800).

□ Best Arcade/Action Computer Games: **K-razy Shootout** (CBS /Atari 400,800). As the first cartridge game for the Atari computer systems produced by

an independent software publisher, "K-razy Shootout" would've drawn more than the usual amount of public notice. It is a fine maze-shoot akin to Stern's "Berzerk" coin-op machine, in which the player must blast through a series of increasingly more deadly rooms patrolled by antagonistic robots. The robots pop into view along the edges of the room, and the player must move the on-screen character with style and panache to zap all of them before the countdown timer at the bottom of the screen runs out. Certificates of Merit: **Crossfire** (On-Line/Apple II, Atari 400, 800), **Star Blazer** (Broderbund/Apple II).

□ Best Computer Audiovisual Effects: **Night Mission** (subLogic/Apple II). This is another prize-winning pinball simulation, with the accent definitely on the word "simulation." The programming wizards at subLogic even have a nifty animated sequence in which an electronic quarter chunks into the slot to initiate the action. And if you don't like the set of sounds and pictures standard on this disk, a special program allows the computerist to modify about 40 different parameters to suit his



'K-razy Shootout' is the first Atari-compatible game from an independent producer.

taste. So if you like the idea of multiple ball shadows, slow motion, or shriller sirens, you can fine-tune "Night Mission" to your specifications. Certificates of Merit: **Choplifter** (Broderbund/Apple II), **Preppie** (Scott Adams/all systems).

□ Best Computer Sports Game: **Cypher Bowl** (Artsci/Atari 400, 800). For some strange reason, sports programs haven't been too popular in the computer-gaming field thus far. One solid effort at changing this state of affairs is "Cypher Bowl," a two-player football contest for the Atari systems. Although the orientation of the field on the screen—with its goalposts at top and bottom rather than at the sides—is unorthodox, this is the most enjoyable pigskin romp yet published for this machine. A simple joystick-activated control system makes it possible for offensive and defensive coaches to quickly choose from a wide range of formats and plays. Certificates of Merit: **Football Strategy** (Avalon Hill/several systems), **Juggler** (IDSI/Apple II).

□ Most Innovative Computer Game: **Moonbase 10** (PDI/Atari 400, 800). Many people had noticed that the Atari disk drive and cassette player could be hooked up to the computer in series, but no one did anything with this setup until PDI gave gamers this outer-space shoot-'em-up. Any game will post a high score when you zap enough alien nasties, but how many will play a congratulatory message from the president? The inclusion of real communications using human speech takes an already excellent space game and raises it to the level of the truly elite programs. Even in a year marked by striking innovation, PDI doubly earns its Arcade Award statue with this highly ingenious piece of software. Certificates of Merit: **Nautilus** (Synapse/Atari 400, 800), **Arcade Machine** (Broderbund/Apple II).

□ Best Solitaire Computer Game: **Snack Attack** (Datamost/Apple II). An outstanding solitaire game is one you can play over and over and still find interesting and involving. The multiple mazes, charming graphics and sound effects, and well-nigh-addictive play action of this maze-chase program make it a great choice on a rainy afternoon. The presence of color-coded doors in some of the walls of the labyrinth is another big plus, adding an extra dollop of strategy to a game that might otherwise have too much emphasis on pure hand/eye coordination. Certificates of Merit: **Omega Race** (Commodore/VIC-20), **Neptune** (Gebelli Software/Apple II).

There you have it, the full slate of winners. Before next issue, the paving crews are going to converge on "Arcade Alley" and enlarge it a bit. Starting with the next installment of this column, we'll be getting slightly more space in VIDEO magazine to cover some hot computer games as well as the usual video-game cartridges. See you all then. 