

VIDEO VICTIM

Confessions of a video addict

I was a video addict.

It all started innocently enough. It was 1977, and I was a junior on my high school paper. I shifted gears in my parents' VW with my feet, leaving my hands available for eating pizza. I had girlfriends. I went to dances. I was a normal teenager in most respects — until the day I discovered coin-operated games.

My newspaper advisor thought a story about pinball and video games would be an interesting feature, so my photographer friend and I went out to do some research and take some photos. This was in the early days of video, just after the advent of Pong and before Space Invaders.

During the course of our research, we discovered an aging pinball machine that we could play fairly well. In one afternoon we had spent about \$4, but had actually won three FREE GAMES! What an ego build! Here was something that we were fairly good at, and could win without getting muddy or getting aching muscles.

You know you're in trouble when you ask for your pay in quarters.

Well, it all went quickly from there. Soon we discovered that one of our friends was a veritable wizard with the flippers. He had practiced so much on the machines in the local pizza parlor that he could hit the targets every time, and he racked up free games right and left.

Soon we ate most of our meals at the pizza parlor, all the while learning the secrets of the bumpers. In time a new machine was added to the pinball arena: Space Invaders. We were hesitant to approach this new device at first, but soon learned its secrets to success.

It wasn't long before we went in search of more video games. We hungered for the sight of exploding alien ships. We thirsted for the sound of the loud 'Whack!' the pinballs made when we won a free game. The 'bwow-bwow-bwow KOOJ!' of stroids became the only music we were interested in. We started frequenting restaurants where there were machines, no matter that we weren't hungry. We started missing afternoon classes while we drove to the nearest

arcade to get a wider selection.

What fun it was! For the price of one measly quarter, you could blast asteroids and flying saucers to bits, save the Federation from intergalactic invasion, zap robot security guards, or race around at breakneck speeds on hairpin curves without risking high insurance rates.

I knew I was hooked when I left my friends and came to Eugene for college. I found myself playing pinball alone. I made excuses for going to the EMU to buy, umm, a Tootsie Roll, and somehow wound up in the Rec Center. I asked for my paychecks in quarters. I was hooked.

I knew I needed help when I started going out of control. I'd spend \$12 in an afternoon after doing miserably on a test, and then find out I'd gotten a B on it. I'd go on a binge when I had too much homework. I'd resort to the games when M*A*S*H got pre-empted. I even got to the point where I could picture Space Invaders so distinctly that I could play it in my mind during classes.

The turning point came when my wife and I went east to visit her parents. They owned a little rec room which they ran along with their normal business. The day after we arrived, the guy they had hired to watch the place quit, and they needed some help. I volunteered.

I spent just four days in the rec room, ten hours a day. Although the games weren't free, they were the only way of passing the time. I gorged myself on Pac-Man, Black Knight, Defender, and Strata-Vox. I got sick of it, then plugged in another quarter. I got sick of it again, but had to keep going.

When the vacation was over, I had no urges whatsoever to return to the gaming tubes. But, while walking through stores or restaurants, now and then I noticed a new game, one with more color and challenge. Eventually I broke down and tried it, then another, and another.

But I still remember those terrible hours in that hot, sweaty little room, watching space ships blow up and hearing the Black Knight chide me over and over again. I can now control myself, and no longer fear the evil tubes.

But lots of people waste their money playing games without knowing The Way It's Done. So if you'll give me a quarter or two, maybe I'll give you some lessons.

Battle Zone

There are two tricks to winning at Battle Zone. Don't sit and spin, or you'll be blown away faster than you can get a quarter out of your pocket. The second trick is the important one: Ram those suckers. Keep the enemy tanks in the corner of your screen as

you approach, then ram that baby, back up quickly, and you can beat the other tank to the draw every time. Now just watch out for those missiles (sometimes you can trick them by hiding behind the barriers), and chase down those funny twirly things.

Asteroids

There are two styles of 'Stroid playing (we're talking here about the good old regular Stroids, not the watered-down, freaked-out version known as "Deluxe Asteroids"). You can play it wimpy, or go for the gusto.

Wimpy players go through all of the first bunch of asteroids except one, and then wait to try and nail the Little Quickies, those pesky little flying saucers with such a good aim. Sure, they're worth lots of points, but it's really not Stroids in the classic sense.

Gusto Stroids is where you go for every asteroid you can get, frame after frame of them. Of course it's a lot more work, but it's a heck of a lot more fun.

You can even stay alive fairly well if you follow a few simple guidelines: (1) Never fire at a big asteroid right next to you. It'll break into littler ones that'll break you into littler ones. (2) Don't be afraid to move around. Don't go too fast, but keep moving, even if you don't need to. You'll have more control to get out of sticky situations, and won't get caught unawares by a Little Quickie at the edge of the screen. (3) Don't hesitate to use hyperspace when you think you might need to. Usually you won't blow up. Even if you do, you probably were a goner to begin with. Now if only real life had a hyperspace button.

Pac-Man

The only way to really reap on Pac-Man is to watch the Masters. These are the folks who sit for hours playing off one quarter, because they've memorized the patterns. There's an intricate system that those little gobblers follow, and Devious

Minds have broken it. If you watch someone with the right patterns you can spend all day at it.

Of course, it may be a lot more fun to play without patterns, but you're the one who wanted these lessons. I don't care what you do.

Venture

This is by far the best of the most recent crop of games. It simulates a Dungeons & Dragons game to the extent that you're a little guy with a bunch of arrows wandering through a dungeon filled with treasures and monsters, which you take care of as best you can.

The only secret to Venture is to watch for the wandering hall monsters when you enter a room. If there's one

next to one of the doors, pick another door to exit through. It's a real bummer to make off with a chest of jewels only to walk into the jaws of a hall monster.

(P.S. As far as I know, the only place in the area that has this game is a new arcade in Springfield at 9th and Main Streets. They also give you more little guys for a quarter than places in Portland do.)

Armor Attack

Play this game with someone else, and develop a system where one of you lures the tanks' fire while the other one blows them away. Decide who's going to go after the helicopter and get it quick. And make sure you put a few

extra shots through each tank you get, as the gun turrets sometimes remain active after one shot.

There aren't many other secrets to this one. Just try to keep from running into anyone, and hope for the best.

Centipede

Centipede is another good new game. The secret is to rack up as many points on the spiders as you can, and not to worry too much about Falling Greeblies. The spiders increase in value depending on how close they are when you nail them. Get under one and wait until it's just above you, then shoot it. You'll get 900 points instead

of the measly 300 you get when they're far away.

Don't worry too much about the crawly things. Just get set at a corner where they have to turn around, and blast them with rapid-fire. If you're careful, there's no reason you can't dodge any troublesome critters that get too low.

Space Invaders

Once again, the best version of this game is the first one. Clean the critters off from the side first, so they have farther to go before they come down on you. Try to count the number of shots you take as you go. This is important, because if you hit the flying saucers at the top of the screen

normally, they're just worth 50 or 100 points. If, however, you can get them on an increment of 11, you'll get 600 points for the ship. Also, start counting over with each new frame of beasties. I know it sounds kind of devious, but this is a sophisticated mini-computer you're up against.

Where to go to blow your dough

Now that you know the tricks of the trade, you'll probably want to rush out and try out your new knowledge. Here are some of the better places around town.

Springfield Arcade, 9th & Main, Springfield

This is the newest, and one of the best arcades in the area. Although it only has a few games, it has many of the best. Even better yet, they give you five ships (men, balls, etc.) instead of the normal three.

Games R Fun, 190 W. Broadway Ave.

This new arcade is full of video games, with lots of the latest arrivals. It's a bit noisy and everything's orange, but it's hard to complain when you get six games for a dollar.

Charlie's Pool and Games, 2596 Willamette St.

This is the original pinball parlour in the Eugene-Springfield area. It has lots of video games, a good selection of pinballs, and some pool tables to boot.