



Photo by Bob Baker

Video game proprietors worry that a spate of video game books will decrease their revenues.

Books assist video buffs

NEW YORK (AP) — There's trouble in Video Game City — code books. Memorize the manual and you'll get hours of playing time for just one quarter.

More and more video buffs have been exchanging techniques for pattern playing, sending arcade owners, who grossed an estimated \$5 billion last year, to the edge of financial hyperspace.

Now the owners face a new problem — a growing number of best-selling paperbacks by video game wizards that serve as how-to manuals.

"Of course it's going to hurt business," says Irving Tauve, co-owner of Manchester Music, a New Hampshire company that owns about 700 video games. "The longer a person plays on a quarter the less quarters I get."

There are at least five paperbacks on the market: Signet's "Mastering Pac-Man" by blackjack expert Ken Uston; Bantam's "How To Master the Video Games;" Pocket Books' "How To Win At Pac-Man;" Simon & Schuster's "How To Beat the Video Games;" and Warner Books' "Scoring Big at Pac-Man."

The books range in price from \$1.95 to \$3.95.

"Theoretically, you could have a user's manual for each of these games," Uston says.

The original press run on Uston's book was 500,000, and according to Signet spokeswoman Fern Leiber Edison, store orders before the book was released required printing of another 250,000 copies. After two weeks in bookstores, Uston's book has climbed to No. 5 on B. Dalton's mass-market best seller list.

Pac-Man has received so much literary attention because it lends itself to more thorough analysis than attack and reflex games. Uston says maze games like Pac-Man require "the most skill, about 90 percent, and only 10 percent hand-and-eye coordination." Attack games range from 90 percent hand-and-eye coordination to 50-50, he adds.

Uston turned his attention to Pac-Man while awaiting the outcome of court appeals on his banishment from casinos in Atlantic City. He is an expert blackjack "counter" who can calculate the chances of a high or low card

turning up after several decks of cards have been played.

Uston's book is the most elaborate on Pac-Man, still one of the most popular of all arcade games.

"The manufacturers are so worried that everyone's going to master these games," says Uston, during an interview conducted over a Pac-Man board at a Broadway arcade.

"But look, I just messed up," he exclaims as his Pac-Man is caught by a pursuing monster.

Uston, who is writing a second book on arcade games, doesn't consider himself an expert at playing, just at analyzing. At a recent arcade party held to promote Coleco's new line of portable, self-contained games, including Pac-Man, Uston brought along Raymond Chan, a 20-year-old college student from San Francisco.

Uston asked Chan to help him with his book research after he saw Chan walk away bored from a Pac-Man after racking up 1.4 million points without a single mishap.

Chan thinks the pattern books make arcade playing more fun and interesting.

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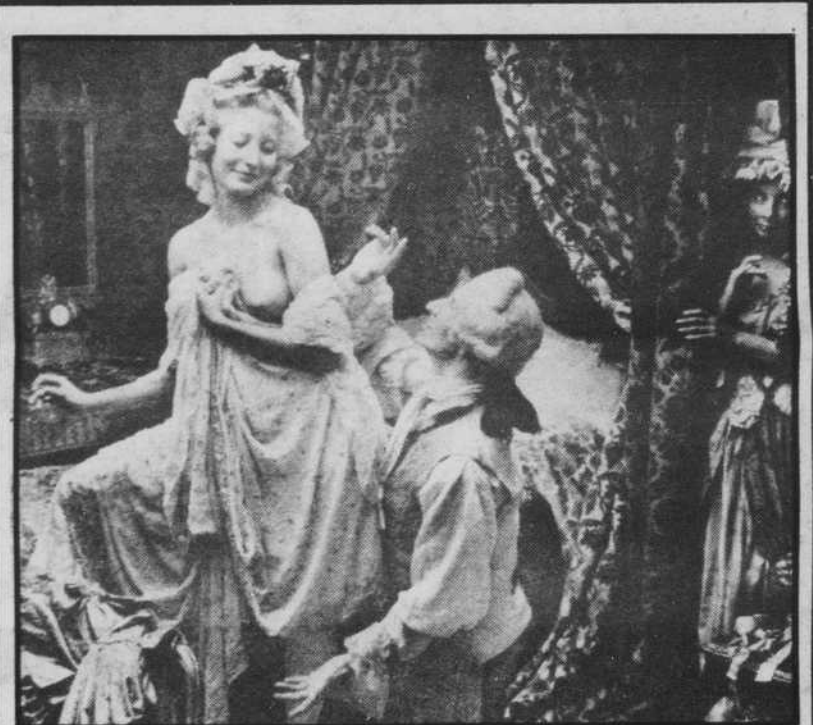
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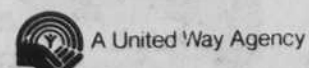
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