

BEWARE THE YLLABIAN SPACE GUPPY!

BY P. GREGORY SPRINGER

A Galactic Neophyte Sees a Vision of Video Games in His Sleep, and Begins a Manual of Philosophy to Appease his Conscience.

LEVEL THREE

Choose One. Enter A or B.

- A) You never play video games.
B) Smart bomb my Swarmers; I'm ready for the Yllabian Dog Fight.

(Correct answer below.)

You walk past. Dens of electronic attractions only repel you. You refuse to play them on some obscure pretext or another. They waste money, they make ugly sounds, they confuse or distract attention to the extreme, they are the bastards of a technological age, they are foolish... or so you think. But you never play them, so you don't know.

Perhaps you are wise to hesitate. Once the appeal of the video games has taunted you into a wrangle, all safety fades. Doubts enter your mind. You find yourself looking for quarters. You close your eyes and see rainbow explosions. Again and again and again...

(Correct answer is B if you have read this far. Proceed to the next level.)

LEVEL TWO

Some basic, temporal strategies are laid for a number of games. If you still insist the games won't graze you, hyperspace ahead to level three. If you expect solutions, proceed with extreme caution.

The best general strategy for all electronic video games is to practice. All the advice in the world won't inform your fingers when and how to punch "thrust" with your index finger instead of "fire" with your thumb. Words can help, but experience means knowledge. Games can be plotted in your sleep, on paper, or daydreaming — imagining the screen and envisioning your moves schematically — but nothing comes easy. Mastery takes quarters.

Much of the for-what-it's-worth advice below has been taken from the PLATO computer system notes-files communication network. Hundreds of anonymous computer addicts, sitting at terminals around the world, exchange information over PLATO on a myriad of subjects;

video games, logically, have a file unto themselves.

STARGATE

The sequel to DEFENDER, STARGATE has all the wonders that made its predecessor the prince of video games, plus more. The landers, mutants, bombers, baiters, pods and swarmers are still deadly, but you're fighting new threats in addition: firebombers, fireballs, Yllabian space guppies, dynamos, space hum, phred, Big Red, and munchies. Since unlike most video games, the enemies attack you simultaneously, you might expect STARGATE to be even more difficult than the high-test DEFENDER. But no, STARGATE has some minor DEFENDER bugs smoothed out. Smart bombs work more consistently and don't slow the game down. The explosions look nicer, so that you might not even mind losing your planet. Mutants and landers move more slowly. Higher scores are easier to get.

Tips: The volcano spurting lava is a decorative distraction; ignore it. During the first wave, try ignoring most of the enemies and concentrate on saving humanoids from the capturing landers. Catch four humanoids on your spaceship (being careful not to touch ground or they'll hop off), then fly into the Stargate warp box and be instantly transported to the fourth wave.

Don't forget to use Inviso. You are invulnerable when you hold down the button with your right thumb, continuing to thrust and fire with your other fingers. Inviso is great for getting out of a tight spot, so use it sparingly.

If you get blisters on your right hand, you're probably spending too much time on "thrust" instead of making good use of your vertical stick. (See Level Six for more sexual theory.) Professional callouses appear on the left hand.

STARGATE wears your eyes out, but worthily. A few games leave you with multicolor hallucinatory afterimages for hours.

DONKEY KONG

Mr. Arakawa of Nintendo claims, with a giggle, that DONKEY KONG is now the most popular game in both Japan and

America. The name comes from a bad translation of Japanese for "stupid gorilla." As the hero climbs to rescue the girl from the gorilla, he must use ladders, conveyer belts, and the ulique "jump" capability to dodge falling fireballs, fuel carts, and barrels. The game was released in Japan in July 1981, and test-marketed in the States that same month. Nintendo has ceased production of its other games to concentrate on DK, and the key to its special status is psychological. DONKEY KONG has a role-playing feel, a narrative dimension usually lacking in games.

No one knows what's in the barrels.

TEMPEST

Atari's Quadrascan non-linear graphics moved from black and white (ASTEROIDS, RED BARON) to color with TEMPEST, an abstract space battle of shapes. Although likely to undergo new programming transformations in the near future, some controversy already rages about the best ways of playing it now. Some skip ahead to high levels for high points and fast play; others proceed through the levels for a longer game but inequitable point accumulation.

If, instead of starting on level one you begin at nine, you'll receive a bonus of 54,000 points (but not the extra lives awarded for regular accumulation of 20K and 40K points). If you make it past level 11, you get 74K bonus points. Some think spinning the knob toward "expert" at game's beginning is, thus, "cheating," but it is a way for a good player to face a challenge sooner and get more points more quickly. If you make it up through level 16 the slow way, you don't get as many points, which is rather unfair.

The color patterns change from blue, to red, to yellow, to light blue on the 49th level. Shoot spikers when you can, or they'll come back out as tankers. You can tell if a tanker is going to change into two fuseballs or two flippers by looking at the center of the tanker. A pinkish center reveals that it will change into fuseballs.

Many players sit on one tube and fire at a steady rate of about 3 shots per second, until flippers approach. Then they fire as fast as possible. Some think this method, which can last up to 19 levels, is boring. Others think it's smart.

TEMPEST is not cute; it is the reductive essence of video game space battle, almost the idea of it put into abstract motion graphics.

GALAGA

The Chicago manufacturers, Midway/Bally, pronounce it "GAL-uh-guh," but some say "Guh-LA-guh." Either way, the game improves upon the space invaders theme by having the attacking insects swarm down in flying patterns before lining up above to continue attack. The key to advanced scores is to allow your ship to be captured by the Galaga's blue beam; then, if you are careful to kill the captor with your remaining ship, you get your old ship back for double fire power against the insects. Stay near the center of the board when possible, dodging the insect fire carefully and swiftly. Remaining in a fixed position for the first two or three challenging stages works to best advantage, even when the dragonflies start spinning down in curleycue confusion.

FROGGER

Not all video games provide space battle. FROGGER has the earthbound plight of the lowly frog trying to cross the road and river without getting squashed or eaten. Move as fast as possible; every second saved earns points. Move your frog forwards or backwards; don't think you have to stay on a sinking turtle's back just because there's no log in front of you. The real key to a good third level play is to use the alligator's tail as a leaping place; it doesn't look safe, but it is.

FROGGER scores never range into the astronomical, and there seem to be bugs in many of the machines: sometimes your frog will jump in a different direction from what you expected. But it's a game of simple pleasures and survivals, almost with an anti-technological theme. Your graceful comedown to reality after intergalactic voyaging: the Peace Frog.

LEVEL ONE

The literature of video games is fly-by-night. Ken Uston's bestseller, *Mastering Pac-Man*, Tom Hirschfeld's *How to Master the Video Games*, and the many other published attempts to circumvent loss

frustration in the arcades can't be of use beyond the life of the game machines, and most machines have a life expectancy measured in months rather than years. Does anyone play 1979's original hit, SPACE INVADERS, except as nostalgia? Will PAC-MAN be an obsolete curio by 1983?

Bernard M. Powers, director of marketing for the Bally's Aladdin's Castle chain of arcades, claims that PAC-MAN holds some kind of record, with a peak popularity that lasted a record 14 months. "It's on the downswing now," Powers says. "The life cycle of games is critical. ASTEROIDS, which was released the same time as PAC-MAN, lasted six months. We hope for six months with any game. Those few long-lasting ones you fall in love with."

New games about which nothing has (yet) been dissected by book include DIG DUG (an underground maze game), FRENZY (an improved and more difficult version of BERSERK), ROBOTRON (another high-speed, humanistic save-the-world drama from the makers of DEFENDER), the three-dimensional ZAXXON, and TRON, a four-part game cleverly based upon the Disney movie.

Already new chips and challenges have made PAC-MAN overly familiar. MS. PAC-MAN, a ribboned dancing female gobbler, vies for attention. Uston's careful patterns for the original PAC-MAN may still work on some machines, but the book is likely to be classic only in the sense that it was made obsolete upon publication.

An article in *Playboy* recently gave strategies for CENTIPEDE, DEFENDER, and PAC-MAN, but the pattern for the latter differed considerably from Uston's model. "On the first three boards, the movements of the four ghosts aren't predictable, so pattern following is a useless — and dangerous — affair," was the *Playboy* Philosophy. Uston, however, brazenly gave useless and dangerous patterns to use, some of which worked on machines only in regional locations. At least for the first boards, you are better off practicing on paper, basing your moves on the close observations done at familiar machines. Remember, you can't do a flawless board one pattern if you make any mistakes. You'll have to put in another quarter, and start from scratch, which is frustrating.

Answer books exist because winning is both paramount and an im-

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