

FEATURES

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Not just for wizards anymore

■ Though the popularity of Pinball's has fallen over the last decade, it's still a daily distraction for some

By Mason West
Oregon Daily Emerald

President of Stern Pinball Inc., Gary Stern said pinball is an American icon, and like our country's economy, pinball isn't in the best shape.

In October 1999, Williams Electronic Games Inc. left the pinball market, making Stern Pinball the sole manufacturer of pinball machines in the world. Stern said the pinball market has bottomed out, and it won't ever return to the level of success achieved in 1992. In that year, Stern said 100,000 machines were made. In 2001, Stern Pinball will have produced 10,000 machines, at most.

Stern said his company is committed to releasing at least three games a year that have been designed in-house. Designing a game takes anywhere from nine months to a year, he said. Stern's upcoming release, Monopoly, was designed in-house with the help of outside designer Pat Lawlor.

Lawlor is a celebrity in the pinball industry, having designed many successful machines, including "The Addams Family," which is the biggest seller of the modern-era games, according to Stern.

Jerry Johnston's company, Amusement Unlimited, distributes pinball machines and other games to The Break in the EMU. Five of the company's 70 pinball machines are at the University, which is more

units than at any other location, but pinball is only 10 percent of the company's business, Johnston said.

Though pinball may be an American icon, it has international appeal. Stern Pinball does 40 percent of its business in exporting machines around the world, primarily to Western Europe. Stern said good pinball is self-teaching in a Pavlovian way: People respond to the mechanical stimuli before visually recognizing it — thus language barriers are less important.

"We need to have enough in the game for the better player, but first we need to create fun for the casual player," Stern said.

University student Jason Lewis is not a casual player. For 11 years, he has perfected his skills at pinball into a fine art. Lewis said he spends a dollar a day for pinball on average (mostly in The Break), with an average playing time of an hour and a half. But that varies.

"I have had to rearrange my grocery budget (because of excessive playing) — not by intention, though," he said.

Lewis establishes a direct connection between pinball expenditures and his classes in any given term.

"Playing pinball is a wonderful diversion from my classes not because it is a mental diversion; it ranks among the only times that my mind is actually stimulated," he said.

Where the average pinball player doesn't know all the subtle nuances of a pinball machine, Lewis has memorized most aspects of his favorite machine, "Medieval Madness." One of his

hints is activating multiball play before raising the trolls so that there are more balls on the table with which to hit the trolls.

Based on his criteria for good pinball games, Lewis said he is not hopeful for the Monopoly pinball machine.

"They found the right medium for that, which is the board game. Pinball machines are manic. They're relentless, and they're fast paced. Monopoly is slow," he said.

Pinball distributor Johnston said that he would likely buy a few Monopoly machines and has already bought two Austin Powers games, one of which is in The Break.

Lewis keeps an eye on new games, such as "South Park," but for the most part he is focused on beating "Medieval Madness" and getting more free games to perpetuate game play. To date, his record of free games, which is how he measures pinball success, is eight. Lewis was present when his older brother beat "Attack from Mars" in the EMU. He described it as "a spiritual experience," vicarious though it was.

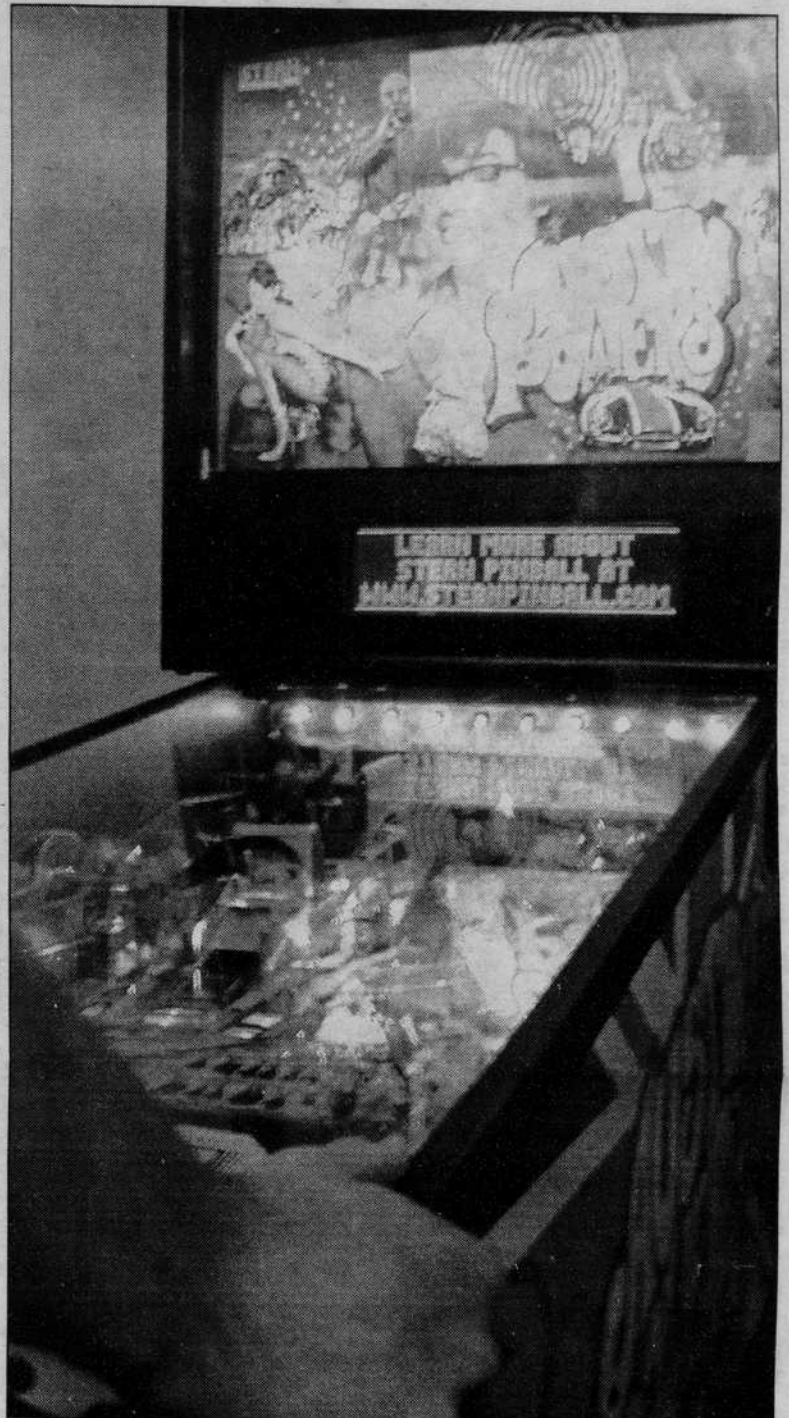
"He is the ruler of the universe," Lewis said.

That title isn't simply Lewis being boastful — the game bestows the honor after the victory.

Though the industry may not be booming, players such as Lewis will consider pinball indispensable.

"I still use the phrase, 'Let's go play video games,' but it means pinball," he said.

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Adam Amato Emerald

The Austin Powers game, pictured here in The Break on the first floor of the EMU, is one of many machines owned by pinball distributor Jerry Johnston.

Bestseller 'Bridget Jones's Diary' is a daily delight

■ The humorous incidents related in this popular volume will ring true for many readers



Helen Fielding
'Bridget Jones's Diary'

By Lisa Toth
Oregon Daily Emerald

She sits at home on Saturday nights indulging in Bloody Marys, waiting for the phone to ring and watching television reruns to cure her loneliness. At one point or another, many readers have been in the shoes of Miss Bridget Jones. This sometimes clueless, 30-ish working "singleton" seeking Mr. Right is the primary character of Bridget Jones's Diary, a novel by Helen Fielding.

But this witty and poignant book is more than just an average daily chronicle of events. It's filled with the day-to-day inner workings of the female mind.

The release of this No. 1 national bestseller-turned-major motion picture has given women everywhere something to laugh about and discuss. Fielding based this book on her columns in the British newspaper The Independent.

The 12 chapters of this creative daily record represent each month of the year. The first chapter begins with Bridget's long list of New Year's resolutions, and the final chapter ends after Christmas the following season.

A few of her resolutions include forming a "functional relationship" with a responsible adult and reducing the "circumference of thighs by 3 inches (i.e. 1 1/2 inches each), using anticellulite diet."

Bridget embarks on an intense quest to find Prince Charming and improve herself inside and out. But it is quickly evident that like Alice falling through the rabbit hole, Bridget can't seem to maintain control in her life. Each chapter begins by documenting her daily successes and failures with the amount of calories and units of alcohol she has con-

sumed, fags (British for cigarettes) smoked and lottery tickets purchased.

What makes the beginning of each chapter amusing is that Bridget is the concentrated version of all the stupid neuroses of the female species.

For example, on Thursday, Feb. 23, she writes:

125 lbs. (if only could stay under 126 lbs. and not keep bobbing up and down like drowning corpse — drowning in fat), alcohol units 2, cigarettes 17 (pre-shag nerves — understandable), calories 775 (last-ditch attempt to get down to 119 lbs. before tomorrow).

Readers can't help but relate their own experiences to those that Bridget encounters — whether it be the flirtations that lead to shagging her boss or her frustration in learning to program the VCR.

On Monday, June 12, she writes about fumbling with the VCR in a frantic attempt to tape a television show:

10:33 p.m. Yesss, yesss. RECORDING CURRENT PROGRAM. Have done it!

Aaargh. All going mad. Cassette

has started rewinding and now stopped and ejected. Why? Shit. Shit. Realize in excitement have sat on remote control.

It also becomes evident as the novel progresses that Bridget unapologetically enjoys sex. Her scandalous frolics with younger men or "twenty-somethings" and the miniskirts and revealing outfits she wears to work further prove that point. But her desperation for male attention also leads to heartbreak or what she refers to as "emotional fuckwittage."

At times, Fielding overplays Bridget's female insecurities, such as her constant need to lose 20 pounds and desire to find a steady boyfriend. This pounding repetition in almost every chapter becomes annoying.

But Bridget's focus on achieving happiness through such superficial means, as well as her flakiness and ineptitude, are what make it evident that romance and the perfect weight aren't the keys to leading a satisfying life.

Whenever Bridget feels as though she is losing it, she murmurs phrases to herself such "in-

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