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your way to the finish of this scenario is to fire off a round. The blast illuminates the entire screen for an instant. Strategically, therefore, the play should keep the ship hugging either the top or bottom of the playfield, firing almost constantly while

ducking asteroids and hitting enemy spacecraft.

But watch that itchy trigger finger! You don't want to forget that poor stranded fellow-pilot. Accidentally icing the guy you're supposed to rescue will cause this scenario to begin all over again.

The sound and graphics are not the most sophisticated available, but there is so much happening in this game that you won't have a lot of time to dwell on the fact. This is quite an impressive bow from Spectravision and *Planet Patrol* bodes very well for games to come.

PIRATE CHASE

Astrocade/Astrocade

Meet the game in the plain brown wrapper. **Pirate Chase** is a two-player contest that may well prove highly habit-forming to videogamers. It really doesn't look like much, but its play mechanic certainly produces a bumper crop of close calls and thrilling confrontations.

Using the joystick portion of the Astrocade controller, each player moves his on-screen symbol vertically, horizontally or diagonally across a rectangular playfield composed of regularly spaced dots. The result is something that might be called a maze-less gobble game, since passing over a dot removes it from the screen and adds its point value to the appropriate player's total. Periodically, special bonus prizes appear at random points on the screen (but always replacing an ordinary dot).

These are generally worth 100 points multiplied by the level at which the game is then being played. After the combatants cycle through an array of trinkets and goodies, the game returns to the first bonus prize for another go-around.

Besides racing against the other player to see who accumulates the greatest number of dots and bonus objects, both joystick wielders must always flee from the pirate. This nautical no-goodnik, symbolized by the traditional skull and crossbones, takes one of the player's precious lives whenever it catches up with the corresponding symbol on the

play is the (intentionally imprecise steering. It is really quite difficult to steer a straight course, much less make sharp turns. As a result, both players frequently end up circling a particularly juicy bonus object like flies buzzing around a pot of honey.

As must be the case with any game that includes an open playfield and a merciless robot attacker, strategy is fairly fluid in *Pirate Chase*.

In general, the best advice is to make as few turns as possible when scooping up all

playfield.

The missing ingredient—about the only one in an otherwise solid cartridge—is the visual element. *Pirate Chase* doesn't look all that attractive, though "plain" would be a better description than "ugly". Let's hope that Astrocade owners have the sense to look past the wrapping to see the gem buried inside.

If electronic game-lovers are able to unshackle themselves from the prejudices of this intensely graphics-oriented period in the hobby, their reward will be a first-rate action contest. Its non-stop play routine, although admittedly somewhat repetitive in longer rounds, is positively riveting.

One of the key factors which does the most to build excitement during

of the dots and prizes. That golden scoring opportunity occurs when the pirate has caught the other player and your symbol is still active. This is the time to concentrate on hitting the bonus objective.

Pirate Chase's dull visuals notwithstanding, offers the rare chance to compete head to head.