

Players Guide to Electronic Sports Games

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EXCLUSIVE
PREVIEW

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TRON

**The History
of Coin-Op
Arcades**

Strategy Session:
Match Racer
K.C. Munchkin
Adventure

**Gaming
Goes
King-size**
Choosing
the Right
Big-Screen TV.





PROGRAMMABLE PARADE

By Arnie Katz and
Bill Kunkel



Man the Cosmic Ramparts!

Space Fortress/Astrovision/ Astro Home Arcade

Coin-op fans will instantly recognize this super fast-action arcade-style space shoot-'em-up as Midway's **Space Zap**. Gamers command a centrally located command fortress capable of firing in any of four directions—North, East, South and West. From those respective positions at the top, bottom and sides of the playfield emerge alien laser-cannons and the occasional, free-flying mystery ship.

As the contest commences, these enemy intrusions are infrequent, appearing at a leisurely pace and waiting a good while before actually firing. Once a cannon fires its laser torpedo, the missile can be detonated by a burst from the player's



fortress, and a second blast will be required to eliminate the cannon itself. Graphics in this Bob Ogdon (of Dave Nutting Associates) creation are crisp and convincing, but it's primary claim as a space action classic is as the world's fastest home blast-'em-up of videogame. Once the player has gotten the feel of the play mechanic, things really start jumping. The fortress is soon transformed into a whirling dervish of destruction, spinning crazily and spitting out flaming death. This is *not* the sort of game that arcaders will find themselves playing compulsively for hours. Wrists give out after about ten min-

utes of heavy duty action. Play sessions will be brief but intense.

The most difficult obstacle players will encounter, aside from weakness of the flesh will be the UFO/mystery ship. Strategically, at all but the highest levels—where it must be incinerated at the first opportunity—play a waiting game. As in most space shoot-outs of a linear type (such as **Space Invaders**,

Spacechase and **Demon Attack**) it's best to let the enemy come to you in preference to actively chasing after him. Sit patiently, but once the enemy strays into range, hesitate not.

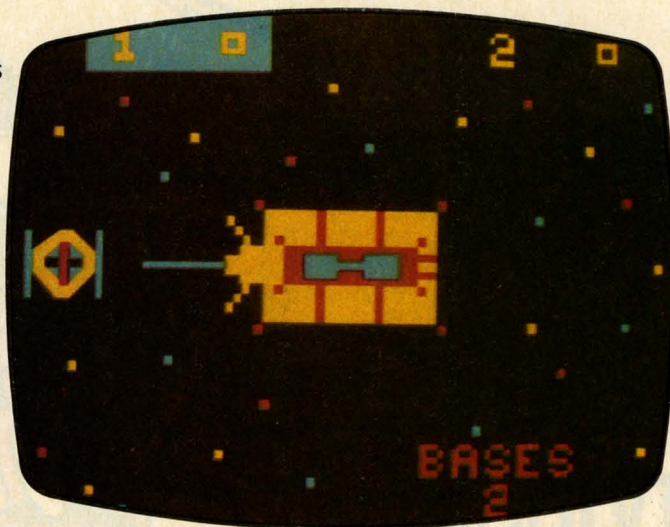
Perhaps the most manic space battle of all time, **Space Fortress** will leave you gasping. But you'll always come back for more.

Trickshot/Imagic/Atari VCS

Trickshot is a programmable pool simulation like nothing computer gamers have ever seen before. Players are offered scaled down one- and two-player versions of eightball, for the purists, but the real interest comes from the wide range of "show off" pool shooting set-ups.

One of the major problems faced by designers in programming for the Atari VCS is its otherwise limited screen-RAM—the number of on-screen objects that can be simultaneously manipulated. Therefore, a full nine billiard balls rolling around on a VCS playfield was absolutely out of the question. Imagic has wisely decided to limit the number of balls on screen at any one time to four, and even these spheres blink when the program periodically replenishes the images. Eightball, therefore, is played with a cue ball and three target balls.

The real challenge, however, comes when players must sink combinations of one, two and three balls with a single "trickshot". Determining the correct angle and applying the correct "english" may take some time, but the rewards of sinking three targets with a single stroke will make you feel like a prime contender for a low-calorie beer commercial.



SPACE FORTRESS

Players shoot by rotating the visible tip of their cue stick in a 360° revolution around the cue ball. The cue ball will travel in the direction dictated by the cue tip's position. There are 16 possible positions—twice as many as are offered in other programmable pool contests—and players can also add topspin, backspin or left/right english to any shots.

The balls roll and drop into pockets with remarkable realism. The graphics, which present an overview of a green



TRICKSHOT

felt table with position markings and six pockets, are colorful and pleasant, while the balls are given a sense of dimension by cunningly applied shading. The sounds are unerring as balls clack together and drop into the pockets with a satisfying "thunk". There is even a version of English Billiards offered among the 14 possible variations. Winners are signified by the appearance of a trophy cup beside their score.

A leisurely paced videogame that should prove a captivating change of pace for both male and female home arcaders, *Trickshot* may well be a sleeper hit for Imagic.

Galactic Invasion/Astrovision/ Astro Professional Arcade

Up to four players can compete in this home version of Namco's well-known **Galaxian** coin-op. Options include a choice of four levels of difficulty and the ability to set the number of cannons given to each participant.

As most arcaders already know, *Galaxian* is a sort of "son of Space Invaders". Gamers move a laser cannon horizontally and fire upward at a swarm of insectoid creatures. Periodically, a trio of invaders peels off from the main body of attackers to sweep down and across the playfield, spraying the ground below with deadly bombs.

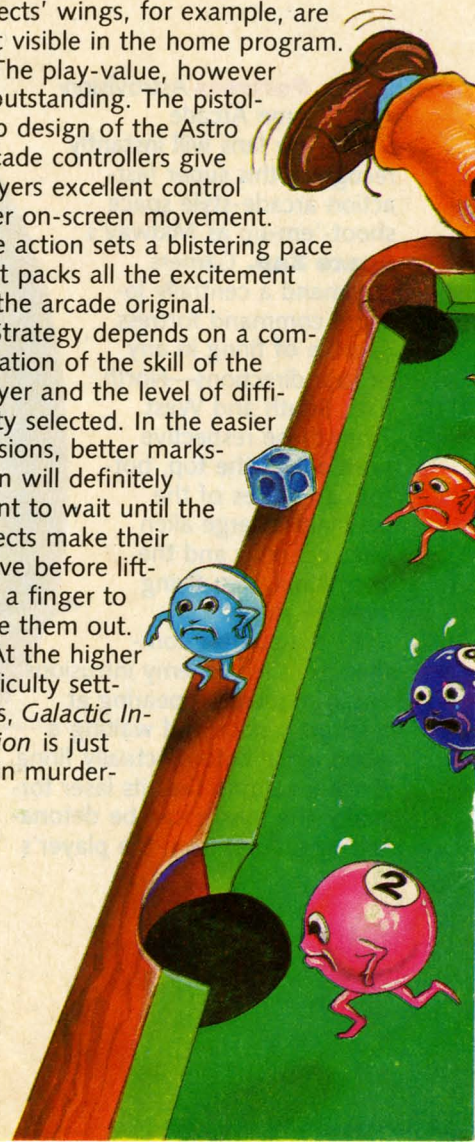
The aliens are a lot easier to hit while they're still in formation, but better players will always withhold fire until some begin to swoop. An attack is worth twice as much when it is zapped in the midst of a divebombing run.

Galactic Invasion's graphics are nice and colorful, but they don't quite match the artistic detail of the drawings used in the coin-op machine. The insects' wings, for example, are not visible in the home program.

The play-value, however is outstanding. The pistol-grip design of the Astro Arcade controllers give players excellent control over on-screen movement. The action sets a blistering pace that packs all the excitement of the arcade original.

Strategy depends on a combination of the skill of the player and the level of difficulty selected. In the easier versions, better marksmen will definitely want to wait until the insects make their move before lifting a finger to take them out.

At the higher difficulty settings, *Galactic Invasion* is just plain murder-



ous. Deadly aliens streak across the screen to ram the defending cannon and are capable of dropping a dozen bombs in one pass. Only the top gunners should sit back and wait for the bugs to make the first move. If they so much as twitch, blast 'em immediately. Once a three-insect group begins a sweep, all but the super-shots are virtually assured of being one "life" down by the time the maneuver is completed.

The aliens always break formation from the sides. Therefore, a wise arcader will begin to attack from either the extreme left or right side of the playfield. That way, you'll have a good chance to eliminate the invaders before they come barreling down the screen at your gun.

Galactic Invasion is one of the first cartridges Astrovision has released since acquiring the Professional Arcade from Bally. It is exactly the kind of well-conceived entry that should get all home arcaders to sit up and take notice of the revived system.

Boxing/Mattel/Intellivision
 Mattel has achieved quite a reputation for its outstanding sports simula-

tions in the past, and video athletes will be pleased to hear that the company's design staff has entirely lived up to its image with **Boxing**. This two-player contest dishes out a full measure of fistic thrills while providing the most accurate simulation of ring action ever provided by an electronic game program.

This cartridge, like most of the sports titles produced for the Intellivision, offers the participants an unusually wide range of options. The game plays at any of four basic speeds, beginning with the rather pokey "training camp" speed and rising to the fastest setting, "championship" speed. Regardless of the speed at which the action takes place, each *Boxing* fight consists of 15 pounds, each one a simulated 1.5 minutes in duration.

The choice of fighter is also up to the human managers. There are six different pugilists in the program's stable, and each one embodies a somewhat different approach to the sport (except for the pair that are exactly alike).

Managers select their ring representatives at the start of each bout by pushing the appropriate section of the controller overlay. The six possible choices are: strong defense (blue), strong offense (red), exceptional endurance (tan), unpredictable (yellow) and well-balanced (light or dark green). Choose your color!

Both managers must choose different fighters, although a dead-even match with the two balanced boxers is appropriate for neophytes or experienced managers of approximately equal skill. As with many Intellivision

cartridges, a better choice and assignment of on-screen colors would have improved things, since there's no particular reason why the two equal fighters had to be colored so similarly.

The name of this game is punch selection. Each combatant can throw rights or lefts to the head or body, feint with either hand or even duck. Landing a blow anywhere scores one point, and the computer will simulate a knockdown or even knockout when one of the fighters has absorbed too much punishment.

Boxing is a fine treatment of a sport seldom covered by videogames.

Haunted House/Atari/Atari VCS

Ever since **Adventure** first appeared on the VCS scene to delight the quest-minded, loyal fans have watched the store shelves for a sequel. Atari has taken its time about providing one, but the drought has finally ended. **Haunted House** is a solitaire adventure which, while differing significantly from the earlier cartridge, should appeal to much the same audience.

Haunted House takes the arcader on an eerie electronic visit to Graves manor, an abandoned pile of stone in the sleepy town of Spirit Bay. The family apparently died out with the death of its patriarch, old man Graves, but strange doings at the dark and shuttered Graves residence periodically frighten and perplex the localites.

Reports of a magic urn, broken into three pieces during the earthquake of 1890, tempt explorers to venture into the manor's dark and sometimes dangerous rooms in search of this valuable item.

The player takes the role of such a treasure-hunter and must search the building's 24 rooms, arranged as four stories with six rooms each, for the pieces required to reassemble the eldritch trophy. The program gives each player an unlimited supply of matches, which are struck one at a time by pressing the action button of the joystick controller, to light a path through the rooms, which are pitch-dark otherwise. The people are gone, but the mansion is far from uninhabited. It is populated by three distinct types of creatures: vampire bats, tarantulas and ghosts.

The tarantulas scuttle slowly around the place, the bats move more quickly on their leathery wings and the



HAUNTED HOUSE / Continued

ghost can travel through locked doors and solid walls at will.

Any time one of these marauding monsters touches the player—symbolized on-screen by a pair of shining eyes—it costs the seeker one life. Like a cat, you've got nine of them. Winning the game consists of collecting the pieces of the urn and conveying them safely to the front door of Graves Manor before one of the nasties takes your ninth life.

An enchanted scepter hidden somewhere in the haunted house offers the player a measure of protection. No creature can touch the player while he or she holds the scepter. Unfortunately, a player can only handle one object at a time. So just as in *Adventure*, the gamer will be doing a constant juggling act.

Also secreted in the house is a magic key. This comes in especially handy in the more difficult variations, in which some of the doors between rooms are locked to prevent easy access.

Movement between floors is accomplished by taking a staircase. Each either ascends or descends, and none permit the player to go back down the way he or she came. You wouldn't want things *too* easy, would you?

Scoring is a trifle fuzzy, though the real test of an arcader's skill is simply the completion of the quest for the urn in a reasonable amount of time. You can judge your performance by noting the number of lives expended and the number of matches burned during the course of the game. It would've been nice if the scoring system had created a ratio between these two factors, since they aren't of equal importance. (As a guess, burning up two matches might be equivalent to losing a life.)

This game's audio-visual trimmings are excellent. It is much more atmospheric than *Adventure* and gives the arcader the spine-tingling sensation that something sinister and supernatural is just about to happen.

Haunted House is one of the most intriguing and novel videogame cartridges to appear in some time. Ⓞ

