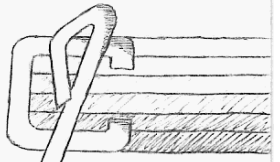


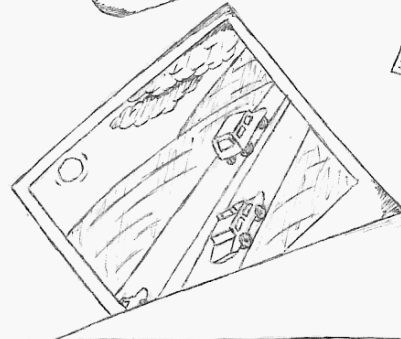
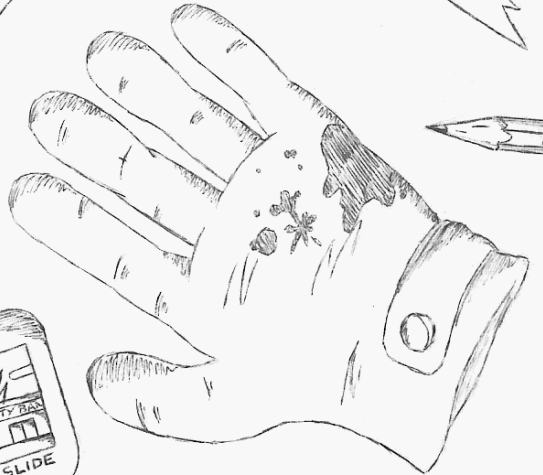
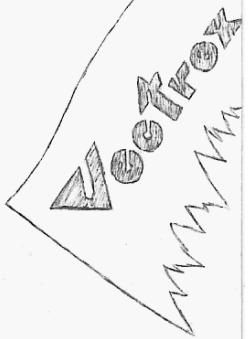
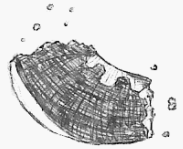
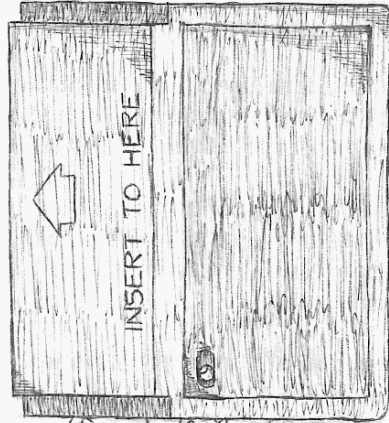
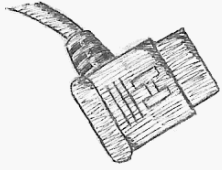
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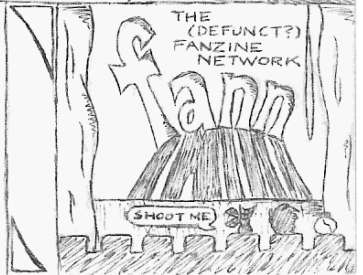
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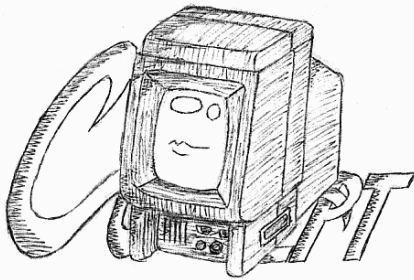


ジェスクリエーションサ
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THE TRIAL OF GENTLE Y!





CONCEPT #5
"The Trial Of the Century"
Winter 1996

The Gamers vs. GCE Vectrex

Defendant is charged with possessing entertainment value uncommon to game systems of its age, and was armed with a built-in 9" monochrome monitor, analog joysticks similar to those available on the Nintendo Entertainment System, a light pen, and a 3-D Imager headset at the time of arrest. GCE is determined to be irresponsible for the deaths of Nicole Brown Simpson and model/waiter Ron Goldman but may nevertheless be sentenced to life imprisonment in the confines of gamers' homes everywhere.

Judge...

The Hon. Jess Ragan
Forensic Evidence...

Sean Kelly, Ph. D.
Baliff...

Edward Villalpando
The Jury...

Brian Norman Pacula
Byron Jay Lisamen
Joshua 'RLB' Lesnick
Russ Perry Jr.
Bashi K. Tanook
Jypsky Shirnian
Chris Marshall Dyer

Court Documents...
Microsoft Publisher 2.0
Evidence...

Analog Joystick
Light Pen & 3-D Imager
One plate of Hamburger Helper
(oops, that was lunch)
Multi-Cart
(alleged to contain 29 games)

Cover Illustration: The honorable (?) Jess Ragan pores over the evidence in this composite by world renowned legal artist, er, Jess Ragan. #@!% budget cuts!

Lettitor From The Editor...

Konnichiwa & long time no see, buds! Yep, 'tis I, Jess Ragan, the fan-ed formerly known as the editor of "Project:Ignition". I just barely punched out the last issue of that nearly a year ago and I'm equally surprised that I was able to release the bookend to "Concept". But hey, I've never liked leaving around loose ends, so here you go...

I usually don't do "themed" issues (it's one thing that's kind of annoyed me about the 'new' "Digital Press"... as one would expect, it usually limits things a bit), but for "Concept"'s grand finale I've decided to do one anyways. Now, I realize that this IS after all supposed to be a fanzine "centered in the employment of programming techniques" (whatever the hell THAT means... funny; making that into an acronym seemed like a good idea back in issue #3, but then again, so did writing a parody of EGM, & look where THAT got me! Oy...), and I've gotten flack from straying from the subject matter before (gee, that's odd... for a minute there, I thought this was MY fanzine! Oh, sorry; it's just the lack of mail talking...), but I hope you guys will bear with me this time, because it's for a very good reason...

Not long ago, I'd obtained a GCE Vectrex in a trade with Ed Villalpando, and in that trade only received two games, the built-in Asteroids derivative "Mine Storm" and the system's attempt at "Pac-Man", "Clean Sweep". Once I'd tired of CS (which honestly didn't take long) and had beaten "Mine Storm", I was hungering for more to play, or at least some information on the games that were available, and realized in the process that nobody, not even "Digital Press", had a centralized source of Vectrex coverage. Very disconcerting for someone who was dying to know more about the machine, to be sure. It didn't take long for me to decide to change that, and after trading an assortment of tough finds for Sean Kelly's nifty multi-cart and spending hours of time playing the 30+ titles & demos on it, got right to work.

This, dear friends, is the fruit of my labor. Inside this handy dandy issue is a comprehensive guide to the Vectrex and its software in a sort of court motif. Corny, yes, but for some reason, it made sense to tie it into the now infamous (and thankfully, finished) Simpson trial. I mean, look at the similarities! DJ Simpson? GCE Vectrex. High priced lawyers? High priced games. A decision which split blacks and whites apart? A vector-based monochrome display which separates the two colors just as well. A female prosecutor who goes rabid at the mere mention of the name Mark Fuhrman? OK, I don't have a parallel for THAT, but you get the point. If you were as tired as I was of not having a centralized source of Vex information, fret no longer. Your wait is over. Piece (yes, I meant that, Russ! Stop being so anal!!! Ugh...).

Jess Ragan, Consummate Amateur

CONCEPT #5'S ILLUSTRIOUS STAFF...

JESS RAGAN.....EDITOR, HEAD ARTIST
ED VILLALPANDO.....VECTREX SUPPLIER
SEAN KELLY.....MultiCART SUPPLIER
CHRIS DYER....."DOOM" ARTWORK
BRIAN PACULA.....LETTERS COLUMN
RUSS PERRY, JR....."RUSS SEZ..."
JOSH "RLB" LESNICK.....MISCELLANY
BYRON J. LISAMEN.....U.S. MASCOT
BASHI TANOOK.....JAPANESE MASCOT
JYPSKY SHIRNIAN.....Galactic MASCOT



And Now, The Trial Begins...

"This is Blake Flakely, WYBU-TV News. On the begrudging permission of Judge Jess Ragan, we've been allowed inside the courthouse to report on what may well be the trial of the century... the trial that determines the fate of former video game great GCE Vectrex. 'The Vex', as he is known, made himself a household name back in the carefree days of the early 80's, where his revolutionary vector-based graphics and unique design captured the hearts of game players in both the United States and Australia. Things couldn't have been better for GCE, that is, until his high production costs and the video game crash of 1984 brought him to his knees and relegated him to the basements and attics of his former fans. He hit rock bottom when his former teammates, the Atari 2600 and Intellivision, made a stunning comeback as Milton Bradley chose to leave him behind, but things started to look up for him in 1992, where he amassed a small cult-like following of fans who refused to give up on the gaming legend. His admirers slowly grew in number, and would have continued to do so had he not been accused by a select few of the charge of 'entertainment in the first degree'. GCE emphatically denied the charge, but nevertheless made a run for it in an attempt to escape a life sentence in the homes of avid pre-crash gamers. Unlike his predecessor, 'The Vex' proved to be quite elusive until his eventual capture in California, where he was then transferred to Michigan for crimes he'd allegedly committed there. This has brought him to this very courtroom to stand trial for... oh! I've just been informed that the opening statements are about to begin. We're making our way to the courtroom now..."

"All rise! Court is now in session; the Honorable Jess 'Donkey Kong JR' Ragan presiding."

"Thanks, Mr. Villalpalooza. You all may sit down now."

(nothing happens)

"Uh, Simon Says 'sit down!'?"

(Everyone in the courtroom takes a seat)

"I'm not laughing, people... if you subject me to another lame joke like that I'll hold you in contempt! Contempt of court, I mean... I already hold most of you in contempt. Let's get to the opening statements, starting with the defense... please, begin."

"Your Honor, GCE Vectrex could not have committed the crime of

entertainment in the first degree... he's just not capable of such a heinous act! Look at his processor... a 68A09 with a 1½ megahertz clock speed!? Please! Have you seen him attempt to draw detailed graphics? Talk about slowdown and flicker!"

"Objection!"

"Sustained. The prosecution may begin."

"Not all of GCE's games are afflicted with slowdown or flicker. Sure, it's difficult for him to handle detailed artwork, but in direct comparison to other game systems of his time, his vector graphics animate much more smoothly, and can scale and rotate as well. What other pre-crash game system can claim to have built-in 3-D capabilities? Or for that matter, a 3-D Imager headset?!"

"The headset of which the prosecution speaks is in fact a mediocre piece of equipment according to Michael Palisano, a man who's been acquainted with the Vex for..."

"I'm sorry, but I have never been acquainted with either the 3-D Imager or GCE's light pen, so references to either are totally irrelevant. Continue, prosecution."

"Let's not forget about the GCE's revolutionary controller! It's the first one to utilize the design made famous by the NES, with an analog joystick on the left end and four buttons, not one or two as was the case with previous systems, on the right. I believe that says a lot about the defendant's ability to commit the crime with which he's been charged..."

"Have you tried holding that controller? Or using all of its buttons at once as is necessary for some games?! The keys are spaced too damned far apart! And another thing, GCE only has a monochrome display... how can anyone find this lack of color to be entertaining?!"

"Objection, Your Honor! The defense is playing the race card!!!"

"Quiet, both of you! I will have order in this courtroom! Do you hear me!? ORDER!!!"

◀BBBLAAATTT▶

"I said ORDER, Chris... Baliff, please open a window..."

"Ooops. Sorry!"

"I just can't tolerate this anymore... you people are turning this trial into a three-ring circus, and as much as that helped OJ, I'm not going to put up with it here. The opening statements portion of this trial is officially over... Dr. Kelly has graciously supplied the court with the evidence necessary in deciding for or against the defendant, so until I've made up my mind one way or another, I'm calling a recess."

"Just one question, Your Honor. Why is the prosecution upholding the quality of the Vectrex here, and bashing its games in the reviews? Wouldn't it be better if..."

"Baliff, hand me the really, REALLY big gavel..."

◀THWACK▶

"Russ dismissed! Lance was right about these economy-sized gavels... don't leave home without 'em! OK, back to business..."

Let's Weigh...

THE EVIDENCE

...Shall We?

Indeed, the defendant is up against some serious charges, but there's no way to know for sure if GCE Vectrex (a.k.a. 'The Vex') is guilty of entertainment in the first degree until we examine the evidence first. There were a lot of clues scattered about the crime scene and thanks to the diligence of forensic scientist Dr. Sean Kelly, we've got them all here. Here is our court reports of the pieces of evidence (henceforth referred to as 'games'), each covered in pristine detail so as to leave nothing out. Also, this document covers both views by the defense and prosecution as well as the impartial (?) thoughts of the honorable judge Jess Ragan himself (or the bailiff and/or members of the jury if need be).

ARMOR..ATTACK

"ARRGH!!! There's tanks to the left of us! Tanks to the right of us!! And helicopters above us!!! And they're all HEAVILY ARMED!!! And we're in a measly jeep! I'm telling 'ya, it's game over, man, game over!!!" "Keep your cool, private! We've been through scarier situations before. In comparison to those, this is just plain boring (then again, we had better firepower then...!) Just keep your hands steady on that missile launcher and I'll do the driving...". Yes, boys & girls, it's "Combat" for the Vectrex. Only in this, there's no pesky second player to worry about and you drive a very small ATV, using the joystick to steer & the buttons as your gas pedal and trigger. But like "Combat", there's a rudimentary maze to navigate and plenty 'o tanks to worry about, and as an added bonus, a helicopter pokes in periodically to ensure that things aren't all fox holes & G-rations for you. To defend yourself, you have an unlimited supply of missiles and the maze itself in which you can find vantage points that facilitate in the destruction of the opposing forces.

Most people agree that this is one of the better Vex games, so I guess I'll have to break the mold & dissent. Sure, it plays well enough, but the repetition is just unbearable... there's only one maze available as opposed to the several in "Combat", and there's nothing but tanks & choppers to avoid, making the playfield VERY sparse. In addition to this, the 'sprites' are small to the point of being microbial, although in their defense they do rotate smoothly in turns, and the heli's pretty attractive, too. But being stuck like a rat in a maze only to have tank after tank fall into your gunsights like so many carnival targets doesn't appeal

to me. Say what you will, but although there's nothing terribly wrong with "Armor", it's not a game to which you'll find yourself returning.

DEFENSE: Solid control, nice looking heli and the damage you do to the CPU's vehicles (the tanks looks severely screwed up after you hit 'em!).

PROSECUTION: Ultra boring with next to no variety.

VERDICT?: Keep your distance.

BEDLAM

Arguably one of the most intense games on the Vectrex block, this creative hybrid of "Cosmic Ark"'s outer space rounds and the fast action of "Tempest" has you in the center of a lot of trouble as an outerspace turret which must fend off a tsunami of pissed off space creatures. Trapped inside any one of a number of geometric shapes, your key to survival is to keep the assorted nasties at bay with your burst laser and the occasional smart bomb (one allowed per round as opposed to one per life a'la "Tempest"). If you manage to run the gambit of shapes in one piece, you're offered another level and a change in the play mechanic that makes the going even rougher. Level 2 offers that extra special claustrophobic touch as each of the playfield's points close in on you, making the aliens' trip to the center a lot quicker and your lifeline a lot shorter. Level 3 throws rotation into the mix as the shape not only contracts but spins, thus affecting a your ability to draw a bead on your many nemesi. And for the final and nastiest alteration, level 6 tosses in a playfield that whips & whirls around madly as if on some illegal narcotic. If you can live through THIS, you're probably not even human...

The graphics aren't spit-shined (although there is some nice scaling at the beginning of rounds) and the sound won't blow you away, but once you get into this, neither will matter. In fact, things like bathing and sleeping probably will be of little consequence, too... A well done, überaddictive, & original effort.

DEFENSE: Play that grabs you and won't let go. Devilish mechanics that worsen after every level.

PROSECUTION: Would have been nice to aim the turret directly instead of rotating it. Level 6 is nigh impossible.

VERDICT?: You WILL enjoy this. Just give it time.

BERZERK

Most Vectrex owners aren't particularly fond of this translation of Stern's not-so-amazing coin-op, but aside from the slowdown & sorely missed voice (hey, "Spike" had it!), you have to admit that the programmer did as much as he could with the hardware, which in all honesty is not suited to this kind of game. The play is

for the most part intact, so there's plenty of bot-blastin' good times for those of you who can tolerate the unfair character placement (I mean, is it me, or is appearing RIGHT NEXT to a mech at the beginning of a round just a tad uncondusive to one's health?), the oddly constructed mazes (you'll sometimes find robots that are contained within impenetrable boxes), and "Berzerk"'s other classic flaws in addition to some weird glitches that occur at the beginning of and during some games. If any of the above sounds like a big turn-off to you, however, it's safe to pass this by.

DEFENSE: OK conversion considering that a game like this lends itself as well to the Vectrex as "Pilotwings" would the Genesis.

PROSECUTION: NO VOICE!! Also, the slowdown is an annoyance & the game wasn't that good in the arcades to begin with.

VERDICT?: If you've gotta have "Berzerk", & don't own it on the 5200 or ColecoVision, here y'go.

BLITZ!

You're REALLY going to have to be desperate for gridiron action to want this, but hey, there's been worse (2600 "Football" springs to mind). As it were, "Blitz!" is more or less the great grandfather of everyone's favorite pigskin sim, "John Madden Football", with the same 3-D perspective of the field as EA's popular series. What "Blitz!" DOESN'T have, however, are the various plays (there are a few; a precious few, but a few nevertheless), nice character detail (in this, the characters are playbook-style X's & O's, and the football is a simple elongated diamond), and great play that made JMF such a hit with football freaks. What's there is OK, but you'll more often than not be tackled by the offense (in which case your character seems to explode... eh?) no matter what tactics you use to get ahead. I'd call this solid, but even that's being a tad optimistic. If you own any other game system, you can probably do better.

DEFENSE: The play is there, & nothing flickers or slows down. Of course, the view's innovative too.

PROSECUTION: Not terribly appealing visually & the CPU's a cheat-happy pappy who always seems to have the upper hand.

VERDICT?: Those annoying Jerry & Jerry guys from the McDonald's commercials should be sentenced to playing this non-stop for the rest of their lives.

Clean Sweep

You've heard of "the soup that eats like a meal", right? Well, as you may have guessed, this game stars the vacuum cleaner that eats like a Pac-

Man. Yup, it's a clone of Namco's classic muncher, but seeing as every OTHER pre-crash system had at least one, we'll forgive GCE for that. Come to think of it, in comparison to some of the worst games in this genre (like "Cat Trax" for the Emerson Arcadia... whew!), CS shines, with clean (if very stark) graphics and play mechanics that are if nothing else solid.

Problem is, there really isn't much else that "Clean Sweep" has to offer. Although everything runs smoothly enough, a vacuum cleaner just doesn't have the personality to compete with the likes of the big yellow one and even the less established eating machines of the era, like Phillips' K.C. Munchkin. And what new play mechanics there are often contribute more to the frustration factor of the title than its originality... like the "dump off" feature, for instance. I mean, "Pac-Man" clones make a guy feel helpless enough, given the fact that your character is on the run for the majority of the game, but when you're saddled with capacity problems as well and must empty your contents periodically in the center of the screen, and there's a small militia of renegade pincers from "Tempest" swarming your home base, well...

Long story short. "Clean Sweep" is a fair "Pac-Man" derivative, and it's the only game of its type on the Vectrex, but there are a lot of raster scan systems that will serve you better in this respect. You're better off with one of the system's many "Asteroids" knock-offs.

DEFENSE: Clean graphics. The pincers look menacing and the digestion animation (in which characters actually shrink & disappear) is imaginative. Serviceable control.

PROSECUTION: Very plain-looking maze. The Vectrex isn't really suited for this kind of game. Gets boring quickly as there's not much variety.

VERDICT?: You won't hate it; you won't like it. Pretty much average in all respects.

Cosmic Chasm

As it so happens, the moon, contrary to popular belief, isn't made of rock or even green cheese- according to the Vectrex, it's composed largely of interconnected passageways forged from jagged phosphorous lines. And it's your job to keep these passages clean of debris (vicious trained attack debris, but debris nonetheless) before the center of each cavern expands, crushing your exploration vehicle against the walls like so much garbage in a trash compactor. Are you up to the challenge? Can you purge the moon of its evil influence before time (& your life) expires? And moreover, will you want to bother after a few games of this? Most likely, no.

OK, OK... I'm being jaded. But still, I have good reason to be... CosChas is more complex than most games on the Vectrex (thank goodness), and the art of the cavern walls and your cruiser is very sharp. But past that, I have BIG problems with... 1. The button layout. It's already bad enough that the keys on the Vex controller are spaced so far apart; but is it REALLY necessary to require the player to rely on all FOUR of them during play? 2. The fact that the vehicle you captain is so, sooo SLOOOW. I mean, geez, when you've got space debris swarming all over you like insane Africanized killer bees, the last thing you want to worry about is a get-away vehicle that handles like a

school bus with a flat tire. 3. The maddening frustration! In addition to the above annoyances, there's being trapped in a cavern with no way out, the dual shot blasts which have an uncanny knack for missing their targets (as the debris always manages to squeeze between the gap between the two bullets), wandering off the map screen & being forced to start ALL OVER AGAIN, sans one ship... AARRGH!!! How can anyone STAND this!?! If this sounds like a fun way to whittle away the wee hours of the day, uh... get a life. Just don't buy this.

DEFENSE: Attractive visual presentation, I guess...

PROSECUTION: The objective is unclear. Don't play this if you've got high (or low, or average) blood pressure.

VERDICT?: One of the most aggravating games I've ever played for ANY system.

DARK TOWER

Long considered the holy grail of the Vectrex collector's library, this prototype has finally exploded on the scene in two forms- as a separate game and as one of the many titles on Sean Kelly's Vex multi-cart. It's been a long time coming for this action-role playing hybrid, but it appears as though the wait was worth it, as DT offers players some decent 3-D and the complex play mechanics that the system was sorely lacking in many of its previous titles.

If you've seen the ads for or reviews of Altus's "Virtual Hydride", you've already got a good idea of how the game plays. Like VH, the entire game is seen from a first-person, behind the back perspective in which you must find the four keys which unlock a looming structure known as the Dark Tower (natch). And like the above mentioned Saturn title, there's a great deal of exploration, real-time battles, and surprises of all kinds that'll keep you occupied for hours. Of course, as one would expect, DT isn't quite as developed as "Virtual Hydride" in most respects; particularly the combat system (you basically trade fireballs with a corridor filled with minotaurs upon opening certain treasure chests) and the usage and variety of items (the gold seems to be only for points & the other items activate automatically), but hey, for a Vectrex game, there's a lot to appreciate. And the graphics are nice, too- as was mentioned before, everything is in 3-D, and the effects for treasure chest inflicted deaths and warps are about as psychedelic as you can get for a monochrome system. If you're an RPG nut, you can't go wrong with "Dark Tower".

DEFENSE: Nice visual presentation (the minotaurs are suitably evil & the warps just SCREAM Timothy Leary). Much more to it than most Vex games. Long quest.

PROSECUTION: The combat system is unvaried. More FRPG elements (i.e. hit points instead of lives) would have been appreciated. Drags on at times.

VERDICT?: Totally original and totally cool. Worth the dough.

Fortress of Narzod

Y'know, I hear a lot of complaints about the lack of original concepts in video games these days (particularly from the editors of "Next Generation",

who never seem to stop droning on and on and on and on about it...), but there's much to be said for familiar themes when the alternative is something like THIS. Yes, "Fortress of Narzod" is a creative take on the stylings of Taito's infamous shooter "Space Invaders", but it also proves that some original concepts are best left on the drawing board.

FofN is a little like "Space Invaders", with just a touch of Sega's "Zaxxon" tossed in for good measure. The game takes place on a long, 3-D catwalk with short walls jutting out from the edges (if you're thinking The Great Wall of China, you're not too far off target). These walls deflect your fire and bounce it around the playfield, possibly back into you if you're not careful. And that's the big problem with this game. More often than not, you'll find yourself being blown sky-high because some fotherhuckin' alien dodged your shot, and if you DO manage to hit an enemy with a deflected bullet, there's a strong likelihood that it'll just be thrown forward a bit and scorch you with a fireball in the process (and wouldn't you know it, friendly fire has no effect on the bad guys...). What this means to you is that after five or so games, you'll figure out that there's only a few safe places to stay, and you'll be forced to wait for the villains to come to you instead of the other way around. Fun. Things heat up a bit when the mutant vultures and fireball hurlin' boss come into play, but the former get annoying fast and the latter (while a formidable opponent) is a sad reward for your diligence in completing 3 rounds of this schlock. Bottom line- it's not worth the bother. This is one fortress you'd be wise not to raid.

DEFENSE: Great looking background art.

PROSECUTION: A boss that looks nothing short of pathetic. The annoying bullet deflection aspect of play. All the monsters get away with murder while you get blown away for sneezing. Cheap-ass vultures.

VERDICT?: As the game itself says, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here"...

Heads Up Soccer

Well, with this and "Blitz!" in mind, you can tell that one thing the Vectrex ISN'T is a sports machine. While HUS looks a little bit better than "Blitz!", with players that actually have arms and legs and a neat-o elevated perspective of the field (like the coin-op version of "NBA Jam", as players who get closer to the bottom of the screen actually grow in size), but I'd go out on a limb and say that the AI is even worse. I really should save this for the hints section, but it's as much a testament to bad programming as it is a helpful cheat, so here goes... if the CPU's on your tail, simply kick the ball ahead of you and presto! It's almost as if he loses your scent, yet the ball's right there for the taking (until you eventually regain control of it...). And the goalie is pretty sad as well... he just zips back and forth across the mouth of the net, making him less of an actual player than he is a mere obstacle. Time it just right & he's no match for you either, giving you the opportunity to score an unheard of amount of points against the opposition in no time at all (well, it WILL take a little while, since the game plays somewhat slowly...). Yeech. Unless you're a total clutz or have the IQ of a bowl of potato salad, there's no way in hell that this game will give you an acceptable run for your money in regards to difficulty, so if you're not bringing a friend along, it'd be in your best interests to forget that this game even exists.

DEFENSE: Intriguing elevated perspective of the field which calls to mind the 32X & arcade versions of "NBA Jam".

PROSECUTION: Easily hustled computer opponent. No challenge at all when you figure out the all-too simple computer AI. Rather slow for a soccer sim.

VERDICT?: Might be OK for 2 players, but don't count on it.

HyperChase

An obvious clone of "Turbo", Sega's racing coin-op from the early 80's which was later adapted for the ColecoVision (and quite well, might I add), HC would have been one of the best games for the Vex as well had it not been for one teensy little problem... you guessed it, the control. "HyperChase", like "Gorf" for the 5200, takes advantage of the potentiometer technology of the system's joystick, making the going more than a tad bit rough for players who would otherwise have a ball with this visually spectacular & blindingly fast racer. Tap the joystick more than a hair bit in either direction and, well, let's just say that you'd better have all-inclusive auto insurance coverage! Let the joystick go and your car snaps right back into the center of the road and possibly some oncoming traffic. What this means to you the player is that to really enjoy the game, you're going to have to have a very keen (near surgical) touch to keep the joystick held "just so" so as to avoid collisions. If that's not a problem, you'll love Hyper... everything is blindingly fast in fourth gear, and there's a lot of off-road scenery including cliff walls, tunnels, and lamp posts that's guaranteed to drop the jaws of the uninitiated and puts the ColecoVision version of "Turbo" to shame (as good as that was). But the rancid control is nevertheless an issue; if someone were to reverse engineer this and add the emulated switch joystick control that it so desperately needs, "HyperChase" would easily stand above most of the games for the system, but until that happens, well, caveat empteur, friends.

DEFENSE: Awesome scenery that zips by so quickly in 4th gear you'd swear you could feel the wind in your hair. Look out, "Virtua Racing"!

PROSECUTION: Analog controls that really suck exhaust. Didn't the people at GCE learn from CBS's 5200 version of "Gorf"?

VERDICT?: If only GCE had scrapped the 3-D Imager and released a steering wheel instead... sigh...

Mine Storm

It's a Vectrex original! No doubt the first game Vex owners have experienced on the system, I'm not going to waste a lot of time reviewing this slick 'Asteroids' knock-off... instead, I'm going to complain about RLB (not Lesnick), the reprogrammed version of 'Mine Storm' that sucks the fun right out of the original and flushes it right down the can. All the programmer did in RLB is add infinite lives, cut the number of rounds available in half (from 26 to 13, FYI) and augment the MS ship with an annoying burst fire that not only chokes the system's processor, but stabs it repeatedly and escapes punishment in the process (there, I managed to work another OJ Simpson reference into the reviews. Are you happy now?). It just goes to show how little it takes to turn a classic into so much

sludge, but thankfully, it's many times harder to find than the original 'Mine Storm', so don't sweat it. Just stick with the built-in version and you'll be fine.

DEFENSE: Great "Asteroids" rip-off with sharp control (you don't float all over the place as was the case in Atari's game) and clean visuals. You've got to be a real space ace to beat all 26 mine fields.

PROSECUTION: Well, for starters, it's "Asteroids", so don't expect a lot of game depth. And of course, it didn't take much to ruin the game as the reprogrammed version proves...

VERDICT?: Kind of pointless to review it at all when every Vex owner is already stuck with it by virtue of its being built into every unit, but hey...

Polar Rescue

If you felt kind of reamed by the NES adaptation of "The Hunt For Red October" (and who could blame you?), here's your chance to truly relive the action of the film, this time on your Vectrex. Well, sort of, anyways... the underwater first-person perspective is actually very good when you consider that the setting doesn't lend itself all that well to a system which utilizes nothing but line-based art, and the control is fairly livable, but there are areas in which the game springs more than a few leaks. For starters, it, like 'Cosmic Chasm', is frustrating. Nothing makes you want to heave a 15 pound game system through the window of a two story building more than the game's idiotic 'battle mode', which commences whenever a rival sub is within attack range. Your engines cut off, making you a sitting duck for the enemy as you desperately try to locate him on radar. Once you finally find him trolling around in circles (almost as if to taunt you, although I'm probably reading too much into this), you get your chance to blow him out of the water with your all-too limited supply of torpedos. Problem is, the seafaring bastard can be RIGHT IN YOUR GUNSIGHTS, and there's a good chance that you'll waste a good 4 or 5 torpedos on him anyways, since it's impossible to determine or control the angle at which they launch. By this time, you'll find out that the enemy subs don't suffer from this predicament, and it won't take long for them to return fire, making you suck seaweed a great deal more often than necessary. And the slowdown, while understandable considering the onscreen detail, is more than a bit of an annoyance as well- the programmers should have smoothed that out a bit by including a lot less of those floating mines, but alas... in all, PR is an admirable (no pun intended) but rather flawed effort that could have used another two weeks in GCE's programming labs. If you're starving for a unique vehicle simulation and something like Konami's "Silent Service" isn't cutting it for you, this could be worth a look despite its lesser qualities.

DEFENSE: The underwater atmosphere is surprisingly convincing for a Vex game. Objects actually fade as if concealed by water as you get further away from them. As with most Vectrex games, the concept is unique.

PROSECUTION: A defeatist "battle mode" that more often than not guarantees you a one-way trip to Davey Jones' locker. A poor torpedo aiming system. The game slows down and flickers like mad when too much is on screen at once.

VERDICT?: Not a bad idea in theory; just not a good one for the Vectrex. The clunky interface will probably have you exclaiming "There she blows..." in no time.

≡Pole≡Position

Namco's classic racing extravaganza is actually done justice on the Vectrex, with large, easily distinguished graphics and more importantly, the solid switch-style control that puts this well ahead of "Hyperchase" in regards to replayability. The pre-race vocals are sorely missed, and it kind of blows that the immense starting line bridge has been replaced with two measly flags (flags that don't even flap in the wind, no less), but those soft spots aside you've got some fairly addictive racing action coming to you in double P. The control as was mentioned before is handled very well- maneuvering around cars is rarely a problem, and the handling in even the nastiest of turns is a great deal better than in many of the 16-bit racing games I've played. That aside, there's not really much else to say, except that you've got only two choices for Vectrex driving excitement and if you've got to make a decision between "Pole Position" and, er, the other game, go for this. You won't regret it.

DEFENSE: Clean graphics and precise control. Mount Fuji and other details on the horizon parallax as you turn corners, just as they did in the coin-op. Mildly addicting.

PROSECUTION: A dragster with square wheels? The last time I saw that, I was reamed out of \$100! No, I didn't REALLY buy "Virtua Racing"... how stupid do you think I am, anyways!? Don't answer that.

VERDICT?: Makes the versions on rival pre-crash sets look just a bit chippy. Worth having if you're in the mood for a vector-based racer with keen control.

◀R IP-OFF

I've said it before and I'll say it again... there's no false advertising here! Not only does the title adequately describe what few play mechanics this sad "Asteroids" clone has, it's also an indicator of how anyone with the misfortune to cross paths with this debacle feels- ripped off. The object is simple- as the pilot of the U.S.S. Carnie Wilson (easily the largest and most unattractive ship in the Vectrex hangar), your mission, should you decide to accept it (do yourself a favor & don't), is to protect a small cache of indelible triangles from the clutches of a horde of unrelenting space pirates, who as luck would have it are piloting some equally crappy spacecrafts (look closely and I swear you'll read the words 'Made In Taiwan' etched in phosphors on some of them). As they arrive to snatch away your inexplicably precious booty, blow 'em away, and continue to do so until the next round (where things get tougher) or you literally die of boredom, whichever comes first (more than likely the latter).

As RLB Lesnick would say, "Let's look at the good points... um, there." What's left is a terribly repetitive, horribly pointless space odyssey(?) with a futile objective, no variety whatsoever, lame enemies, a lame title character, really lame visuals, & lame, well, everything else. Most definitely without hesitation the worst game bar none on the Vectrex.

DEFENSE: The defense rests.

PROSECUTION: Everything in this game JUST PLAIN SUCKS!!!!!! AARRRRGGGGHHH!!!!!!

VERDICT?: Never before has a video game been more aptly named.

ΣΩΡΑΜΒΛΣ

Never heard of it, eh? There's a reason for that. Way back in the early 1980s, Konami created a concept which they felt would eventually revolutionize the gaming industry, and felt so confident about it that they not only created their own game incorporating these mechanics (that would be "Super Cobra"), but designed one for the now defunct coin-op manufacturer Stern Electronics, as well (that would be "Scramble"). Both games are nearly identical except for the settings in which each occur ("Scramble"'s futuristic, "Super Cobra" is not), and neither did all that well in the arcades due to their difficulty (one could only crash into the same cavern so many times before giving up, don't 'cha know). But Konami later tried the formula again, adding a rudimentary power-up system, detailed backgrounds, and bosses, and unleashed it upon the world as "Nemesis" (later renamed "Gradius")... and the rest is history.

Well, enough with the trivia. You want the dirt on "Scramble", so here it is... it's a vector-driven version of the game Konami gave to Stern, and it's so similar to "Super Cobra" (same play mechanics, same enemies, same tunes, etc., etc...) that an unknowing bystander might mistake the two games for each other if given the chance. That's OK, though, because "Super Cobra" was a great game, and this carries on the tradition with the same solid control and advanced (for the time, anyways) play mechanics that made SC an underground hit. It's shorter than "Cobra", and the frustration of ramming into the sides of the claustrophobic caverns has been preserved, but other than that, I'd have to say that "Scramble" is at least worth a look. If you can find it at a pawn shop or garage sale, don't hesitate in picking it up.

DEFENSE: Workable graphics, especially considering that the original game was a raster scan affair. Precise control, smoothly scrolling foregrounds, and a healthy dose of challenge are also strong points.

PROSECUTION: Some caverns are too tight to squeeze a pin through, much less your ship. Weak explosions. Konami wasn't credited in the title screen.

VERDICT?: It's the only game of its type on the Vex, so go for it.

Solar Quert

Yes, it's yet another in an all-too long series of Vectrex "Asteroids" clones. This one's pretty good, but don't expect any surprises... well, there IS the ability to pick up solar energy in the wake of blasted enemies, and the cool hyperspace animation and super weapon that further surprises you by not being all that super, but other than all that... You rocket around, pick off tiny enemies, score loads of points and avoid crashing into a sun that looks more than a little like an asterisk as drawn by a man on hallucinogens. The end. If that prospect excites you in any way after "Minestorm", "Cosmic Chasm", and "Star Castle", by all means pick up a copy.

DEFENSE: Most of the elements in this game are if nothing else done solidly...

PROSECUTION: ...not spectacularly, mind you; just solidly. I'd put a red mark through Cinematronics' sad attempt at a super weapon, too... it adds nothing at all to the gameplay, & the button which activates it would have been put to better use as the hyperspace key, as opposed to putting it on the far left of the joystick.

VERDICT?: A great add to the collections of those who actually bought "Sub-Terrania", "Solar Jetman", and the Windows Arcade Pack (for, of course, "Asteroids"!).

Space Wars

"Ladies and gents, this ain't just any game... give it up for THE FIRST VIDEO GAME EVER! Hoo hoo hoo!!! And in the dog pound tonight are... these are the people who've slept with the first video game ever! Give it up! Hey, who the... Jon Stewart?"

"Better make room on that couch... Paramount just gave me the boot, too..."

Well, that's today's glance into talk show limbo... as dear Triangle Head made quite clear, "Space Wars" is actually the Vectrex translation of MIT's "Space War", history's first video game. And it's pretty good, too... you'd be surprised at how well it holds up considering its age (um, lessee... about, what, 30 years now? Sheesh...). As the pilot of a star cruiser, you must fend off your arch rival whilst keeping tabs on your fuel and weapon supplies. Play too aggressively and you could find yourself out of both and in a jam of strawberry, er, massive proportions. Do things overly conservatively and you might be reduced to cosmic dust by the enemy's photons. I tend to use a great deal of evasive action in my strategy, but that's me... you might come up with your own battle tactics; maybe not. Who can say? Anyways, you'll be amazed at how openended this seemingly simple space sim is, and it gets only better in the fierce two player competitive mode (don't get me wrong; the Vectrex is a decent opponent too, but artificial intelligence just can't beat the genuine article, y'know?), so if you've got a likeminded friend who doesn't mind serving up a can of whoopass (or being served that can, as the case may be) on a game system that's older than most of his siblings, you'd better pull up an extra controller and slam this puppy into your Vex's cartridge slot. Highly recommended despite the age of the original.

DEFENSE: Reliable controls. Deceptively simple play mechanics that'll glue you to your 9 inch screen. Fairly attractive visuals. Two player simultaneous action.

PROSECUTION: Needs more options (and while you're at it, throw out the haywire gravity in game 8! Talk about pointless!); perhaps a handicap for one or both players in regards to fuel and weapons quantities. Battles end too quickly.

VERDICT?: The classics really ARE timeless, and SW proves it.

Spike

Thought "Ristar" was an innovative mascot? Think again. There was another star on the scene long before him, and this guy's on a mission to save his favorite heavenly body (and how! Woo woo!) Molly from the clutches of a nameless snaggletoothed villain and his cronies. In true "Donkey Kong" style, he must

jump & climb his way to the top of a 3 story structure where the fair Molly, locked away in a cage, awaits his rescue. Along the way, Spike must fend off a strange looking duck & what appears to be an animated TV set on a spring as he ascends the steadily moving platforms, collecting the key to Molly's cage and eventually saving the young spike headed lass from certain doom.

If any of this sounds familiar, well, you're right, but "Spike" has three things that Mario's premiere effort does not, and those are... 1. Voice. It's the only Vex game with this added bonus, and while it sounds a tad bit rough, it is amusing the first few times you hear it (of course, the same thing could be said for "Bubsy", and look at how many people hated that...). 2. Play elements that seem lifted from "Frogger" as well. The level design is very simple, but this problem is alleviated somewhat as the challenge arises from both fighting off the unrelenting enemies and staying aloft on the game's moving platforms all at once. And finally, there's 3. To get anywhere in "Spike", you've got to use all four buttons on the Vex joystick. This is a pain, because as many of you know, the buttons on this particular controller are spaced much too far apart, and having to use all four of them in a game that requires fast reflexes is next to impossible. Just giving the game one kick button as opposed to two would have helped it immensely in this respect, but this was not to be...

Already you've probably surmised that this is yet another clone of a game that the Vectrex was not well suited for, and again, you're right. You have to forgive GCE for it, though... they did after all want to offer their consumers a fleshed out library of titles, and since "Donkey Kong" knock-offs were such a hot property back in the early 80's, a game like "Spike" was inevitable. And there's been worse in the genre, so if you manage to dig up a copy for a reasonable price, you won't be too disappointed with it.

DEFENSE: The voice is kinda cute the first time you hear it. Plays fairly well and is challenging. The intermissions were a neat idea.

PROSECUTION: Being forced to use all four of the Vex controller's buttons gets confusing, especially in the midst of a dire situation. The platforms are sloppily drawn with lines that overlap one another.

VERDICT?: Probably shouldn't have been made. The voice that was sorely lacking in "Berzerk" and "Pole Position" didn't really deserve to be here instead.

Spinball

In one word- yuck. I don't know what toads the editors of "Electronic Games" were licking when they gave this an honorable mention for their "best game of the year" award in 1983, but the fact remains that this is about as far from the best of ANYTHING as a pinball game is likely to get. Although the layout of the playfield is deceptively inviting, the ball itself ruins any enjoyment this game could possibly offer- it's jumpy, ugly, and has the physics of a basketball. Almost as bad is the immense amount of slowdown and flicker present in "Spinball"- it's so bad that you'd swear you were watching a silent film from the 20's, what with the flashing and clicking and all. In short, yuck.

DEFENSE: Cool scaling which begins each game. The playfield is filled with possibilities.

PROSECUTION: Horrid ball movement that ends most games quickly. Absmal slowdow and flicker.

VERDICT?: Buy "Midnight Magic" (2600) instead.

Star Castle

If you're not familiar with this title, I'll spare you the long painful description and basically say that this is the game that inspired "Yar's Revenge" for the 2600. Based on an ancient Cinematronics coin-op (OK, so I lied about the 'sparing you a long, painful description' part), your mission is to destroy the space tyrant which has ensconced itself in the center of the screen. Around it are three spinning walls which shield it from your attacks and can store heat-seeking electric charges which will eventually detach themselves and hunt you down. If these walls are completely destroyed, the tyrant just creates new ones, so you've got to use strategy and peck away holes in its defense. Problem is, once this is done, the tyrant gets to take potshots at *you*, and its fireballs are a force to be reckoned with (and a sharp contrast to your wimpy pellet fire!). If you can manage to live through all this and take this tough customer out with a lucky shot, the castle collapses and the inhabitant perishes in a satisfying explosion, only to be replaced by a smarter and faster successor.

Well, anyways, to make a long story short, it's what you get when you cross "Asteroids" with "Yar's Revenge", and it, like the latter game, is very addictive. The further you get down the lineage of space monarchs, the nastier things become, right down to the point where the electric charges can actually outrun you and the walls of the castle spin like some nuclear powered top on a rampage. You'll keep coming back for more, though... trust me. If you loved "Yar's Revenge", you can't live without "Star Castle".

DEFENSE: Addictive play. No, make that totally immersive, grabs-you-and-won't-let-go, "Is it 3:00 AM already?!" play...

PROSECUTION: The aiming could be a little more precise. Microbial characters.

VERDICT?: Leave me alone! Can't you see I'm busy playing this!?!

Star Hawk

There's really not much to this game, but what's there is very attractive and even mildly absorbing. It's one of those 'space trench' games that sort of simulates the climactic Death Star battle in the "Star Wars" films, only this is a little more straightforward- just blast everything you see. If you make it to 10,000 points, you get 20 extra seconds in which to destroy everything that moves. If not, the game ends. There are plenty of ships on which to satisfy your itchy trigger finger, but they don't fight back, so basically what you have here is a glorified shooting gallery that nevertheless stays intense due to the above mentioned time constraints. The graphics are totally fab- the trench scrolls by quickly in 3-D, and the game's various ships look nice when scaling away & look even better when they're exploding into their component lines. Sounds aren't so hot, but they work. And the play is fairly reliable, too- just don't pick the analog option if you want to keep your sanity. To put it succinctly, "Star Hawk" is a mindlessly fun shooting gallery in sci-fi clothing that, while sorely lacking in depth, is nevertheless recommended.

DEFENSE: With an excellent first-person perspective like this, who needs a Vectrex Imager? Nice and intense, too, with plenty of enemy cruisers to turn into confetti. LOOOVE those explosions!

PROSECUTION: Is this all there is to it?! Little more than a shooting gallery, with next to no depth and predictable targets. The game is made artificially hard in the later rounds, where even perfectly targeted foes escape death far too often (um, guys, ever hear of 'collision detection'?).

VERDICT?: Instant recipe for fun- let your brain cells go on vacation and plug in a copy of "Star Hawk".

Star Trek

Actually, that should be "Star Trek: The Game", but you get the point. I expected this to be a direct conversion of the quirky Sega coin-op in which players battled Klingons from both a first-person and overhead perspective, but was disappointed to discover that it bore almost no resemblance to it. I got over my initial dismay quickly, though, as "Star Trek" for the Vectrex actually plays more than a little like the classic Atari Games coin-op "Star Wars" (which should come as little surprise as both are vector-driven games). It's obviously not as good, and it doesn't really have much to do with the series of films on which it's based (in fact, I believe its European counterpart was named "Star Warp"...), but disregarding both quibbles, you've got to admit that "Star Trek: The Game" dishes up some of the meanest 3-D battles around on the Vex, with a perspective that's literally out of this world (all together now- GROAN...) and some vicious alien assailants which for vector-drawn characters actually do resemble their silver screen counterparts. The play mechanics are much more deep and involving than those in, say, "Star Hawk", with an intriguing shield option which literally deflects incoming photons and the ability to warp and dock, and the opposing ships are by and large a great deal smarter, ducking and weaving like the dickens and getting in your face just before launching their deadly cargo. And to top it all off, there's a well-detailed boss spacecraft (perhaps Ricardo Montalban's ship from the second film?) that adds even more to the experience, provided you can find it, of course (it only seems to appear in the first sector of option 1 games, although the wrath of Kahn [sorry!] could well be hidden elsewhere, too...).

OK, time for a new paragraph (and the obligatory summary...). "Star Trek" is one of the easiest finds in the Vex library, and for fans of the "Star Wars" coin-op (ironic, eh?), there's no discovery more rewarding than this. Even if you aren't (and if so, what the hell is your problem!?!), it's still worth your trouble.

DEFENSE: Great (if sparse) visuals- the explosions are a thing of beauty, and the ducking and weaving Klingons and Romulan War Birds are similarly inspired. Fairly in-depth play mechanics. A totally cool boss.

PROSECUTION: Seems kind of 2-D for a 3-D perspective game, almost as if the Enterprise is running idle in space, turning only to face the occasional Klingon in combat. Recycled sounds from other Vex games is a minus as well; why no tunage from the films?

VERDICT?: Beam it up, Scotty.

Web Wars

"Ooh! 'Web Wars' is such a great Vectrex game! 'Web Wars' plays just like 'Tempest'! 'Web Wars' is the best game on the system! 'Web Wars' gives me reason to live!" That's all I ever hear from every other Vectrex owner on the planet, and I'm just PLAIN SICK OF IT!!! I hate to break it to you, people, but "Web Wars" just isn't that great. And contrary to popular belief, "Web Wars" is far from being the "Tempest" clone that most Vectrekies claim it to be- the play mechanics are centered around a single, scrolling playfield, & the round objective is totally different... as a bird of prey of some sort, your mission is to collect a gaggle of weirdo aliens which resemble anything from midwest flies to Space Invaders to Abraham Lincoln in a web-like half pipe. Much unlike "Tempest", once you've collected a beast, you're then expected to escape to a "trophy room" via a warp. If you succeed, you are then awarded another round identical to the last with a new critter to procure. The problem is, nothing is stopping you from picking up the alien and making a break for the exit the instant it appears, making the bulk of the action in between seem hopelessly pointless and even a little aggravating. This wasn't the case in "Tempest", in which the play objective actually centered around blasting the game's assorted menaces. While this is admittedly a simple way to go, at least it has continuity, and that's a quality that's definitely lacking in WW (you're spending far too much time either dying or jumping to new rounds to actually PLAY the game, whereas in "Tempest", the action was paramount).

Not that it would matter, though, as what action WW has is maddeningly frustrating and devoid of variety. The only blastable enemies you encounter are these fat X shaped aliens that head from the horizon to the lip of the halfpipe, making navigating next to impossible in the process (and if you attempt to fend them all off, you won't be able to concentrate on adding specimens to your trophy room or warping out of that particular round). There's a vulture, too, but it's unreachable with your bullets (an odd coincidence, since you ARE after all controlling a space osprey...), and only serves the purpose of raining down deadly accurate fireballs as you struggle to dodge the already innumerable X-shaped marauders. This is not much of a problem in the first few rounds, but when you're cruising down the half-pipe at 100 kilometers an hour or more (the speed at which you're forced to begin in the later stages), you can't help but begin to notice that you're finding yourself beak first in the tarmac not as a result of your own ineptitude but because the computer put you in a no-win situation. This almost never happened in "Tempest", where an expert player could always find his way out of a nasty situation if he implemented the right strategy or was quick with the dial.

OK, so the game looks really nice. The view of the half-pipe actually changes as you move back and forth, and is remarkably detailed without suffering from the slowdown and flicker that has plagued so many other well drawn Vex games. Big deal. The game play is lacking, and that's what matters (well, at least I think so, but judging from the inexplicable success of "Donkey Kong Country", I could be wrong about this...). As a "Tempest" derivative (NOT, and I repeat, NOT a clone), "Web Wars" is a hit or miss affair. If you're looking for a Vex game with the intensity of the Atari Games classic, I'd go with "Bedlam" instead.

DEFENSE: The half-pipe looks wonderful, and the control is by and large fairly responsive.

PROSECUTION: Repetitive play. Much of the game is spent staring at the "trophy room". That vulture!!!

VERDICT?: Pretty. Annoying. It's pretty annoying!!!

ARMOR...ATTACK

Stay away from any tanks you haven't hit TWICE. They may be destroyed, but they're still quite well armed. Don't trust your initial instincts when battling the helicopter; when it comes in for the kill, it will first point its nose towards you, only to rotate 40° in an attempt to fake you out. If you fall for this tactic, you're as good as dead, so don't take its actions at face value... let it rotate first BEFORE firing. The tanks tend to home in on your position- use this to your advantage by either hiding behind bunkers and picking them off or leading them into other tanks, where both assailants will destroy each other with friendly fire.

BEDLAM

Try keeping your hands off the quick rotation button (3) until the second round... it tends to make aiming inaccurate in the first. If you have to let any aliens approach you, make sure it's the thin X-shaped ones; they rotate around you briefly before closing in, giving you the opportunity to pick them off before they do any actual damage (although if you're easily confused by the spinning, this might not be such a great idea...). Also, use the lead in tactic of firing just ahead of the aliens' circumferential path in the rounds where the shapes spin- shooting directly at them gives the fiends the opportunity to rotate around your blasts- and only fire at the points of the shape (to extend them, thus giving the aliens that take those paths longer to reach you) when the coast is relatively clear of foes.

BERZERK

Be aware that the computer, as sporting as it is, may put you right next to some robots just as you enter a room. If this happens, your only hope is to pick them off the instant you see them; running is useless as your character is too slow to avoid electrocution at the hands of Otto's mechanical militia. The mechs are by and large very stupid and will blindly follow you into the electrified walls and other robots; use this to your advantage so as to avoid close range combat (particularly risky in the later levels, where the robots' fire is literally too quick to dodge). Also, take note that the gameplay becomes faster as the CPU is relieved of sprites, giving the few enemies that remain a noticeable pep up in the process.

BLITZ!

One important note- RUN ALL PLAYS! It's a monotonous process, but you'll always get your extra first downs and eventually the six point touchdowns this way. Also, keep in mind that in passes, it's possible to control the ball in mid-flight. Not very realistic, but it can come in handy...

CLEAN SWEEP

When you're cleaning the halls as Masked Vacuum Super Gold (er, your invincible counterpart, rather... guess I've been watching too much Fox Kids', eh?), be aware that you will know be endowed with a bottomless vacuum bag which needn't be emptied until your powers wear off. Try not to use the energizing corner rooms just to polish off dots, however; emptying your contents in the center of the screen is a more profitable (and less limiting) method of making room for more.

COSMIC CHASM

If you're being menaced by rock chunks (always a fun phrase to try to work into a conversation... "So, where were you last Friday, Phil?" "Oh, just being menaced by rock chunks, that's all..."), blast what you can, then escape to an already completed zone. This way, anything you've destroyed won't come back to haunt you when you reenter to finish the job. And keep a map handy- if you accidentally wander off the premises, you'll be forced to redo the entire mission, sans one life (AARRRGHHH!!!)

DARK TOWER

Unless you insist on playing the game non-stop for the next five hours, might I suggest option four at the menu screen? With this in place, most of the items you need are already in your possession, including most of the keys and a sufficient amount of gold for the trip (not that you ever seem to use any...). The riddle of the tower is a snap; just place the keys in order of value (from gold to brass) and you're on your way to supreme power, amply-endowed love slaves, and Republicans in office for the rest of your days!

FORTRESS OF NARZOD

If you absolutely must play this, stay away from the bottom center of the screen. Your bullets are almost guaranteed to ricochet back into you from this point. Let the enemy forces come to you before taking them on- things are much more precise this way. And if you feel you need protection from the incessant fireball hurling antics of the game's marching marauders, fire at the vultures as they enter the center of the playfield. Their rotting carcasses will act as (temporary) shields (of course, in the instances where the vultures themselves take potshots at you, it'd be wise to hug the center of the screen and blast 'em the moment they come out, as they're a great deal more accurate than the ground-based troops).

If Cheaters Never Prosper, Why The Hell, Am I In Second Place?

HEADS UP SOCCER

If you're being persuaded by a player from the opposing team, simply kick the ball away and your antagonist will give up the chase and pursue other interests (ah, the joys of early artificial intelligence...). For E-Z goals, head to the bottom of the goalie box just outside the penalty line and wait for the frantic CPU goalie to zip out of your line of fire. Once you have the timing down for this, you'll be feeding the net a steady diet of black and white balls and racking up huge scores in no time!

HYPERCHASE

If you want to live to see fourth gear, apply a light but steady touch to the joystick at all times, and hold it in position- if you let go, the racer will snap back into the center of the road, possibly into oncoming traffic. Worry more about crashing into the sides of the road than other cars; you usually can't help but get into fenderbenders anyways due to the awful control.

MINE STORM

Stay in one of the four screen quadrants if you've blasted all the mines down to their component chunks- the UFO always appears on one of the cardinal edges of the screen, and if you're there too, a collision is bound to occur. Being mobile increases your odds against the chasing and kamikaze mines- if you wait for them to come to you, you won't have the time to rotate to blast their parting shots or evade their offspring. Destroy the smallest and/or most dangerous mines first, then concentrate on the easier targets. This way, you won't have to finish half a round only to have to repeat it entirely by losing a ship to the tougher enemies (which sadly often happens in the game's later stages).

POLAR RESCUE

Don't bide your time in reaching the docking bay- turn so that the arrow on the radar screen is pointing straight up, then hold down the throttle and go warp speed to the end of the round (making sure to go under the various floating mines, of course), stopping only to replenish your fuel supply by downing rival subs. And speaking of rival subs, press the joystick upward if one has launched a torpedo your way (as opposed to pressing left or right, as would be the natural response). This is a fairly reliable way to dodge enemy fire, although chances are if you've already been locked on by a torpedo, you're shark bait anyways.

POLE POSITION

Don't be afraid to let go of the accelerator in a tight situation; it's better than crashing, which eats up a great deal more time. Also, don't fret if you've been stopped just feet away from the finish line with time on the clock; this happens after three laps no matter how well you have or haven't done. A weird way to finish a successful game, but hey.

RIP OFF

If a shape has been carried out of the center of the screen, wait for another enemy to drag it off, then blast it as it nears the rest of the cache. Oddly, you can't drag the shapes back to the center yourself. Also, you have unlimited lives, so do whatever is necessary to keep the pirates' grubby little hooks off your inventory (should you actually want to play this for more than 15 seconds, anyways...).

SCRAMBLE

Your ship's collision detection runs in a straight line from the nose to the thruster, so don't sweat it if a wall clips a bit of your wing- you won't be damaged. Practice bombing; you'd be surprised at how often a "perfect" shot goes awry and overshoots or undershoots its intended target (it's not the computer's fault; it's just tough to get used to the bombs' trajectory). Ken Uston's strategy of crashing into the base at the end of the level doesn't work here; you've got to bomb it to move on to the next round.

SOLAR QUEST

If things are getting too hot to handle (!), blast

the enemies but try not to pick up their solar energy. In doing this, you'll discover that some bits of energy won't be pulled into the sun's gravity, and that ships cannot be replaced until this energy has been collected, sufficiently cooling things off for you. Also, let the enemies chase you around the sun a while until they're in a condensed pack, then turn around and let 'em have it with the super weapon (I guess there's a use for it after all!).

SPACE WARS

Play defensively in rounds with low gravity, letting the CPU-controlled ship chase you around a while until his power and fuel supplies have both been depleted. THEN you can let him have it!

SPIKE

For a quick boost of points (and difficulty), jump for the cage at its extreme left (when part of it is offscreen). You'll sacrifice a life in the process, but look at the payoff! Also, avoid the confusion of kicking your foes- it's best to grab Molly's bow as it floats down and scamper up the levels as your enemies are stunned. Oh, and one more thing- it's a good idea to depend largely on jumping in the later rounds, as walking is usually hindered by the moving platforms and Spike can actually leap onto the ladders in most cases if the joystick is held up while touching one.

SPIN BALL

The machine is very sensitive to body language, and will tilt if it's used three times within 5 seconds. Use it sparingly; the best times to shake the table are in dire situations (when the ball is dangerously close to leaving the playfield) or if the ball needs assistance in landing in the trap which activates double ball play (VERY important in getting those high scores, since the trap also closes off many of the areas from which the balls can escape).

STAR CASTLE

If the outer wall of the castle is intact, you can destroy the innermost two walls completely without fear of regeneration. My favorite strategy in the later rounds is to peck holes at the belly of the castle, only to veer around it, travelling upwards and wrapping around back to the bottom of the screen in times of distress. Remember, boys and girls, wrap around is your friend!

STAR HAWK

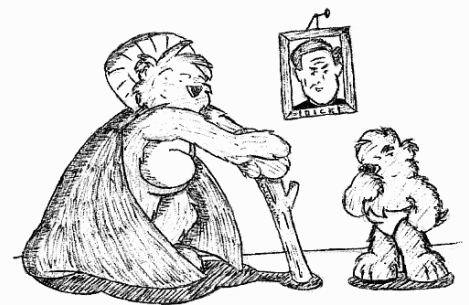
Always, always, ALWAYS hit the fighter that appears just above the trench periodically. It doubles the points you get for destroying the other enemies for a brief period of time. Also, learn to anticipate the patterns of ALL the on-screen ships, and use the lead-in tactic of firing just BEFORE the ship is directly in your sights to increase your accuracy.

STAR TREK

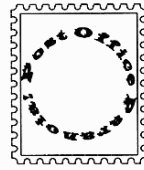
If you've docked with the space station before the Klingons and/or Romulans have had a chance to fire, the CPU extends you the courtesy of making them wait to attack until you're finished and things are on the up and up. Never pass up a chance to battle the boss ship- an extra life is yours for the taking if you manage to defeat it (here's how- keep your crosshairs aimed directly at the small, multi-pointed star in the nose of the cruiser and keep blasting to destroy its photons and eventually the ship itself). Activate the shields a moment AFTER an enemy has fired at you... this way, it will still remain activated as the shot hits its target and will deflect away harmlessly. If you're too impulsive with the shields and activate them prematurely, well... remember what happened to William Shatner in "Star Trek: Generations"?

WEB WARS

In the later rounds (after you've collected six creatures), don't pick up any aliens until you hear the raspy firing noise that's commonly associated with the vulture's blast. If you attempt to pick one up before this time, you'll be reduced to Falcon McNuggets for reasons I don't fully comprehend. Stay on the move when the vulture is overhead- it's difficult to time just when it'll fire, and if you're standing around waiting for it, you won't have the chance to dodge the incoming fireball and avoid being turned into Thanksgiving dinner (gee, I must be hungry or something...).



Brian Pacula



Post Office Paranoia!



Jess Piece-Face,

OK... watch, I'm dropping it.

THUD There.

Yeah, California's a great place to meet celebrities, if you're into that kind of thing. In Marin County alone my immediate family and myself have spotted, tagged, and catalogued Bonnie Raitt, George Lucas, Jodie Foster, Sammy Hagar, Robin Williams, Heuy Lewis (who contrary to popular belief did *not* actually whip out Little Huey in "Short Cuts"), Bob Newhart, and probably some others I've forgotten. Some waitress friends of mine have apparently seen Jon Lovitz and Dana Carvey where they work, and John "Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus, I'm Making Millions Selling A Crappy Book" Gray lives here. Tiny Tim played a little club a few blocks from where I live. There was also a persistant rumor that Tom "I'm Not Gay!!!" Cruise had moved to Mill Valley. Oh, and my mother's attorney is friends with Green Day's attorney. My brother was just a few urinal stalls away from Clint Eastwood (absolutely true). As you can see, Marin is just plain crawling with famous people, but aside from Dave Barry and George Lucas, I've never met anyone I could give a flying $\int \Omega \subseteq \kappa$ about. In general, I don't really like famous people (that's what happens when you read "Spy" magazine too often, I guess).

Which brings me to another point... OJ isn't "not guilty" because America idolizes sports "heroes". He's "not guilty" because his talented lawyers successfully exploited a non-existent racial issue (if you've heard what happened when the cops arrived, you know there's not a way in hell Fuhrerman could have planted evidence). Meanwhile, The Juice is valiantly trying to find the REAL killer, using the failsafe method of playing golf in Florida and hoping the balls hit the real killer on the head, thereby incapacitating him (odd that I'm listening to this while listening to a song called "Bloody Night, Bloody

Knife"...). But hey, who really cares. I just hope Paula Barbieri watches her back.

I'd better get going now. I have to go to Driver's Ed, and BOY is it a bitch. We're probably not going to get to see "Red Asphalt", since the same stupid people keep holding up the class by asking stupid questions. I guess it's only partially their fault, since every inquiry sends the teacher into another long anecdote. THEN these people start bitching about what you can and can't get a ticket for, which is BEYOND stupid since there's no $\int \Omega \subseteq \kappa$ way mewling about how unfair it is that one can get ticketed for flicking lit cigarettes out a car window [WHAT? If they actually feel that way, I don't think CIGARETTES are what they've been smoking lately... ed.] will actually change the law. Then yesterday, some dimbulb stole some Doritos™ [©@@šœ¶-ed.] from behind the cafeteria counter during a break, and when class resumed the teacher reinforced the concept that **STEALING IS WRONG** (true) and that ratting on who stole the chips won't make you look like a complete asshole (not true). I wonder how much it's worth to the guy to stay in the class. I wonder how much cash he brought with him today. I wonder if I can get a moment alone with him before class today. I wonder if he's ever been blackmailed before [contrary to popular belief, Brian Pacula, not fate, is a harsh mistress indeed... ed.].

OK, bye. Remember: There's only one Paul Sharrar [donata?-ed.].

Cynsyrilly,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Not much I can add to that, except to say, er, uh... was your brother able to resist the temptation of saying something like "Draw, partner", or "Go ahead, make my bidet"? I guess the threat of having his winky shot off made clamming up all the easier...

THE RE-VIEW MIRROR

Wrestlemania: The Arcade Game by Acclaim/Genesis

I must in all honesty admit that this title caught me by surprise... not only did I not realize that the game even existed until just recently, when the home versions were announced, it just so happens that Acclaim's Genesis version is actually the better of the two 16-bit translations! Go fig. Hey; I'm not complaining, though... while this is a step behind Capcom's incredible Gen adaptation of "Saturday Night Slammasters", it's without a shadow of a doubt the second best wrestling title on the system, and a tremendous improvement over Acclaim's previous uses of the WWF license. Slick play control, intense action, infriggin'credible animation and some totally demented special moves combine to make this almost good enough to make up for Sculptured's abysmal "Simpsons" games. Almost.

Graphics: 8 Sound: 7 Play: 8 Interest: 7 Overall: 7 1/2

WarGames by Coleco/ColecoVision

Based on the United Artists film of the same name, this attractive and realistic Cold War simulation pleases in so many ways... first, the map screens are drawn in painstaking detail, so Michigan looks like Michigan and not some afterthought on the parts of the programmers. Secondly, it's about 1,000 times more advanced than its closest 5200 equivalent, "Missile Command"... where you'd mindlessly blast ICBMs from the night sky in Atari's game, WVG forces players to implement strategy and use a variety of armaments to thwart the intentions of the USSR and other hostile nations. And finally (although I don't know how much of an effect this'll have on other players), it just REEKS of the 80's, and that alone is enough to bring tears of joy to the eyes of a nostalgic old soul such as myself! If you're in the market for this kind of game, this is definitely worth owning.

Graphics: 8 Sound: 7 Play: 6 Interest: 7 Overall: 7 1/2

Triple Play '95 by Electronic Arts/Genesis

I didn't really expect much from this cart ("Then why'd you rent it, you bonehead?!" Uh, it's a long story, really...), but must in all humility admit that it DID kind of throw me off guard initially... the game's programmers did an excellent job of hiding TP '95's crippling flaws behind a veil of realistic presentation (between the cheering crowds and spitting pitchers, you'd swear you were in the nosebleed section of an actual ballpark!) and tons of options. But it doesn't take you long to discover that things aren't all jock cup adjustments and warm beer in EA's latest baseball sim... no sirree! Fact of the matter is, TP '95 plays terribly; the stop and jerk feel of the fielders is reminiscent of playing PC software on a 286 and the batting is unforgivably inaccurate. Being that this IS after all an EA Sports game, it shouldn't be much of a surprise, but...

Graphics: 7 Sound: 7 Play: 3 Interest: 5 Overall: 5

Killer Instinct by Nintendo/SNES

If you really think about it, this is a terrific port of the RareWare coin-op when you stop and consider how many people stared in disbelief or laughed in your face upon even suggesting the possibility of a 16-bit translation (as I did when the game was still fresh in the arcades), but nevertheless, it's far from being the "best arcade translation on the SNES" as "Nintendo Power" has (predictably) suggested. For starters, the character art is a little on the blah side when you compare it to say, "Super Street Fighter 2"'s or "WeaponLord"'s- it's grainy and indescrpt, and lacks the spit-of-the coin-op's sprites. The control is also an issue... it's very stiff and unforgiving, partially due to the design of the original game and partially because the SNES controller imparts these traits to most of the system's titles anyways. Bottom line- you're better off just saving your money and holding on to SSF2.

Graphics: 8 Sound: 7 Play: 6 Interest: 6 Overall: 6 3/4

Games I'd Missed... Street Fighter: The Movie/Saturn: Better than the PS-X version, with better control and less access time. Most SF2 fans will end up hating it anyways if just for its cheesy digitized characters, laughable voice, and dull backdrops. Ultimate MK3/Arcade: Nice to have some of the old standbys back, but that aside it's just more MK. Donkey Kong Country 2/SNES: Better than the first game, although the play mechanics are still pretty shallow. Nice eyecandy, though... Marvel Super Heroes/Arcade: Terrific! I'm not too fond of the power-up gems (the CPU invariably has way too many of them), but the addition of Spider-Man was sheer brilliance, as was the inclusion of Shuma-Gorath, a tentacled eyeball that's strange even by "Darkstalkers" standards... Mega Man 7/SNES: Funny, I could have sworn I've played this at least 10 times before... wake up and smell the unoriginality, Pat! In fact, I'd call this WORSE than the better NES "Mega Man".... at least they had SOME semblance of inspiration and/or replayability... Fighting Vipers/Arcade: I don't care for 3-D fighting games, but at least this one's fun to watch, and very brutal (there's nothing quite like demolishing a chain link fence with the battered body of your opponent!). Dumb characters, tho... one looks like Bulk from "Power Rangers"! Bug!/Saturn: Sort of a 3-D "Bubsy", with fully bit-mapped levels that scale both in and out flawlessly. Still not as good as... Jumping Flash!/PS-X: Great hybrid of "Doom" and "Sonic", without "Bug!"'s restrictive play mechanics & levels.

VectorMan by Sega/Genesis

Probably Blue Sky's first "take no prisoners" Genny title, it's obvious that a great deal of work went into the creation of this hybrid of "Ballz" and "Turrican"... for instance, the backgrounds are almost eerily convincing, with such effects as the flapping flags, lens flares, and the penetration of sunlight through still waters being of particular note. And everything else is up to par with the system's more memorable games, more or less, but that's not to say that VM doesn't have problems. There aren't any passwords or for that matter continues, forcing you to play entire games in one setting, and once you've mastered levels there's a good chance that you'll never want to lay eyes on them again. Still, this is in direct comparison to Blue Sky's previous Genesis releases a quantum leap forward, and as such is still worth a look.

Graphics: 8 Sound: 7 Play: 7 Interest: 5 Overall: 7 1/4

Earthworm Jim 2 by Playmates (Shiny)/Genesis

You're probably well aware of the fact that I was not terribly fond of the first EWJ... the cute graphics and sound didn't hide the fact that it was in essence just another of Dave Perry's "just add license" games, with next to no play technique or replay value. Mercifully, this wasn't as much the case with EWJ2... true, the new stages are generally not as inspired as those from the first game, and they DO seem shorter, but the game itself is a great deal more fun, with more vivid background art, fabulous animation, a wider variety of weapons, and stages that deviate from the typical "run from point A to point B" mentality that plagued previous Perry efforts (although I could have done without 2 of the 3 Peter Puppy stages...). Oh, and of course, EWJ2 is VERY funny... I loved the game show and Level Ate's sadistic salt shaker, although that ending... ugh. Too short, and VERY Lesnickian...

Graphics: 8 Sound: 8 Play: 7 Interest: 7 Overall: 8

Virtua Fighter 2 by Sega (AM2)/Saturn

OK, OK... so maybe the Saturn isn't so bad after all. I'd expected this game to be a servicable port of the coin-op right from the moment I saw the prelim pix in "Next Generation", but I didn't think I'd actually ENJOY it, since I've never really warmed up to the concept of polygon-based fighting games. Problem is, this conversion is much more than servicable... it's BETTER than the arcade VF2 in the respect that you can play for hours without constantly being interrupted by the machine's requests for quarters (oh yeah; it plays better too, thanks to the Saturn's 6-button joy pads...). And of course, the attention to detail in "Virtua Fighter 2" is without parallel- from each character's distinct fighting style to their eerily human reactions to a wide variety of battle situations, it's obvious that VF2 is the creme de la creme of 3-D tourney fighters.

Graphics: 10 Sound: 9 Play: 8 Interest: 7 Overall: 9

Ridge Racer by Namco/PlayStation

Well, the included "Galaxian" teaser is kind of on the weak side (the actual games as available on the GameBoy and ColecoVision are better, frankly), the announcer sounds like a bad lounge act, the control's a tad too sensitive, and there's only one track (although the difficulty you select DOES alter the course somewhat), but those minor quibbles aside, there's no doubt about it... "Ridge Racer" kicks serious asphalt. In addition to putting up a solid challenge and offering a wide variety of cars, RR delivers graphically... both the racers (the Mappymobiles actually have a Mappy decal on them that looks like it was peeled right off the cabinet of the Namco arcade sleeper, for instance) and the environment in which they compete are almost frighteningly realistic. Geez, and to think that most of us were blown away by the arcade version of "Hard Drivin'" just five short years ago...

Graphics: 9 Sound: 8 Play: 7 Interest: 7 Overall: 7 3/4

To prevent those of you who have no interest whatsoever in the Vectrex from using this issue as a bird cage liner, that much-needed roughage in your diet, or worse, I've taken the liberty of including these handy dandy reviews of games for other systems. Just so you know, the ratings system from P:1 applies here as well- 'G' is for graphics, 'S' is for sound, 'P' is for play control, 'I' is for interest, "Trix" are for kids, etc., although I WILL drop the missing points category, since most folks found it to be more confusing than helpful. And without further adieu...

Doom Troopers by Playmates (Adrenaline)/Genesis

And to counter the wonderful success Playmates has had with Shiny's "Earthworm Jim" series, we have "Doom Troopers", without a shadow of a doubt one of the worst Genesis games in recent memory. This is a title only Adolph Hitler could love- it's needlessly gory, sadistic, torturously frustrating, and has this bizarre penchant for slaughtering hundreds of guys named Steiner (especially annoying as this is one of the main characters...). The graphics are generic (an unsuccessful marriage of lame SGI renderings and predictable backdrops), the play control is imprecise, and the level design is just plain awful, making Konami's mediocre Genesis adaptation of "Contra", as hard as this is to believe, look like a miracle of game design in comparison. Just about anything would, really... it's that bad.

Graphics: 4 Sound: 4 Play: 4 Interest: 2 Overall: 3

Street Fighter Alpha by Capcom/Arcade

I didn't expect much from this prequel to the original SF2... after all, it only has ten normally playable characters, and more than half of them were milked dry in previous Capcom games. I wasn't so jaded as to avoid it completely, though, and now that I've plugged a few tokens into SF:Alpha, I must say that, despite or perhaps due to the overly familiar characters, it's as good or better than the first title to use Capcom's "Darkstalkers" game engine (gee, I wonder what THAT would be... hmm...). The play control is as one would expect on a level with the other SF2 games (if a little on the loose side in turbo mode...), and the animation, while not up to par with "Darkstalkers'", is very good. Some of the characters are a little weak (Rose & Birdie, especially) and Guy seems out of place, but that aside, you'd be crazy not to buy the upcoming Playstation version.

Graphics: 8 Sound: 8 Play: 8 Interest: 9 Overall: 8 1/2

Street Fighter: The Movie by Acclaim (Capcom)/PS-X

Acclaim's not known for setting many precedents in the world of video gaming, but SF:TM changes this... for all the wrong reasons. First off, it's the first game to contain both the digitized visage and vocalizations of action film staple Jean Claude Van Damme, which is a lot less exciting than it sounds since phrases like "Round 1" and "You Win" are rendered almost totally unintelligible by the musclehead from Brussels' painfully thick Belgian accent. Next, we have the graphics, which for 32-bit renderings are actually far LESS detailed than those in the 16-bit (and 8-bit if you count the TurboGraphx) versions of SF2. And finally, thanks to the hideously LOOONG access time and CD-based tunes which loop every 30 seconds, we have a game which surprisingly enough ISN'T saved by merit of its excellent control, making SF:TM the PS-X's 1st flop.

Graphics: 5 Sound: 5 Play: 8 Interest: 7 Overall: 5

Turbo by Coleco/ColecoVision

Although it can be argued that "Turbo" was to the early 80's what "Ridge Racer" and more accurately "Daytona USA" are to the present, this much is obvious- the ColecoVision wasn't quite as successful in capturing the graphic and aural splendor of its groundbreaking 3-D driver as the PS-X and Saturn were with theirs... the graphics, while colorful, are overly tiled, and the racers lack the detail of their coin-op counterparts. Still, this is as far as ColecoVision games go a commendable effort nevertheless... there's a great deal of scenery that literally fills the screen and whizzes by at a reasonably impressive speed, and the analog control is precise without being frustrating the way "HyperChase"'s was. The challenge is somewhat negligible- once you get the hang of it you'll be driving for hours on one game- but it's still worth the purchase.

Graphics: 8 Sound: 7 Play: 7 Interest: 7 Overall: 7 1/2

The Fate Of The Free World Hangs In The Balance...

THE STAFF INFECTED

Well, ladies and gents, the jury has come to a decision... and I've completely ignored it, so here's MY verdict... the Honorable Jess Ragan has acquitted the defendant, GCE Vectrex, of the crime of entertainment in the first degree. I've studied the evidence (all 29 pieces of it) carefully, and have decided that none of it is in fact conclusive. And I've heard convincing arguments from both sides, but the fact remains... GCE in my eyes poses little threat to society or for that matter other, better classic game systems like the ColecoVision and Atari 5200. But, of course, this is only one man's decision, so feel free to make your own justice and incarcerate the defendant if you feel it is necessary...

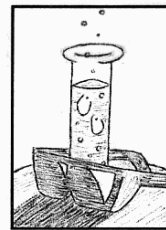
Well, that's more than enough foolishness for this issue... really, I'd like to thank both Ed Villalpando and Sean Kelly for supplying the equipment necessary to make this issue a reality. If any of you are interested in ordering classic games or systems from either of them, contact me and I'll send you their respective addresses ("Why not just print them here?"), you say? Well, first of all, I don't have them with me, and secondly, let's just call it an added incentive for you more procrastinative folks to respond to the issue... you know who you are...). And of course, tell 'em I sent you!

So, with that bit of business out of the way, I suppose I should babble a bit about the freshly released Saturn and Playstation, eh? I've tried both, and I've gotta tell you, I must humbly admit to finding Panasonic's 3DO much more impressive the first time I tried THAT. Sure, the PS-X does a grand job of handling Gouraud shaded polygons, but most people have agreed that the machine is not quite as capable with 2-D graphics, and frankly, I'm far more interested in the kinds of titles "Next Generation" constantly bitches about ("boo hoo! SNK just made ANOTHER 2-D tourney fighter! Woe is us!" Really, people, if the game itself is excellent, and most SNK fighters are, what's the big deal!?) than games like "Tekken", which are admittedly beautiful but very weak in respects to gameplay. And there's the Saturn, too... low resolution aside, it's about as good as the PS-X, but really, with rumors running rampant that Sega's already considered ruining it the same way they buried the Genesis with cockamamie "upgrades" (more like SIDEgrades, if you ask me...), who in their right minds would risk buying one (no offense, Pat, Chris, and Joe...)? Practically all of the smaller rental stores in this area absolutely REFUSE to carry the Saturn, and I'm sure this is the case just about everywhere else (except of course at the ludicrously expensive Blockbuster Video rental outlets, which disturbingly enough are now owned by Viacom along with every OTHER company in the United States... but I depress). My humble opinion on all this? Wait. Give the two companies time to consolidate their systems' hardware and lower their prices... this way, you'll know for sure which system is primed to win the war of the 32-bit systems, and there'll be many more games from which to choose once you've made the initial investment.

OK, what else...? Oh, yeah... I'm sure everyone's rending their garments and gnashing their teeth due to the recent cancellation of "Mystery Science Theatre 3000", so here's what I suggest you watch instead from now on... 1. "NightsStand With Dick Dietrick". If you've sick of the tsunami of cheesy afternoon talk shows ("Gabrielle" & "Carnie" were the last straws for me... yesh!), this wacky parody is just what the doctor ordered. 2. "Sailor Moon". Yeah, go ahead and laugh, but as far as I'm concerned, this blows away most of the anime! I've had to PAY to see, including dogs like "Golgo 13" (sorry, old Bien, but it's true!), "Vampire Hunter D", and "The AD Police Files". It's no "Ranma 1/2" or "Urusei Yatsura" either, but you DO have to give DIC credit for bringing it our way and FINALLY putting the kabosh on that horrid "Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers" rip-off they put in syndication about a year ago. 3. "The Drew Carey Show". If you're still watching "Friends", I pity your wretched soul... And finally, there's 4. "Hercules" and "Xena". Sure, they're both a tad campy, and it looks as though Sam Raimi was looking more for sexual appeal than actual acting talent when he hired Kevin Sorbo to portray the mighty mythological legend, but the fight scenes are a hoot, and the scenery is a wonder to behold (if only EVERY action-adventure show was filmed on location in New Zealand... sigh...).

I guess that about does it for this final issue of "Concept". Oh, just a few things before I go special thanks go to Chris Dyer, who in his benevolence supplied us with the awesome artwork on the preceding page. Coincidentally, Chris tells me that while "Sub-Zero"'s future is in doubt, he definitely WILL publish a comic in the coming months... the last time we talked, he threw around ideas for some kind of karate spoof, so we'll see what comes of it in the near future. Also, the first issue of "The Gameroom Blitz: Baud Edition" is finally FINISHED! E-Mail Jeff "Talon" Bogumil at aj809@fyn.yu.edu to discover just when and where it'll be posted. This ASCII format fanzine is totally non-proprietary, so feel free to boot it up and distribute it (fully intact, mind you!) to friends, family, your goldfish, whatever. And finally, Pat Reynolds is seriously considering a comeback (it'd be the right time for it, since most of the newer guys seem to lack the focus and inspiration of the last generation of fan-ed's... sorry, guys, but really, calling a fanzine "Game Mag" is NOT what I'd call a flash of creativity... no offense, of course), so lend him your support and keep your eyes peeled for when "Fantazine" #10 (finally) hits your mailbox... I, of course, will have my hand in the project and will axe the rambling, incoherent "Yeeow!" in favor of a totally new article that's unlike anything I've done before. The suspense is making you lose control of your bodily functions even as we speak, I suspect... >). Welp, time to serve the green tea for this issue. I hope you'll enjoy ignoring this as much as I relished wasting my time and money publishing it. Later...

JESS RAGAN 馬金



Jess Ragan...

... was at last count one hydrogen atom short of a water molecule. He's currently confering with Bill Nye the Science Guy and the host of "Beakman's World" in a futile attempt to make himself whole once again.



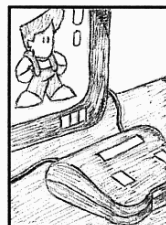
Russ Perry...

... is in an unending struggle to defeat the evil Queen Bernyl and her minions with assistance from four friends and a mysterious young man in a cape and tuxedo (whom he claims is "dreamy") even as we speak.



Brian Pacula...

... has been closed alongside other national parks and monuments due to the inability of the president and Congress to make a mutual agreement on a budget which will cut spending by the year 2000.



Chris Dyer...

... was finally unveiled at the Shoshinkai Toy Exhibition in Japan. Nintendo claims that the machine is far superior to its contemporaries and is vying for an April 1996 release in the United States.



Ed Villalpando...

... was a mighty princess, forged in the heat of battle. His quest is to scour the countryside in search of wrongdoers and bring them to their knees with his incredible fighting skills. His courage will change the world...



and Sean Kelly...

... was tested as a fat substitute with surprising success. There's an excellent chance that the FDA will approve him within the next year, although he's been found to cause anal leakage in about 5% of test subjects.

