eview: Alien Arcade

by Chris Myrick

Type: Children's Arcade
Publisher: Luxenberg Software (303/364-2077)
Retail Price: $49.95
Street Price: $30.00
Requires: Mac Plus or newer, System 6.0.5 or later, 1 Meg RAM for black and white, 2 Meg RAM for color.
Protection: None

 normally get a kick coming up with a snazzy introduction for the games I review, often going along the lines of describing a situation in the game and how you get into it.   This time, however, perhaps the best introduction to Alien Arcade is to use a quote from the box it came in.

"The average child will see over 10,000 killings on TV by the time they are 15.   That's more than enough.   So no one dies in Alien Arcade.   Most arcade games confuse action with violence; Alien Arcade understands your kids can have all the action of an Arcade game without the violence.   As parents you deserve that kind of choice for your children."

While I cannot confirm the figures presented in the above quote, the message is clear.   Alien Arcade, a new game by Luxenberg Software, is non-violent, and as such, represents a good choice for parents or people who would rather not expose their children or themselves to more violent games.   It is apparent from the profusion of successful arcade games that violence of some sort is a strong factor in making arcade games popular, but is it possible to have an equally successful game without heaping servings of violence?   Let's see how Alien Arcade does.

Into the Arcade. The entrance to the arcade in Davis, where I currently reside, has a placard with it's name "Library" hanging over the door.   The entrance to the Alien Arcade is a little more interesting.   You are presented with an external view of an interplanetary arcade, complete with a really confused chicken and a couple of witty sayings.   After this screen dissolves, you are presented with a choice of arcade games.   This is the first area where Alien Arcade shines.   Instead of just having one game, you have the choice of six different

games, Andromedroids, Fungus Patrol, Nerdoids, Quasar Klutzes, Quasar Rain and Stink Snakes.   Clicking on one of these buttons leads you to that particular game where you can either start the game immediately or get a brief synopsis of the instructions.   So what are these six games?

Andromedroids. Don't ask me why the computer is no longer taking care of the assembly line at the Andromedroids factory.   Don't even ask me why you happen to be the plant manager in charge of making sure that Andromedroid assembly continues smoothly and unabated.   Your task is simple.   As robot parts (heads, lower units and torsos) come out of the overhead chute, you place them in the assembly bins in the correct order (lower units, torsos and heads) and create robots.   The only glitches in the system are as follows.

1). The guys in the parts department are lazy so you don't get the parts in the order you need them—parts that you can't use right away are dropped in the recycling bin.

2). Somewhere along the line a bunch of Mercurian Metal Bugs (MMBs), rather cute little fellows with lots of legs and a penchant for eating robot parts, have infiltrated the parts delivery system and may come out of the overhead chute at any time.   As long as you place these guys in the Mercurian Metal Bug Bin, all is well.   If you don't. . . well, lets just say that it is not a pretty sight.

3). The longer you play the faster the parts (and MMBs) appear and the faster they appear, the faster you put them away and the faster you put them away, the faster they appear. . .

ungus Patrol. As a member of the Mothership fungus patrol, you spent your days sitting alerts in your bungee cord powered fungus removal craft, happily chanting the fungus patrol motto, "Beware for there's a fungus among us."   Now you are patrolling your sector of the ship when fungus spores appear from nowhere, insidious oval green spores that quickly turn into belligerent bungee cord chomping fungi.   Spotting a target fungus, you aim your ship directly at it an pressing the release button (mouse button), you rocket out, powered by the finest bungee cords in the universe and quickly mop the fungus up.   As you ricochet back to the starting location, you're already turning your ship around to clean up another fungus, before it gets to your bungee cord.   As you deal with the fungal onslaught, spores appear more frequently and the fungi move quicker (evolving, perhaps?).   Keep close tabs on all the fungi 'cause a fungi on your bungee will send you ballistic.

Nerdoids. Nerdoids are a strange alien life-form, much like some humans I know, who are basically brownish-orange blobs, with glasses, that like to spend their time in the computer room.   I have no problem with this but you, as the computer room controller and keeper of the comic books, must prevent over-use of the computer room and under-use of the comic book resource.   Lucky thing that the Nerdoids like reading comic books and will forgo computing for comics.   All you have to do is launch comics books to the Nerdoids and they're happy.   Your job is not without risks.   Nerdoids, much like some of my computer addicted friends (including myself), are a little clumsy and tend to drop things; in their case they drop calculators and pocket protectors.   If you get hit by these you lose comic books. Lose too many comic books and you'll run out of comic books before you run out of Nerdoids and then they'll get into the computer room. . . the last thing you want is to let them into there.   The longer you play, the faster the Nerdoids get and the faster and more unpredictable the falling calculators and pocket protectors get.   Be careful, 'cause a Nerdoid can carry a lot of pocket protectors.

Quasar Klutzes. What is a Quasar and why are they klutzes?   A Quasar is a bipedal, turret eyed blue space creature with a penchant for bananas and an acute lack of situational awareness.   Easily distracted, Quasars will slip on banana peels (dropped by other Quasars) or bump into each other when trying to reach the same banana.   In this game your raison d'être is to feed Quasars bananas by floating them past them on helium balloons.   Said Quasars will then drop the peels, causing the following Quasars to slip and fall off the structure.   While Alien Arcade doesn't go into the specifics of why you should do this, you should do it anyway and maybe later you'll be told why.   In the meantime, you release banana laden balloons in an effort to feed the Quasars and cause them to fall, while dodging falling Quasars and the banana dissolving clouds of Robot Dog gas that are released by the rampaging Robot Dog.   As you advance through the infinite waves the game speeds up and falling objects begin to reinvent the laws of physics.   You have been warned.

uasar Rain. Now that we know what Quasars are and have caused a large number of them to fall, where are they falling to? Well, it appears that they appear above you and your Mom-E-Tron, a catapult-like device that safely bounces them onto one of four conveyor-like beds. Using your mouse, you position the Mom-E-Tron so that the falling Quasars avoid falling into the Safe-T-Net and instead bounce into bed, making some interesting sounds. Since the Quasars have slipped on bananas, there are also falling bananas that cause you to lose points. As with the other games in the Alien Arcade, there are an infinite number of levels, with speed increases at each new level. Eventually the Quasars come streaming down so fast that it indeed looks like a Quasar rain.

Stink Snakes of Saturn. Now here we have an interesting life-form, a snake, purportedly from Saturn, with the ability to turn into a happy face if hit with a pie. You sit in your handy pie launcher and are faced with wave after wave of Stink Snakes. Hit them with pies and they're happy (and they become happy faces). Miss five snakes and you lose. As the game progresses the snakes become more evasive and move faster (you'd think that the pies didn't taste good or something) but it is definitely fast-paced action and a barrel of laughs. You're limited in the number of pies, so use them wisely.

Summary. Alien Arcade is a horse of a different wheelbase. Unlike games that have one module and a steep learning curve, Alien Arcade's six modules are all simple, as evidenced by the one page manual, yet immediately entertaining, even for adults. The action is fast paced and requires hand eye coordination equal to that of any of the more typical arcade games. The sounds used in Alien Arcade are amusing and the graphics equally so, if a little simple. Still, for a reasonable price, you get six games that can do triple duty as games for younger children, games for we children over 20, or as a stress relieving tool. Any parent who has children interested in computer and video games should definitely take a look at Alien Arcade; it doesn't require the most advance hardware (even my old Mac Plus can run it), it is death-free and it is strangely addictive for so simple a concept (much like Tetris).

Pros
• No violence
• Simple, addictive game play
• Runs on most Macs
• Six different games included in the Alien Arcade
• Good sounds
• Infinite levels of play

Cons
• No means of selecting levels of difficulty for those of us with slower than normal reflexes
• Graphics are simple
• Some modules may be physically impossible to play at the higher levels