

**Concept Approval
for
High-Attraction T-MEK**

10/6/94 8:30 AM
Central Conference Room

Distribution:

Geoff Holmes
Mark Pierce
Dan Van Elderen
Dennis Wood
Mary Fujihara
David Macias
Jim Flack
Matthew Ford
Gary Stark
Brian LaFrance
Norm Avellar
Rich Chargin

St. Louis

Company Confidential

Goals of this meeting

- 1) To decide whether to move the T-MEK LBE project forward to initiation.
- 2a) If NO on #1, to examine Team T-MEK's alternate options.
- 2b) If YES on #1, to look ahead to Team T-MEK's next project beyond.

Desires of the team

Our first choice would be for us to do the T-MEK mini LBE (High Attraction) game as described below. We firmly believe in the strength of the T-MEK license. We feel that the team and TWI have a fortuitous opportunity to explore a new market and make the most of a good game that promises to become excellent.

Either after the LBE project (if it is approved) or instead of the LBE project (if it is not approved) we want to develop a game directly for the consumer market. This game may or may not continue the T-MEK license. We are especially interested in home systems that use texture-mapped polygons. We also have an eye on the PC market, due to its demographic and the greater possibility of developing a networkable game.

Mace As excited as we are by the idea of Mace, the polygon fighting game, we are hesitant about taking this project on. Our reasons include the enormity of the task, the uncertainty of the market for expensive uprights, and our lack of experience with and/or enthusiasm for fighting games, among other reasons. We would do our best with Mace and give all our hearts to it, but we suspect that we may not be TWI's best team to do this fine game.

In general, we are eager to explore product development outside of the traditional coin-op platforms. We enjoy making 3D, immersive experiences. We believe in strengthening the T-MEK license. We all want to make interactive games, for we believe such games have a promising future.

T-MEK LBE (High Attraction)

Description

The T-MEK LBE is a 6-way combat simulator game. Game design still open; players may compete 3-on-3 in a base-capture scenario or cooperate in an effort to defeat a planetary boss, while competing for points and glory. Players choose from three experience levels, allowing those inexperienced with video games to enjoy an interactive thrill ride while giving sophisticated systems and strategy to the fanatic gamers. The action is fast and furious. The T-MEK characters of Nazrac and planetary bosses are prominent. Players enjoy a pre-staging area with instructional aids and an immersive atmosphere, and have the opportunity to purchase T-MEK merchandise afterward. We may commit to providing a software upgrade for the '96 season.

Target market

- Casual funseekers and the simulator core.
- 500 amusement parks in US.
- 50 very large family fun centers in US.
- TWI's possible future operation locations.

Look to Macias for more details and data support.

Development time

FGA by 4/95 to take advantage of amusement park summer season.
Program upgrade FGA by 4/96 for same reasons.

Unit cost

See document "Proposed Configurations".

Revenue generation

Good candidate to pilot revenue-sharing; look to Macias for details.

T-MEK consumer

Description

Every member of the T-MEK team expresses great interest in developing directly for the consumer market. We see in T-MEK an opportunity to make a killer game for the PC CD or set-top market—a game that will be the next standard of excellence for solo and LAN- or phone-linkable action games. We could become the founders of a division that TWI greatly needs: interactive home entertainment. The T-MEK license can then help build a market for the game of the future: home-to-home interactive games, played through phone lines or interactive cable. To be at the forefront of the gaming industry, we feel that TWI needs to start exploring interactive home games now rather than after our competition blazes the trail ahead of us.

Target market

Consumer simulator, action, and wired crowd.
PC/Mac platforms, perhaps SGI as well; set-top platforms such as Saturn and... Taz??

Development time

For LAN-linkable PC: 12 months from initiation to store shelves.
For Saturn or similar: 12 months from initiation to store shelves.
For home-to-home: unknown; perhaps 24 months from founding of division to grand online opening.

Mace

Description

Mace will be a polygon fighting game with the beautiful motion and views of Virtua Fighter II but imbued with a savage glee that tops Mortal Kombat II. Armed and armored combatants brought together from many times and places thrash it out in a bloody battle with a wide variety of moves, parries, weapons, and dismembering injuries.

Target market

Fighting crowd and lovers of violence everywhere.

Development time

18 months from initiation to FGA.

Unit cost

Could be \$5K @ 40% margin for family upright (judging from Gauntlet 3D estimates).

The High-Traffic Product

What is our planning horizon?

When do we need to become profitable?

What is the product and business model?

What is the impact on our coin-op and consumer business?

Product Definition

Multiple Configurations: The high-traffic product is intended for several types of customers with varying abilities and needs. For example, a mobile system is required for State fairs and some FEC operators.

Operational Considerations: Operational issues include, minimizing costs and designing with customer usage and support in mind. Creative partnering needs to be explored.

Financial Considerations: These products will require establishing revenue sharing partnerships in addition to out-right sales partnerships.

Strategic Implications: The Property business is about consumer exposure and the generation of profit generating vehicles to exploit property popularity. The high-end is also an obvious fit for cost-effective technology driver applications. It's possible that high-profile operations may be a better investment than traditional arcade and FEC locations.

This product will allow us to expand the customer base of our other coin-op products. This will reduce our dependence on our current distributors.

T-MEK is the lowest risk product available and best suited to explore this opportunity.

We need to assign adequate marketing and sales resources to have a successful product for 1995.

Customer Considerations

- Capacity. What is the throughput?
- Quality. Reliability and perceived quality to the consumer.
- Price. Return on investment.
- Novelty. They need to provide something new on an annual basis.

The customers for this product are segmented in the following table. These figures are estimates of domestic operations and do not include a larger world-wide market. The global opportunity could be significant.

Market Segmentation

<u>Segment</u>	<u>Market Size</u>	<u>Daily Traffic</u>	<u>Price/play</u>
Tourist Anchors	20	High (thousands)	?
Theme Parks	20	High (thousands)	\$2-4
State Fairs and Festivals	20	High (thousands)	?
Avg. Amusement Parks	500	Med. (low thousands)	?
Shopping Malls	?	Med. (high hundreds)	?
FEC's	100	Med. (med-high hundreds)	\$1-2 very low
Deadicated LBE's	20+	Low (low hundreds)	\$8+ high

*price/play figures are based on John Odum's estimates, Nazrac's Tour, and Virtual World Entertainment Centers.

Our Customers are interested.

Nickels and Dimes is currently exploring the possibility of purchasing Two Galaxian 3's from Namco. They are also considering a purchase of eight Virtuality products. David Robert's stated that they have 25-30 stores that could accommodate a \$50-60K high-end product. He also stated that they are exploring a two-player laser tag product that costs well over \$100 thousand.

Edison Brothers entered an agreement with Virtuality PLC to support their VR product line. They reportedly have 25 mobile installations and a total of 85 machines. Some of their Dave and Busters locations have a Galaxian 3.

Financial Scenario

Eight revenue sharing and or lease arrangements are established, worldwide based on the Deluxe configuration. This will represent 96 cabinets.

Twenty-four Standard configurations are operating in a combination of amusement parks, F.E.C.'s and Malls. This will represent 144 cabinets.

Refer to the attached spreadsheet for revenues and costs.

Assumptions

Eight, 12-seat Deluxe sites are aggregated with twenty-four, 6-seat Standard sites.

Seasonality is figured into the Utilization (%) estimate, and not captured monthly.

One percent of those who play, purchase a small margin merchandise item. This figure could be dramatically larger for future product themes based on popularized Warner Bros. properties.

Mall space rental runs an average of \$6,000 a month for a 5,000 square foot, Just for Fun arcade in a Chicago suburb. We are fully burdening the Eight Deluxe sites with this monthly estimate and applying 50% of this burden to the Standard configuration sites. The Standard configuration sites are FEC's which have other equipment. As another example, Magic Mountain leases their buildings to high traffic hopefuls. A dedicated Karaoke building made \$200K in a year of which 35% went to Magic Mountain. From John Odum's perspective; This comes out to \$ 77 per hour on average for each operating hour, of which \$ 27 went to Magic Mountain. They are open to negotiating leases like these.

Location Staffing is an estimate based on eight Deluxe locations needing 5 people and twenty-four Standard locations needing 3 people. For a total of 112.

Other expenses include six accounting and support individuals or some fraction of managerial individuals. Minimal traveling is included.

Depreciation is 60% year one, 40% year two. The Seat cost is derived by the number of Deluxe and Standard location and is rounded up.

		Monthly Pro-Forma												TOTAL 199X
		Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	
REVENUES														
Number of stations	240													
Play time (hour)	0.1													
Players/hour	2,400													
Operable hours/week	84													
Utilization (%)	25%													
Players/week	50,400													
Play fee (\$)	\$3.00													
Operations Total		\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$654,696	\$7,856,352
MERCHANDISE														
Units sold	1 percent	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	2,182	26,188
Avg. price/unit (\$)	\$5.00													
Avg. COGS/unit	\$1.50													
Total Gross Profit		\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$7,638	\$91,657
TOTAL REVENUES		\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$662,334	\$7,948,009
EXPENSES														
MARKETING														
Launch Program														
Shipping \$3K/truck	30	\$90,000												\$90,000
Training		\$30,000												\$30,000
Advertising		\$36,000												\$36,000
Promotions		\$24,000			\$12,000			\$12,000			\$12,000			\$60,000
Advertising		\$72,000			\$24,000			\$24,000			\$24,000			\$144,000
		\$252,000	\$0	\$0	\$36,000	\$0	\$0	\$36,000	\$0	\$0	\$36,000	\$0	\$0	\$360,000
FLOOR SPACE														
Deluxe Locations	\$6,000/mo	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$48,000	\$576,000
Standard Locations	\$3,000/mo	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$864,000
Total		\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$120,000	\$1,440,000
STAFF														
Number of employees	112	five in 8 locations/four in 24 locations												
Salaries and benefits														
\$10/hour 40 hours		\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$400	\$4,800
Total		\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$44,800	\$537,600
OTHER														
Acct & Tech. Support	6 people	\$95K burden per person												
Salary, Bene's, Travel		\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$47,500	\$570,000
Seat Cost, incl. theming	\$6,000													
Deprec'n(60%40%yr1:2)	2yr.	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$72,000	\$864,000
TOTAL EXPENSES		\$416,300	\$164,300	\$164,300	\$200,300	\$164,300	\$164,300	\$200,300	\$164,300	\$164,300	\$200,300	\$164,300	\$164,300	\$3,771,600
EBIT														
Time Warner Split	40%													
Location Split	60%													

Proposed configurations for High-Attraction T-MEK Macias and Ford • 10/4/94

Configuration 1: Mobile

The mobile configuration provides minimal theming. No extra monitors show the game play, and the cabinet is standard with new decals. VCRs and monitors show the necessary videos for the advertisement, background story, and control instructions. Minimal posters are provided.

Item	Unit cost	Units	Extended
Standard T-MEK unit	\$5,648.00	3	\$16,944.00
GT24M8 PCB	\$35.00	6	\$210.00
MOB ROM 1Mx8	\$6.00	48	\$288.00
New decals and bezel	\$180.00	3	\$540.00
VCR + 27" monitor + stand	\$1,760.00	3	\$5,280.00
Poster	\$250.00	4	\$1,000.00
Crates for shipping	\$4,500.00	1	\$4,500.00
Total Cost:			\$28,762.00
Price at 65% margin:			\$82,177.14

verify math

Configuration 2: Standard

The standard configuration provides the location with basic theming. Two external monitors shows the game action to spectators. The cabinet is standard with new decals. Diamond plating on the floor surrounds the units. VCRs and monitors show the videos for the advertisement, background story, control instructions, and followup. A standard number of posters are provided. A control instruction station is provided. A light box with sign is provided.

Item	Unit cost	Units	Extended
Standard T-MEK unit	\$5,648.00	3	\$16,944.00
GT24M8 PCB	\$35.00	6	\$210.00
MOB ROM 1Mx8	\$6.00	48	\$288.00
New decals and bezel	\$180.00	3	\$540.00
External monitor + audio	\$650.00	2	\$1,300.00
VCR + 27" monitor + stand	\$1,760.00	4	\$7,040.00
Control instruction station	\$600.00	1	\$600.00
Poster	\$250.00	6	\$1,500.00
Light box with sign	\$1,800.00	1	\$1,800.00
Basic theming package	\$1,500.00	1	\$1,500.00
Total Cost			\$31,722.00
Price at 65% margin			\$90,634.29

Rough development costs for High-Attraction T-MEK

Ford and Macias • 10/4/94

Item	Qty	Years	Unit cost	Extended
Personnel				\$434,775.00
Core team members	5	0.5	\$93,000.00	\$232,500.00
Industrial design	0.5	0.5	\$93,000.00	\$23,250.00
Audio group	0.5	0.5	\$93,000.00	\$23,250.00
Technician	0.5	0.5	\$93,000.00	\$23,250.00
Publications	0.5	0.25	\$93,000.00	\$11,625.00
Software tools group	1	0.1	\$93,000.00	\$9,300.00
FCC/UL	1	0.2	\$93,000.00	\$18,600.00
Product manager	1	0.5	\$93,000.00	\$46,500.00
Misc. support	1	0.5	\$93,000.00	\$46,500.00
Services				\$100,500.00
Cabinet graphic prototyping	1		\$3,000.00	\$3,000.00
Poster design	4		\$1,500.00	\$6,000.00
Tooling for plastic parts	1		\$15,000.00	\$15,000.00
Alias training	1		\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00
Video production	1		\$75,000.00	\$75,000.00
Material/Equipment				\$45,000.00
SGL Indigo 2 system + Alias	1		\$45,000.00	\$45,000.00
ICEless development system	3	In house?	Unit cost?	???
Total Estimated Development Costs				\$580,275.00

A Visit to the TANK LBE

Walking through the TANK LBE from a new player's perspective
TANK group • Matthew Ford • 9/24/93

Note from 10/5/94: I wrote this more than a year ago. Many things about the LBE concept and the T-MEK game have changed, but this still might help get across the general mood. I plan to re-write this should we go to initiation.

I am going to narrate an imaginary visit to an ideal installation of TANK as an LBE. Since "TANK" is a temporary "working title" for the game, I'm replacing it with the name "ArenaX".

My wife Katharine and I are shopping in Mondo Mall on a Saturday afternoon. After buying a few things, we come to the midpoint of the mall. A sign points downstairs advertising the mall's resident arcade. A banner hanging underneath the sign announces, "NEW! Play ArenaX, a virtual reality adventure you can't get at home!" I remember hearing about this new arcade game which is like that BattleTech game way out in Walnut Creek. I cajole my wife into checking it out.

When we first enter the arcade, I see in the back a sign with scrolling LED letters, visible over the dozens of game cabinets. It reads, "Challenge your friends to a game of ArenaX! Enter a virtual reality where the warrior with the most courage, fastest reflexes, and smartest strategy wins!" As we walk back, I notice a few other fun games I make a mental note to play later on.

We arrive at the back of the arcade, where a large section has been marked off with those thick velvet ropes they use in movie theaters. Two high-school age boys are already there. They are standing just inside the gap in the ropes, looking up at a large monitor overhead. Beyond the monitor lurk four large cabinets, looking like they are made out of charred and battle-worn metal, with sliding doors enclosing whoever might be in them. We step through the ropes and look at the overhead monitor.

The first thing I notice is the sound—it's all around me. There are two speakers to either side of the overhead monitor, and there are two more speakers on top of the two rope-supporting posts that we just walked through. Sometimes I hear shots and explosions behind me, sometimes in front.

The monitor shows movement through a canyon on a desolate planet. Every once in a while the movement takes a turn and I see flickering flames and wreckage. At the bottom of the screen is a control panel with flashing lights. In the top corner of the screen is the name "Mongrel". It seems that we are seeing things from Mongrel's point of view.

A tank comes into view on the monitor. A digital cursor appears over it and the name "Sally" pops up over the cursor. Mongrel's point of view pivots so that the "Sally" tank is right in the center. A target cursor in the center of the screen changes color. All around me I hear a descending hum like electric sparks discharging, and a glowing green ball of electricity appears on the monitor, streaking toward Sally. It hits, and Sally's tank bursts into flames. Looks pretty cool.

Then the monitor's view shifts sharply to the side, and the control panel vanishes. The viewpoint pivots to see a tank—the one we were just looking out from—vanishing in the distance. The viewpoint sails quickly across the battlefield, approaches another tank, and slides right into it. The control panel reappears. The name "Slamdog" appears in the upper corner. Hm, someone else's point of view.

"Would you like to make a reservation?" The voice startles me, and I look to the left. A young woman is behind a small counter with a cash register. On the counter is a hunk of molten glass with the label "Excavated from The Fire Pit on ArenaX". I ask, "How much does it cost?"

"Each game lasts ten minutes. The cost is four dollars per player," the woman says.

"Four dollars, whoa," I mutter. "Why so much?"

"ArenaX is an experience unlike any other video game. You enter an entirely enclosed control pod with quadraphonic, digital sound, and have ten minutes of uninterrupted adventure, playing against real people, not a computer. It's like being inside an action movie."

I turn to Katharine. "What do you think?"

"Looks fun," she says. "What if you get blown up, though, is the game over?"

"Oh no, after just a few seconds you're back in the arena—to take revenge on whoever got you."

"You hear that?" Katharine says to me. "Watch out."

"Okay, we'll try it," I say.

"Great. This is your first time playing ArenaX?" I nod yes. She says, "The next beginner's game is in about five minutes."

The woman gives us two membership forms and shows us a spot on the counter with attached pens. My hands are full of mall packages, and the woman offers to put them behind the counter. Katharine asks me if I can fill out her card for her and leaves to play pinball. I fill out the simple forms which ask for our names, address, and a space marked "Game name—one character per box please" and a line of ten boxes. I ask the woman at the counter, "What's a game name?"

She looks up from the two teenage boys, from whom she is taking money. "A name by which you will be known in the game world. Like a nickname. Look at the top 20 board here, you'll get an idea of what other people use."

She points to a chalkboard on the wall titled "Top 20 career ArenaXers". I see a collection of funny and tough-looking names: FunBall, Meat, Caffeine, Shorty, Nirvana... On my form I write "Stucco" as my game name. I call to Katharine and ask what she wants to use.

"How about Temp From Hell?" she asks.

"Too long," I say.

"How about HellTemp?" the woman at the counter chimes in. Perfect.

I hand over the cards and pay \$8.00 for the two of us. "All set," she says. "I'll have your membership cards ready after the battle is over. You'll be playing in Sortie 14—it's on your receipt. The monitor says when your time is coming up." She points to the overhead monitor and sure enough, on a strip at the bottom it says Next sortie: 14 Starting in 2 minutes.

I watch the monitor for a while and notice that the explosions on the screen match the muffled sound of explosions and cackles of delight from the game pods. Ah, the monitor is showing the game actually in progress, moving periodically from one player's point of view to another.

When the strip at the bottom of the monitor flashes Sortie 14 starting NOW, I look around for Katharine, and see her just arriving, the two boys behind her.

"Welcome, Sortie 14. Let me show you the game options." She directs us to a wall on which is a collection of small posters which look like colorful technical drawings, done in a military style. "For the upcoming battle, you need to choose four things: where on the planet ArenaX you will fight, what kind of tank you will use, a special weapon, and an evasive maneuver. The only thing you need to agree on is where you want to have the battle. Your options are described here." She motions to three rows of postcard-sized pictures on the wall in a box labeled "ArenaX Locations". "Since you are all beginners, you may only choose from the locations in the top row. The other locations are too dangerous for you."

"Aww," one of the boys says. "I wanted to try the Fire Pit."

"After five games you can choose from locations in the top or middle rows. You'll just have to get a bit more experience," the woman responds. "After deciding on a location, you each choose your tank, special weapon, and evasive maneuver. Take a look at the available options on the wall, and check off your choices on these boards." She hands each of us a glossy clipboard-sized thing with an attached dry-erase pen. On the board is a blank for my game name and checkboxes for tank types, weapon types, and evasion selections. "Ignore the team check boxes; beginners always have a free-for-all battle. I advise you to decide on a location first. Excuse me a moment," the woman says, and goes back to the battle pods. She starts letting out the players within: their game must have ended.

"It doesn't matter to me," my wife says, looking at the section of the wall showing available weapons. I look at the location selections. Each card has a picture of the planet surface and a few comments about the characteristics there. "The Ruins" have a wide playing field broken up by remnants of destroyed buildings. "The Sun's Anvil" looks like an enormous desert with few obstructions. "North Glacier" looks interesting...

"How about the Storm Plain?" one of the boys says. I look. It is described as having murky light, broken hills, and perilous lightning strikes which add a random element to the game. Looks cool. "Okay," I say. The other boy nods.

We then all privately decide on tanks, special weapons, and defenses. There are quite a few of each to choose from. I look for the woman and see that she is with the group who just played, directing their attention to the overhead monitor for battle highlights. She catches my glance, comes back over, and answers our questions.

I decide on a lightly armored but quick-moving tank, a guided missile as my special weapon, and a defense called Time Warp which I'm not sure I entirely understand but am eager to try.

The attendant is just finishing handing out some sheets of paper to the other group, who are talking excitedly about the battle they just had. The attendant comes to us and asks, "Have you decided on a location?" We tell her. She steps to a PC,

moves the mouse, and clicks. "The Storm Plain it is. Let me review the controls, then I will take your selection boards."

Referring to a dummy set of controls next to the PC, the attendant shows us how to move our tank, how to fire the different weapons, and a few strategic tips. "Are there any questions?"

Katharine asks, "What about the lightning?"

"Ah yes. You will see moving through the air dark storm clouds. When they start to flicker underneath and you hear a crackling sound, it would be a good idea to move."

I clear my throat. "What if you don't?"

"You'll have to find that out the hard way," the woman replies with a grin. "May I take your selection boards?"

We hand them over. She glances at them, then sets them on the counter. She leads us back to the pods. "HellTemp, in here please." My wife climbs into a pod. The attendant slides shut the door so that the pod is completely sealed off. "Roach?" One of the boys climbs into a pod. "Stucco?"

I get into the pod and the door closes. I'm sitting in a molded seat. The two control sticks are down at either thigh. I move them nervously. Right in front of me, the huge screen appears as though I am looking through the windshield of a tank. A control panel glows at the bottom of the screen. It looks like what I saw on the monitor outside. Outside the windshield of the tank is an industrial-looking corridor stretching off into the darkness. On the control panel flashes "Prepare for battle". A deep rumble fills the pod. It feels as if I am sitting on a huge engine.

After a several seconds of nervous anticipation, a voice crackles over the speaker. "Warriors, prepare to enter the Storm Plain."

The engine revs and I start moving down the corridor, faster and faster. I come to some banged-up steel doors which swing open just as I arrive. I hear a sound of wind. I see a dark field of stones with high walls in the distance. Clouds roll overhead. Lightning flickers on the horizon. I roll out of the corridor. The doors are gone, and I am alone in this imaginary canyon.

After moving around for a few experimental moments, I see a shape dimly moving out there. I look at my radar readout and it registers another tank in front of me. As I'm taking this in, the tank has turned toward me. A glowing cursor brackets it and the name HellTemp appears next to it. For some reason my tension heightens. Just as I consider relaxing, a glowing ball is streaking toward me from HellTemp! I try to swivel out of the way, but too late: I hear a loud crackle and the screens on my control panel fill with static for a moment. My energy bar is a couple notches smaller.

"Hi honey!" I hear my wife's voice over the intercom.

I press the intercom button and shout "Hey!" but she is already running off, dodging my fire...

The game is full of surprises, ambushes, and turnarounds. Thanks to the lightning the radar is sporadic at best, so I never know what may lie around the next corner. I try to attack my opponent's bases to get points, and blow up storage buildings in hopes of getting special weapons or recharging my depleted supplies.

Once I blow the building up, I drive into the wreckage and pick things up automatically. One time I get a fun weapon which, when I press my trigger button, instead of the usual particle beam I shoot forth a blitz of sparks in a wide area in front of me. When Roach gets caught in the spray, his tank goes out of control, sparks crackling all over it. This is the same thing that happens when someone is struck by lightning, as I discovered firsthand—the controls don't do much to control your direction though you still can fire, and you just have to ride out the several seconds it takes for the frenzy to die off. As Roach's tank darts about randomly, I am able to finish him off with my thumb button—his energy was low from a recent exchange with Bubba, which is why I went after him. Unfortunately, the fun spark weapon only lasts for three bursts before my trigger fires particle beams again.

When HellTemp blasts me one last time with my energy low, my control panel vanishes and my point of view swings back so I am looking at my own tank as it explodes. Nice touch. My point of view sails across the battlefield until it gets near the end of a canyon. I lift up into the air, then straight down. The control panel swings up from the bottom of the screen and I am once again off and running, seeking revenge on the weakened HellTemp. Under my score on the control panel flashes "Destruction Penalty"; this means that the next 1000 points I earn will be only half credit. Hm, nailing HellTemp with a guided missile should help get me past that problem...

So the game goes on. Once I find myself in a crossfire between Roach and Bubba. The quadrasonic sound makes this especially intense as I hear the zap of their shots hitting me from both in front and behind. A siren goes off, letting me know my energy is low. I hit my EVASIVE ACTION button and suddenly I am back to where I was about 30 seconds ago—pointing towards the spot where I was (will be?) ambushed. So that's the Time Warp! I circle around to the other side of the hill and attack the confused Roach from behind.

I have a limited supply of guided missiles and time warps, indicated on my control panel. I get more by destroying storage buildings and probing the wreckage. While doing this, I periodically set free robotic walkers which march around shooting at everyone. Oops. I also find some places guarded by frustrating turrets which pop up out of the ground, take a few shots at me, then disappear again.

By the time the words "30 seconds left in the battle" sound in my ears, I am almost relieved. It has been an intense ten minutes—I'm sweating! Soon my point of view lifts up out of the tank and shoots straight back, through the canyon walls, the scene fading to black.

The attendant opens my pod door. "All right, Stucco, come on out," she says. I emerge to see my fellow fighters looking as dazed as I feel. The two boys are already jabbering about who did the worst to the other. I look at my wife and squint my eyes in mock hostility. She grins, teeth showing.

We are back at the overhead monitor. I notice a few new people choosing game options. The attendant gives us, "If you will look at the overhead monitor you will see highlights from your battle. Your score sheets will be ready in a moment."

The battle highlights do the same roving-camera trick I saw earlier, but it does not show the entire game. It seems to concentrate on the parts with the most

conflict, where someone was giving someone else a lot of damage. We all laugh and enjoy seeing things from another point of view. I got to see a huge battle that broke out among the other three players as I was off raiding storage buildings.

As the highlights end, the attendant gives each of us a sheet of paper hot from the printer. It details each of our scores and gives a short play-by-play of who destroyed who and when. I came in third, just behind HellTemp! I guess I spent a little too much time raiding storage buildings and not enough time ganging up on people... Roach came in first, as I has guessed he would. He was playing well. The attendant said, "And here are your prizes for those who destroyed others more times than they were themselves destroyed. For Roach, who got seven others and was himself destroyed only twice—" she handed some dark blue thing to Roach. She continued, "And for HellTemp, who claimed five victims and was destroyed three times." The attendant gave Katharine two light blue strings of... beads! They were like Mardi Gras beads, the plastic kind that cost about a penny a string and you could attach around your neck or wrist. Despite their simplicity, I envied them.

"Wow, regular players must have a million of these things," Katharine said.

"Not really. You can trade five light blues for a more prestigious dark blue, like Roach got. You can trade five dark blues for a purple, five purples for a red, and so on, all the way up to small blacks and large blacks."

"Oh," I said, resolving to earn some beads myself. Perhaps tomorrow. I carefully folded the score sheet and put it in my pocket.

"Here are your membership cards," the woman said, giving Katharine and I credit-card sized pieces of cardstock on which was printed our game names, some numbers, and a bar code. "Our number is on the back. You can call and make a reservation, or schedule one now. Excuse me," she said, and went to the counter to help a new customer. We watched the live broadcast of the current battle for a while, got our bags and went off to play a few games in the arcade.

"Maybe we should call Rik and Geri. They would get a kick out of this," Katharine suggested, twirling her light blue beads.

I agreed. Maybe with a smart bomb as my special weapon I could really kick some butt.