

# Operators' Salvation In Bearish Coin Market

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box every week. You have to nurture it. Just ask the operators of some 58,000 prize dispensing games currently on the street.

According to V/T's 1990 *Census of the Industry*, prize dispensing equipment accounted for \$603 million in dollar volume in 1989, with 58,000 units on location — 8,000 more than 1988.

Arcade games, the companion to the lucrative prize dispensers, passed the \$30 million mark in dollar volume for the first time in 1989. The weekly average cashbox take was \$58, with 10,000 units on location — 2,000 more than the previous years.

Playing a more critical role in the solvency of redemption operation are the suppliers, who are constantly scouting American culture for the next hottest licensed product, piece of costume jewelry, or other doodad for which every player wants to vie. This past year, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles were the big hit in the licensed category. Inventive suppliers put desireables such as baseball cards and Bart Simpson in capsules.

Evergreen products — popular items that hold a permanent fixation for the player base — are another popular route to go in supplying a redemption center.

This year saw a mix of redeemable product as the industry has never seen. There are now telephones, Walkman radios, tee-shirts and baseball caps stuffed side-by-side with the more traditional pins, buttons, stuffed animals and other thingamajigs inside cranes.

Ten-speed bicycles dangling above  
(Continued on Page 93)

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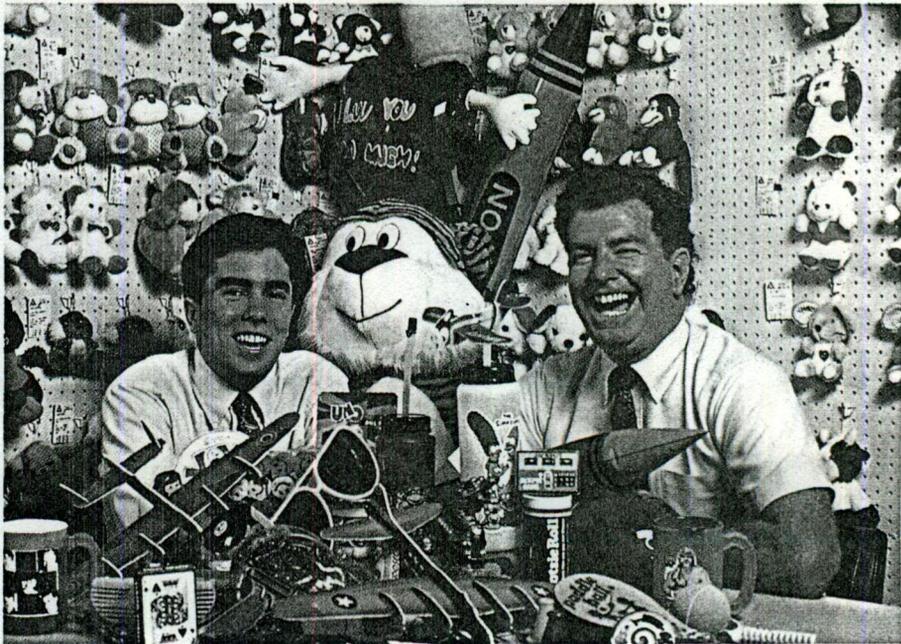
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**HAPPY JACK:** Acme Premium Supply's Jack Kelly (right) sure gets a kick out of his job selling the company's diversified line of plush and other goodies to redemption centers the world over. Here, he yucks it up with the company's Glenn Sagendorph. For more details see story on Page 116.

## AMOA Expo Sold Out; Annual Fete Largest Industry Show Ever For Coin-Op

CHICAGO, Ill. — It's official. AMOA Expo '90 will be the largest show ever, with a record 705 booths sold to more than 200 exhibitors for the annual industry fete, slated for Oct. 24-28 at the New Orleans Convention Center.

Of special note in this year's show is the first "Redemption Row" exhibit arranged for the Expo, featuring a confluence of manufacturers, suppliers and distributors who have made this market segment thrive in the recent past, and who have joined forces for an even more cohesive market.

Of course, the usual celebratory welcoming ceremonies, hospitality suites, awards banquets and promotional eye-catchers make this event an industry must for anyone seriously interested in the coin-operated amusement business.

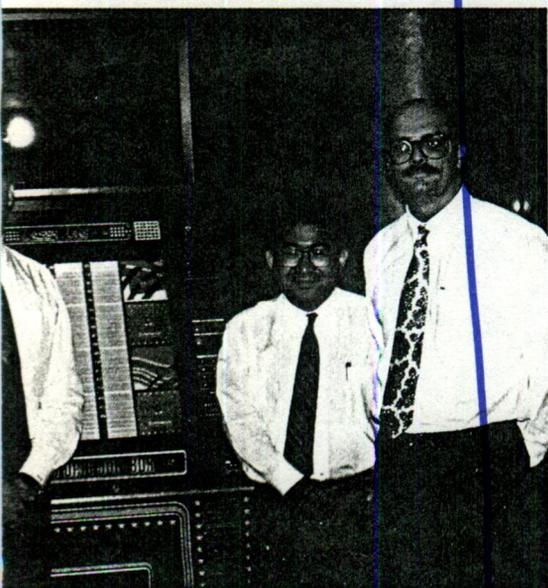
This year's Expo will see the elevation of current AMOA Vice-President Jim Trucano to the post of AMOA President; the annual Wayne Hesch Scholarship Fund Drawing; the meeting of The Half Century Club; and, as expected, the introduction of a panoply of new product designed to give a quick ROI to operations coast to coast.

Look for V/T's unparalleled AMOA Expo '90 Preview next month. All the exhibitors, all the events, all the new

products will be highlighted in an edition designed to serve as an invaluable guide to the Big Show.



**WINNER...AND STILL CHAMP:** Atari Games Corp. had never produced a fighting game. But "Pit-Fighter" has changed all that. And there's a whole new angle to the theme now, thanks to the Atarians. See story on Page 102.



ht, Pioneer's Mary Carlross, Paul Scribner, Steve Sawawa are joined by Philadelphia operator Emery [unclear] LA East at the launching of the company's box. See story on Page 95.

TOP OF THE HEAP

# With 'Pit-Fighter,' Atari Enters The Fighting Game, But In A Whole No

MILPITAS, Calif. — Maybe the rumblings were heard around the Atari Games Corp. cafeteria. After all, there were a lot of people talking about it. Engineer Rob Rowe. Product Manager Jerry Momoda. And that new guy, Gary Stark. Especially him.

The scuttlebutt was that Atari was going to design and release a fighting game, that proven earner that Atari execs previously had considered too pedestrian, too volatile for the company to embark upon.

But that wasn't all.

This game was going to be different — very different. Groundbreaking. Very unpedestrian. Very Atarian.

After many months, that game has arrived and proceeded to be a cash-box champ most anywhere it has been placed. It's "Pit-Fighter," a two- or four-player dedicated viddie employing actual fighting sequences chosen from thousands of frames of videotape shot of three different fighters — two martial artists and a wrestler.

This Atari first was also the first project headed up by Gary Stark, the upstart who convinced the Atari fathers that it wasn't going to be just any old fighting game.

Momoda remembers.

"I said, 'Hey, these games are making money, and it's a proven theme.' Ever since I've been at Atari, I was favoring development of a fighting game. It was obvious kids liked this kind of thing. It's how you present. Violence is distasteful, but if you present it in a way that is not too bloody, it's not so bad."

This was the type of project Stark had in mind when he made the pitch to lead his first Atari project.

"I looked at what was hot and figured Atari needed to do a fighting game," said Stark. "It's been interesting to get them to do it. Now, doing a fighting game would not be as hard a thing after getting this far."

As Momoda tells it, there's still a lot of flexibility with the fighting game format. For one, there's more to the martial arts craze in the United States than the sheer violence of it all. It's campy to sit around Saturday afternoons with friends, eat pizza and watch "When Tae Kwon Do Strikes." It's a fantasy to watch Japanese heroes such as "Ultra Man" do battle with vile monsters bent on taking over earth. It's becoming embossed in the leisure time culture.

But he's quick to point to Gary Stark, Rob Rowe and Mark Steven Pierce in explaining why Atari did this game. These engineers had new ideas. And in the video game business, anything that's different and earns is the objective in this bearish era.

### COMPLEX PROCESS

"Pit-Fighter" is produced with digitally-processed graphics. Real people were filmed performing myriad poses, which were later choreographed into a cohesive whole.

"These guys did a great job in essentially directing these types of models to assimilate all this action," Momoda said. "The programmers put it all together, made it a real fighting game. The digitally-processed graphics was an evolutionary process from the first time Gary got the idea. It grew to the point where the quality of the graphics kept improving. We tweaked and tweaked, doing things like upgrading the quality of the video equipment. It was the first time we produced this type of look for a game, and it was a real learning experience."

The end result was a game that cinematically zoom and pan and give a three-dimensional look. "It's a really neat feature of this hardware," said Momoda. "We knew players wanted to see big graphics, but also see a little more background in a game. We thought they would like the close-up and zoom-in and zoom-



**PIT CREW:** It takes more than three designers to t above is everyone who had a hand in bringing th

out look. Having the size of the characters change depending who and what is happening on the screen. The 'camera' vantage point of the player adapts to the gameplay situation."

Now that the Atarians are using terms such as "zoom," "pan" and "close-up," and considering that the company is now majority-owned by the Time-Warner conglomerate, can it be hard to imagine that this type of project will be encouraged more often? Not at all. A beaming Ed Hamoway of Time-Warner proudly keynoted the introduction of "Pit-Fighter" at 30 Rockefeller in New York last month, accentuating that more breakthrough projects are to be expected from Atari Games Corp.

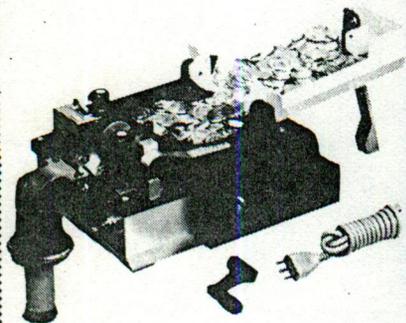
Imagine having Warner's considerable experience at film making at your disposal for projects building upon "Pit-Fighter."

Rowe explains that the Atari team that worked on the game team virtually had to become movie makers to implement the design. That wasn't necessarily new to Rowe. For a few years now, he has been shooting Atari's promotional videos in-house. Now, he films "all the promotional stuff. It's a lot of fun in a campy way

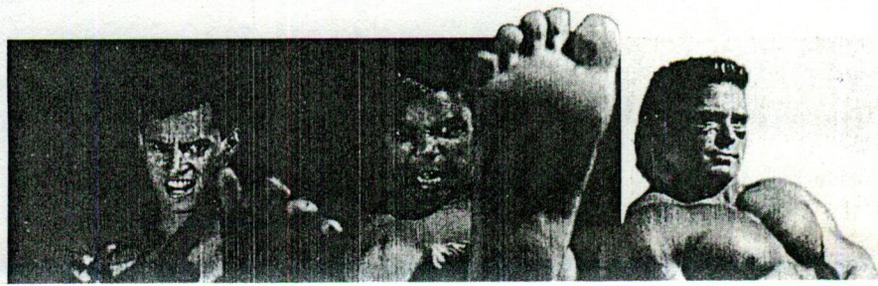
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**PIT CREW:** It takes more than three designers to tame a "Pit-Fighter." Pictured above is everyone who had a hand in bringing the game to your local arcade.

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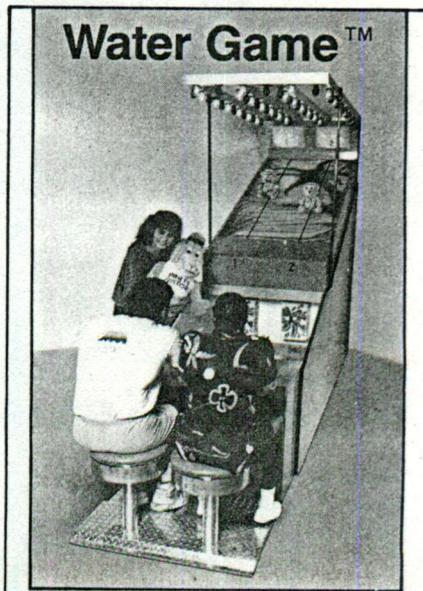
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the kind of video you see on late-night television."

For this project, Rowe, whose previous games included "Cyberball" and "720 Degrees" had a chance to videotape a much more textured production. "The high end of it was that we ran the tape into a PC and used the capture programs that we had available," Rowe said. "We tried to find the best system for manipulating graphics efficiently. With some custom operations we did in-house, we turned out 800 frames of graphic pictures per week. We posed each character, took one shot of them, then moved on to the next shot. The microcomputers aren't really fast enough to capture the whole move,

(Continued on Page 129)



of wrestling comes to the redemptive world of coin-op.

This is not the first time the flashy, costumed mat warriors have full-nelsoned the industry with their gruff charm. Any video game operator knows "WWF Wrestling" was one of last year's smash hits.

The Monaco game plan on this package — a collection of pins for jewelry boxes, butterdish capsules, rotary cups, bulk and display — is to regularly update the product as new challengers enter the ever-growing family of professional wrestlers and new champions are crowned.

Monaco's Ira Erstling says the pins should be a raging success, considering the expansive popularity of these

love for the WWF, said the initial response to the pins has been excellent because "everybody knows these characters, not only the kids, but the adults."

He accentuates that the WWF and his pins are here to stay.

"This is going to be forever," he said. "This stuff is not a fad. It doesn't go away. As soon as new wrestlers are introduced, so we will introduce new pins. If people are smart, they will buy them. A lot of people don't realize how hot it really is.

And Erstling's personal favorite wrestler? "None other than the Ultimate Warrior," he said, without missing a beat.



**BIG BRUISERS:** Pictured above are the well-known wrestlers that are bound for redemption collection of HMS Monaco Et Cie, Ltd.

## ATARIANS LAUNCH 'PIT-FIGHTER'

*(Continued from Page 102)*

though. We're looking at some kind of hardware to capture it right from tape. We're still seeing the jagged edges, and we wanted to get the best possible picture."

Rowe said that for every move the characters had, six or eight pictures were shot. For instance, during a sequence the engineers were trying to build for a specific piece of the gameplay, they would use one frame for one part of the motion, then move on to the next movement. A meticulous process, but one that has laid the groundwork for future projects Atari already has on the table.

Stark, as project leader, said he took "a start-from-scratch" approach to the game, especially in modeling the characters, who he found in his local gym.

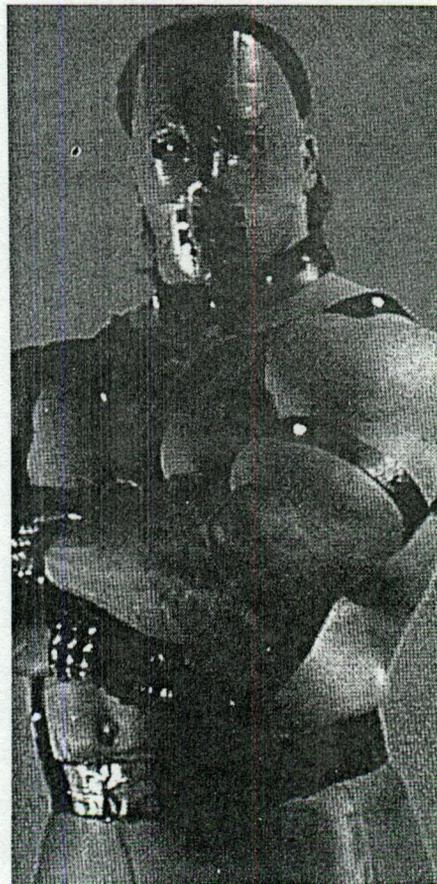
"I wanted to use physics in designing this," he said. "I looked at what way the body traveled — should it go forward or back? — and tried to put a bunch of realistic things in it. And that was interesting, because I could sit there like a kid and play the game and discover moves that I didn't consider possible."

There were more firsts the production of this game entailed. For one, Stark and Rowe effectively became Atari's versions of Coppola and Spielberg.

"We had to become our own little Hollywood," said Stark. "That was a major part of this project. Things like how a smoke machine works. All those little things. We got real efficient at it toward the end. It took a while, but when we got good at filming it, it still would take two hours to get one character's moves. But we did some amazing things with duct tape. It was more than a noble program."

Garnishing this well-baked project with his expertise in framing a game for the market was Mark Steven Pierce, who has been involved with such arcade toppers as "Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters," and "Klax."

"We added the concept of putting women in the game, tightening up the game times, things like that as we approached our release target date," Pierce said. "We approached the game as more of a violence-simulator that as a straight fighting game. Fighting games have been around now for awhile, and we see those as a genre now to address, more than just a fad. When we came on the scene, we wanted to make sure we had a real strong product. 'Pit-Fighter' has superior graphics and gameplay. It was done real well."



**ROLE PLAYING:** Muscle-bound martial artist Bill McAleenan was brought in to act out some of the fighting sequences to generate video action for "Pit-Fighter" game players.



**BIG DAY:** At right, Joe Robbins and his wife, received the \$75,000 donation for the Starting Now Primary Youth Program at Highland Park, Ill. Robbins selected Starting Now as the recipient of the donation from the Home Machine Association Charitable Foundation. Robbins received the award at last year's ACME show. The program works with various dependencies.

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# SOLO Challenge

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