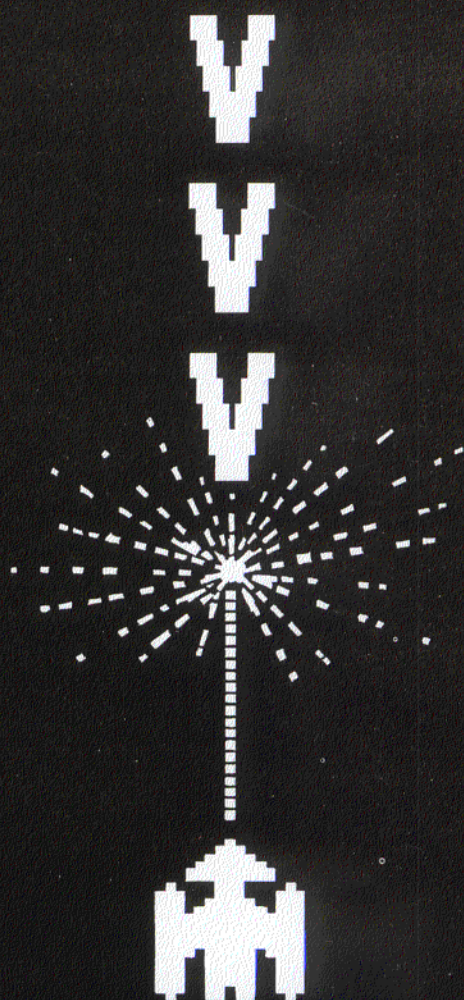


INVASION OF THE SPACE INVADERS



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SPACE INVADERS



EARLY ON IN WAVE 2; TAKING OUT THE LEFT-HAND FILES.

Space Invaders is owed the respect paid to the senior member of any family – even though we all admit that the old boy has become a bit of a bore in his declining years. Now don't get me wrong. If it hadn't been for Space Invaders, none of us would be where we are today.

The main innovation of Space Invaders was as follows: *it gave you real drama on the screen.* Who cares whether you can eliminate dots with an electric tennis ball? So what if you can knock down ten plastic cowboys on a shooting range? Who gives a toss when a toy car skids on a

patch of toy oil? After Space Invaders, we were *defending Earth*, against monsters, in sublunar skies. Here they come again. . . .

The tyro player, the kid to whom the experience of being Invaded is relatively novel, puts in his coin, slides his turreted tank into centre stage, and blasts happily away at the massed, bomb-dumping aliens. For thirty seconds or so he'll be pleased with his progress and confident about his chances. Thirty seconds later, all three of his tanks, or 'lives', will have been blown away.

Why? The phalanx of enemy invaders moves laterally across a grid not much wider than itself. When it reaches the edge of the grid, the whole army lowers a notch. Rule one: **narrow that phalanx**. Before you do anything else, take out at least three enemy columns either on the left-hand side or the right (for Waves 1 and 2, the left is recommended). Thereafter the aliens will take much longer to cross their grid and slip down another rung. Keep on working from the sides: you'll find that the invaders take forever to trudge and shuffle back and forth, and you can pick them off in your own sweet time.



The only remaining problem on Wave 1 is in taking out the last two or three aliens. Try to ignore, by the way, the pulsing, accelerating throb of the machine as the enemies descend, which is just meant to spook and panic you. The last two or three aliens move faster and spray off bombs at an angle. If they reach the surface, then the game is over, extra lives or no extra lives. It'll take you a few times out before you can start picking these guys off with any confidence. Advice: position your tank under the eave of a defensive barricade, **and keep your eye on the aliens, not on the bombs**. Got him? Now that Wave 1 is over – whew – let's move on to Wave 2. But first a word about Saucers.

'Do you count?' is a question that most Invadees ask each other pretty early on in their acquaintance. *Counting*, which bears resemblances to *Lurking* in *Asteroids*, is a tactic (despised by some) which relies on the predictability of the machine's logic board. The Saucer in *Space Invaders*, which bleeps across the top of the screen at fairly regular intervals, gives scores of 50, 100, 150 and 300, seemingly at random. Once, in *Nice*, I watched a master Invadee doing his stuff – and every Saucer gave him 300. 'Pourquoi?' I asked. Why the hell does that happen to him and hardly ever happen to me? The answer was, of course, that Monsieur

was a counter – and so was I from that day forth.

The Saucer's scoring pattern is linked to the number of shots you fire. In brief, the Saucer scores 300 on your 23rd shot and on every 15th shot thereafter. **Start counting.** I once overheard one Invadee tell another: 'Fire another three and go for 150 on the ninth.' No doubt there are more tricks and gimmicks of this kind, but in my view too much *counting* takes the fun out of being Invaded. (NB: don't hang around too long at the end of a Wave waiting for extra Saucers to show up. If you get below eight Invaders on the board, then you get no more Saucers anyway.) Some players don't bother with the Saucers at all. 'Listen,' they'll tell you. 'Screw the Saucers. My job is to defend Earth.'

The Second Wave, which starts off a rung lower, is dealt with in the same way as the First. Narrow the phalanx, work from the sides. In general, **let the Invaders move towards you**. Don't chase the body of aliens across the screen. Every game has a distinctive fire-and-dodge action that you will gradually master. In *Defender* it is a fast two-finger action on Fire and Thrust, in *Asteroids* a spray action on Fire and Rotate. In *Space Invaders* it is a continuous co-ordination of Fire and retreat, Fire and retreat. The Invaders edge sideways towards you; you peep into range, let off a shot, and retreat again – all fast and fluid, rising to about two shots a second in hectic play.

On the Third Wave your tactics change. The lowest invaders are now, at the outset, far too





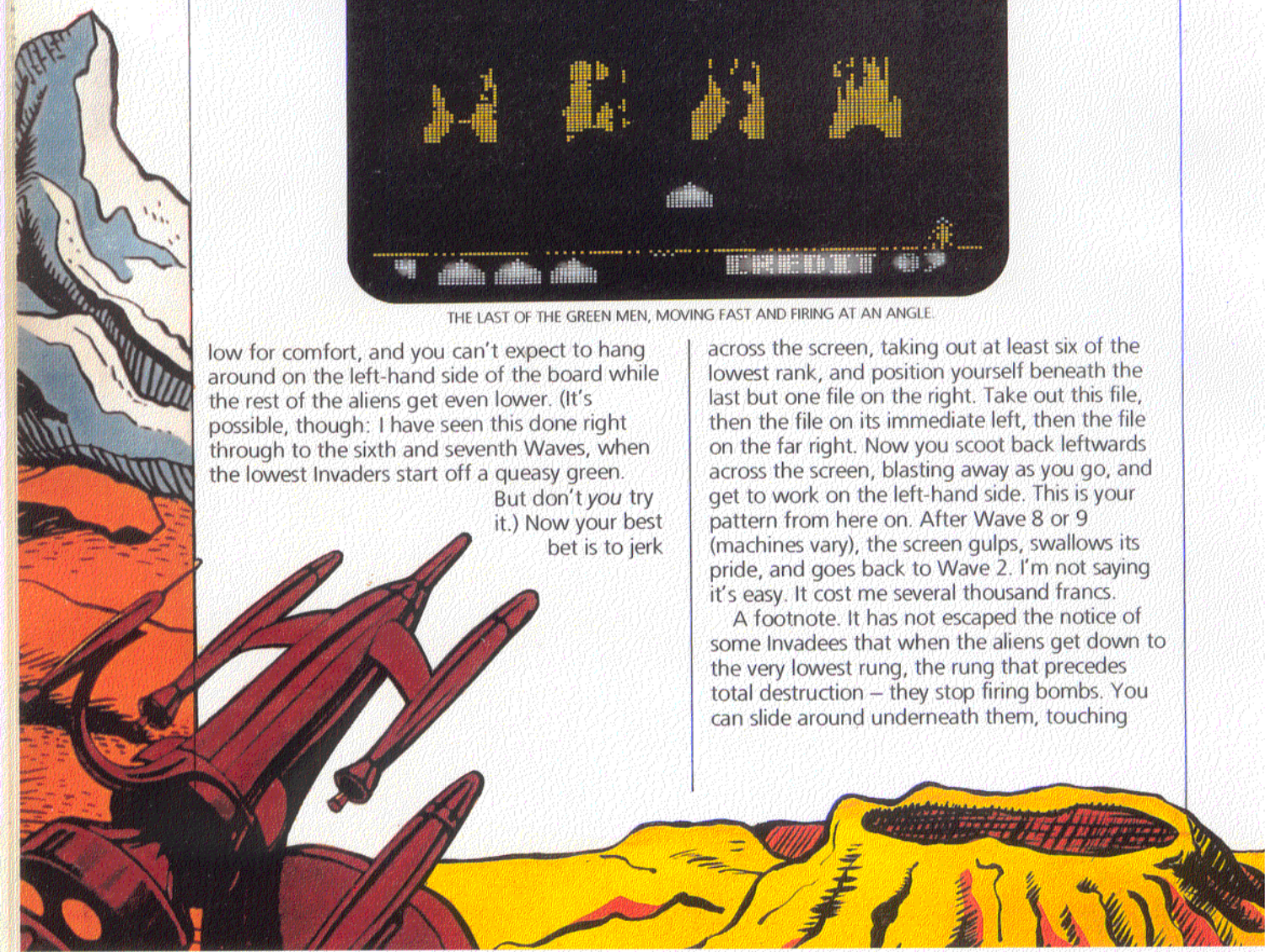
THE LAST OF THE GREEN MEN, MOVING FAST AND FIRING AT AN ANGLE.

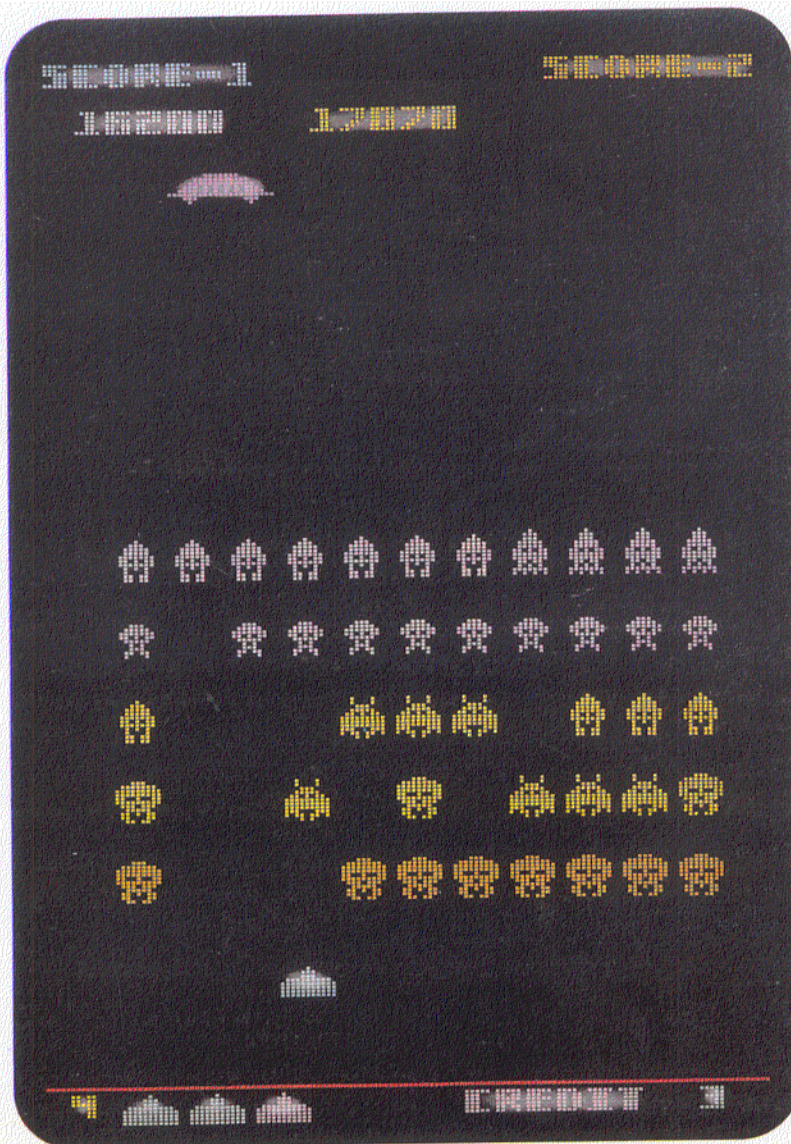
low for comfort, and you can't expect to hang around on the left-hand side of the board while the rest of the aliens get even lower. (It's possible, though: I have seen this done right through to the sixth and seventh Waves, when the lowest Invaders start off a queasy green.

But don't you try it.) Now your best bet is to jerk

across the screen, taking out at least six of the lowest rank, and position yourself beneath the last but one file on the right. Take out this file, then the file on its immediate left, then the file on the far right. Now you scoot back leftwards across the screen, blasting away as you go, and get to work on the left-hand side. This is your pattern from here on. After Wave 8 or 9 (machines vary), the screen gulps, swallows its pride, and goes back to Wave 2. I'm not saying it's easy. It cost me several thousand francs.

A footnote. It has not escaped the notice of some Invadees that when the aliens get down to the very lowest rung, the rung that precedes total destruction — they stop firing bombs. You can slide around underneath them, touching





ALL BARRICADES DESTROYED; SEMI-INVISIBLE SAUCER; INVADERS LIKELY TO BREAK INTO TWO.

them with your nozzle, and survive! Some Invadees have attempted to develop a play-strategy on this basis: they retain a lone alien at the top left-hand corner of the board, and allow the right-hand files to descend, then pick them off when they are bright green but bombless. Well, it is fun – and gives you an odd feeling of invulnerability, even of invisibility. But one slip and the game is over. And I ask you: is this any way to defend Earth?

SPACE INVADERS PART II, SUPER INVADERS, ETC., ETC.

After the success of the original machine, several mutant variations were quickly spawned. We saw – and battled with – amoebic invaders that split in two when hit; flashing phantom Saucers that dumped bombs, alien reinforcements,



barricade ballast; we saw the introduction of the highest-score nameplate, the gimmick whereby the day's most successful Invadee got to print out his name – or, more often, his favourite swear-word – at the head of the screen (see page 25). These variations made for many absorbing hours, tensed over that hot black screen. But none solved the original problem of Space Invaders Part I: the eventual boredom of the first two waves. Anyway, by that time, we were all playing Galaxian and Asteroids instead.