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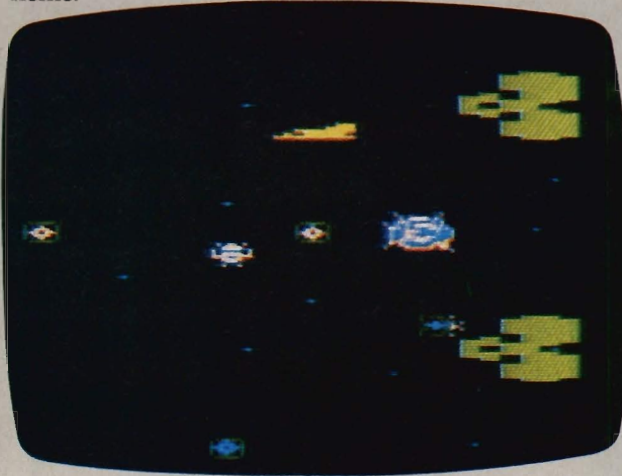
COLLISION COURSE 11

ZiMag/Atari 400/800

By William Michael Brown

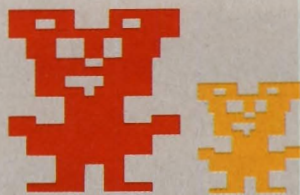
ZiMag doesn't make games anymore, but there's still a good chance you could run across this disk in your local computer store's bargain bin. If so, beware—from its *Alien*-outtakes cover art to its lame screen graphics, *Collision Course* is about as interesting and original as Parchesi.

The basic motif here is warmed-over *Defender*—a good choice, but badly done. Your job is to protect a trio of cargo ships returning home from a five-year mining expedition. All four of you are heading through a particularly dangerous part of the galaxy that seems to be lined with floating mines and killer satellites. Your escort cruiser comes with guns to nail the mines and satellites as well as a shield to protect you from them—but the shield time is very limited (about six direct hits will do you in). You're up against a time limit for completing your mission, and you must complete it—you've got to make sure that those cargo ships make it home.



Along with four different skill levels, the game contains four different types of mines—well, make that three, since the regular and "Mirus" mines are exactly alike, except for the way they're depicted on the screen. There are also smart mines that try to chase you, and accelerator/decelerator "beacons" that speed up or slow down your convoy whenever you hit them.

The gameplay and graphics will make you wonder why you need 24K of Atari computer memory to play it. You've got a very short amount of time to get through all three mine fields, and the cargo ships are such big, dumb targets that you can just about count on losing all but one of them (the designer must have counted on it too—you only have to get one ship home to win a round, and there's a *huge* point bonus for



getting another one through). Boiled down, *Collision Course* is your standard space shoot-em-up with all the excitement surgically removed.

Once you're a little skilled at blowing up the mines (concentrate on accuracy), start exploiting the accelerator/decelerator beacons for a high score.

WORMS? 1111

Electronic Arts/Atari 400/800/1200

By William Michael Brown

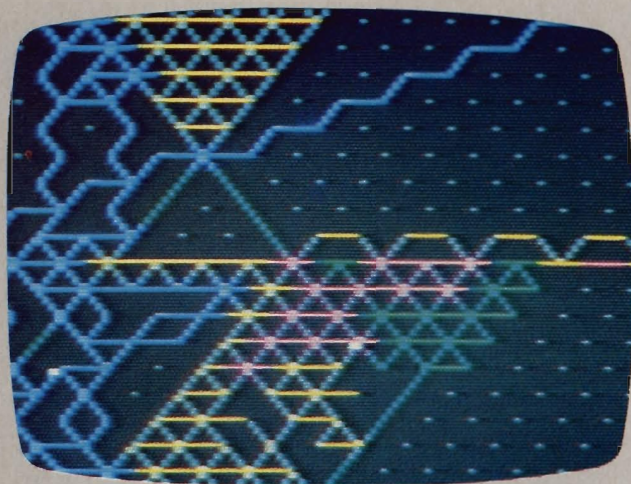
"You will find detailed instructions enclosed. Do not read them. Instead, sit down and get started. Don't ask how. Just start. You know how these things work... Resist them. Do not read them for a very long time. In fact, do not read them until you know how the game works... Then never read the instructions. Innocence is bliss."

That advice is the very first paragraph of the jacket notes to David S. Maynard's *Worms?*. Now, I've never met Mr. Maynard, but after playing *Worms?* for about 20 hours, I can tell you that he has probably the most original, refreshing and seriously *weird* imagination of any video game designer today.

What do I mean by "seriously weird?" Well, basically this is a game right out of *Steppenwolf*: "Magic Theatre—Not for Everyone." There are no ramps to climb, no Invaders to fry, no Gorfs or Defenders or death-dealing wizards here. But if you're tired of all those game cliches and want something that really uses the potential of your computer; if you're a fanatic for the turf-stealing subtleties of Go; if geometry was your favorite subject at school *because you liked the pictures*; or if your single most favorite magazine column was Martin Gardner's "Mathematical Games" in *Scientific American*—then, my friend, prepare yourself for a diet of *Worms?*.

The basic *Worms?* variation puts you and up to three friends in command of worms that lay trails from dot to dot in a big hexagonal grid. Each dot is the center of a territory that can be captured (score: one point for each territory) by the worm that lays the very last (sixth) trail in that territory. Each worm has to be trained at the outset on where to go in different situations—say, whether it's the first or fifth worm to lay a trail into a particular territory. Once trained, they recognize patterns and go on autopilot, merrily laying trails until they come to another situation they haven't been trained for, at which point they stop and await your command.

The fact that you can rip off some other worm's territory just by being the last one to lay a trail in it gives *Worms?* all the strategic fascination of ancient,



classic games like Go and chess. Combine that with the beautiful colors of the worm trails, and the fact that all the sound effects are keyed by particular movements of each worm, and you've got an aesthetic extravaganza of a game. All four worms going at it hammer and tongs sounds like a shimmering electronic fugue, and the colors of trails and territories seem to constantly run through the spectrum as the advantage shifts from player to player. You can also save particularly crafty worms to disk for later use; play against any number of smart or stupid computer-controlled worms; or combine your instructions to the worm with the computer's ideas for an odd mixture of hard logic and human inspiration.

As I said, not for everybody (that's why it's getting only three joysticks). But if you want challenge—and are dying to find a little originality among the humdrum pre-fab games being put out today—*Worms*? is your meat.

Save your first worms on disk and start experimenting with variations on your most successful tactics.

MOUSKATTACK III

Sierra On-Line/IBM PC

By Hartley G. Lesser

Plumbers have it made, you say to yourself. After all, they earn enormous dollar amounts per hour for repairing sinks and other ceramic entities that have gone awry. Well, think again, folks. *Mouskattack* certainly leaves little doubt that a plumber's joint can be far from a happy one.

This arcade-style game presents the player with the unfortunate predicament of Larry Bain, ace plumber

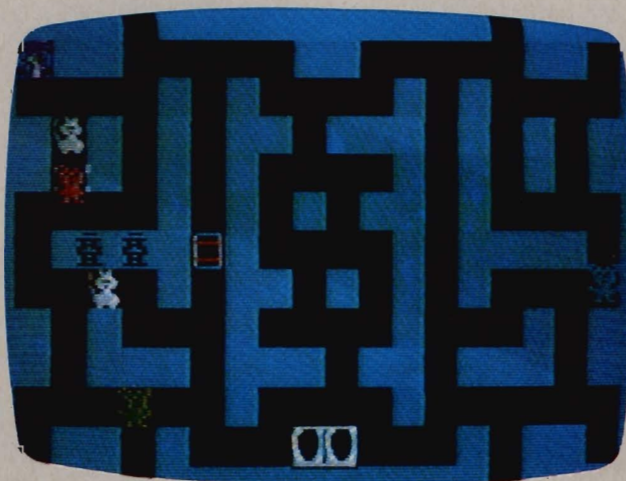
and rodent runner, who has been hired to lay piping in Rat Alley. Larry is controlled via joystick or keyboard, with the former the choice of most gamers due to its exacting control. You define the keys for UP, DOWN, LEFT, RIGHT and CARRY control when using the keyboard.

You start this maddening game with three plumbers, two cats and a single trap. The trap holds the rodents—which seem to arrive from nowhere—only temporarily. Your plumber must run over the trapped renegades from a Roquefort nightmare to rid the maze of them. Should a rat manage to escape the trap, it graduates into a Super Rat.

Your two cats are pretty useless, as they turn out to be as afraid of the rodents as the rodents are of them. Using your CARRY capability, however, allows you to place your cats wherever you want them in the maze. Their presence turns the normal rodents from their course. The Super Rats, unfortunately, hold your felines in little regard—in fact they totally ignore them, which is of no benefit in your harried circumstances.

As you maneuver your plumber throughout the maze, lengths of pipe are laid behind him. In order to gain victory, Rat Alley has to be totally piped. But with the incessant arrival and constant movement of the rats, victory seems a distant goal. In addition, not all of the pipe you lay is connected. This requires going back over certain lengths of pipe once, twice, three or even four times, to fix the constructions. Very hard on the nerves.

Mouskattack is very challenging, as progress into the second level takes a great deal of work. My single complaint is that the screen representation of each rat looks a good deal like a teddy bear. Something that cute shouldn't be so bloody fatal.



The trap's not heavy, it's my guardian.