Outhouse
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Soft Sector Marketing
6250 Middlebelt
Garden City, MI 48135
Model I/III, $15.95 cassette
$19.95 disk

An arcade game about an outhouse? You've gotta be kidding! Nope — this is Outhouse, Soft Sector M's hilarious new entry into the "original arcade game" category of TRS-80 software.

Actually, the game itself is not hilarious — just the concept of protecting an outhouse and its contents from thieves and aliens bent on destroying your ship and the outhouse below. The outhouse begins with 200 feet of paper. The enemy attacks you in waves, and after each wave that you survive, you are awarded bonus points based on how many feet of paper remain. After every fourth wave, you are also rewarded with a fifty foot roll of paper, although your total cannot exceed 250 feet.

By now, you are surely wondering what types of villainous vandals are attacking the outhouse, and what you, as a concerned citizen, can do to save the paper and the outhouse from certain destruction. First of all, there are seven different types of enemy creatures. Fireballs and rotors will try to destroy you by colliding with you. Anglers and crunchers will try to obliterate the outhouse by crashing into it. Zappers will try to destroy you by firing a laser at you. Thieves will run toward the outhouse and run out of it with the loose end of the paper, unrolling it until they leave the screen. Squatters will run toward the outhouse, enter it, use up about five feet of paper and leave.

In order to protect yourself and the outhouse from these vicious varmints, you ship is armed with a laser which never runs out, and three smart bombs, which destroy all aliens on the screen.

The game starts out fairly slow, but gets progressively faster and harder. After about wave eleven, it gets so fast that it is almost physically impossible to destroy everything without using a smart bomb. I honestly cannot remember the last computer game that I have played that was so fast moving. It really tests your skill and coordination.

So, what we have here is a game that is fast and funny. But is it a good game? I have played a few fast-action games that just did not appeal to me. Fortunately, Outhouse is not one of these. There are enough different types of aliens to give the game variety and hold your interest. There is enough variance in speed to provide a seemingly endless challenge.

The controls for Outhouse are rather difficult to master. They are similar to those of Big Five's Robot Attack, and consist of using the arrow keys for movement, any number key for a smart bomb, and the space bar and arrows for firing. The way the firing works is that you simultaneously press the space bar and the direction that you want your laser to go. It is not that hard once you get used to it, but it can take a while to get used to it. Outhouse is joystick compatible, although you must go back to the keyboard to press a number for a smart bomb.

The sound and graphics are good (although there is no crescent moon on the outhouse). The disk version has a very high quality voice and saves the eight highest scores to disk.

Outhouse — it is fun, fast and funny. It is, perhaps, Soft Sector Marketing's best game yet. After a day, you will like it. After a week, you will love it. Call SSM sick. Call them disgusting. Call them today and order Outhouse.

Matt Friedenberg