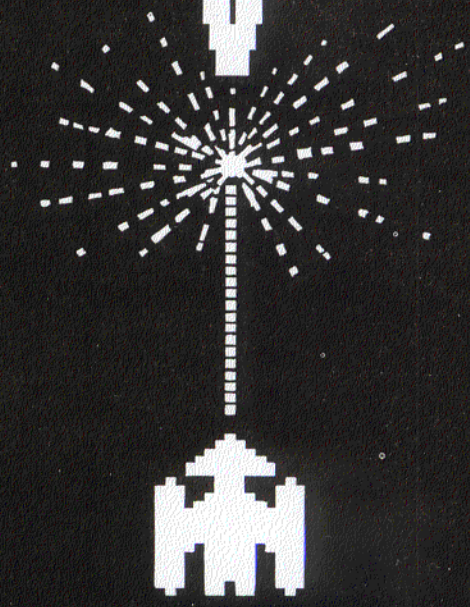
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MARTIN AMIS

INTRODUCTION BY STEVEN SPIELBERG

HUTCHINSON
London Melbourne Sydney Auckland Johannesburg

BATTLEZONE

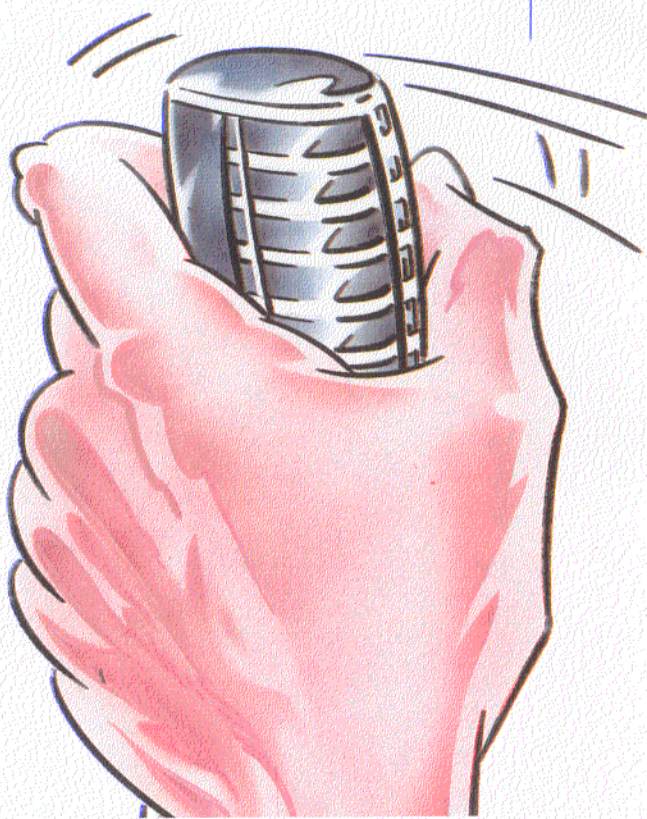


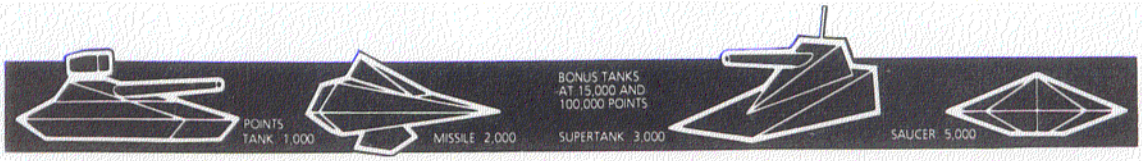
AN ENEMY TANK APPEARS NEAR THE MIDDLE OF THE SCREEN, VIGILANTLY STARING THE WRONG WAY. BY SKILFUL NUDGES ON YOUR CONTROLS ...

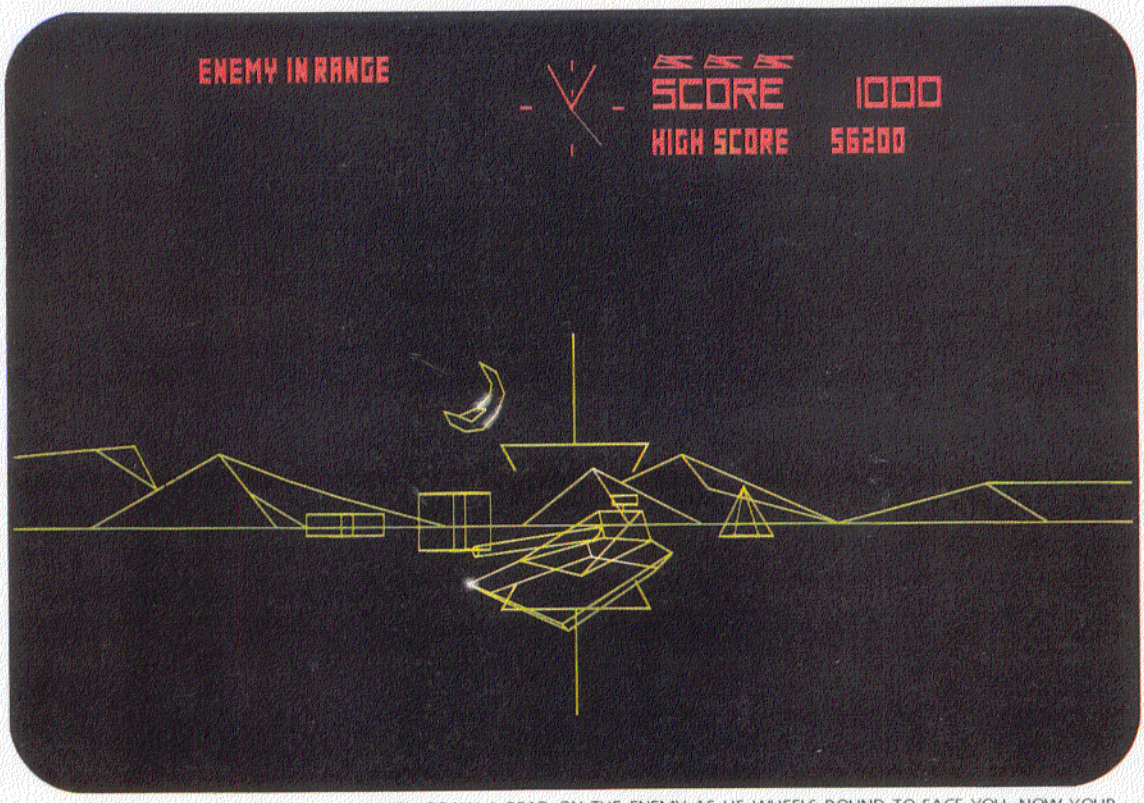
This is the futuristic tank game, with real tank controls, radar, enemy and terrain etched in diagrammatic silhouette, and wonderful accuracy of distance and perspective. This is a game of spatial awareness. It attracts a relatively middle-class and elderly audience; its patrons and admirers are intense, thin-lipped characters, whose fantasy lives are clearly of martial bent. They certainly look like officer material to me.

Admire, first, the cute controls. To begin with, I thought this was gimmickry – why not just a single joystick? But the double-fisted handlebars give a crucial sense of simultaneous forward and sideways movement, and give extra drama to the backward lurch. The radar gizmo is pretty perfunctory, but the screen is a gem, combining the look of op or pop art with the feel of a genuine battlezone: limited vision, nasty surprises, panicky adjustments while the enemy tank wheels slowly round to get you in its sights.

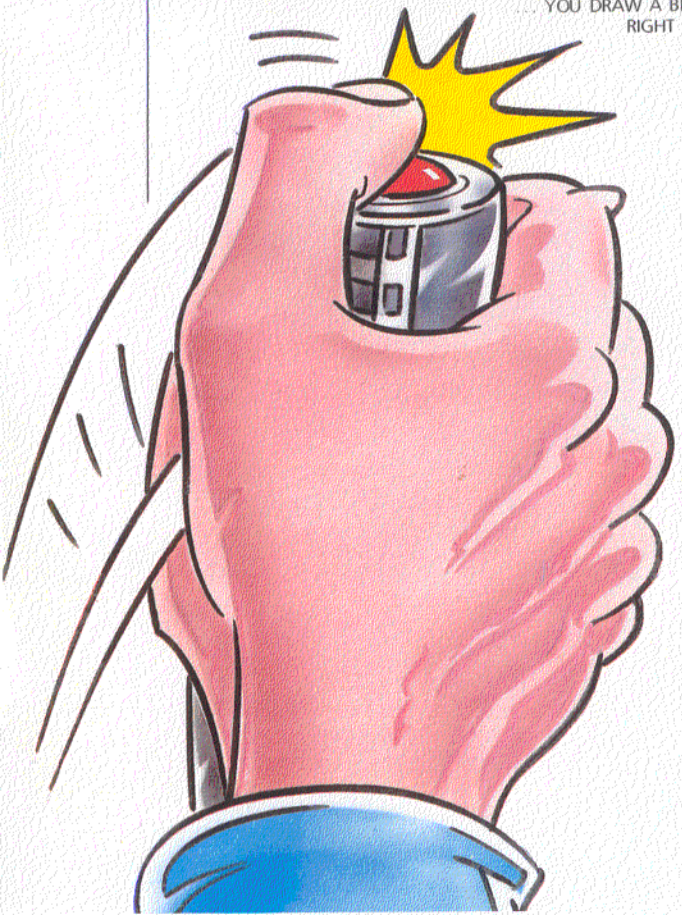
There are four adversaries – tank, supertank (sleeker and more mobile), Trojan Horse (swooping down from the air, vaulting obstacles, spike-nosed) and saucer (sometimes a







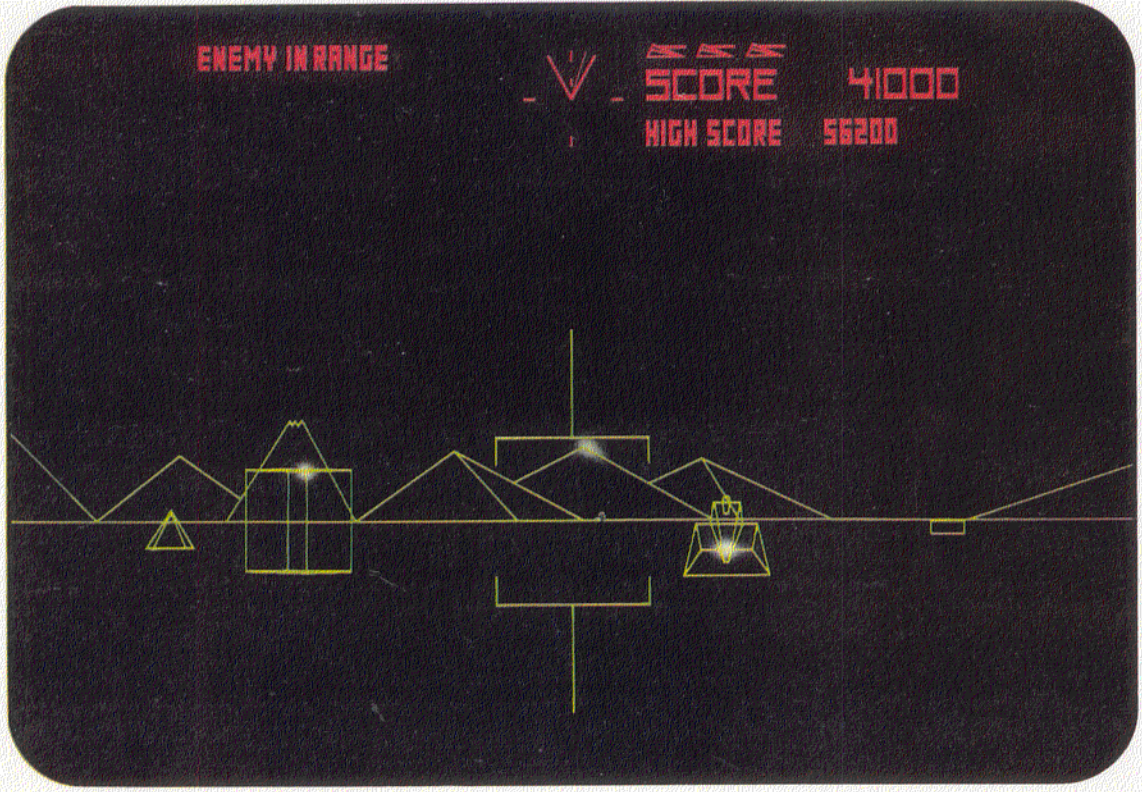
. . . YOU DRAW A BEAD ON THE ENEMY AS HE WHEELS ROUND TO FACE YOU. NOW YOUR RIGHT THUMB COOLLY DESCENDS ON THE CRIMSON FIRE-BUTTON.



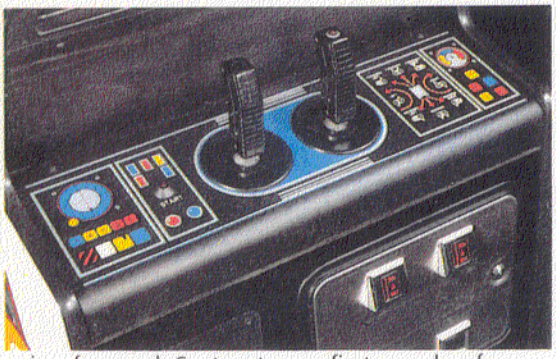
bleeping dot in the distance, sometimes as colossal and immediate as the mother-ship in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*). Various stylized transparent building-blocks provide protection or obstruction on the bare terrain. The radar console declares whether the enemy is to your right or your left – or behind you. The battle begins.

At the outset, a fat enemy tank will present itself invitingly, quite near the centre of your sights. You use the normal controls to draw a bead on your foe, making the fine adjustments by giving your handlebars gentle slaps and shoves until you have squared yourself up dead on line. By now the enemy tank will have sensed your presence; it is wheeling round towards you; you fire; the tank splinters in satisfyingly far-flung shards. Sometimes you will seek the protection of a building-block, and watch the enemy tank fire furiously and uselessly at you, seemingly only yards away. Then you reverse and nab him when he heads for unobstructed land.

My main piece of advice? **Go forward.** Keep



A SUPERTANK. THESE APPEAR MUCH LATER IN THE GAME; THEY ARE ALSO MUCH MORE AGILE THAN THEIR OVERWEIGHT COUSINS. ALREADY HE HAS YOU IN HIS SIGHTS. BRACE YOURSELF FOR IMPACT.



going forward. Sort out your first couple of tanks, then push both handlebars and go forward at top speed. Ignore the radar, which will frantically point to enemies that you are content to ignore. You'll find that nothing much happens for a while – then the big guns come at you, with their big scores. The valuable saucers don't fire at you and, furthermore, don't have to be hit dead-on. Preceded by a deep and menacing chord, the Trojan Horses jump down from the sky and career towards you: **wait until the last possible second before you hit these guys.** When your score climbs up to 20,000 or so, the supertanks start to appear. Then things get really serious.

One sees phenomenal scores in Battlezone – right up there in the six figures. These Rommels and Pattons of the arcades, they seem to know exactly what is happening, they seem to know exactly where everything is. Enemy tanks fire at them, but they have judged the angle to perfection; the shells pass them by; they retreat, they manoeuvre, they come surging in again for their hit. They dream of North Africa, of carnage at Carthage, of Thermopylae. I haven't got the stamina, or the officer qualities. I want out of this hot sweaty tank – I want to get back to base for a quiet game of Berzerk or Astro Blaster. But someone has to fight in the battlezone, and I admire these men in their vying machines.

