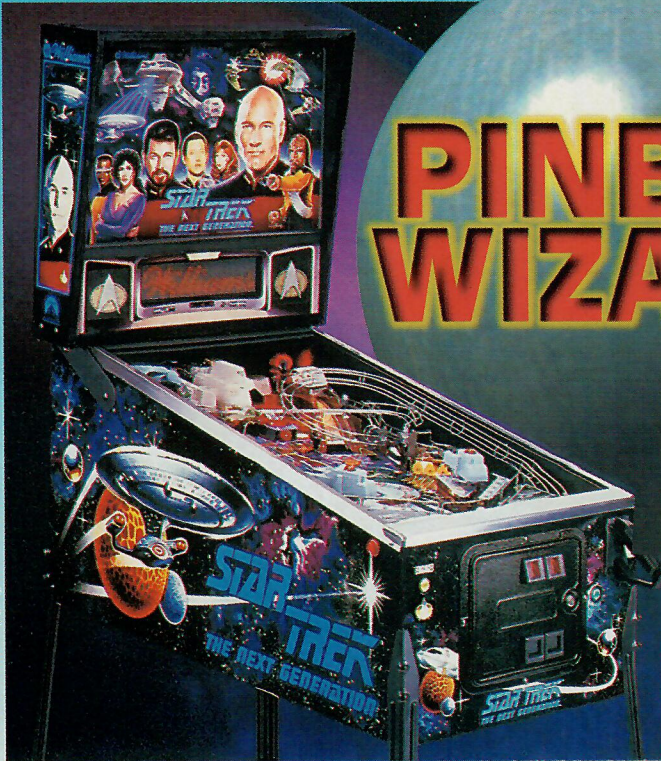


Art: Paul Farris/Copyright 1993 Paramount Pictures



PINBALL WIZARDS



Art: Copyright 1993 CBS

BY TIM FERRANTE

Over the years, pinball machines have evolved from simple arcade games into hi-tech art.

There was a time when pinball machines were nothing more than countertop units with silver balls and not-so-springy gadgets. Adorning their myriad of nails and holes were patchworks of colors and shapes ostensibly designed to pluck a penny from a likely customer. Drab and distant, these were the rickety ancestors of today's strikingly attractive games.

Pinball art, to a debatable degree, is as important as the playfield action and sounds. Imagine for a moment your favorite pinball machine without any artwork—just a stark color. Now, dress that same vision with the awesome designs and colorful graphics of a genre movie or comics character, and it becomes a completely different experience.

The 1976 acquisition of pinball manufacturer D. Gottlieb & Co. by Columbia Pictures helped spearhead genre franchises as the

machines' main attraction. Columbia's own *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* was transformed into an extremely popular game in 1978 called *Sinbad*. Artist Gordon Morison rendered the Ray Harryhausen creations for the game, which appeared at a time when the industry's technology was changing over from traditional electromechanical design to solid state microprocessors.

Sinbad was built as three different versions (not a common practice even during those transitory days); two *Sinbad* four-player versions, an electromechanical and solid state and one two-player electromechanical version, with an entirely different backglass, known as *Eye of the Tiger*. It's the only Harryhausen film ever realized in pinball form. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Buck Rogers*, *Spider-Man* and *James Bond* would soon follow from Columbia's new subsidiary.

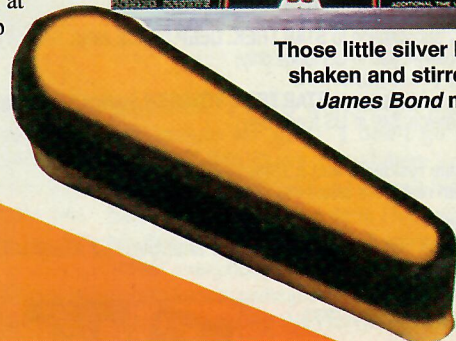
Over at the Bally pinball factory, *The Six Million Dollar Man* became the maiden foray into licensed SF and fantasy games. Artist Dave Christensen placed Lee Majors in the center of the backglass, garbed in full bionic gear and charging headlong at the player. But nothing could top their powerhouse license from Paramount: *Star Trek!*



James Bond & Sinbad Games: Copyright 1977, 1980, 1994 D. Gottlieb & Co.

Art: Copyright 1980 EON Productions Ltd. & Gildrose Publications Ltd.

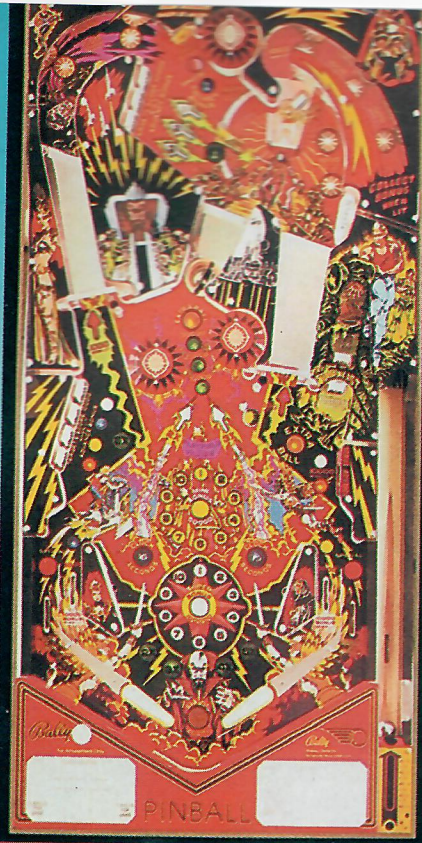
Those little silver balls are shaken and stirred in the *James Bond* machine.



The release of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* caused this game's art to be changed at the last minute to reflect the film instead of the TV show.



Art: Kevin O'Connor/Copyright 1980 King Features Syndicate & Famous Films BV



"Flash Gordon had such rich colors," says illustrator Kevin O'Connor, who found inspiration for the pinball art in the over-the-top production design of the 1980 film.

Originally intended and designed as a homage to the classic TV series, the game's backglass was altered at the eleventh hour to coincide with the 1979 release of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. The entire artwork package (backglass, playfield, cabinet and plastic light shields) was illustrated by industry vet Kevin O'Connor.

"The project started out with Paramount sending us a lot of reference material from the old series," O'Connor remembers. "We always described them as the pajama uniforms with the high boots. I went all the way to finished art. Then, Paramount said they had a new *Star Trek* movie coming out and all-new reference material just started pouring in. Since my character portraits were *exactly* the way I wanted them, I couldn't risk changing them. The body positions stayed the same and I had to Gesso [the artist's equivalent to white-out] and repaint all of the uniforms and parts of the *Enterprise*."

Prior to the changes, a few of O'Connor's television backglasses were printed. The early sample games featured the TV-themed glass, becoming one of the pinball collecting hobby's most-prized finds.

The world's first *Star Trek* pinball (there was a 1971 game called "Star Trek" not based on the Paramount franchise) was a huge success



Art: Paul Faris

The Ninja Turtles craze left no merchandising stone unturned, including pinball.



Art: Paul Faris

Design & Layout: Jim McLernon

The never-produced *Total Recall* pinball machine would have had two playing fields linked to a single back.

for Bally. The above-average production run was just shy of 17,000 units.

Pinball Properties

Bally's next genre license was Universal's *Flash Gordon*. King Features Syndicate's stalwart space hero, here updated to 1980 sensibilities, rocketed 'n' rolled through the universe to a score by Queen.

"Flash Gordon had such rich colors," O'Connor enthuses. "There was only one other artist at Bally beside myself who would have been interested and that was Paul Faris, but he was doing something else at the time. I was very excited about doing it because Flash was one of my favorite heroes. The movie designs were very trendy and stylized.

"I picked up on the nice symbol on Flash's chest and used that in the center of the playfield and on the cabinet's side. It could have been a much better game if done using today's standards, but back then it was a killer. They built 10,000 of those things!"

Faris has been illustrating pinball machines since 1977. He's a huge genre fan (his 1980 *Space Invaders* pinball is a dazzling tribute to H.R. Giger), but he didn't get the chance to render a film project until 1990 with Data East's *Back to the Future* game.

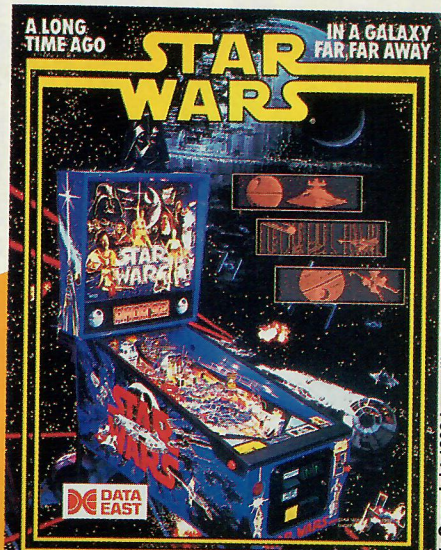


The *Sinbad* pinball machine was all the rage in 1977.

Art: Gordon Morrison/Copyright 1977 D. Gottlieb & Co.

"The company's executives cold-called the folks at Universal one day, and suddenly they had a license to produce a pinball machine based on the film series," Faris explains. "We had less than a month to pull it off, and they entered into this thing without really checking if the actors were going to give approvals to be depicted on the game. They had a playfield design intended for another game and time was tight. So, they made it *Back to the Future*."

"We got Christopher Lloyd, but they had problems reaching Michael J. Fox. It was never made clear why he refused, so I substituted my son, who was very insulted...he's taller than Fox! It was one of the fastest packages I've ever put together."



Art: Copyright 1992 Lucasfilm Ltd.

The 1992 *Star Wars* machine had such hi-tech innovations as a moving R2-D2, exciting action handle and an animation display.

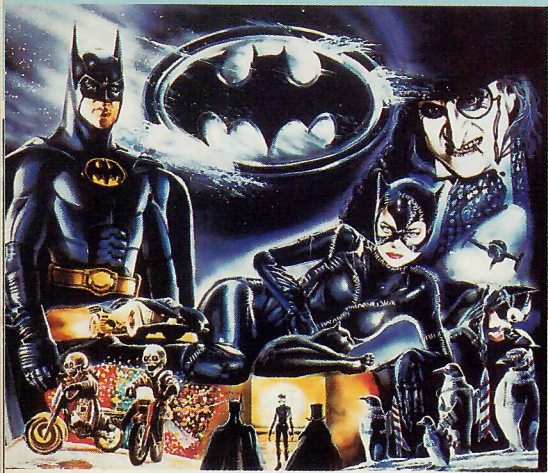


SHOOT AGAIN



Art: Paul Faris

Thanks to Paul Faris' artistry, Jack Nicholson, Michael Keaton and Kim Basinger all happily approved their likenesses on the *Batman* machine.



Art: Paul Faris

This *Batman II* art was part of an unused conversion kit that would have allowed vendors to convert their old *Batman* machines for the new movie.



Art: Copyright 1993 Lucasfilm Ltd.

Faris and O'Connor teamed on Data East's *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, which was being readied around the time of the first film. "I did the backglass and Kevin illustrated the playfield," Faris points out. "It was another case where things had to move quickly. We met with [Turtles creators] Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird and they were just great. They gave us free rein.

"The ironic thing was that I originally depicted April O'Neal normally endowed. I had to keep faxing revisions to Mirage, who wanted a more buxom April. I'm not a wild Turtles fan, but I figured it was a younger age group that was into these characters which, of course, it is. Her depiction became somewhat of a problem for some people and I got blamed, but it wasn't my doing at all!"

Pinball Adventures

Probably the most bizarre game Faris worked on was the never-produced *Total Recall*. Based on the Arnold Schwarzenegger hit, the machine was unusual in that it required two players.

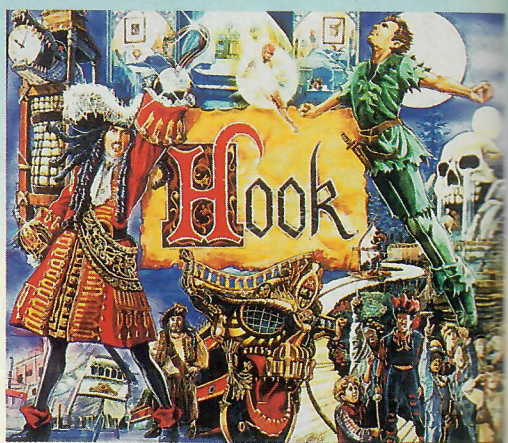
"It was going to be a double playfield," Faris reveals. "It was designer Tim Seckel's first game and looked like a Siamese twin pinball machine, a kind of upside down 'Y' shape with a single head portion. It was pretty progressive in the world of pinball. I went to finished art on it—playfield, backglass, everything. But, from a manufacturing standpoint, it would have been unbelievable...perhaps it should have been called *Total Nightmare!*" Faris laughs.

Similarly, Faris produced finished backglass art for a *Batman II* pinball conversion kit. He had illustrated Data East's earlier *Batman* pinball ("That was an excellent situation where Jack Nicholson, Michael Keaton and Kim Basinger all approved my likenesses of them on the first submission") and the company approached Warner Bros. with a simpler game answer to their first sequel. Vendors would have had the option of converting their existing *Batman* games into *Batman II*, using the new backglass and a re-programmed microprocessor. Warners never took to the idea, and it was scrapped.

Data East was producing licensed games at a phenomenal rate. Faris created the art package for Steven Spielberg's *Hook* pinball, though he admits "we didn't have likeness rights on that, and I had to rely on suggestive portraits." O'Connor was called in to interpret an old silverball friend for *Star Trek: The 25th Anniversary*. Having already been rushed through work on the *RoboCop* pinball, O'Connor was offered another chance, this time for the *Trek* TV series—without revisions, but restrictions!



The *Jurassic Park* machine featured 11 different mini-games.



Since the rights to the *Hook* cast's likenesses were not bought, Faris' art relied on "suggestive portraits."

"It was very restrictive for me," O'Connor admits. "The game features a remarkable transporter effect where the crew actually disappears before your eyes. But it's smack in the middle of the backglass, so I was forced to paint a border around this effect. Here I had the license of my life and getting a second shot, but it had this big square thing plopped in the middle!"

The game is one of O'Connor's finest works. Its black base color provides a perfect balance for the fiery fluorescent graphics and warm flesh tones. A spectacular depiction of the *Enterprise* fills the side of the cabinet while Romulan and Klingon ships approach from the background. And, because of designer Joe Kaminkow's insistence on heavy illustration, the machine features bits and pieces from several classic episodes.

Although fully licensed, O'Connor was concerned

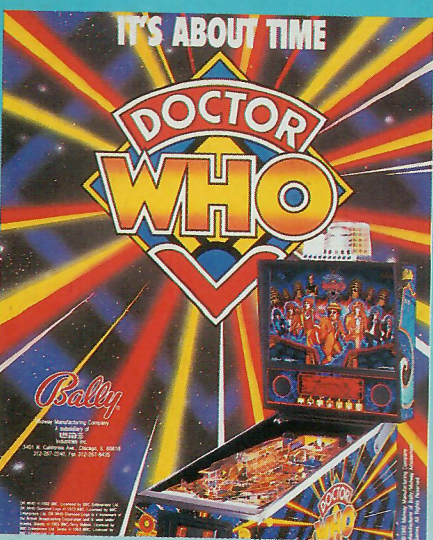
Three video modes challenged the player's skill in the *Indiana Jones* machine from Williams.



EXTINCT



Art: Copyright 1992 Universal City Studios & Amblin Entertainment
Art: Copyright 1992 BBC



Bally's Doctor Who machine pitted Doctors one through seven against the Master and Davros' Daleks.

about approvals for likenesses, particularly from William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy. "Nimoy held out," the artist states. "I don't know why he held out so long, but we had to take the chance of putting him on there and hope he would come around and allow his likeness to be used. It wouldn't have been much of a product without it. Eventually, he sent his approval and the sound department got James Doohan to record custom speech."

Pinball Masterworks

Paramount's most popular property was licensed again, this time to Williams Electronics, Inc., the world's largest pinball machine manufacturer. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* would become one of the company's most ambitious pinball projects and a stunning visual achievement for its artist, Greg Freres. The game's multiple levels of complexity are aided by custom speech recordings by several cast members and Jerry Goldsmith's rousing main theme. Williams composer Dan Forden scored the rest of the game with such expertise that his cues could be seamlessly dropped into any given TV episode. The Steve Ritchie playfield design is both intimidating and intriguing, featuring three-dimensional models of a Romulan war bird, the *Einstein* shuttlecraft, a Klingon Bird-of-Prey and a huge attacking Borg ship. It is, without question, one of the finest pinball machines ever built.

"Steve felt the *Next Generation* license was crucial and set out to create the biggest, best and brightest, most fun pinball machine he had ever designed," Freres says. "In this case, I started the likeness process in early pencils to avoid the licensing people jumping on a nose that

didn't look right. I usually don't worry about capturing a likeness in pencil sketches because I'm more worried about composition and layout. But I pushed myself from the start."

Designer Ritchie found a kindred spirit in Freres. The pair are gadget freaks when it comes to loading up a playfield with three-dimensional objects, most notably the pair of "ball launchers," which is *Star Trek's* preferred term to describe guns and the looming Borg ship capable of firing a pinball directly from its hull.

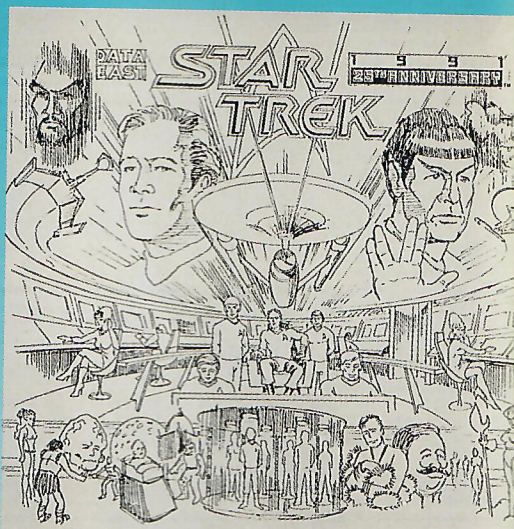
"The Borg ship was to be the centerpiece, and we were dealing with the original cube design," says Freres. "We got a call late in the project from Paramount who said, 'We're redesigning the Borg ship.' We said, 'You're kidding, right?'" Well, they weren't kidding and we were only weeks away from a trade convention where we were going to premiere this game. We had already worked out the intricacies of what the Borg cube would do. Thank God we hadn't yet ordered a mold.

"Michael Okuda started faxing us pencil sketches indicating what the new vessel kind of looked like. A week would go by and a more refined sketch came in, then rough photos. It took a month before we had the final design, and the sculpture and mold were started immediately."

Freres, proud of his artistic achievement, attended that trade show, where the awesome *Next Generation* pinballs lined the Williams booth (the company would eventually build 11,725 of them). It was there the artist received one of his most rewarding backhanded compliments regarding his superb backglass art.

"The game was a terrific success," Freres notes. "After we were all done and everyone was celebrating, someone walked up to me and said, 'I really liked it when you guys did artwork on the backglass; you shouldn't use these photos.'"

While this overview can't possibly offer a full accounting of all genre-related pinball machines or their artists, a visit to any arcade can supply a happy look at O'Connor's dynamic *The Flintstones*, *Judge Dredd* (a game built two years before the motion picture) and *Congo*. Look for Constantino Mitchell's captivating *StarGate* and *Waterworld* or Morgan Weistling's sensational *Maverick* and *Batman Forever*. Doug Watson's *The Shadow* is a flashy combination of styles—art deco and polished, hi-tech precision—while Faris' *GoldenEye* is an eye-popping tribute to Ian Fleming's creation. Other recent pinball adventures include Sega Pinball's *Twister*, Premier/Gottlieb's *Barb Wire* and Sega's *Independence Day*,



Art: Kevin O'Connor

Watching all the classic Star Trek episodes got O'Connor into the mood to create the 25th Anniversary machine.

Sega's *Space Jam* and the newest release, Sega's *Star Wars Trilogy: Special Edition*. Scheduled for later this year from Sega Pinball is *The X-Files*.

The pinball community's waltz with Hollywood seems to be unending. For the artists, it's a pleasurable coincidence to professionally dabble in the almost impenetrable field of motion picture illustration.

Says Kevin O'Connor, "It's probably as close to movie art as a guy can get while sitting in his Chicago studio and not having to fly anywhere!"



Art: Kevin O'Connor/Copyright 1991 Paramount Pictures

Star Wars, Star Trek 25th & Jurassic Park Games: Copyright 1991, 1992 Data East USA

"The game features a remarkable transporter effect where the crew actually disappears before your eyes," notes O'Connor, who had to work the effect into his art for the *Star Trek 25th Anniversary* machine.

