# The Last Starfighter.

Intro

In 1984 a movie called The Last Starfigter (from now called TLSF). It was a Sci-fi adventure movie. It was the first movie ever to be made were all the special effects (except explosions and make up) was made on a computer. The computer was a Cray X-MP. This and the fact that space movies were very popular in this time made everyone expecting this movie to be a big blockbuster like Star Wars. This is why Atari bought the rights for the movie so they would be able to make a game based on it. It was going to be released on both home consoles and on an arcade. The arcade was never finished.

The Movie.

Like I said in the intro it was Atari that bought the rights for TLSF. The production of the game was started in Atari`s arcade division. The original project team was made up of Chris J. Horseman (Project leader), Jim Morris (Project engineer (software)), Jack Ritter (2nd project engineer (software)) and Barry Whitebook (Animation). Ted Michon and Mike Albaugh came onboard on this project later in the development. Prior arcade games to use 3D was only vector games. Atari had for several years worked on a general purpose 3D arcade system, but it was always "a few years away" every time they wanted to use it (an arcade game called I Robot was actually released in 1983, and this game had solid 3D but this game was hard coded and was very different from TLSF, this was actually the first game developed by Atari that was programmed with C). This is where Ted Michon comes into

the picture. Ted worked as a consultant for Atari and developed a super high bit mapped system with a polygon fill engine. Atari decided to use this to on the TLSF arcade. They also had to use the systems expanding capabilities to implement a math box that could handle the 3D transformations. The programming of the math box was done by Mike Albaugh.

The programming of the arcade was done mainly by Jim Morris. The additional programming with the cave sequence on the game was done by Jack Ritter, you can see a picture of the cave sequence on the picture below. Jack came onboard from Cinematronics.
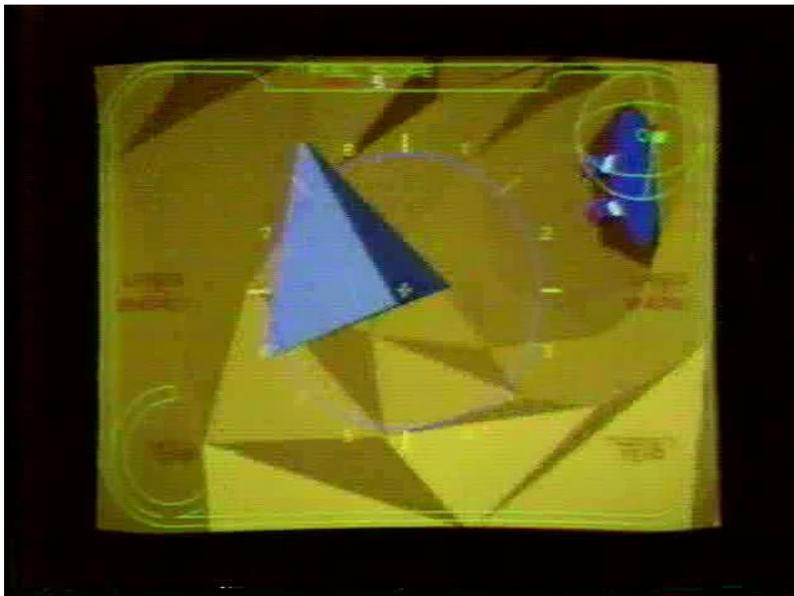
In the programming process Jim used a 68 000 Motorola 16bit CPU, the first to ever be used at Atari. The programming language was C. It was also used several 3d tools that later also were used in other games. TLSF became a pioneer in using the 68 000 CPU. Earlier most games were made with the 6502 CPU. The arcade games Hard Drivin (1988) and Stun Runner (1989) have a very similar graphics with TLSF game, even though another graphic engine was used on these games.

The gameplay in the game was taken right from the gameplay in the movie and scenes from the movie; this was often done with spinoff games like this. The game was actually very similar with what you see in the movie, at least regarding the graphic. The controller on the game was a controller from the Star Wars vector games that Atari made. When Atari choosed to drop the game is was about 75% finished. There was no cabinet for the game, but the game worked and it could be played on a test bench. It was also made some simple sound effects for the game.

The End

The reason behind Atari`s decision to cancelled the game so far into production was several. Atari had for some years pay`ed much money to the movie companies for the rights to produce games with themes taken from movies. This rights costed Atari a lot of money over a long time. Atari gambled on the movie to become the success that everyone predicted, but this did not happen. The film didn't fail, but it wasn't a success either. In the production of the arcade they found out that the machine would have a sell price of 10 000$, and this was a lot of money back in the 80`s. If the movie had been a big success this price could have been defended. The vice president in Atari thought that no one would buy a game for 10 000$. And not long after the project team got the message that the game was cancelled. On the same time Atari was in deep financial problems that was caused by Atari`s consument division.

On the top of all this came the big video game crash. The result was that Atari started to fall and fall, until it was closed in the end. The original arcade division of Atari was shutdown in 2001 when Midway choose to shutdown Midway West (Midway had bought Atari Games (Atari`s arcade division) and changed name to Midway West). Prior to this Atari had been sold a couple of times, and the leaders had also been changed more than once. But Atari never became the company it was prior to the crash.

Some ears after Atari cancelled TLSF arcade game, the arcade game Hard Drivin was released. This game sold for the same price that TLSF had (10 000$).

Play the game.

Even though the TLSF is long lost you can actually play the game on your own computer. This thanks to the guy`s behind the page roguesynapse that has made the game to PC. Visit their page on http://www.roguesynapse.com/games/last_starfighter.php to download and try the game.

For you that wants some extra information on the game you can read the original proposition that was rescued from Atari`s archives. Read it on this link:
http://www.atarigames.com/laststarfighterproposal.pdf

Thanks to:

I wish to thank Jim Morris (www.wolfman.com) and Ted Michon for all information they have provided me about the game. An extra thanks goes to Jim for providing me with the video from the game.
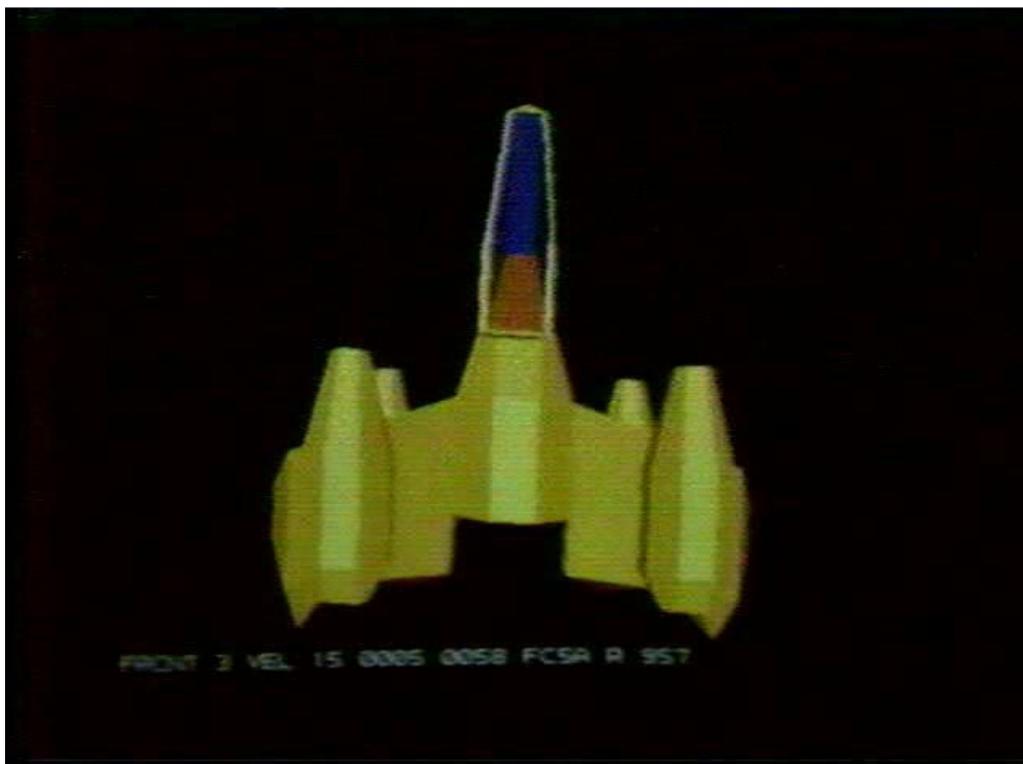
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