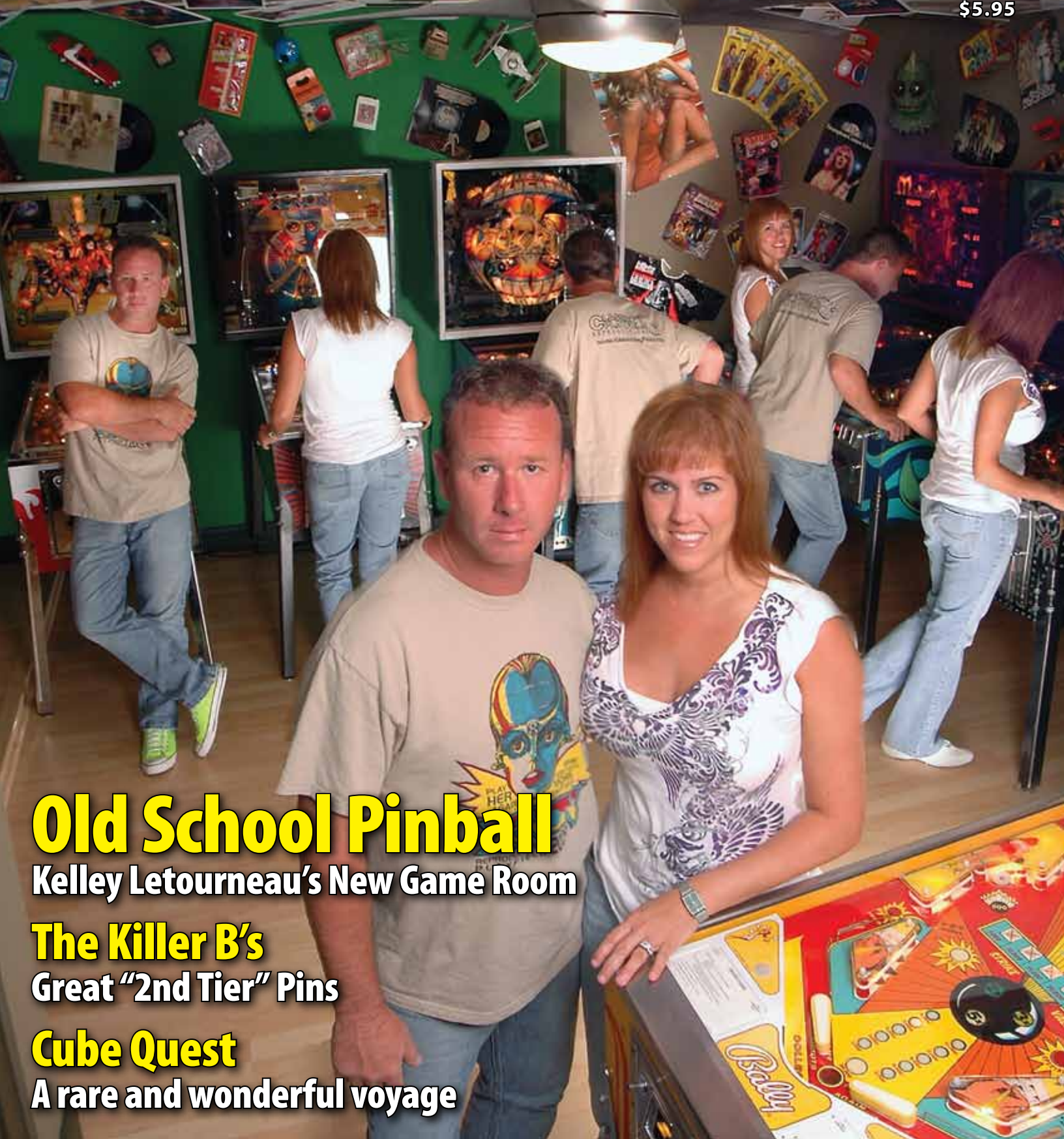


# GAMEROOM

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## Old School Pinball

Kelley Letourneau's New Game Room

## The Killer B's

Great "2nd Tier" Pins

## Cube Quest

A rare and wonderful voyage



## The Killer "B's"

I love the pinball community at large. It's been 11+ years now that I've been a pinaholic (help is coming, or so I've heard) and I continue to see evolution and growth. You know we are a special group when we invent or rediscover terminology from other parts of pop culture. What I'm talking about this month is this newish way to categorize your collection in *A*, *B*, and possibly *C* and *D* list games.

I've heard people mention titles of machines in this way for a long time, but for the last 12 months have noticed it becoming fairly common in pinball discussion. I found myself trying to describe a machine to a non-pinaholic as a "B" title. What did I even mean by this? All the while, the fellow nodded his head like he understood exactly what I was talking about.

I normally break up games in other ways. Examples could be by designer, by manufacturer, by year, or electronic system. Maybe the WMS Superpins all in a row, or machines that have specific themes. You guys remember the Theme Collecting TOTS article I wrote back in January 2008, so no reason to re-hash it here. Still, in looking at a way to define what an A list or B list machine could be, I can't help but think of money being the determining factor. This really is a tough one to grasp; as an average title like *Gilligan's Island* could be quite valuable if it had a full-on restoration (clearcoated playfield, speaker upgrade, EL wire on the ramps, chrome hardware). Again, price also fluctuates heavily when you look at retail game resellers against pinheads who restore in their basement or garage. The same title might cost 50% more from a retailer who has to pay the rent and power bill. So charging \$2500 for a Gottlieb *Stargate* doesn't earn it an A list placement in



my opinion. And now I've revealed yet another variable in this whole mess of A, B, C's. It's all in the eyes of the person who stands belly up to the lockbar. One person's C title might be another's A title. It's all quite subjective in the end, and what follows is surely the opinions of yours truly. It's also true that some players find less to love in an A title than other overlooked games. A Bally *Kiss* would be a good example of a machine that most agree isn't a particularly fun machine, yet demands high prices for machines in even the roughest condition.

With all of those disclaimers aside, let me throw out some common examples of what most of us agree are A titles. The *Addams Family*, *Twilight Zone*, and *Medieval Madness* come to mind immediately. *Attack From Mars*, *Cirque Voltaire*, and *Theatre of Magic* are all strong, popular titles. Stern managed to earn some A list status with *Lord of the*

*Rings*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and *Spider-Man*. There are swarms of pre-DMD games that scream A-list, like *Black Knight 2000*, *Funhouse*, *Banzai Run*, *High Speed*, *Pinbot*, and *Bride of Pinbot*. How about older solid state titles like *Firepower*, *Haunted House*, *Black Hole*, *Eight Ball Deluxe*, *Centaur*, and *Xenon*? You can't leave out the dozens of EM machines with a strong following like *Captain Fantastic*, *Fireball*, *Wizard*, *Slick Chick*, *Gigi*, *Sweethearts*, and many, many more.

I sometimes think of B list games as pinball machines that have potentially fallen under the radar of the big pinball money. This group of games can be as exciting as any while being scooped up for half as much money. If you're looking for some serious pinball fun, look long and hard into the B list and some gems will stand out. Here are a few of my favorite B's from DMD to early solid state machines.



## The DMD Killer B's

All of these DMD pinball titles are great players and can be found for well under \$2000 if you are patient and look hard enough:

- 2003 **Terminator 3** – Steve Ritchie design, good flow, good theme integration, nice lighting, and an interactive backglass!
- 2001 **Monopoly** – Pat Lawlor's first Stern offering. Has all the crammed in shots we expect from Lawlor, and a fun family theme!
- 1999 **Revenge From Mars** – While repetitious, it's always a crowd favorite and provides a great playing experience. It's the best of Pinball 2000!
- 1998 **Viper Night Drivin'** – While quirky in some ways (glow balls!), there is a lot to offer in this title, including a black light effect. It's no Corvette, but neither is the price.
- 1997 **NBA Fastbreak** – The scoring is a bit funky, but the game play and sound really make it a well-rounded basketball game.
- 1995 **Congo** – The only thing that hurts this machine is its relationship to a bad movie. As a pinball machine, it's got a fantastic layout and a lot of interesting shots.
- 1995 **Frank Thomas Big Hurt** – Gottlieb didn't strike gold with too many titles, but this one has my pick as the best Gottlieb DMD game. It's a little too easy to play, but I still love to whack home runs and build up stats.
- 1994 **WWF Royal Rumble** – If you're a wrestling fan, this game integrates the theme well enough into a widebody double playfield arrangement.
- 1994 **Demolition Man** – Superb Norman designed machine with great sound and gadgets.
- 1993 **Gladiators** – Another rare Gottlieb gem in the DMD era. This machine has a fun flow with some unique shots. I wish I had never sold the one I had.
- 1993 **Judge Dredd** – Another WMS Superpin like Demolition Man. This one is themed after the Judge Dredd comic series, not the movie. It's a very complex design with a ton of shots and great flow. The music and sound effects are fantastic.
- 1992 **Fish Tales** – You don't have to be a fan of fishing to get into this theme. It has a tight lower playfield layout, but plenty of excitement when you get your shot patterns down.
- 1992 **Black Rose** – One of the best

Trudeau playfield designs in my opinion. It's a wonderful theme, tightly integrated into the rules. You can't beat the cannon!

## The "B" Land Before Dots – Alphanumeric Pins

- 1991 **Cactus Jack's** – Another Gottlieb title that is fun for anyone to jump in and play. Little jumping cactus guys sing and dance while you enjoy multiball. Yee-haw!
- 1990 **Back to the Future** – I love this movie series, and Data East pulled off the license pretty well for its time. Good



Gottlieb's Lights, Camera, Action

sound, tough to beat on a properly working machine.

- 1989 **Lights, Camera, Action** – My favorite Gottlieb of the era. This game is loaded with cool things to do. If you have the header attached with the flood lamps, the lighting design will really impress.
- 1988 **Swords of Fury** – There is a lot crammed into this non-licensed medieval theme. The sound FX, music, and entire playfield design make it a great game, deserving more than a B-list rating.
- 1987 **Space Station** – Great theme, music, and lighting. There are a ton of targets to shoot at and a multiball experience requiring some skill to master.
- 1987 **Laser War** – This was the first Data East title. It's really a fun game with a modern connection to Firepower in some ways. Multiball is very fun to experience and the lighting and stereo sound is well done.
- 1986 **Strange Science** – Probably close to an A-List game for this era, Strange Science is often looked over (overlooked?) as

just another Bally 6803 game. It takes the electronic platform to the limit with 5 ball multiball and great artwork.

### B-List 6 and 7 Digit Solid State Machines

- 1984 **Laser Cue** – At first look, this is just another re-run of Alien Poker. But playing is believing as this update has an added fourth flipper to pound the upper 3 stationary targets, and a good multiball. A shooters game worth owning.
- 1983 **Firepower II** – What do you get if you mash the original Firepower into Sorcerer? This machine, designed by Steve Ritchie's brother, Mark. It doesn't have 3 ball multiball, but the 2 ball will do. A borderline A-List title in this year of below average machines. FP2 is fast and is often found at B list prices.
- 1982 **Caveman** – It's hard to find a B-List title in 1982, but Caveman (a mix of video and pinball) is actually a fun game that is often found cheap. The video game portion is really well integrated into the Caveman theme.

- 1980 **Embryon** – This game seems to be climbing the collective interest ladder but still can be found as an overlooked gem. It's a "very" widebody machine with plenty of things to shoot for. It has an interesting set of Newton balls, and a ball saving right outlane flipper.

- 1980 **Seawitch** – Stern put out several fast playing, bonus building, drop-target machines in this era. Seawitch is a fine example of that with 4 flippers and 3 separate banks of drop targets. The watery theme is a bonus.

I'm sure some of you are reading this article and wondering why I didn't place specific titles on this list. It's my impression that many of the machines that I instinctively wanted to put on this list have indeed become discovered and popularized. Still, I think those of you that haven't played many of these titles before should see if there is one of them that strikes a chord with you. Price dictates a lot when it comes to entertainment. Finding that special machine that connects with you at a bargain price just makes everything sweeter. Good luck chasing the Bees! **GR**

