Video games are just an amusing waste of CPU cycles and photons, right? So why are they more than just a curiosity to “serious” electrical engineers? Trivial offshoot though it might seem, the video game industry has fostered a crop of innovations that affect almost every facet of today’s computer industry. For one thing, it has driven down the cost of high-end graphics processors to affordable levels. For another, the game industry’s economics has in effect funded much ongoing research in the development of new hardware and software systems. Historically, the bulk of academic computer graphics research has been unconcerned about real-time image synthesis. Many of the advances in this field have come as a direct result of the video game business.

Supercade, which examines the early years of the video game industry, is therefore more than just a nostalgia trip to the video arcades of the past, and gives an insight into the graphical user-interfaces, multimedia presentations, and other ubiquitous elements of modern computer use.

The book starts at the start, with Will Higinbotham creating an “interactive exhibit,” called Tennis for Two, using analog circuitry and an oscilloscope for a display—a precursor to Pong. It also details how MIT’s Tech Model Railroad Club metamorphosed into the group that created another seminal early game, Space Wars, and the birth of arcade video games and home game systems.

But the heart of Supercade is the golden age of arcade games in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Every major home game system of that era, as well as early home computer systems, is covered. The book ends with a glimpse of these systems’ distant descendants: today’s powerful home game consoles, which, along with PC games, account for an industry revenue of billions of dollars, rivalling Hollywood.

Along the way we are treated to photographs of the key participants, machines, designer’s notes, schematics, brochures, and sell sheets, and best of all, screen images from the many games detailed in the book. The compilation of these graphics alone makes this an impressive work, and Burnham does a great job of touching on most of the successful and important games of that period.

Many of Supercade’s sections are by contributing authors, whose disparate styles add distinctly to one’s enjoyment. By far the most interesting to me are those parts written by the people who were actually involved in the industry in the period the book covers, although some redundancy does arise when two authors cover the same shared history.

Where Supercade really shines, however, is as a reference book, complete with a detailed table of contents and index.

Historical significance aside, the book is also a rich source of nostalgia. As I read through the stories and vignettes or flipped through the screen images, I was carried back to where I was and what I was doing at the time I first encountered each of these games. I often found myself thinking, “Yeah, I remember that. That was really fantastic!”
Christopher Locke established himself as one of the foremost chroniclers of the information age with his contribution to the popular 2000 book, *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, in which he spelled out how traditional hierarchical models of marketing and corporate communication were being disrupted by that most disruptive technology of all, the Internet.

Now in *Gonzo Marketing*, he sketches how models of marketing should look if businesses wish to thrive in an age where Locke sees the Internet as the ultimate revolt of the masses.

The book’s title is inspired by Hunter S. Thompson, self-styled creator of so-called gonzo journalism, who rejected that sacred cow of journalism, objective detachment. In his view, “The writer must be a participant in the scene while he is writing it.” So *Gonzo Marketing* is peppered with lively anecdotes and stories, beginning with how Locke was introduced to the power of small-scale, or micro, marketing by a busker in London who after receiving an extravagant £10...