

'Games people play'

by Lawrence Savell

Carefully ascending a number of carpeted steps, a well-dressed man approaches the top of the aisle. Around him, dozens of six-foot alley cats, golf balls, fruits, and vegetables shout, jump, and otherwise gyrate in a vain effort to gain his attention.

Puzzled viewers ponder the situation; a closer look reveals the true nature of this spectacle. Underneath the orange peels, animal skins, and aluminum foil lurk ordinary human beings who have sacrificed their dignity for a chance to make it big on a television game show.

It is obvious that the present popularity enjoyed by game shows is directly related to the financially depressed atmosphere of our time. Rather than suffer further anguish through serials, afternoon viewers turn to quiz programs to see people overcoming the economic crunch. Even though observers are not making any tangible gains, they are still happy when a contestant "rakes it in."

It is interesting to note that even these television contests have not been invulnerable to the sting of inflation. Prizes have been constantly rising in value recently. It is not uncommon for a person on "The Price Is Right" to win \$6 or \$7,000 in one episode. Cars are being given away at a rate far greater than that of a few years ago. The most obvious increase has been seen in the nighttime version of the "10,000 Pyramid", which has inflated by 250%.

Recognizing the wide interest in participating in such lucrative endeavors, shrewd publishers have produced books on how to win at these games. The money crunch has changed what was once a game into a business, where applying for a show is as hard as getting a job and the competitive nature of players rivals the ferocity of the business world.

Although only a small number of people ever get to appear on a television quiz program, these shows benefit viewers by allowing them to pretend they are the ones winning the cars and collecting the cash. In this way, they at least feel there is a way out of their gloomy existence. If these programs allow observers to "make it big" vicariously, then the world where people make a "Gambit" in a "Big Showdown" trying to win a "Jackpot" in a "Split Second" might have some value after all.