

Video Review

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THE WORLD AUTHORITY ON CONSUMER VIDEO

Latest Tape & Disc Reviews and Equipment and Test Reports



WHICH BLANKS ARE BEST? CBS LABS TEST 30 VHS TAPES

**Pac-Man, Fooley!
Top Champs Reveal
The Greatest Games**

**Stereo Video:
Is It Really
Worth the
Money?**

**Complete
Fall Product
Preview**



**Plus: Calvin Trillin,
Sarris, Simels and more**

AUGUST 1982

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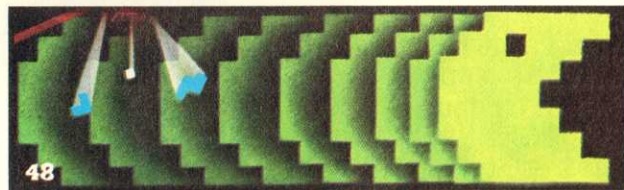
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FROM THE EDITOR
VIEW POINTS

Games grown-ups play

"I'm nuts about video games. Like all the other kids in my grade school, I guess. My mom and dad think I'm just plain nuts. Anyway, I don't like to argue about it. I just like to play the games. If I wanted to fight about stuff, I sure wouldn't play game carts. There's nobody to fight with but yourself when you're playing carts. If you lose, it's your own fault. And when you win, it's not like fighting, because you're not beating anybody. With game carts, you can play 'em for a real long time, and the more you play, the better you get at it, till you're real good, then you play a different game. It's hard to get real good at some of the games, but I think they're the best ones. When you finally do, it makes you feel neat. And my cousin Marky doesn't cry about getting beat or anything."

"I find video games fascinating. Although most games hold an intangible, ephemeral value that transcends pure logic—the *a priori* euhemerism—of certain video strategy games will forever hold me captive. Rarely have I known an endeavor to remain intriguing cerebrally. Second only to computer technology, with which many strategy games share a clear affinity, I contend that video games are the greatest thing since sliced atoms."

"I totally approve of video games. As a matter of fact, some of them are simply darling. But the main reason I say they're one thing that's absolutely great for the kids is that they keep the kids away from the darn junk on TV these days (not to mention out of my hair—but, now that's another story!). I think some of the ones I've seen are educational. And, more than anything, they're one thing I can get the whole family to do together—and you know how hard *that* is to do with any family, I don't care who you are. I know my husband and I have a lot of fun with the kids when we play the games, and I think it's something the kids feel like they can do with us all on the same level. *I'm* certainly no better at those games than the kids are, I'll tell you that much (and my husband is even worse)!"

It seems as if everybody's a video-game fan these days, for all sorts of reasons—kids, parents, technology whizzes, truck drivers. . . . The game bomb has exploded, and the whole country's been shaken. Millions of Americans are playing video games at this moment. Hundreds of thousands of game arcades have been opening almost everywhere. More than a dozen new companies have introduced some five times as many home game cartridges in the past few months alone. And the whole whirlwind wave has been hitting so fast and hard that more and more Americans simply don't know what to make of it.

From the beginning, *Video Review* has worked to cover all the news in video games authoritatively and critically. Now that job is bigger and much more important than ever. And we say: We're ready for it. In addition to all the regular coverage of all facets of video games that we've been steadily increasing for some time, we've been working on a major move unprecedented for any video magazine: an entire regular section dedicated to critical, comprehensive reviews of the latest games, written by the country's top games experts.

As this issue was going to press, we were rounding up the newest releases, in order to have the first reviews of all the latest games in print just as they hit the stores. Watch for them in the next issue of *Video Review*.

David Hajdu

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Hookers, heifers and the creeping terror



Apple Core

For a mere \$29.95, an Apple II home computer owner can purchase a text fantasy game that teaches how to be a pimp.

"Street Life," by Nelson Wood (Hard Core Software), is a recent entry in the growing galaxy of adult computer games—but this one has a business twist. Though it's filled with jargon they don't teach at Harvard Business School, the course work is similar: A player is rewarded with points for the diligent pursuit of money. Ruthlessness is a plus.

The fantasy goes like this: Manage a pack of ladies of the evening for profit. In the course of the game you've got to decide which car to buy, how much to spend on gold and diamonds (fixed assets), when to insist the girls put in overtime, which cops, thugs and other pimps to avoid and how to deal with the kind of health problem that requires penicillin.

Naturally, the object of the exercise is to accumulate as much cash as possible by paying out as little as possible to doctors and police on the take. P.S.: Don't insult your

neighbors. Hiring hoods for gang warfare costs plenty.

Apple II, thou miraculous machine, is this thy fate? □

Game Experiment

Dr. Jess McKenzie of the FAA recently recruited 19 non-alcoholics and had them come into his lab. He served juice, put the subjects to bed, and the next morning asked them to play "Combat" on an Atari machine.

Later he asked the group back to the lab and proceeded to raise their blood alcohol levels to .15. "We got them drunk," says McKenzie. "Most of 'em couldn't hit the floor with their hats."

The next morning, 15 hangover victims played "Combat"—with no loss of performance. Four refused to get out of bed. □

Video's Schlock Market

"Nobody ever went broke underestimating the taste of the American public," said H.L. Mencken more than 50 years ago.

Proof no. 12,897,003: Bob Blair of Tulsa, OK.

Blair, vice president of a videocassette company called VCI, this summer launched a series under the heading "La Bad Cinema." To make this roster of turkeys, a movie has to be more than just a bomb, it has to stink in rotten company.

"I've always been fond of movies that are so bad they're funny," says Blair. "There's a market out there for films with no redeeming qualities."

Last June, VCI released four greats on cassette: *They Saved Hitler's Brain* (right), *The Creeping Terror*, *The Crater Lake Monster* and *Hillbillies in a Haunted House*. *Terror in Tinytown*—a western with an all-midget cast—is currently slated for fall release.

Though *Hitler's Brain* has

been nominated by some experts as the worst movie ever made, Blair's personal favorite is *The Creeping Terror*. "A spaceship lands on Earth," he explains, "and a monster, who looks like a guy wearing a quilt, exits and starts eating people. When the monster devours people, they literally crawl under the blanket. I mean, this movie is cheap. There's no dialogue because the director lost the soundtrack."

"At the end of the movie

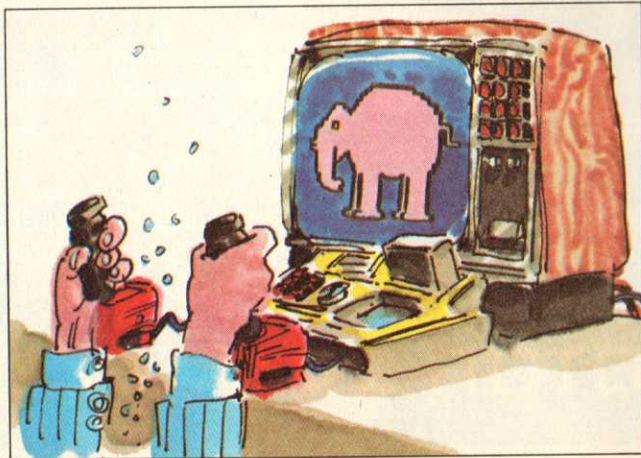


the monster withstands an assault of airplanes and bullets. Then a '57 Ford rams it and it's curtains. They made cars right in those days." □

Pac-Master

Eric Schwibs is an 18-year-old computer science major at Buffalo State College in upstate New York. He is also the most stupendous "Pac-Man" player in the world.

Last May 1, Eric and some friends gathered at Patrick's Pub in suburban Orchard Park to begin the game of games. A quarter was plinked down the slot at 9:45 p.m. At midnight, Eric was playing on the same quarter. At 1 a.m., ditto. At 2 a.m., likewise. At 3 a.m., Patrick's rolled up the floor, but the bouncer, two bartenders and a cook stood by, in awe, for another three hours. At dawn the match ended. Eric's score was 2,935,590.





"When I hit around 2.9 million, the machine stopped," says Eric. "You see, there's a bug in the program. You can't go over 251 screens. And I had two men left, too."

Eric says he introduced himself to "Pac-Man" in February, 1981. Since then, he's played "a couple of thousand games" at Patrick's—and even a few in his sleep.

"I have this recurring dream that makes me wake up in a cold sweat sometimes," he says. "I'm at Patrick's playing. I have too many drinks. Then I leave. I'm driving home fast in my yellow car, and *bam!* A green monster and a red monster nail me on the exit ramp." □

Codes for Misconduct

Most suburban high schools' student newspapers are content to chronicle the cafeteria lady's new hairdo. But the *Jet Jotter* of Longmeadow, MA, is a different cut of chops.

A few months ago, *JJ* published an ingenious article that showed readers how to alter wires in their cable-TV signal boxes so they can watch Home Box Office, Showtime and other pay-stations for free.

Within a few weeks of publication, according to an AP report, around 1,000 Longmeadow cable customers dropped every extra pay tier from their contracts. The not-

so-mysterious mass drop-off stung Times Mirror Cablevision for a bundle of dough, and executives were not amused.

John J. Fitzgerald, advisor to the student newspaper, defends the article as "an excellent piece of journalism," adding that the paper report-



ed that tampering with home signals is illegal.

The author, one presumes, has received 1,000 unsolicited (and anonymous) recommendations to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. □

Britannia Rules The Airwaves

Britons could do more than just watch the war in the Falkland Islands on television—for a while last spring, they could play it.

The British videotex system Prestel usually offers its 16,000 subscribers a routine fare of stock reports and "nuzak" via telephone lines connected to home television sets. But last April, a few days after a mess of Argentine troops invaded Her Majesty's Falkland Islands, Prestel added a new dish to the menu: a

video game called "Obliterate."

Harry Arm-Chair Patriot, choosing to punch up the game, instantly became a nuclear submarine commander in the British task force. The message on his TV screen read: "Your orders are to obliterate the Argentine Flagship *Fray Bentos*. The honor of the nation is in your hands." (Fray Bentos is a brand of Argentine canned corned beef sold in England.)

If Cmdr. Arm-Chair botched a torpedo shot, the screen said: "Your poor judgment is endangering the reputation of your country and giving the enemy a chance to retaliate." A direct hit elicited: "Well done, sir! You are a national hero. Horatio would be proud of you."

A loud protest from the House of Commons caused the telecommunications service to scotch "Obliterate" after a week's run. After all, reasoned the politicians, blowing up Argentines in the South Atlantic is one thing, but making a game out of it—now that's not cricket! □

Auction Shots

In the good old days of cattle auctions, cowboys used to load 'em up and drive 'em down to a stockyard outside of town. Today, cattle remain

Livestock Marketing in McAlester, OK, a growing number of cattle auctions take place in hotel rooms, where auctioneers sing their songs in front of projection TV sets that play color videotapes of herds up for sale.

"It's just like a normal auc-



tion," drawls Sherrill. "We go right into the fields where the cattle are and get them on tape. Then we edit it down—you know, take out the dull parts—and show the pictures to the buyers."

How do you get the cattle to smile? he is asked.

"We don't have any trouble getting them to pose," says Sherrill. "We coax them with a sack of feed to walk past the camera. Then we coax 'em



on the plain and their videotapes do all the traveling for them.

According to Kenneth Sherrill, president of United

back the other way with more feed."

Producers have been doing that with actors for years. □

GCE

Video-Game Console/Monitor Vectrex Arcade System \$200 approx.

Space rocks, space ships and other screen images can rotate 360° to simulate 3D, thanks to the high-resolution vector screen and the 64K memory of this two-piece game system.

The control panel has a four-foot cord and tucks away into the monitor's cabinet when not in use. *General Consumer Electronics, 233 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401 (213) 394-9667*



PARKER BROTHERS Video-Game Cartridge "The Empire Strikes Back" \$27.50 approx.

Now you can strike back at the Empire. By maneuvering your snow-spearer to attack lumbering Imperial Walkers on the ice planet Hoth, you keep them from destroying precious power generators. Repeated hits weaken the Walkers and, naturally, The Force can be called upon in times of dire peril.

There are 32 game variations on the cartridge, which is compatible with both Atari and Sears video-game consoles.

Parker Brothers, 50 Dunham Rd., Beverly, MA 01915 (617) 927-7600

MARANTZ Videocassette Recorder Model VR-200 \$1,295

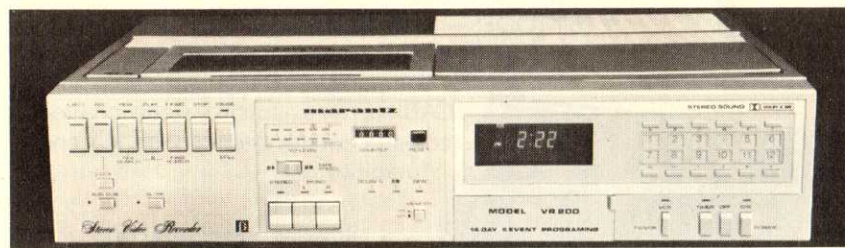
The first stereo, tabletop model in the Beta format, this VCR features both Beta Noise Reduction (BNR) and Dolby C circuitry.

One of the first VCRs by Marantz, the model VR-200 has freeze-frame, slow motion and nine-times-normal-

speed forward and reverse scan in Beta III. A wired remote control handles all playback functions.

The recorder has a 14-day/five-event programmable timer, a stereo headphone jack and two-channel audio-dubbing capability.

Marantz, 20525 Nordhoff St., Chatsworth, CA 91311 (213) 998-9333

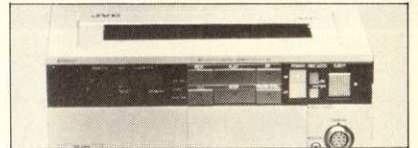


JVC

Portable Videocassette Recorder Model HR-2650 \$1,495

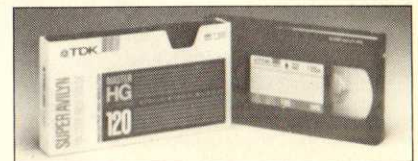
Stereo sound and Dolby noise-reduction circuitry make this VCR a hi-fi portable. The 105-channel, cable-ready tuner (model TU-26U) has a 14-day/eight-event programmable timer. A wireless remote control is included.

Four video heads help ensure clean playback effects—freeze-frame,



slow motion and forward and reverse scan—in the SP and EP modes. The three-speed recorder also has an electronic counter.

JVC, 41 Slater Dr., Elmwood Park, NJ 07407 (201) 794-3900



TDK Blank Videotape Master HG T-120

Smaller and more highly magnetized particles, plus modified binding techniques, help make this first tape in TDK's new Master HG series a step up from both standard- and high-grade videotape.

According to the manufacturer, the cobalt-treated ferric-oxide tape offers a higher signal-to-noise ratio and fewer dropouts than TDK's previous Super Avilyn tapes.

TDK, 12 Harbor Park Dr., Port Washington, NY 11050 (516) 625-0100

ON THE DRAWING BOARDS . . .

It's gametime, folks: Laser-videodisc pioneer **Pioneer** is planning to release *The Curse of the Idol's Eye* interactive videodisc game by Christmas. About the same time, **Thorn EMI** should be offering more than 20 video games for **Atari** 400 and 800 and **Commodore** VIC home computers. The \$20 to \$40 game cassettes and cartridges will include a cube-type puzzle . . . "KC's Crazy Chase"—follow-up to Pac-Manesque "KC Munchkin" video game—is due from **Odyssey** shortly. Much further down the road is an interactive "life-size" golf game from **Odyssey**, a la type in sci-fi flick *Outland*, utilizing video projection . . .

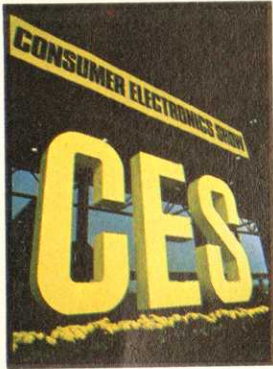
Gee, that's svelte: Thin, virtually flat color TV set, designed to hang on the wall, is being talked about—again. **RCA's** long-under-wraps flat set is 40 inches wide, 30 inches high and three

or four inches thick . . . **RCA** also gets small with the first ½-inch Saticon videocamera, the lightweight (3.3 pounds) model CC012, due in September . . .

Beta late than never: **Toshiba** plans to have a stereo, Beta-format VCR by early next year. Beta licensor **Sony** is also working on stereo Beta for this country, with plans to have a model after stereo broadcast-TV standards are finally established—maybe mid-'83 . . . This is **ITT**? Giant electronic concerns are in the forefront of the digital TV race. Working with **Zenith**, **ITT** recently showed a prototype set with digital TV-signal processing, allowing for high-definition and other new modes of TV. **Standard Elektrik Lorenz** subsidiary plans to have mass-produced digital TV sets by mid-decade.

—Frank Lovece

FALL PRODUCT PREVIEW:



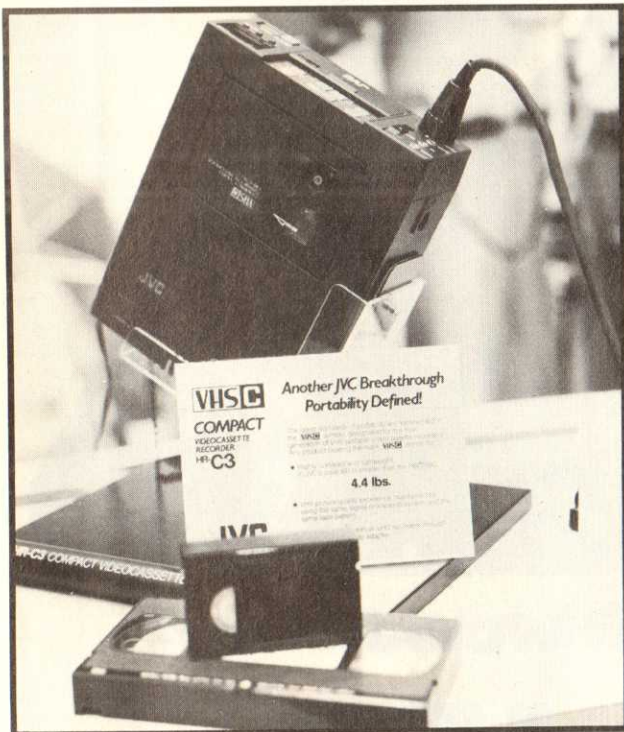
Dateline: tomorrow. It's the Consumer Electronics Show of Summer '82. But for the international rally of video pros still crowding the show as this issue was about to go to press, the video event of the season was an extraordinary peek at the biggest video news of next season.

What's in store for video fans this fall? Unveiled in giant, glitzy exhibits, in private demos and in conferences throughout Chicago's McCormick Place, the big newsmakers at the summer CES were video games—enough of them to make Frogger himself want to croak. Then, equally dramatic, though in a much different way, there was major video news about every

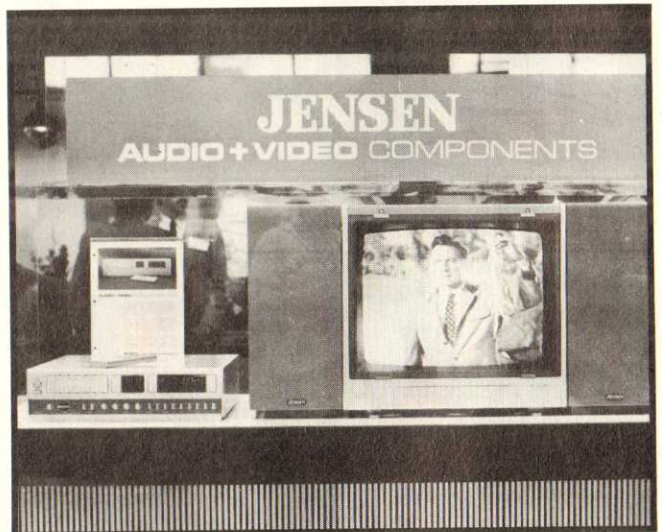
kind of product from VCRs and prerecorded programs to home satellite systems.

First of all, like a scene from a dynamic sci-fi space game, the world of electronic fun has almost instantly exploded to become the super-nova star of consumer video. At a pace practically impossible to keep up with at CES, at least 16 companies introduced more than 180 new games, including some impressive new entries such as Atari's "Defenders," Activision's "Pitfall" (in both Atari and Intellivision formats), and Intellivision's two "Tron—Solar Sailor" (with voice synthesis) and "Tron—Deadly Disc" (released in both Atari and Intellivision formats).

Meanwhile, just as games have been garnering more and more Hollywood style, Glitter City is going gaga over games. In a string of small surprises, Paramount and 20th Century-Fox each premiered new home video-game ventures at CES. Plus, George Lucas' company, Lucasfilms, announced a deal with Atari to start co-



JVC's version of the compact VHS-C VCR (above); Sharp's audio microcassette/monitor (below).



Jensen enters video with a tuner/receiver and monitor (above); Magnavox shows a new LV disc player (below).



developing interactive games for home computers.

Back down to planet earth, the hottest topic in video gear at the show was VHS-C, the new mini videocassette recording format developed by Japan's Matsushita company. Though the commercial viability of the new format is one matter—and a highly controversial one—the VHS-C products at CES seemed to impress most observers. (For more on the subject, watch for next month's *VR*.)

In conventional VCRs, Sony somehow stole the show with a video system the press wasn't even allowed to see. In a set of private demonstrations protected with cloak-and-dagger security, Sony conducted what several participants said was the most outstanding display of consumer video technology ever. What the company has developed, according to all reports, is the first VCR capable of *three-channel, fully digital* sound, unofficially described by Sony as "comparable to the digital audio-disc." The recorder demonstrated was a prototype, but mass-produced models were said to be planned to hit American stores in "late '83."

A year earlier, Marantz will actually have the first stereo Beta VCRs in the country, starting with a tabletop model with both Dolby C and Beta Noise Reduction.

As for stereo prerecorded programs to play on the Marantz model, none of the program producers said any titles would be ready this fall.

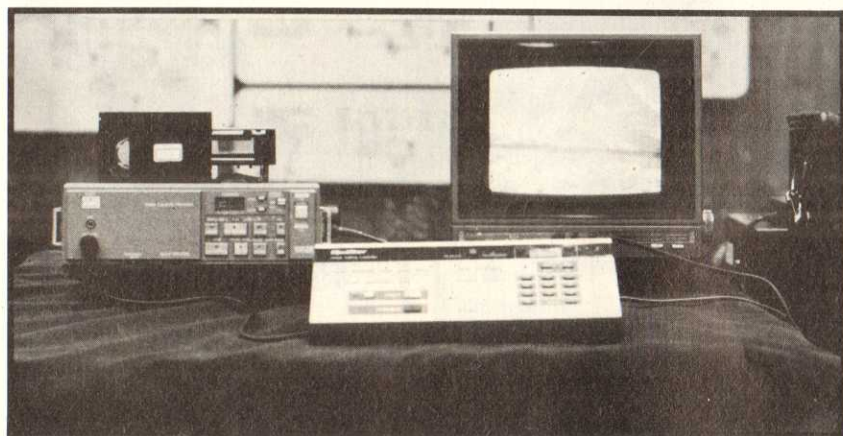
In VHS tape and both CED and LV disc, the stereo titles attracting the most attention at CES included *Star*

Wars (CBS-Fox), *Dragonslayer* and *Paint Your Wagon* (Paramount) and *Physical* and *The Marvelous Land of Oz* (MCA). In fact, even some of the smaller independents (Vestron, Pacific Arts and Blay Video) were playing up the role of stereo in their future releases.

Several companies used the summer CES to announce major new distribution alliances for releases within some of these categories. Among them: a new quarterly *Playboy* videotape periodical to be released by CBS-Fox, and a new series of children's programs from Family Home Entertainment to be released by MGM-UA.

A few companies announced plans to try to reduce prerecorded tape prices, but only in selected areas. For example, Paramount showcased its new "Gateway" series of cult favorites and B horror movies at prices ranging from \$49 to \$69. Warner Home Video similarly showcased its \$70 *Night at the Movies* series of '50s movie classics and short subjects. But nobody seemed to be talking about any price cuts either in major new top-of-the-line programming or among current bestsellers.

In an unusual taste of the video programming possible in years to come, North American Philips showed off some of the special capabilities of laser disc players. Interfaced with personal computers and outboard electronics, three players demonstrated three potential applications of consumer disc technology: computer-game interplay, computer-teletext interaction and frame storage with compressed audio (so the viewer can watch one image on



Quasar's VHS-C model was introduced with a separate editing board (above); Fuji's VHS-C cassette, with a recording time of 20 minutes (below).



Sony's Marine Pack (above); NEC displays its first camera (below).



COMPLETE REPORT FROM THE CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW

one disc frame while hearing the sound at normal speed).

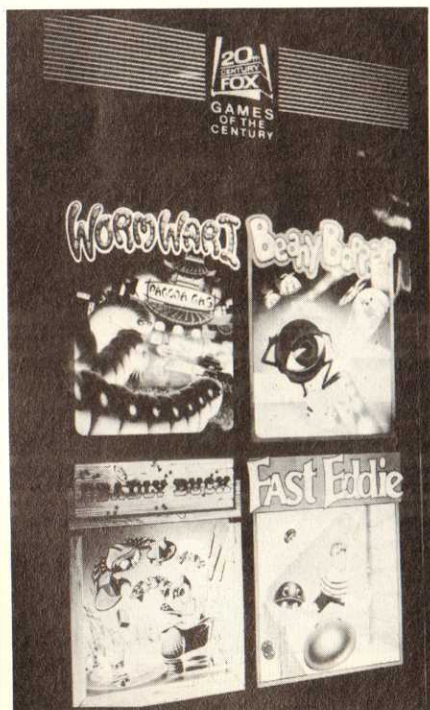
Another future product in prototype at CES was a micro-videotape recorder/camera combo. Although the black-and-white unit won't be available here for at least another year, the model shown privately by Elbex struck some at CES as fairly impressive.

In other products, here and now, all the major companies introduced new, fall-season lines of gear amounting to literally hundreds of new models. Some of the biggest eye-catchers were all the new lines of video components (monitors, audio-video receivers, etc.) from a range of companies including Fisher, Jensen, Prodon and Sony. (Again, watch for more on video components in next month's *VR*.)

As for blank videotape, two products which might have stopped previous shows—the diminutive VHS-C from several companies and a T-180 cassette from PDMagnetics—barely caused a ripple at this one. PDMagnetics

admits that its nine-hour VHS cassette won't be on the market for some time. Meanwhile, the company is seeking VHS-license approval for its T-150. At the same time low-priced, unlicensed VHS and Beta cassettes from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea showed up in quantity for the first time, with the promise of more to come. Heretofore, output from these sources has been limited by the supply of videotape.

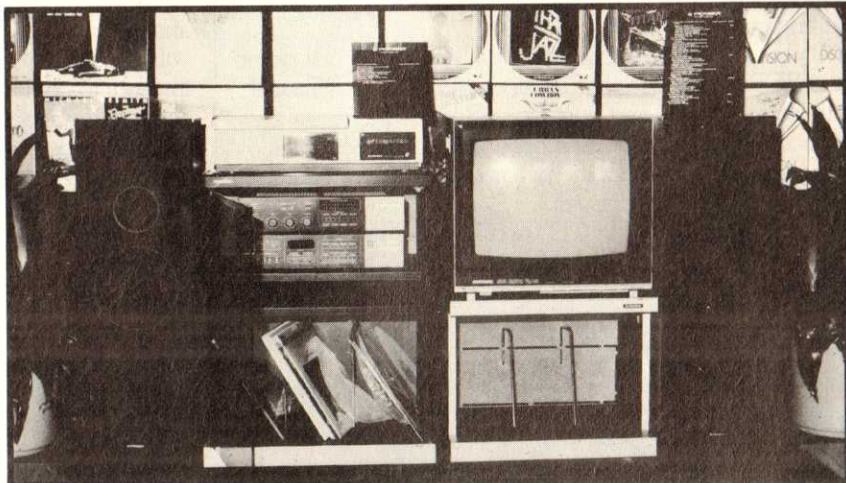
Finally, the who's-got-it-cheapest war among satellite-antenna manufacturers seemed to be over among CES exhibitors, as prices edged upward from the lows set six months ago at the winter show. Now manufacturers are concentrating on improving the quality of their products (most systems now offer motorized remote control either as part of the basic package or as an option) and on appearance both outdoors and in. System add-ons are proliferating, including stereo tuners and computer interfaces. (David Hajdu/Roy Hemming/Robert Angus) □



20th Century-Fox's first games (above); Fisher's first VCRs (below).



Emerson's first game system (below).



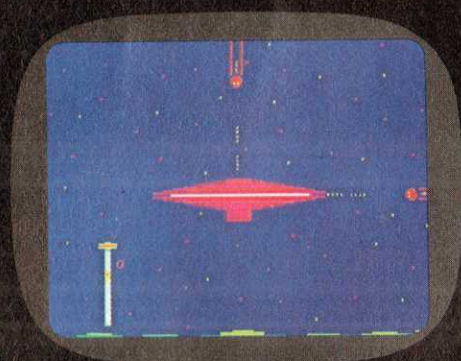
Pioneer's component system, with LV disc player and monitor (above).



Atari's WWII program (above left); Paramount's Gateway series (above right); Akai's stereo tabletop VCR (below right).



PACK IT IN,



THE GAMES THE CHAMP

By Laurie Winer

Change, change, change—like the video revolution itself—is the essence of mastering video games. Memorize the patterns, perfect each game and move on.

The hottest video champs in the country no longer even look at "Asteroids," "Space Invaders" or "Pac-Man." They're passe to the top players. These days, the champs are choosing other games: games with more challenges, greater complexity and better graphics. The names of the games aren't on everybody's tongues, nor on anybody's T-shirt, but some of America's foremost home-game aficionados say they're the best games of all.

While these video-playing demons exhibit extraordinary hand-eye coordination, they can't always pinpoint what makes a home game great. (Most of these champs, after all, are under 18.) But they aren't content to settle for merely the best-known. They seek out the unusual, and they know, almost the instant they pick up a joystick, whether a new game will be challenging, varying and visually exciting. Here are the games the video whiz kids rate as the greatest, with their hints for winning.

DEMON ATTACK (Imagic) This is as close to arcade-quality graphics as any home game has gotten. It was the first to have individual animation (movement for each separate object). The enemy birds, for instance, flap their wings in a lyrical, balletic motion. When you get right

down to it, though, it's another of the "shoot or be shot" strategies.

Aside from the birds, watch out for aliens. At the higher skill levels, the birds will split in two. When that happens, kill one of the new birds—then concentrate on the aliens.

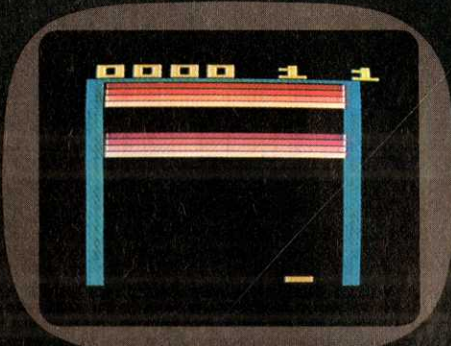
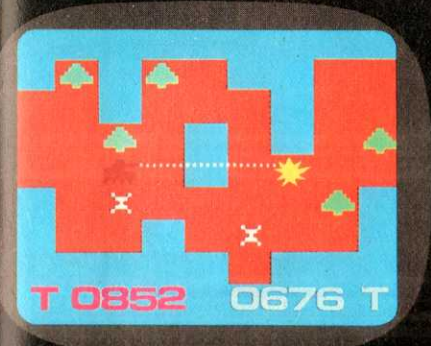
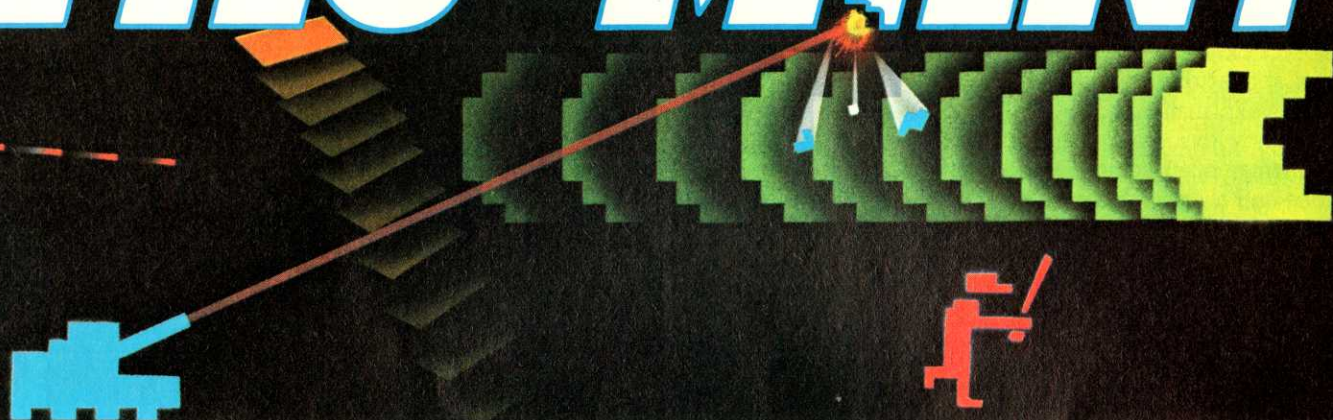
GRAND PRIX (Activision) This is a car race against time. You're on a straight course, and must avoid bridges, oil slicks and other cars. Players say there is a pattern to the bridges and slicks, but exactly how the other cars will come at you is not predictable.

For those who favor "fast graphics," nothing else is as fun to watch as this one. Frank Tetro calls it "downright beautiful." There's just one problem, according to 14-year-old champ Sean Bubba: "All the crashing will give you a headache."

MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL (Intellivision) As far as sports games go, Intellivision pretty much corners the market on graphics, realism and complexity. In fact, some indict the Intellivision sports series of being excessively complicated and, therefore, too slow. But anyone who enjoys the intricacies of real-life baseball will probably be engrossed by this one.

Instead of a joystick, you use a rectangular hand control complete with an overlay for maneuvering each player. Just to give you an idea of the choices involved: Your pitcher can throw a fastball, fast curve, slow curve, outside curve or change-up. To urge you on, there's the

PAC-MAN!



S SAY ARE REALLY BEST

sound of the crowd cheering when sides switch, and an umpire who yells, "Yer out!"

MISSILE COMMAND (Atari) The experts call this one dynamically graphic, but it has a decidedly morbid premise. Although the cities you're protecting from bomb blasts are supposedly on a planet called Zardon, they look suspiciously familiar. When your cities are finally obliterated—as they inevitably will be—the whole sky flashes. This game could be called "Nuclear Holocaust."

According to the experts, once you reach level six, you'll have to lose some cities. Sacrifice the three grouped together on either side of your missile base, then concentrate on saving the remaining three. Always protect the city closest to your missile base. When you're attacked by a wave of four missiles and one is headed directly for your missile base, protect the base. The other bombs in the wave won't hurt your cities.

Here's an inside tip from video champ Robert Heineman: Start the game at level 13. Let the enemy missiles destroy all of your missiles on the first wave. As the world is blowing up, watch the city on the extreme right: The initials of Missile Command's designer will appear there. May he attend the next disarmament rally.

QUEST FOR THE RINGS (Odyssey) This may be the best game in Odyssey's Master Strategy series. Also, it comes with a story book too complicated to even begin describing here. Suffice it to say that two players must recover 10 magical rings hidden under 23 possible

castles. You really need one or, preferably, two good partners to play "Quest."

With its detailed story and varied graphics, it combines adventure with skill as well as any video cartridge around. This is the one game no champs we know of have yet mastered, but it's one of their favorites, because "it just doesn't get boring."

SUPER BREAKOUT (Atari) As far as peace-loving games go, this one can't be beat. "It's got a wonderful melody; you don't have to listen to shooting all of the time," says game whiz Bubba. In order to enjoy what is indeed a lovely six keyboard soundtrack, you must have excellent reflexes. Atari has taken the original home game "Pong" a long, long way.

The idea is the same, though: You're given a paddle with which to hit a square ball. Only instead of simply hitting the ball toward another paddle, you're breaking down a multicolored wall of bright orange, periwinkle blue, hot pink and lime green. As you progress, your

For this report on the most underrated home games, the following video champs were consulted: Eric Blitz, 20; Sean Bubba, 14; Frank Cretella, 15; Dave Dahlin, 13; Tiffany Gaber, 17; Mark Gray, 19; Robert Heineman, 18; Kenny Jordan, 12; Mike Kohler, 15; Bob Kuwatch Jr., 31; Scott Minning, 12; James Nassour, 16; Laura Pangilinan, 10; Todd Rogers, 17; Frank Tetro, 16; Kenny Vance, 18. Also, thanks to Randi Hacker, games editor of Consumer Electronics Monthly; and Michael Blecha, electronics manager at Crazy Eddie in NY.

paddle gets smaller and the ball goes faster.

Bubba adds a psychological dimension to the game: "I pretend my friends are in jail on top of the wall and I'm getting them out."

YAR'S REVENGE (Atari) This game has superb graphics along with a high degree of complexity. Like so many of the newer games, it comes with an elaborate storybook, explaining the backgrounds of the figures that appear on the screen.

This explanation, however, will not help you understand how to score well in a fairly complex game. Heineman offers some advice: "Stay inside the neutral zone and always have a cannon ready. When the Qotile [the enemy] fires at you, jump out of the neutral zone, staying behind it, and fire. Then get out of the way. Once you get up to a high level, the swirl [a whirling pinwheel fired by the Qotile] will track you. Remember that it cannot go from left to right. So jump off the screen at the left and reappear on the right. The swirl will be temporarily confused."

Whimsical Games

There are certain games that champs appreciate for their ingenuity or humor. While these games may be more easily mastered than the aforementioned group, they always elicit a smile when played for the first time.

FAST FOOD (Telesys) Mr. Mouth floats around trying to gobble as much junk food as possible. He racks up calories instead of points. But should he mistakenly gobble a purple pickle—immediate indigestion, loss of points (sorry, calories) and a large "burp."

FREEWAY (Activision) You're a chicken, and you're trying to cross the road. Only the road isn't Main Street so much as the L.A. freeway at rush hour.

KABOOM (Activision) A mad bomber races across the top of the screen while you run to catch his dynamic droppings in a bucket of water. Get 10,000 points and the bomber stops smiling.

LOST LUGGAGE (Games by Apollo) An airport baggage checker goes berserk and starts throwing all your luggage around. If you don't catch it, it will open on the ground. If you don't catch the suitcase thrown by the international hijacker, get ready for a big surprise. □

You Shot Me Down In the Electronic Game of Life

By Calvin Trillin

You tell me you found another
and you wouldn't trade her
For two hundred points
of "Space Invaders."

It's all so cruel;
it's so downright mean.
I'm nothing but a blip
on your Atari machine.

The author of eight books, Calvin Trillin is a regular contributor to The New Yorker and The Nation.

Video Review

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Colecovision: mixing the unmatched

An unknown comes out of nowhere, challenges the champ, knocks him out and saves either (a) his parents' farm, (b) his sister's virtue or (c) all of the above. Kinda gets you right here, don't it?

Well, Coleco isn't exactly coming out of nowhere, and as far as we know it hasn't got any virgin siblings, but it sure is an underdog about to challenge the champ video-game companies. If Colecovision lives up to its promise, it could knock out both Atari and Intellivision in the first round.

Somehow, Coleco's new Colecovision system (scheduled to hit the stores this month) has managed to smooth out some of the rough edges of the graphics of other systems, including Atari's. Take "Donkey Kong," for example. The cartridge (which, incidentally, comes with the purchase of the under-\$200 console) is based on the popular arcade game. Now, we all know how disappointing most arcade-to-home game translations have been. (In "Asteroids," for example, the asteroids look more like popcorn than rocks, but never mind.) Well, this game loses nothing in the translation from high-school hangout to living room. The colors are as vivid and the characters just about as clear as the coin-operated game's version.

Game Compatibility

This is due to increased ROM in the cartridges and the 49K resolution ability of Colecovision, which gives it about three times the pixel capacity of Intellivision. (Pixel refers to the number of dots used to create a graphic image; the greater the number, the higher the resolution, and the clearer and more defined the picture.)

But, improving the graphics was, perhaps, the easiest part. Building the cartridge selection, now that was difficult. After all, Atari already has the rights to just about every popular arcade game ever designed. It's also developed this little habit of suing the

ROMs off anyone who tries to sell a game that remotely resembles one of its exclusives.

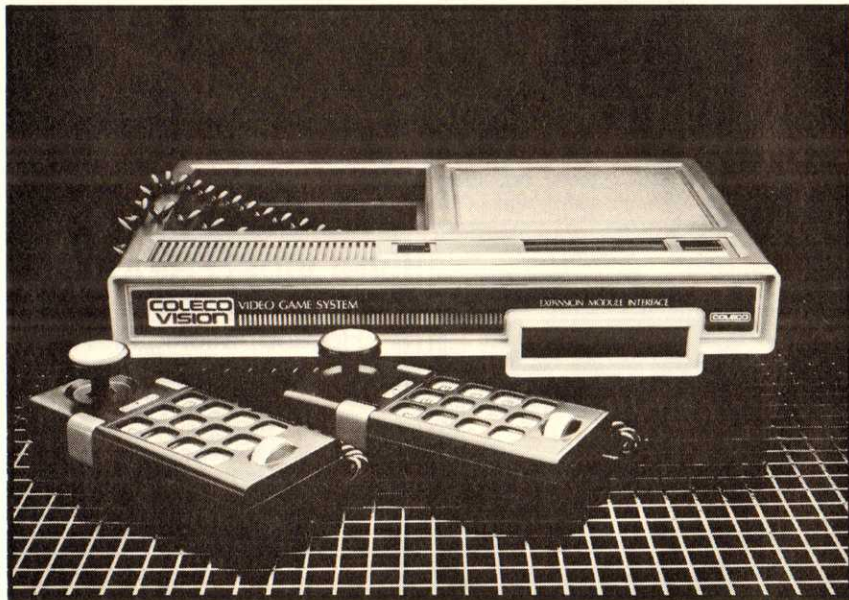
So, instead of risking being dragged to court on a copyright rap for having given people facsimiles of the real thing, Colecovision decided to give people the real thing: Atari cartridges. For \$60, you can buy an Atari "expansion module" which, in essence, makes the Colecovision console an Atari console.

What it does, see, is plug into the cartridge slot in the Colecovision console. Then any and all Atari-compatible cartridges can plug right

cartridge on another console—not when the memory within the cartridge is always the same. This is a tragic drawback, but it's not Coleco's fault, really.

Unique Controllers

Additionally, the controllers on the Colecovision are different from those of other systems. They are joysticks similar to Atari's, only they allow movement in eight positions. There is, in addition, on the same controller, a 16-position keyboard similar to Intellivision's. But unique to the Colecovision controller is a



Colecovision: An 'expansion module' provides compatibility for Atari games.

into that. This, of course, gives Colecovision a distinct advantage. No matter how good the graphics of other systems, they tend to suffer because "Asteroids" and other Ataricarts can't be played on them. But they can be played on the Colecovision console. This means that games from Activision, Apollo, Imagic, Parker Brothers and even Mattel's new Atari-compatible line, can also be used on the Coleco system.

It's important to mention, though, that the graphics on the Atari cartridges *are not improved* when played on the Colecovision module. A game-cart's graphics cannot be improved just by playing the

speed roller—much like the control on the arcade game "Centipede." By rolling this ball with your thumb, you can control the speed of certain figures in certain games. This is definitely something that a lot of hardcore gamers might find a sensational addition. The greater the speed, the better the challenge and the faster the action.

Secondary controllers will be available in the future, specifically designed for driving games such as "Turbo." The unit will have a steering wheel, gearshift and accelerator pedal built into it, and should cost something in the neighborhood of \$60. (Randi Hacker) □

Who wins when game systems compete?



Robert Gerson

Video games may lose some of their fun this year—at least for people thinking about buying them. The awesome popularity of home game systems has created a market explosion, but recent developments threaten to make a game purchase a potentially expensive mistake.

There are three major systems out today: Atari's Video Computer System (VCS), Mattel's Intellivision and Odyssey from North American Philips Consumer Electronics. Their sales are in that order, too, right now, with Atari game consoles outselling Mattel's by about three to one, and Mattel sales about double those of Odyssey.

Game Plans

Up to now, it hasn't been too difficult to choose among the game systems. On price, Odyssey wins out. When cost is no object, and graphics and the complexity of the on-screen display count most, Intellivision takes the honors. Occupying the middle ground, but with the largest selection of game cartridges, is Atari. All, of course, have unique features and games to recommend them.

But this year, six totally new formats will be either introduced or expanded. Scheduled to make a splash this year are Activision (offering a game originally developed by Bally), Coleco, Commodore, Emerson Radio and Tycom, all of which will sell game consoles in the \$125-\$180 class, about the same as Atari and Odyssey. The sixth new game system is from Atari itself, which plans to sell a \$395 super-game designed to siphon away the more affluent customers.

All the games use unique cartridges that won't fit another brand's consoles. The only company plan-

ning to offer a degree of compatibility is Coleco, which says it will offer an adaptor so its console will accept Atari VCS cartridges, and it's working on a similar adaptor for Intellivision cartridges.

But that's only part of the confusion that awaits the unwary and uninformed game buyer. Today's low-end home computers play games too, using programs fed from cartridges, cassettes or magnetic discs. These come from such companies as APF, Atari, Commodore, Radio Shack and Texas Instruments, and their \$230-\$400 street prices overlap the high end of the game-console spectrum. To stir the pot even more, the Astrocade, Coleco and Intellivision consoles are designed for expansion into full computers—but considering the way true computer prices are dropping, buying a game on that basis would be an error.

I assume by now you've gotten the point that not all these games, with their different formats and essentially similar programs, can possibly survive. The first-year investment in a game console with the average 10-12 cartridges can easily run \$450-\$500, which puts it on a par with buying a new color TV set or videocassette recorder. And unlike those products, game consoles are totally dependent on the addition of new cartridges. Your future enjoyment of one console rests on the con-

tinued availability of new cartridges from the manufacturer. If you have any doubts on that, ask some people how much they like their now discontinued Fairchild, RCA or original Coleco or Odyssey programmable games.

Guessing Games

What's going to happen in the programmable game business is totally predictable. This year, and probably into next year, game demand will continue to skyrocket, and all of today's entries, and some of tomorrow's as well, will sell out. But then the market will level off, and the increase in competition will be reflected in dramatic price cutting, product dumping and many games vanishing from the scene. The identical course was followed by the electronic handheld game business which went from boom to bankruptcy in less than three years. And, just as with handheld game companies, being first on the market won't guarantee future success.

So how do you pick out a game this year with some reasonable degree of safety? Well, of course you follow the usual criteria of brand reputation, play quality, price and so forth. But, at the same time, keep in the back of your mind the question of how happy you will be with the current cartridge selection should new ones stop coming out. □

