

Video Review

\$1.95

THE WORLD AUTHORITY ON CONSUMER VIDEO

Equipment Tests
And Reviews of
Latest Games,
Tapes, Discs and
Cable Shows

PREVIEW: VIDEO '83

Best and Worst Products of '82

*Steven Spielberg's Unknown
Video Movies*

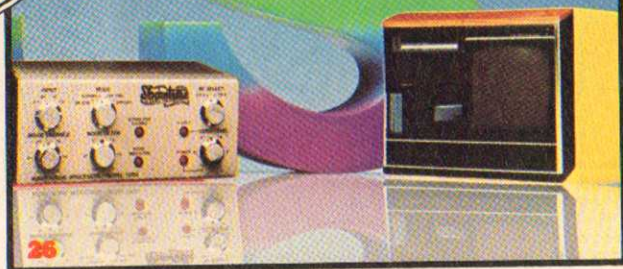
*Complete Guide
To Latest Disc
Players*

1983



DECEMBER 1982

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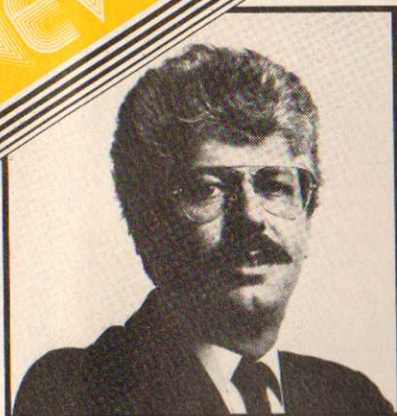


Sara Photo: ©Frederick Marc Ltd., 1982

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First system you can bank on



□ **VICTOR AT C:** JVC will be going it alone this year with new mini VHS-C portable. Other VHS format VCR companies (RCA, Sharp, etc.) have decided not to offer their own VHS-C VCRs this year, reportedly owing to low demand. JVC model will be priced at around \$850. Though number of shoppers who'll buy portables remains uncertain, several other VHS licensees indicate they might dive in in '83.

□ **MATTEL HELL:** Advice to Intellivision owners awaiting long promised keyboard aimed at upgrading game console to computer: Don't hold your breath. Mattel says four-year preparation for selling keyboard is being abandoned and indicates personal computer is in works. No reason is being given by Mattel for decision, but it's understood escalating cost was primary consideration.

□ **HEAVEN CAN'T WAIT:** RCA, getting religion, will launch ambitious videodisc project involving Bible which could carry over into year 2,000 and beyond. First five volumes of *New Media Bible* are now being released (see Freeze-Frames, p. 22). RCA says it's already sold 50,000 discs of *Ten Commandments* and 5,000 of *Jesus of Nazareth*, hoping to continue miracle by turning Bible discs into profits.

* * *

□ **BANK SHOT:** "The check is in the TV set" could become latest nonpayment excuse once New York electronic home-banking service goes into effect late in '82. Chemical Bank is launching Pronto service, which uses inexpensive home computers to link system to home TV sets via standard telephone lines. Initial plans call for Chem Bank to offer subscribers Atari 400 computer, phone modem, automatic dialer, Pronto computer cartridge and other needed accessories for roughly \$500. In beginning, bank customers subscribing to system will be able to transfer funds to different accounts within Chem Bank, pay bills, send electronic messages to other subscribers. CB says it hopes to license other banks across US to use Pronto.

* * *

□ **PAY-PER-MOUSE?** Despite numerous glitches, Disney says it's going ahead with plans for pay-TV Disney Channel. Things looked shaky when Westinghouse pulled out of partnership earlier this fall. Channel will offer mixture of kid vid and family entertainment. Launch, scheduled for April, '83, has company whistling while it works.

* * *

□ **JOIN THE CLUB:** With pilot project rated success, Columbia House is launching major nationwide push for CBS Video Club mail-order operation. Among offerings: movies from both Fox and CBS video libraries, including World War II series narrated by Walter Cronkite. Most other offerings will probably be series as well.

* * *

□ **TROUBLE IN CABLE CITY:** Stereo TV may be great idea, but reality for homes wired to cable systems is somewhat grimmer. That's word from executives in cable industry, many of whom say stereo broadcasts through cable channels often cause severe interference on adjacent channels, possibly render current pay-TV descrambling systems obsolete and result in host of other problems. Possible remedy, according to National Cable Television Association? Rebuilding or modification of 4,700 existing cable systems.

* * *

□ **HOCUS FOCUS:** Film meets video head-on in new development demonstrated by Kodak for its disc camera. Future disc photo bugs will be able to purchase separate video display units to see their pictures on their TV screens. Photogs can then use unit's remote control to crop or enlarge TV image or to zoom in on particular details, blowing them up to full size of TV screen. By pressing a button, this new image is then instantly encoded on magnetic core of disc and may later be sent to processor to be made into photo prints. Process basically uses video to photo edit—to frame your photographs like pros do. No release date has been set for video display unit, though company spokespeople see it as good while off.

THE LATEST IN NEW PRODUCTS

Latest gear from Coleco, Fisher and more



QUASAR
Videocassette Recorder
Model VHS125UW \$800

Quasar turns "front"-face with its first front-loading VCR.

The tabletop recorder has one-day/one-event programmability and

features scan in both forward and reverse, plus freeze-frame and frame advance. The VHS-format VCR comes with a four-function wired remote control.

Quasar, 9401 W. Grand Ave., Franklin Park, IL 60131 (312) 451-1200



COLECO
Expansion Module
Model 2413 \$69

Here's a better way to spin your videogame wheels. This expansion module includes an accelerator foot pedal and a steering wheel set in a dashboard that plugs directly into the ColecoVision game system.

An auto-racing game is included. Coleco, 200 Fifth Ave., Rm 1234, New York, NY 10010 (212) 242-6605

Unless otherwise noted, all New Products specifications are manufacturers' data—not results of Video Review tests or measurements. All listed prices are manufacturers' suggested retail. Availability of products varies according to supply and locality.

PANASONIC
Videocassette Recorder
Model PV-1285

Pared-down simplicity is the main attraction of this budget VCR. (It has an "open list price" expected to settle around the \$400 to \$600 range.)

This VHS recorder comes with a one-day/one-event digital timer and has forward and reverse scan and frame advance in the EP mode.

It also comes with a wired, remote pause control. (Photo not available at presstime.)

Panasonic, One Panasonic Way, Secaucus, NJ 07094 (201) 348-7000

HEWLETT-PACKARD
Portable Home Computer
Model HP-75 \$995

This computer can fit snugly under your arm like a book, but it can store volumes of information.

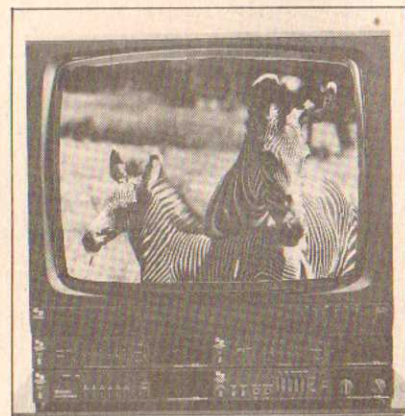
Hewlett-Packard's portable computer, the model HP-75, measures 10 inches by five inches and weighs only 1.5 pounds. It's equipped with a typewriter-style keyboard and can be plugged into a TV set or printer.

Additional software modules for the portable computer system will be

SCHNEIDER
Plug-Together Component Audio/Video System
Model EVS-8070 \$2,500

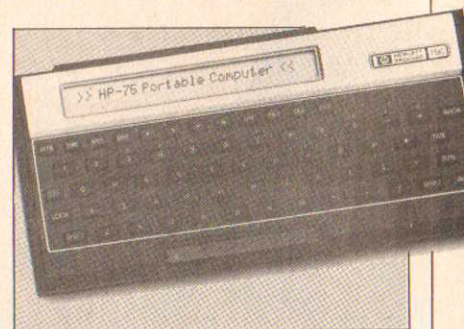
Schneider's first component audio/video system is a "stacked" set designed to free your living room from the tangle of electric wires. The individual components plug directly into one another with multipin jacks and can be arranged in several configurations.

The video part of the component system features a 22-inch monitor and a tuner. The audio system is comprised of a stereo cassette deck, a preamplifier, an AM/FM stereo tuner and a turntable with cartridge. The speakers included have two six-inch woofers.



The system is cable ready. Next year Schneider plans to introduce a VCR that can also be plugged into the system.

Schneider, 181 Herrod Blvd., Dayton, NJ 08810 (609) 655-2666



available early next year.

Hewlett-Packard, 1000 N.E. Circle Drive, Corvallis, OR 97330 (503) 757-2000

ROYALE

Blank Tape

Model DQ-T-120 \$9.95

Here's another brand of standard-grade 120-minute tape.

This chromium dioxide videotape is cobalt-treated to provide stronger signal response, according to the manufacturer.

Royale, 20 N.W. Second St., Gresham, OR 97030 (503)



FISHER

Component Video System

Model AVS-192 \$1,500

Fisher puts two and two together with its first component video system. Two speakers are matched with a 19-inch monitor and a video signal control box.

The monitor has two built-in power amps and is rated at about 400 lines resolution. The signal control box has a four source selector and a sleep timer that allows you to set it to turn the system off in 30, 60 or 90 minutes.

Speaker stands are also included.

Fisher, 21314 Lassen St., Chatsworth, CA 91311 (213) 998-7322



DISCMASTER

Videogame Joystick

PointMaster Competition \$16.95

For trigger-happy game players, this joystick's trigger control is on the top of the handle to allow you to both fire and swerve—single-handedly.

The PointMaster joystick is compatible with Atari's model 2600 videogame console and model 400 computer, Commodore's VIC-20 home computer, Sears' Telegame console and other game systems. It comes with a five-foot long cord.

Discwasher, 1407 N. Providence Rd., PO Box 6021, Columbia, MO 65205 (314) 449-0941

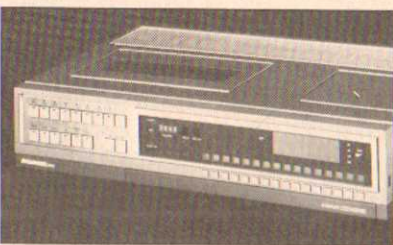


SYLVANIA

Videocassette Recorder

Model VC3620 \$1,250

There's a kind of hush all over the video world when using this Dolby



stereo, VHS-format recorder.

The VCR's special effects include double speed scan, freeze-frame, frame advance, variable slow motion, automatic rewind and memory rewind. This 105-channel, cable-ready recorder can be programmed to record eight events over a two-week period.

It comes equipped with a 16-function, wireless remote control. Sylvania, NAP Consumer Electronics Corp., I-40 and Straw Plains Pike, Knoxville, TN 37914 (615) 521-4316

NEC

Videocamera

Model TC-100

This first NEC tubeless videocamera can capture all the subtleties of dark, romantic scenes. Its CCD (charge coupled device) solid-state circuitry is designed for high sensitivity to low light.

The camera comes with a f/1.4, 6:1 (12.5mm to 75mm) power zoom lens and an extendible boom microphone. A standby switch gives you the ability to save on battery power between shots.

It also comes with a detachable, adjustable viewfinder, a padded

shoulder rest and a hand-grip.

NEC, 1401 W. Estes Ave., Elk Grove Village, IL 60007 (312) 228-5900



ON THE DRAWING BOARDS

Inching Away: Pioneer is leading way with smaller, cheaper LV videodiscs, to be available early next year. Discs will be eight inches in diameter, as opposed to 12 inches, and will have 20 minutes of programming per side.

Johnny On the Pancake: Sony's Watchman is only first layer in coming stack of pancake-flat TV sets. Future Sony Watchmen will likely include color TV version. Possible combination Watchman/Walkman and Walkman with built-in FM radio are also under discussion. . . . UK's **Sinclair** will bring out two-inch screen, flat pocket TV set by mid '83 for around \$100, and possibly TV/wristwatch. . . . **Seiko's** TV/wristwatch is now

slated for mid-'83 US introduction for about \$400. . . . Both **JVC** and **RCA** are still working on flat-screen sets to hang on the wall, though projected release date is still way up in the air.

Three On a Joystick: Magnavox will introduce its Odyssey³ game system in late '83, said to have better graphics and keyboard. Earlier Odyssey cartridges will be compatible with it through use of special module. . . . **Coleco** will have computer keyboard module that attaches to ColecoVision game system and turns it into personal computer in early '83. . . . **CBS** has gone into computer game field, developing its own software and also signing licensing agreement with **K-Byte** (B.J.)

Smelly video, Seka and the KGB



Seka and Yo Shall Find

Linda Lovelace has gone down in history. Marilyn Chambers is off promoting her R-rated spy thriller, *Angel of H.E.A.T.* That leaves Seka as the last of the big-time porn queens. But even for her, X just isn't marking the spot anymore.

According to her manager, Fred Mark, the platinum princess hasn't made a hardcore movie in almost two years. Now she spends her time at video-store grand openings, at rock clubs as a guest emcee and behind a desk working feverishly at her latest venture—the Seka Fan Club.

Fan club? Like the Baker Street Irregulars? Like the Merry Marvel Marching Society? Let's take a look at the \$5 membership kit.

Let's see—you get an auto-graphed glossy photo, a membership card, a newsletter and a catalogue with Seka tee shirts, key chains, personal erotic phone calls, used panties and other sultry sundries. Just write to 664 N. Michigan Ave., #1010,

Chicago, Illinois 60611.

Used panties? Used for what? (F.L.)□

Testament Pattern

Can't you just see it? The marketing manager is sitting at his desk, lost in thought. He works for a company that wants to sell videodiscs. Lots of videodiscs. Suddenly, a lightbulb flashes on above his head. "What's the bestselling book of all time?" he asks himself. "*The Bible*," he snaps back to himself. "So what could be the bestselling disc of all time?"

That's right. Soon you'll be able to slip an RCA disc into your CED player, sit back, relax and watch a dramatization of, say, Adam and Eve, or the story of Joseph, or the Gospel According to Luke. The scenes have been acted out by local actors in the Holy Land, and the narration—of the King James version—will be dubbed in a variety of languages. Alexander Scourby, best known for his roles as a heavy in thousands of TV shows and movies, is doing the English readings.

Depending on how the first five discs sell, it's conceivable that the whole *Bible* could go video by the year 2,000. A

spokesperson for RCA was reluctant to guess how many discs that would come out to for a whole set, but did say that each one is expected to sell for \$20.

Somehow, I have trouble envisioning little kids skipping into school talking about watching the Bible last night. (D.C.)□

Smell-O-Video

Stereo and higher picture resolution notwithstanding, the most important breakthrough in video's simulation of real life may be as plain as the nose on your face. Now a new videotape of the movie *Polyester*, starring Tab Hunter and directed by John Waters, makes use of "odorama"—a smelly way to aesthetic enjoyment.

Each videocassette comes packed with a "sniff card" with 10 numbered dots on it. At different points in the movie, a number appears on the side of the screen, and the viewer is supposed to scratch the correct dot to release the appropriate smell, then sniff the card. Among the aromas that heighten one's experience of the tape are those of pizza, dirty sneakers, gasoline and certain human bodily functions. The card is said to be

reusable for repeated viewings of the movie.

The whole concept staggers the mind even as it stimulates the nostrils. Future possibilities: the smells of horse and sulfur for episodes of *Gunsmoke*; fish and salt breeze for *Moby Dick*; not to



mention even fishier and saltier movie genres. (B.J.)□

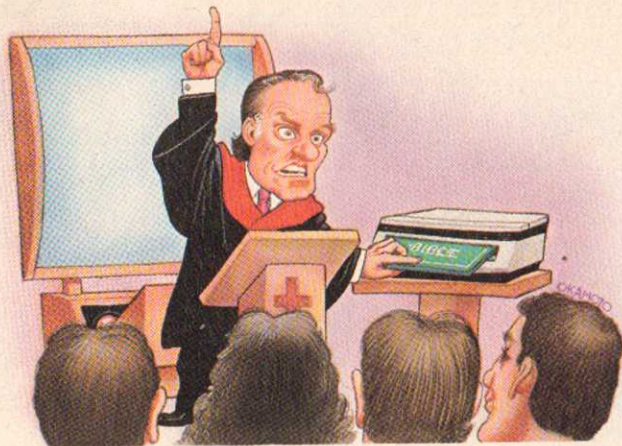
Toro! Toro! Toro!

Some are born to greatness. Some have greatness thrown upon them. And some just get thrown.

Take Toro Iwatani. He's a videogame designer for the giant Japanese company, Namco. Toro had a dream one night, recounts a Namco exec, that he was being chased by bullies. Suddenly, he ate a power pill and, like Popeye, turned the table on his foes.

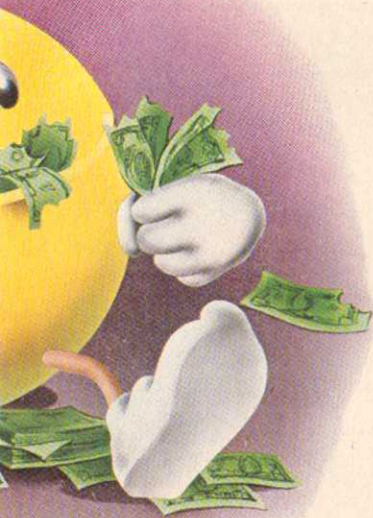
From that, Toro created Pac-Man. *The Pac-Man*.

Not that you'd know. Despite the several million dollars and several cottage industries



generated by his character, Toro never even got an extra yen for his effort. Kids do not trade Toro Iwatani cards.

Toro was eventually promoted to Namco planning and development manager, but that's still a far cry from fortune and recognition. Still, it could lead to some interesting ideas for games. How about one called *Conglomerate*? You have to get your man through a maze with a billion-dollar idea while avoiding competitors, industrial saboteurs and marketing vice presidents. . . . (F.L.)□

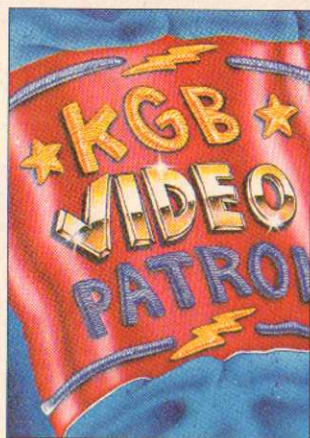


KGB vs. VCRs

"Freeze that frame right there, Ivan," or the Russian equivalent, is ringing throughout the Soviet Union.

Horrified by a growing black market in erotic videotapes—a bourgeois interest if ever there was one—and more than a little miffed by the popularity of such "anti-Soviet" programs as the movie version of *Dr. Zhivago* and TV versions of works by Alexander Solzhenitzyn, the KGB is trying to pull the plug on Soviet VCR owners, according to foreign news sources quoted in *Billboard* magazine.

Even though there are probably only a few thousand



VCRs at most in the USSR, the KGB policy equates a video recorder with "a typewriter or a printing press in terms of dissemination of information and propaganda."

There's no mention in the report of just what the KGB is doing with the material it's confiscating. One can't help imagining the temptations of a warehouse full of porn tapes and equipment to play them. (D.C.)□

Spin-Off City

News from our friends at *The TV Collector* newsletter:

We recently had the good fortune to come upon a rare find—a batch of network press kits that dated back to the 1950s. These were from shows that never made it to the air, as the pilots just didn't have the pizzazz needed to sell the series. Luckily, some of them were eventually pulled apart and reworked, and became hit shows of their time. You may recognize some of these original titles and formats.

JANE WYATT EARP A western about a sharpshooting mother of three. In the pilot, her husband tries to sell life insurance to Sanka Sam, the scourge of Main Street.

THE BEVERLY SILLS-BILLIES Rural sitcom about a group of opera singers who go to live in the mountains, with Robert Merrill as Uncle Ned and Roberta Peters as Sillie June.

BEN CASEY JONES Light-hearted western about a surgeon who does his operations

while engineering a moving train.

McLEAN STEVENSON'S LAW Adventure about an undercover cop searching for the man who keeps canceling his television shows.

RUN FOR YOUR WAGON TRAIN Starring Ben Gazzara as a wagonmaster whose train keeps leaving without him.

TELEPHONE TIME TUNNEL James Darren plays a man locked in a phone booth. When he tries to call for help, the only person he can reach is Gidget.

BAT BURKE Starring Gene Barry as an undercover crime fighter in the old west who needs a cane to get around.

FISHIN' IMPOSSIBLE Action series about a government agent who'd rather go fishin', but every time he opens his tackle box, he finds a tape that says, "Good morning, Mister Phelps..."

DOBIE GILLIGAN Sitcom starring Bob Denver about a student who gets shipwrecked on an island inhabited by beatniks.

THAT BERLE Milton Berle in a comedy as an aspiring comedian who goes to live in the big city. In the opener, while working at a gas station, he

of the TV show *Family*.

THE ADVENTURES OF OZ-ZIE AND THE FLYING NUN Light comedy about a nun with super powers, trying to help a man figure out what it is he does for a living.

FUDD FOR THE DEFENSE Cartoon drama series. In the pilot, Elmer's first case is thrown out of court when nobody can understand what he's saying.

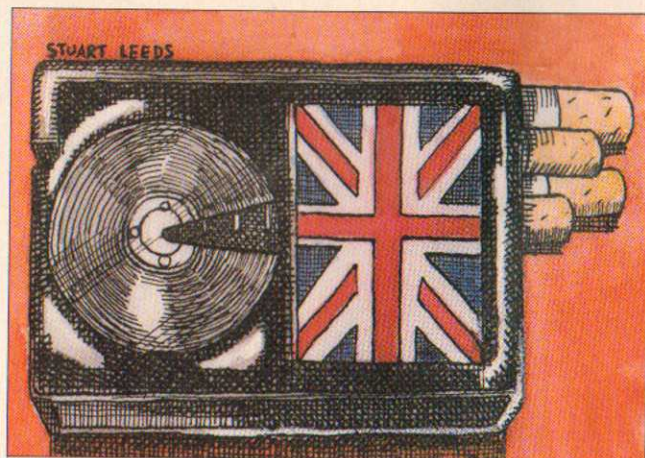
DAN AUGUST, DECEMBER BRIDE Burt Reynolds as a transvestite cop.□



If Ads and Butts

Remember "Come to where the flavor is," the old cigarette-commercial slogan?

Well, just as the going gets good in some recent British X-rated videocassettes, viewers are experiencing delayed gratification because of the interruption of 90-second com-



mercial. Intersession, one of the Queen's own X-rated videocassette manufacturers, has begun selling advertising time to cigarette companies, modifying the old adage that there's nothing like a smoke after sex to there's nothing like a smoke during sexy video. (B.J.)□

spills gasoline on Marlo Thomas, and a romance begins.

THE DON AND PHIL DONAHUE SHOW A serious talk series hosted by two brothers who sing all their questions. The opener features the Osmond Family, The King Family and the cast

mericals. Intersession, one of the Queen's own X-rated videocassette manufacturers, has begun selling advertising time to cigarette companies, modifying the old adage that there's nothing like a smoke after sex to there's nothing like a smoke during sexy video. (B.J.)□

By Robert Gerson

If you've liked what you've heard about the video products of 1982, you'll love 1983. That's because you'll be hearing about the same things. In many instances, though, you'll be actually seeing those long-talked-about products for the first time.

Believe it or not, '82 was a rough year for the folks who manufacture video equipment. The entry of a number of new brand names into the mainstream of video triggered a mad scramble for space on the showroom floors of video stores, which in turn sparked unparalleled price competition. Though video fans snapped up bargain-basement-priced equipment at a record rate, they didn't buy fast enough to keep up with the manufacturers' ability to produce, and inventories piled up in factory warehouses.

What all this behind-the-scenes business has meant for the average video fan is . . . glut. Manufacturers displayed a natural reluctance to feed any more than a trickle of their more advanced equipment into the stores. Their concern was that new models would make it even harder for them to sell off what was already in inventory and that the equipment would be caught up in the raging discount fever and so lower profits in '83. But the factories can't hold back forever, so there'll be lots of new product action in the coming year.

Stereo Audio/Video

By the end of '83, stereo audio will at last come into its own in video. Whether stereo TV broadcasting will start by the end of '83 is still questionable as of this writing, but it's finally become accepted by product decision-makers as something important to video fans. Regardless of the stereo broadcast situation, two-channel sound will be available in mid-priced VHS home VCRs for the first time late in the year, by which time Beta models with full hi-fi stereo capability will have appeared, along with a flood of prerecorded stereo videocassettes for both Beta and VHS formats.

Of course, stereo is already standard in all videodisc players in the LV format, and is expected to be included in close to 70% of all the CED models sold in '83, up from about 30% in '82.

Next year will also mark the first big year for component video systems.

NEW YEAR OF VIDEO

Despite all the ballyhoo surrounding last year's components, it's estimated that fewer than 150,000 machines were actually available in '82, which means they represented something in the neighborhood of one percent of the year's total TV sales. Supply this year could put a million components in American homes.

Where Credit's Due

To a degree, how well component systems take off in the beginning of '83 will determine how well they do for the rest of the year. Component video is expensive. You can't get away with paying much less than \$1,500 for a complete system, and for the best components, the sky's the price limit. The credit crunch of '82 sharply cut into the popularity of projection TV systems, along with all other high-priced consumer products. So there's an understandable concern that a continued shortage of financing will hold down component video demand.

Several more modestly priced systems could show up this year, but the favorite TV sets of shoppers in '83 are expected to be new video-ready color TV sets, not pure monitors. Such pseudo-monitor sets, with video and audio input and output jacks, along with electronic cable-ready tuners, will be moving down into the popular price class in '83, and some 19-inch models in the under-\$600 range should be available.

There'll be an

1983

S PREVIEW TO COME

important new jack to look for on the back of '83 TV sets, too—one marked "audio detector out." This will be for feeding an unprocessed audio signal to the stereo decoder boxes that will appear as soon as the video industry has settled on a stereo broadcast standard.

Digital signal processing will surely make headlines in '83, but the technology will show up in relatively few models. The all-digital color TV set has been touted as a product for this year, although that's looking less and less likely. Not even samples of complete sets of the necessary integrated circuits are available now, and manufacturers generally want at least a year of testing under their belts before throwing a revolutionary chassis design into American viewers' laps.

Minis: Serious

In VCRs, portables will continue to provide most of the innovation excitement. JVC's mini VHS-C format has been something more than a modest success since it went on sale in Japan last fall. That's a good enough track record for it to get the support of the name-brand American companies who have been holding back on introducing their VHS-C machines. Sony is ready to go with an ultra-compact, portable, color, camera-VCR combination using a standard Beta cassette. You can expect to see it in one version

or another by the summer of '83 if the VHS-C seems to be catching on here.

It should be another year before any fruit is borne by the multinational, 100-odd company effort to come up with a world standard for 8mm VCR-camera combinations. Yet the old quarter-inch standby, the CVC format, will still be with us. Until recently, all production of CVC VCRs has been by Japan's Funai, with sales here handled by Technicolor. Now the developer of the system, a Japanese company called Future Technology, is set up to manufacture on its own. It claims that an unnamed US company will introduce both a lightweight, near-pocketable CVC portable and a CVC camera-VCR combination this year.

Down the Tubes

Color cameras with solid-state sensors instead of traditional pickup tubes are expected to hit with a rush in the summer of '83. Being compact in size, light in weight and easy on power consumption, they'll provide an attractive alternative to conventional tube cameras. But for '83, at least, they'll cost twice as much as comparably equipped standard videocameras. In fact, that difference will escalate as camera prices drop even further this year. So video fans will find they will be able to step up to new cameras with electronic viewers for prices comparable to those of much more basic cameras of past years. The cost of the premiums charged for auto focus, power zoom and built-in character generators will be coming down, too.

In videodisc players, the big question is whether or not the JVC-developed VHD system will finally be introduced. The VHD group (GE, JVC, Panasonic, Quasar and Thorn EMI of England) skipped its planned '81 launch, of course, and canceled out again in '82. The current schedule calls for VHD in the summer of '83. The VHD group insists that all its production problems have been solved, though it acknowledges marketing difficulties—facing competition from two existing systems in a slowly developing field—still exist.

Whatever is decided about VHD, the proponents of the LV and the CED systems will be pushing harder than ever to increase first the accep-

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83

Thank Julius Caesar. Until he introduced the modern calendar in 46 BC (Before Calendars), nobody knew December was time to look back at the past year's developments in video. Now, as we near the end of '82 AD (After Dumont), it's time to give all the consumer video equipment of the year the "thumbs up" or the "thumbs down."

Overall, '82 might not have been so much a year for video innovation as one for video improvement. After all, '81 was the year that had brought such milestones as stereo VCRs, practical component video systems, a new videodisc format and great reductions in VCR size and weight. So, for the group of top video engineers, analysts, editors and writers who chose the following products as Best Gear of the Year for '82, making their selections proved mostly a matter of crystalizing the predominant product trends and choosing the best examples of them. For example, the stereo-video age may have begun in '81, but it was in '82 that audio noise reduction, a vital part of high-fidelity sound, appeared in force in consumer video equipment. Similarly, a few component video systems may have emerged in '81, but components changed this year from being high-priced and hard-to-get to being common at a wide range of prices from a variety

TOP GEAR

of makers. And while '81 saw the lightest and smallest VCRs using half-inch tape up to that time, it was in '82 that a half-inch-tape VCR arrived that was even smaller than a quarter-inch-tape VCR.

If there has been one predominant trend in '82 video, it's leaned toward better integration of components, toward proliferation of the audio-video, learning-and-entertainment media centers predicted since the first TV-ready radios came about in the '30s. It's important to remember, though, that even though the year's coming to an end, the following equipment is not. On the contrary, all of the most innovative video products of '82 are likely to remain widely available through '83, and are intended to perform for many more years. We've come to praise the best video achievements of the year, not to bury them.

VCRs

Sizing up this year's best videocassette recorders is relatively easy—VCRs are smaller and lighter than ever. In



R OF '82

fact, '82 gave us the most compact half-inch VCRs to date: the VHS-C format espoused by JVC (model HR-C3U) and by Sharp (model VC-220). A VHS-C recorder weighs about 5½ pounds with battery, making it even lighter than the Technicolor VCR using quarter-inch tape, which made headlines of its own in '80. The VHS-C format is also another first of a kind: It's the first new format designed to be compatible with an existing format, in this case VHS. Already extremely successful in Japan, the unusual VHS-C recorders may prove to be the missing link between today's full-featured tabletop VCRs and the all-in-one VCR/videocamera combos envisioned as the next word in compact, mobile video. Whether or not VHS-C ends up doing as well in the US as in Japan, the new format unquestionably marks a considerable achievement.

It's not, however, the year's only advance in miniaturization. Panasonic unveiled the lightest VCR to use half-inch tape ever, a portable (model PV-5110) weighing only 8¾ pounds with battery—about a pound less than the lightest

Beta-format models. Canon, JC Penney, Magnavox, Olympus, Philco and Quasar have also introduced compact portable VCRs, and it's likely we'll see even tinier models next year as Beta manufacturers take up the dare.

Compactness, of course, doesn't automatically mean lightness. One of the most compact VCRs of this year, Sharp's model VC-3500, weighs 15¾ pounds. But within those pounds is a portable VCR with a built-in rather than a separate TV tuner/timer. An update of last year's all-in-one VC-2250 portable, the VC-3500 isn't the first such VCR, but it's several pounds lighter than the earlier model and boasts three record/playback speeds (SP, LP and EP), while the VC-2250 had only two.

Hitachi's portable VT-680M falls into the same category as Sharp's new portable. At 15 pounds, it's not light, but it's still the first half-inch tape VCR with a built-in monitor.

Over the past year, tabletop VCRs have come alive with the sound of stereo. While last year you could've counted the number of stereo VCRs on one hand (even if you're Mickey Mouse), virtually every VHS-format manufacturer introduced at least one stereo VCR apiece in '82. This includes Curtis Mathes, GE, JC Penney, Kenwood, Magnavox, Panasonic and RCA.

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By Deirdre Condon

Worst? What do you *mean* worst? Choosing the year's worst video products is sticky. The problem is indeed in defining what we mean by worst. First, we look for things that don't work, obviously. Then we have to find out why they don't work. Are there production problems that can be, and perhaps have been, corrected by the manufacturers? Or do the products work, but only in certain situations, though their ads imply universal application?

We think products falling into these two categories are bad, but don't qualify as the worst. What we looked for instead were three things: products that don't work, that the manufacturers know don't work, but that they produce anyway; products that might work, but are so limited, or just plain goofy, that they should never have left the drawing boards; and products that may work, but in doing so create potential hazards to equipment and/or human life.

Because we take seriously our obligation to warn our readers away from these kinds of products, we drew on three areas of expertise in choosing this year's honorees. We asked our technical editors for their choices, along with substantiation for these choices. Then we asked the people who do the buying for some of the biggest wholesale outlets in the country. These buyers like to pick up inexpensive devices as quick-sale items. So things they refuse to touch carry quite an onus. Finally, we contacted more than 100 reputable video store managers to find out what they wouldn't carry, or stopped carrying, this year. The results were surprisingly unanimous.

A Real Blank

Manufacturers of blank tapes in the two major consumer video-recording formats are supposed to be licensed by

FLOP GE

Sony for the Beta format and by JVC for the VHS format. Insisting on licenses is these format developers' way of ensuring quality, since the individual tape manufacturers can't receive licenses unless they meet fairly stringent specifications.

Some companies make unlicensed tapes anyway. You won't find a VHS or a Beta logo on the box, but you might find the price pretty appealing. Still, no one would expect the quality of an unlicensed tape to be up to snuff.

There's one tape, called AlmoTronics, that leaves even hardened discount store managers surprised by its dismal showing. Maybe showing is the wrong word—the tape's dropout rate is so high there's really not much to see.

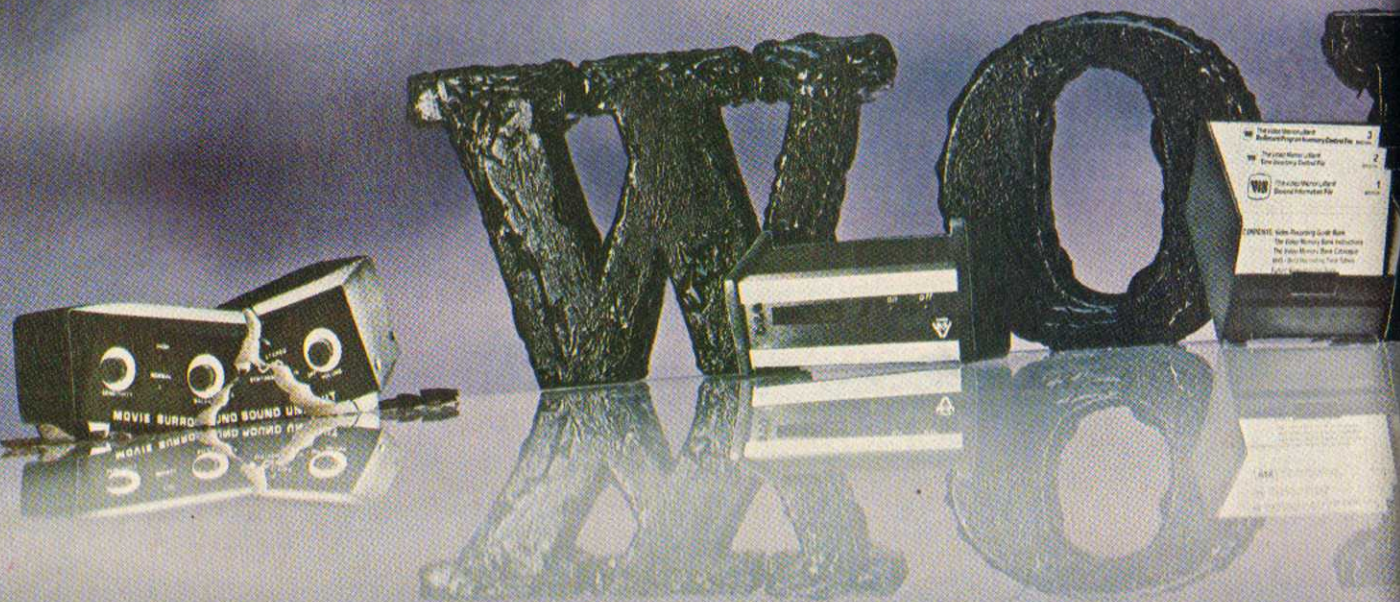
Commented one of the few video store managers we spoke with who even risked ordering this brand at all: "We sent them all back. They were a big zero."

Energy Crisis

Nearly every video store owner and wholesaler we spoke with mentioned Energy Video's enhancer as being right at the top of their worst product list.

A video enhancer, as you probably know, is intended to boost the color video signal. Some models also allow you to adjust color toward red or green, or let you cut out an accidental color signal that's found its way onto a tape of a black-and-white program. One of the main uses for an enhancer is to ensure a proper color signal during tape dubbing.

Complaints regarding Energy Video's enhancers became a litany: "It doesn't work, and it's overpriced."



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As far as we're concerned, however, absolutely anything that doesn't work is overpriced.

No Thanks for the Memory

This qualifies as the most impractical item of the year. It's called the Video Memory Bank, and it's a filing system that allows you to instantly locate segments of programs on various tapes in your library.

While this kind of product is sorely needed, this particular effort isn't it. It's so complicated that you need total recall to be able to use it. It would be easier to devise a mnemonic system based on the charts on each cassette box. And it would be a lot cheaper.

Up, Shape, Up

If you know much about videotapes, you know that the first axiom of tape maintenance is that tapes should be stored vertically, not horizontally. That's because the tape can shift down around the hub of the cassette, crinkle, then, when played, damage a VCR's video heads—parts which are very expensive to replace.

So along comes a company named Shape with a sectional videocassette storage cabinet. Each compartment holds up to four tapes—horizontally.

Death to the Killers

In the edit-lest-ye-be-edited category, we have the famous commercial killers, or editors. There are two kinds, neither of which works very well.

The first design is for taping black-and-white TV pro-

grams. The editor puts your VCR in pause as soon as it detects the color signal of a commercial. When the signal ends, the VCR goes back in full swing. Of course, it takes a few seconds for the VCR to get to normal speed, so you lose a few seconds of your program. Some VCRs back up a little when in pause to avoid this problem, but most of the commercial killers also move the tape forward a little when the VCR's in pause to avoid tape and video-head wear. If you hit one of those long commercial breaks that occur during an extravaganza, you're going to have quite the little blank spot.

Have you ever noticed that TV commercials are louder than the programs are? The inventor of the second type of editor did. It works by putting your VCR in pause whenever the decibels hit a certain level. Not a bad idea, but certainly not foolproof. Say you're recording a war movie and, during an exciting scene, a bomb goes off. Or during a passionate scene in a romantic mini-series, the music rises in a crescendo. We hope you're watching while you're taping, because you won't find out what happens next by viewing your tape.

One store manager we talked with had a slightly different problem with the editors he tried: "Sometimes," he told us, "I got nothing except commercials."

No commercial editor we've seen works well, but the brand we heard the most screaming about was Shelton.

The Video Explosion

One video product that might qualify as most dangerous to your health is the ever-present "Turn your TV set into a Projection System" magnifying lens. There are different kinds, under different brand names, but none of the ones we've ever encountered works very well.

One type is a free-standing magnifying screen in a

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The most interesting among them, perhaps, is Marantz's VR-200—the first stereo, Beta-format tabletop. The pioneering VCR has fixed audio heads, rather than the more advanced "flying" type used for video heads. It utilizes the newer Dolby C noise-reduction system rather than the predominant Dolby B, but also has a Beta Noise Reduction (BNR) for use with tapes encoded with that system. Still, it's the most advanced VCR yet in terms of audio. Significantly, it's the first consumer VCR that does away with ALC (automatic level control), letting you adjust audio levels as you record, and even providing twin meters specifically for that purpose.

Videodisc Players

Contrary to dire reports at various times this year about the fates of the two existing videodisc formats, both RCA's capacitance-electronic disc (CED) system and Pioneer's laser (LV) system came forth with mighty improvements in '82. Built-in CX noise reduction was the big advance, offering audio quality approaching that of good hi-fi audio systems. In CED players, Hitachi and Toshiba both followed RCA with their own CX-encoded stereo CED players.

Scoring points for sheer vision, however, are Magnavox and Sylvania, whose LV models 8101 and VP7200, respectively, come with input jacks for interfacing with personal computers. Although each needs an expensive computer-interface module in order to render a home computer more than just a fancy remote control, the notion of combining videodisc players with home computers may be the boldest step yet on the way to seeing our own home-grown HALs.

TV Systems

Component video is nothing new. Yet '82 will go down as the year video components emerged from the high-tech cocoon of NEC, Sony and Teknika and became accessible products under the auspices of such traditional TV-set makers as Magnavox, Sears and Zenith.

Aside from these, Jensen, Panasonic, Pioneer, Proton and Sanyo also came up with notable component video systems in '82. For taking the idea furthest, however, leave it not to these well-known makers of sophisticated electronic gear, but rather to trusty, traditional Zenith. It came out with a component system that not only separates the monitor and speakers from the TV receiver but also breaks down that receiver into a trio of components itself.

In other (literally) large and small achievements in TV sets, RCA's model VGM2079 color console with a 25-inch screen may be the largest set with built-in storage space for a VCR, videocassettes and miscellaneous gear such as cameras. At the other extreme are Panasonic's CT-3311 color set with a 2 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch screen, about the smallest color set ever. Then, Sony's 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ -pound FD-210 Watchman may not have the smallest screen in history (two inches) but it's still the most compact TV set ever—only 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches long and 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ deep.

In projection TV sets the year's most notable advance is a seeming paradox: a compact, portable projection set—the Novabeam Two—from Kloss Video.



Videocameras

The area of most striking change in all of video could be innovation in color videocameras. Over the past year, such sound and sight sophistication took the form of stereo audio and built-in titlers. Although Akai's '81 video-

camera (model VC-X1) and its '82 follow-up (model VC-X2) could be used with Akai's stereo microphone to record stereo tracks (with a stereo VCR, of course), JVC's model GX-S9U camera is the first to come with stereo microphone jacks and two-channel, mike-mixing controls. It also encompasses most of the seemingly ubiquitous automatic features that've made this year's videocameras about as difficult to operate as Polaroids.

Akai's model VC-X2, incidentally, is the first consumer videocamera with time-lapse mode, a familiar photographic feature which lets you record fast-motion portraits of action that occurs over long periods of time, such as flowers blossoming.

Finally, built-in character generators, allowing video-camera users to throw titles onto their homemade handiworks, became a staple in '82, with Canon, (Curtis Mathes, GE, JC Penney, Magnavox, Olympus, Panasonic, Quasar, Sylvania and Zenith) each offering at least one model with this feature.

Blank Tape

In videocassettes, the tape time barrier was broken this year. VHS-format T-160 tape brought video recording time to new lengths: eight hours in the VHS extended play (EP) mode. Released just in time for *VR*'s annual tape tests, T-160 tape by Fuji, JVC, Maxell and RCA proved good enough to compare with most name-brand T-120s.

Accessories

Maybe it was the push of public-access cable TV around the country; maybe it was the growth of regional, low-power TV stations allowing amateurs to air their own productions. Whatever the reason, '82 became the year for accessories that let the video enthusiast craft more professional-looking video productions than ever.

Take Quasar's VE582UQ home-editing console. It marked the first time Mr. and Ms. Consumer Video could pluck images from one VCR and juggle them into a cohesive narrative on another VCR with a precision heretofore unimagined except with the use of outrageously expensive pro equipment. Coupled with Showtime Video Ventures' model 7000 audio/video processor, the home-editing console allows images to be edited to a fine edge. Several companies' video processors fit the bill, of course, but this particular model from Showtime combines a variable video amp, an audio amp, an automatic image stabilizer, an RF converter, a switcher and the same enhancer circuitry which won a 1982 CES Design and Engineering Award for Showtime's VV-270P enhancer.

To help get interesting images in the first place, though, outdoor-video enthusiasts could look this past year to Sony's MPK-60 Marine Pack, a waterproof case for Sony's SL-2000 portable VCR and any Sony color videocamera. While not the first such consumer casing for underwater videotaping (Sea-Cam, a Miami company, has had similar

underwater packs for a couple of years), it's the first with the mass-production push and the pricing possible from a major company. The Marine Pack's one drawback is that it's designed solely for Sony equipment, but it's tangible evidence of video's increasing freedom and mobility.

Game Equipment

The one yardstick most frequently used to measure the quality of game consoles and compatible games has been the fidelity of home adaptations to their arcade versions. This may not always be valid, but it's by far the most common one. Using this measure, the award for best adaptation of the arcade experience goes to Atari for its model 5200 second-generation console, and to Coleco for its ColecoVision. Aside from uncanny graphics, each is also backed up by a large number of game cartridges.

Kudos also goes to GCE for its Vectrex stand-alone with

a built-in monitor. This monitor uses a high-resolution vector screen, rather than the raster type used for virtually all other video screens. It produces abstract, line-sketching screen displays, in contrast to the efforts at naturalism of Atari and Coleco, and offers 3D and zoom effects that make their games comparable to the arcade versions.

A final technical achievement which has so far only shown itself to be the seed of potentially the biggest video-game and home-computer innovation of all is voice synthesis. While rudimentary consumer voice-synthesis modules have appeared in the past, Mattel Electronics' Intellivoice and Odyssey's The Voice are the first to utilize the concept within the active framework of videogames. □

Written by Frank Lovece, with Bob Angus, Frank Barr, Hans Fantel, Len Feldman, Bob Gerson, David Hajdu, the staff of Video Review and other analysts and consultants.

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frame that you place a few feet in front of your TV set. Unfortunately, you lose a lot of color and picture detail with this type. In fact, one company that makes them has a color brochure that clearly illustrates just how lousy its screen's reproduction is.

The other type of magnifier presents more serious problems. This one bolts directly onto a TV set's screen. You have to sit directly—and we mean directly—in front of the set in order to see the picture. That's not so bad for a person living alone. Still, there's one other property that qualifies this product, year after year, as among the worst.

Remember in fifth-grade science class when you had to set fire to a leaf by using a magnifying glass? If you thought that was fun, put a large magnifier on your TV screen, leave your curtains open, and see what happens. A couple of our sources swear they know of instances of TV sets blowing up because of a bolted-on lens.

Blurry Thinking

A camera you can't focus? That was the idea behind Sharp's model QC-30.

Sharp has a well-earned reputation as an innovative company. It built the first one-piece portable VCR with a built-in tuner/timer: the My Video. Many of its designs are extremely ingenious. But this one camera is, well, ingenious.

The purpose for leaving out the more complicated—and more expensive—focusing apparatus was to keep costs down, thereby attracting the kind of person who wouldn't normally buy a camera. In other words, Sharp invented a video version of the Brownie.

We're all in favor of lower prices, but we think Sharp should have given video fans more credit.

It's What's Inside that Counts

In this category, we have quite a few companies and various pieces of equipment. We won't name names, because it's not the quality of the product that we're criticizing; it's the accessories or, sometimes, the lack of them, that irk us. Call it a pet peeve.

There are great VCRs packaged, for instance, with last year's power adaptor which, unfortunately, doesn't work



with the new model. To get the new one, you have to pay an extra \$30 to \$35. Compounding this inadequacy is the fact that the new ones haven't yet, as of presstime, gotten to all the video stores.

Then there's the portable VCR that doesn't come with a battery. You have to buy it

separately. Not only that, but its input and output jacks are different from any other conventional jacks. When you want cables, you have to buy from the VCR manufacturer.

We could go on and on, but the point is this: What's worse than a company trying to nickel-and-dime you to the poorhouse after you've laid out a substantial amount of money on expensive equipment?

Switcher's Brew

One of the handiest items for any video buff is a switcher. It allows you to hook up all your equipment to one box so you don't have to unplug and re-plug each piece of gear every time you want to go, say, from watching a tape to watching a disc while recording a TV program.

Poorly made switchers, however, are worse than no switchers at all. The one we had the most complaints about has the rather provocative name of Switchmate and is sold by Rodfield Distributing. The signals, it seems, aren't sufficiently isolated. Said one of our sources: "Some switchers cause interference, and this is one of them." Another source told us: "This one ended up combining all three signals and leaving you with a real mess on your screen."

Joystick Shocker

Here's a one-of-a-kind product: a shock absorber for Atari joysticks. No, we're not kidding. This is what the ad says:

ATARI FANS! SAVE THOSE HANDS!

Extend Playing Time!

Heavy-duty 1" foam shock absorbers custom-made to tightly cover joystick base. \$8/pair.

Our only comment is that if this product keeps thousands of America's adolescents from developing video-game wrist, we'll put it on next year's Best Products list. □

Research assistance by Mary Busch and Abigail Reitsnyder.

By Barry Jacobs

Sex seems to follow hard on stardom's heels, at least when the heels belong to such celebrities as *Pac-Man*, *Tron* and *Donkey Kong*. Seven companies are in the process of rushing out the first "X-rated" home videogames—ones that replace the latent sexuality of *Pac-Man*'s gobbling antics with full-blown, explicitly raunchy free-for-alls.

What's coming are the kind of adult games whose characters have secondary sex characteristics rather than spacefins. Players score points, in many cases, by achieving repeated intercourse instead of intergalactic supremacy. It's little wonder, then, that the traditional battlelines between pro- and anti-pornography forces are already forming over this latest mode of "adult" fun.

At first glance, such electronic erotica seems to be an almost can't-miss proposition, combining the recent popularity of videogames with the age-old popularity of porn. With more than eight million home videogame systems already in American homes, figure the adult-game makers, the potential for the success of "X-rated" games must be tremendous. Since most current videogames are designed for kids, they reason, the adult videogame field is practically virgin territory.

"How long can an adult really keep interested in an asteroid?" asks Saul Saggett, marketing vice president for Select-a-Tape, one of the new adult-game manufacturers. "Our videogames are designed with the specific purpose of being more interesting for adults."

Sex Object-ivity

That interest can take several forms. While erotic titillation might be supposed to be these games' strong suit, several of the adult-game makers stress that the games are "whimsical." They also contend that the games can stand as much on their playability as on their suggestability. "We are not just coming out with different versions of one sex object chasing another," says Stuart Kesten, president of American Multiple Industries, another of the adult-game manufacturers. "Our games have good play-action."

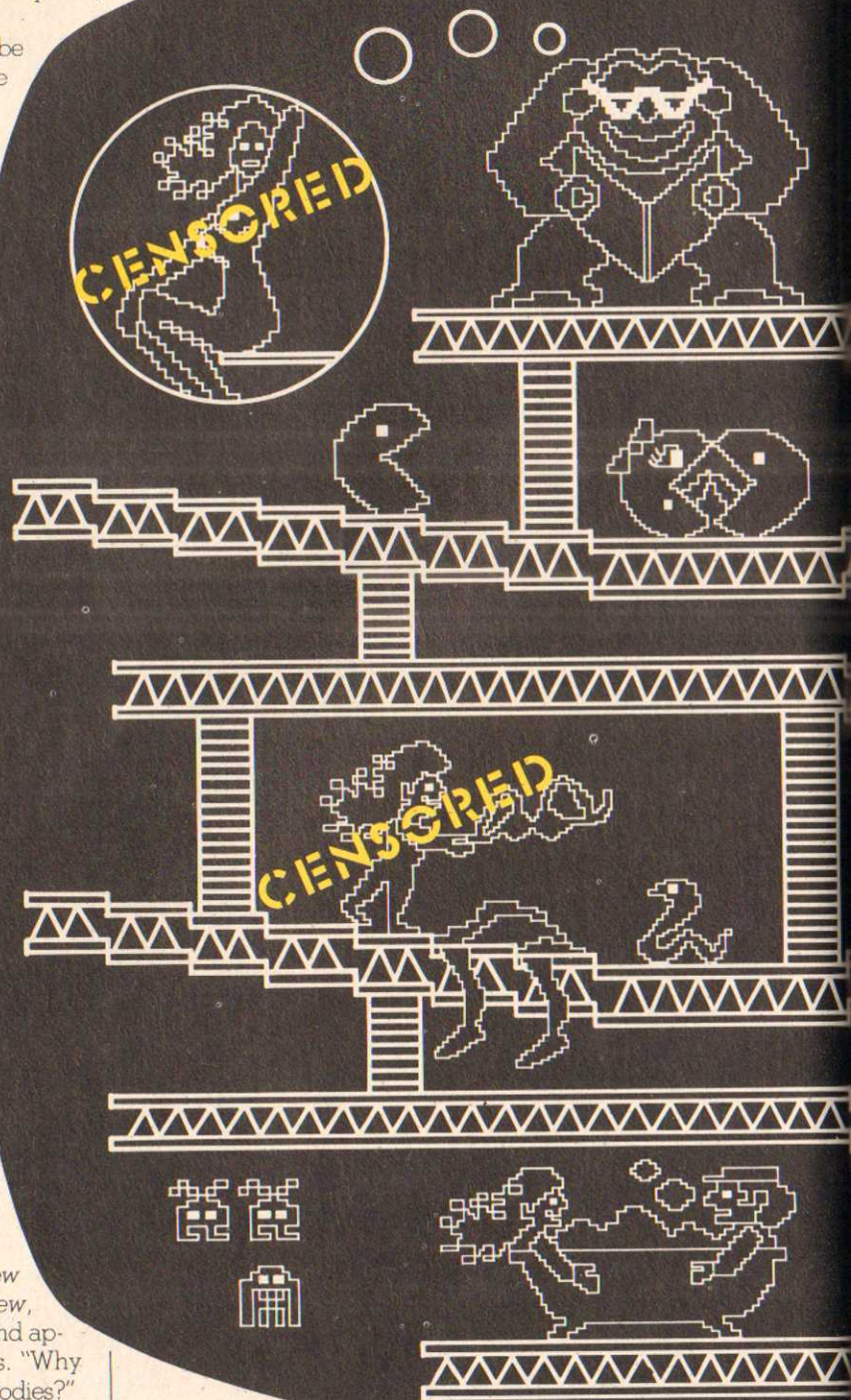
According to Alan Roberts, president of blue-game maker Select-a-Tape, his games will be "humorously erotic." He says, "It is impossible to render the human body accurately on the videogame screen. So our characters are very funny-looking. The first reaction of people I've shown the games to has been to laugh."

Nevertheless, reaction to the games in other quarters has been mixed, at best.

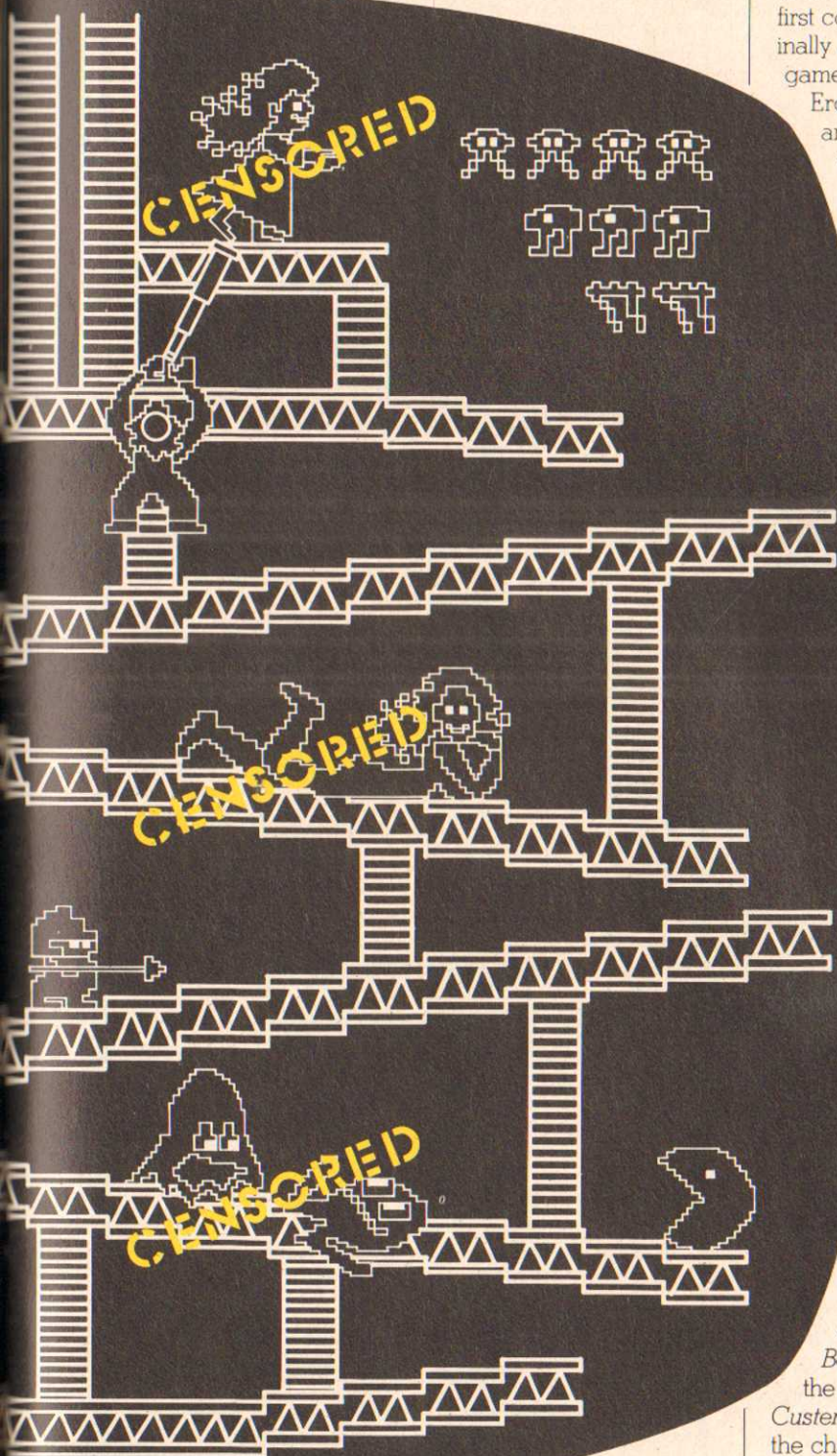
On the one hand, Al Goldstein, publisher of *Screw* magazine and a contributing editor of *Video Review*, raves about them. "They're an obvious, natural and appropriate development for videogames," he says. "Why should children have a monopoly on all these goodies?"

On the other hand, Nolan Bushnell, inventor of the Atari videogame system with which all the adult games

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G TO PORN: GAMES



will be compatible, says he "now knows how Henry Ford must have felt when the first traffic accident happened." He adds, "I think people may buy these adult games because they're a 'goof.' But I don't think there's enough resolution in the game system to make them very pornographic."

Atari itself (which Bushnell sold to Warner) has adopted a hands-off approach. "We project a very family-oriented image," says Atari spokesperson Karen Esler. "We don't want to get involved in any discussion of adult games."

Drawing most of the hardcore games' initial publicity, as well as flak, is American Multiple Industries (AMI), the first company to come out with adult videogames. Originally a video accessories company, AMI is selling its games under the name "Mystique Presents Swedish

Erotica," having licensed the name "Swedish Erotica" and several X-rated movie titles from Caballero Control, the blue-cassette manufacturer. In October, AMI released its first three Atari-compatible games: *Custer's Revenge*, *Bachelor Party* and *Beat 'Em & Eat 'Em*, at \$49.95 apiece.

Porn Movie Mania

Just as conventional home videogame makers have looked to Hollywood for game "themes" (such as those of *Tron* and *The Empire Strikes Back*), AMI plans to offer in January games loosely based on three X-rated movies, *Talk Dirty to Me*, *Filthy Rich* and *I Like to Watch*. Through '83 AMI president Stuart Kesten says the company will release non-sexual, family-oriented videogames, as well as more adult fun.

To a degree, *Custer's Revenge* epitomizes the thrust of most of AMI's and other companies' adult videogames. On the right side of the screen, Pocahontas is tied to a stake. On the left side, General George Custer appears, visibly aroused, shall we say. The player attempts to move Custer toward Pocahontas. Cacti pop up suddenly, and arrows shoot across the screen. If Custer is hit by either, he does a little dance and his arousal wanes. If Custer gets past the obstacles and reaches Pocahontas, they have sex, and she smiles. You rack up points with repeated "scoring."

If You Can't Beat 'Em . . .

In *Beat 'Em & Eat 'Em*, a man excites himself on the rooftop of a tenement building, and a female prostitute stands on the street below. As the man begins to climax off the roof, the player moves the woman back and forth trying to catch what Kesten calls "throbbings" in her mouth. The player is penalized if the woman either drops some of them or is seen catching them by one of the figures that appear periodically in the tenement windows.

Bachelor Party, says Kesten, is both a variation on the "straight" videogame *Breakout* and similar to *Custer's Revenge*. On his last night of bachelorhood, the character (named Spanish Fly) goes careening around the screen trying to "make it" with as many women as possible.

(Continued)

Perhaps because Pocahontas is tied to a stake in *Custer's Revenge*, the game has provoked some strong objections. Kristen Reilly, a spokesperson for Women Against Pornography, a non-profit New York City-based special interest group, feels that the game not only "trivializes and sanctions rape by using it in an entertainment context," but also is "racist regarding native Americans."

When the game was described to him, Cal Thomas, vice president for communications for the Moral Majority, said he hopes "it will run the course of all novelty fads and slip into the abyss it so richly deserves." Thomas said, though, that the Moral Majority "had all it could handle right now" in fights over other issues and had no immediate plans to campaign against adult games. Stuart Kesten defends *Custer's Revenge* by saying it is "not a rape or ravage scene," but is "pure adult entertainment."

Minor Problems

The other six hardcore-game makers are at various stages of development with their games, though all are hoping to make them available by early '83. Cal Vista, the X-rated videocassette manufacturer, is working on three Atari-compatible adult games to retail for \$49.95 each, according to company president Sidney Niekirk. "In one game," he says, "the player has to stick parts of a body—a little part of a breast, for instance—onto a skeleton on the screen," explains Niekirk. Two other games, he says, are "a little bit like *Pac-Man*."

Select-a-Tape president Alan Roberts plans to bring out his first "X-rated" videogame in January, with one additional Atari-compatible release scheduled for a month or several months after that. Its first game, *X-Man*, like some of AMI's games, has intercourse as its goal. It also incorporates gobbling figures reminiscent of *Pac-Man*.

Multivision, a new company, will bring out *Harem*, its first Atari-compatible game, by the end of this year, followed by two games, *Centerfold* and *Studs*, early next year. According to company president Eugene Finkei, a longtime erotic photographer for several men's magazines, *Harem*, unlike other adult videogames, has two levels of play. The player guides his man through a complex maze to reach the flying carpet. Upon reaching it, the screen changes completely and the man is inside the harem, making his way through its eight chambers. A slight twist on the intercourse theme is that players get more points the longer they spend with each woman, but to do so they must fight off the eunuchs that roam from chamber to chamber.

Two other companies have also jumped on the bandwagon. Wizard is working on two Atari VCS-compatible games based on X-rated movies, and hopes to make them available by early next year. VCX, the X-rated videocassette manufacturer, is working on adult videogames compatible with both the Atari and the Intellivision systems. For the moment, though, VCX is putting most of its efforts into developing erotic computer games.

Whether adults take to simulated sex in videogames the way the kids have taken to flying through space remains to be seen. In any case, the controversy over the new pornographic games seems sure to heat up. Will the games actually be given ratings like movies? Will their sale be restricted in some areas? It's too early to tell, but a lot of people are clearly both excited and worried about these less-than-erotic stick figures vamping it up on the videogame screen. □

MY FIRST TIME...

In a unique kind of videogame first, VR's West Coast editor Marc Wielage gave some advance versions of the world's only erotic videogames a hands-on run-through as soon as they were released from the test labs. Weighing their playability and judging their erotic content in a frenzied afternoon at the controls of his Atari game system, Wielage filed the following findings.

* * *

I got my first crack at the world of adult videogames with *Custer's Revenge* and *Bachelor Party*, two of the three games from American Multiple Industries. Smug innuendos and bad sexual puns come quickly to mind when playing these games. But what concerned me more was whether these adult videogames really offer game fans anything they can't already experience with other games—or with real life.

Custer's Revenge reminded me of *Kaboom* and *Lost Luggage*, which are based on the fairly old videogame theme of avoiding objects falling from the sky. The idea is to steer Custer across the screen to reach an Indian maiden, taking care all the while to avoid numerous falling arrows, and—at the second level of difficulty—two prickly cacti.

Video Bighorn

Custer looks like a cowboy in his birthday suit, save for a hat and a bandanna, and stares at the unadorned maiden with what seemed to me to be keen longing. In playing the game, when I steered Custer past the obstacles to the other side, he "sprang" to attention.

The higher my score went, the more arrows rained down from the sky. As the score mounted, the game got much harder. I found it fairly challenging.

I think *Custer's Revenge's* game play, however, is less inventive than its basic idea, though this is mainly owing to the memory limitations of the Atari system. For one thing, the game's graphics are fair at best, certainly not up to par with, say, the graphics of some of the better Activision games. As far as the erotic nature of the sexual scenes depicted goes, let's just say that you'd have to have a very healthy imagination to find them stimulating.

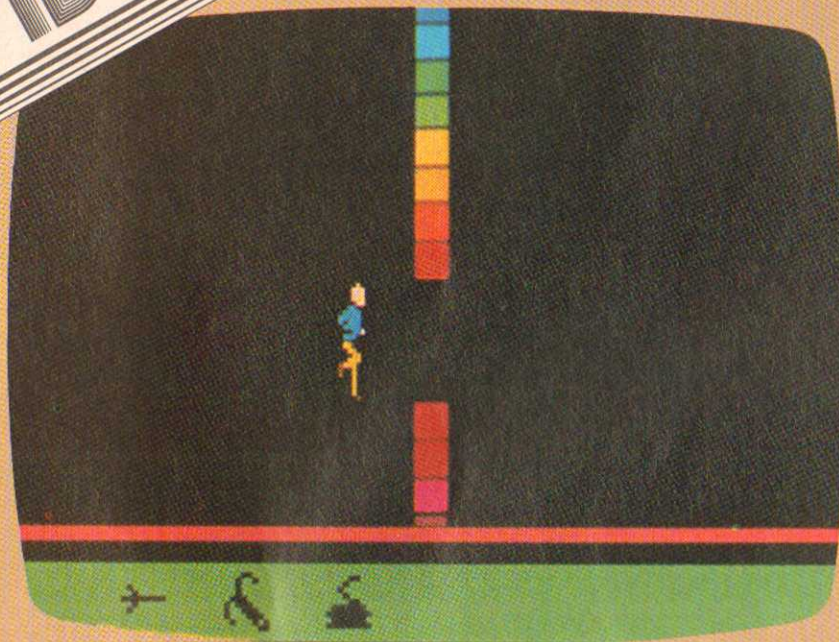
The background graphics include several clouds and a large desert mountain, along with a distant Indian teepee that puffs up occasional smoke signals. The sound effects provide a realistic tom-tom beat. But I was a little disappointed that none of these details changed at all when Custer started over again from the left-hand side of the screen.

Bachelor Party is a little simpler in conception and seems to be a variation of *Breakout*. When playing the game, I moved a naked bachelor around the screen, chasing stick-figure women. The quality of graphics was actually somewhat worse than that of *Custer*.

After playing both these adult videogames, my heart wasn't exactly beating wildly, nor was I panting for breath. I found their sexual twist to be amusing for about a minute, after which the initial charm quickly wore off. In that their playability is not all that different from more conventional videogames, I'm not sure they're really worth their relatively expensive price (\$49.95).

Granted, these first porn videogames are imaginative adult variations of some good games and may add some spice to a late-night party. But, my first shot at playing them leaves me lusting for more. (M.W.)

Raiders, Preppies and a \$50,000 prize



On the run in Atari's multiboard *Swordquest*: a touche situation.

The sub-games themselves seem fine, but when you win one, it doesn't seem to affect the rest of the game very much. Most of the time you can get out of a sub-game just by pushing a button, which puts you back in the maze and allows you to select another room. Sometimes it seems you must play a sub-game for a given amount of time before you get out, but you never seem to have to win to escape.

Another reservation I have is that since the cartridge has no active memory, you're back to square one each time you turn off the VCS console. I suppose you could simply leave the thing on for days if you want to commit a TV set to it, but I'm not sure what that would do to the set, and I personally do not want to find out. The only alternative might be charting out a map of each path on paper in order to quickly reach advanced levels.

Nevertheless, *Swordquest* is a real conceptual breakthrough for videogames; certainly, it opens up a whole new world of videogame possibilities and demonstrates just how much complexity and how many multi-branched logic-trees "simple" games can offer. □

Noted science-fiction writer Norman Spinrad's novel Bug Jack Baron is being adapted for a movie.

Cartridges

SWORDQUEST I (EARTH WORLD) ★★★
Designed by Don Hitchens.
and II (FIRE WORLD) ★★★
Designed by Tod Frye. (Atari VCS-compatible cartridges. \$39.95 each)

By Norman Spinrad

For a while now, I've thought that the future of videogames will lie not in the area of home adaptations of arcade games, but rather in the direction of something like the "interactive story." Charles Platt did a comic strip like this once, Bantam is publishing a series of interactive children's books, and a few videodisc programmers are working on interactive mysteries. The idea is that at various points in the narrative, the reader/viewer is called upon to make choices, and the plot of the unfolding story then branches depending on what the reader does. Obviously, this is pretty unwieldy in books or magazines. It seems to me that the ideal vehicle for something like this is the videogame. The *Swordquest* series is definitely a step in this direction.

It's also an innovation in that the first person to solve each game in the four-game series wins a \$25,000 prize!

In both of these initial two games, you maneuver a heroic figure through a maze. Some doorways warp your hero into subsequent mazes; others put him in arcade-like sub-games where you must move him across barriers to reach other spaces where he can pick up or drop off treasures and helpful objects. Putting the treasures in the correct rooms transports your hero to the Chamber of the Sword, which is the object of the quest, and you win the game. Segments requiring manual dexterity are only part of an overall game in which you are using your intellect (and a clue-laden comic book that comes with each game) to try to figure out a symbolic puzzle. A very nice concept.

The execution, however, is something else again. For one thing, the graphics of this Atari game are primitive, and this is more than a flaw in aesthetics. In *Earthworld*, for example, each room is marked with a sign of the zodiac, and there are 16 objects to be picked up and dropped off in the right houses. The trouble is that the symbols themselves are for the most part indecipherable. True, the instructions identify all 28 symbols, but since so many of them cannot be identified *without* the instructions—far too many to memorize—you must refer back to the instructions constantly. If you should lose the instructions, forget it!

KC'S CRAZY CHASE ★★★
Designed by Ed Averett. (Odyssey Odyssey²-compatible cartridge. \$35)

By Frank Lovece

How many munchies can a Munchkin munch before a Munchkin's all munched out? That was what Odyssey used to ask in its ads for its *Pac-Man*-esque game *KC Munchkin*. The answer, according to Atari, the wrath of Pac, was none. The original KC would probably still be munching today if Atari's legion of lawyers hadn't claimed copyright infringement and eventually gotten *KC Munchkin* taken off the shelves.

The Odyssey game really wasn't any more similar to *Pac-Man* than many other maze games, most notably On-Line Systems' *Jawbreaker* computer game. It was, however, more fun than Atari's own VCS adaptation of the arcade megahit. In *KC Munchkin*, the munchable objects were on the move rather than stationary, getting faster and more elusive as the game wore on. The player could choose variations in which the maze would be constantly shifting, or would even become invisible. Except for the Master Strategy series of videogame/boardgame combinations, *KC Munchkin* was probably the most lustrous

RATINGS

- ★★★★ Outstanding
- ★★★ Good
- ★★ Average
- ★ Below Average

thing in Odyssey's videogame lineup.

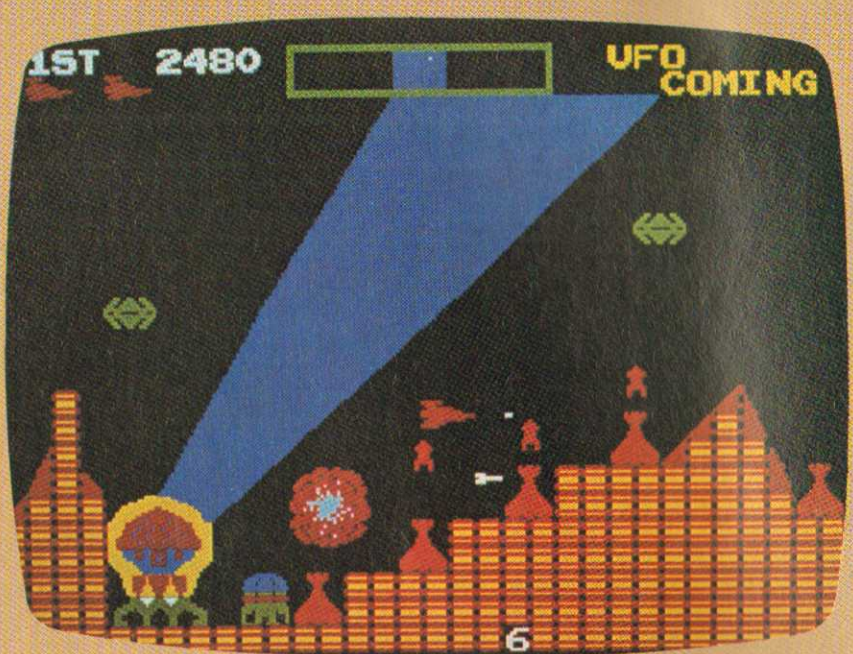
Now, along comes *KC's Crazy Chase*, which, like Imagic's *Atlantis-Cosmic Ark* duo, marks one of the first efforts at videogame sequels. It was originally called *KC's Revenge* for obvious reasons, but was changed following either sophisticated and highly technical game-title research or else a bad case of chicken. It's also one of the first Odyssey² games to use Odyssey's voice-synthesis module, the Voice, though the repetitious cries of "Run!" and "Hurry!" soon wear thin.

There's still a maze, and there's still KC. The difference is a slithering creature called a Dratapillar—composed of a strangely familiar yellow face attached to a row of circular body segments—and the klutzy Drats, acolytes who have a tendency to spin around like revolving doors whenever the energized KC rushes past.

You score points when, among other things, KC eats the body segments of the Dratapillar. You also score by having KC spin the Drats and, nominally, by having KC eat trees, which sporadically sprout like sprouts and usually just get in the way. Early stages of the game are fairly simple, but the action speeds up to a nice degree of challenge by the third board.

KC's Crazy Chase trades on its whimsical angle, with darling graphics on the package and, like *Pac-Man*, cute and relatively non-threatening antagonists. It's probably a great game for young kids because of its whimsy and its strategic ease: Get into a pattern of having KC eat a body segment, then spin the temporarily disabled Drats, and you can rack up points.

But there's something interesting in this whimsy. For the most part, videogames have become thematically divided between the whimsical types and dead-serious war games (the former epitomized by *Pac-Man*, the latter by the arcade game *Robotron*, in which your screen persona must rescue its



Coleco's *Cosmic Avenger*: home version of its 21st-century world.

family from apparently horrible deaths).

In this respect, I think, videogames share a tradition with boardgames, which have known a similar division for thousands of years—encompassing everything from the ancient Egyptian forerunner of the humorous *Snakes and Ladders* to any of the 30 or so variations of chess so far unearthed. The somber-faced world of sports hasn't this distinction, with rare exceptions. Neither does the whimsical world of pinball, again with rare exceptions.

Clearly, then, videogames did not spring full-grown from the Devil's garden, as some would suggest. Of course, they are carving out traditions of their own if for no other reason than their electronic nature. But their essential traditions seem to be rooted in game experiences that offer a link between

families playing *KC's Crazy Chase* today and those playing *The Game of Goose* in the 16th century. Except that the *Goose* players didn't have to listen to electronically synthesized honking, of course. □

COSMIC AVENGER ★★★★★

Adapted by Eric Bromley and team from the Universal arcade game. (Coleco ColecoVision cartridge. \$30)

By Ken Uston

People often ask me, "Ken, what's your favorite home videogame?" I've generally answered, "It's difficult to select a single cartridge, but I'd say probably Atari's *Asteroids* or *Defender*, or Mattel's *Space Battle*. But no more. My favorite game now, bar none, is Coleco's *Cosmic Avenger*."

Let me give you an idea of how this game can hook you: I'm writing a new book on home videogames, and I sit in front of my videorecorder for eight to 14 hours daily. Know what my research assistant and I do for fun after we're finished playing all kinds of videogames all day? We play one videogame—*Cosmic Avenger*!

This game is an adaptation of the coin-op game of the same name, which never became very popular. For those of you familiar with the arcade game *Scramble*, *Cosmic Avenger* is similar but more fun.

Your role is that of the captain of a spaceship, which you guide through an alien land. You encounter three types of colorful playfields. The first has mountains and valleys and 21st-century-looking buildings. Various alien objects and their missiles must be avoided, including rockets and dangerous UFOs. Your ship can drop bombs or launch missiles horizontally.

The second pits your craft against blue tanks which fire feisty blue missiles from the base of the screen. The final playfield is an underwater ice castle. Bright icebergs float



KC's Crazy Chase: same Munchkin, new Dratapillar.

at the bottom and top of the screen. Your ship encounters submarines, torpedoes and other underwater threats.

After you complete a cycle of the three playfields, they repeat continually but are more difficult because your ship has less room in which to maneuver.

The graphics of *Cosmic Avenger* are fabulous and virtually of arcade quality, made possible by the capacious memory of the ColecoVision system. There are many moving objects of varying colors, as well as diverse sound effects.

Even the controls are fun to operate, since the up and down and thrust functions have been combined into the ColecoVision joystick, which makes it particularly easy to maneuver the spaceship. A couple of tips:

- You can often score higher if you hold the bomb-firing button down continuously, so you can concentrate on maneuvering the spaceship and launching missiles.

- When going through the ice castle, travel at the slowest possible speed by pushing the joystick sharply to the left. Your ship will be safer, and you'll be able to rack up more points by destroying alien objects instead of merely avoiding them.

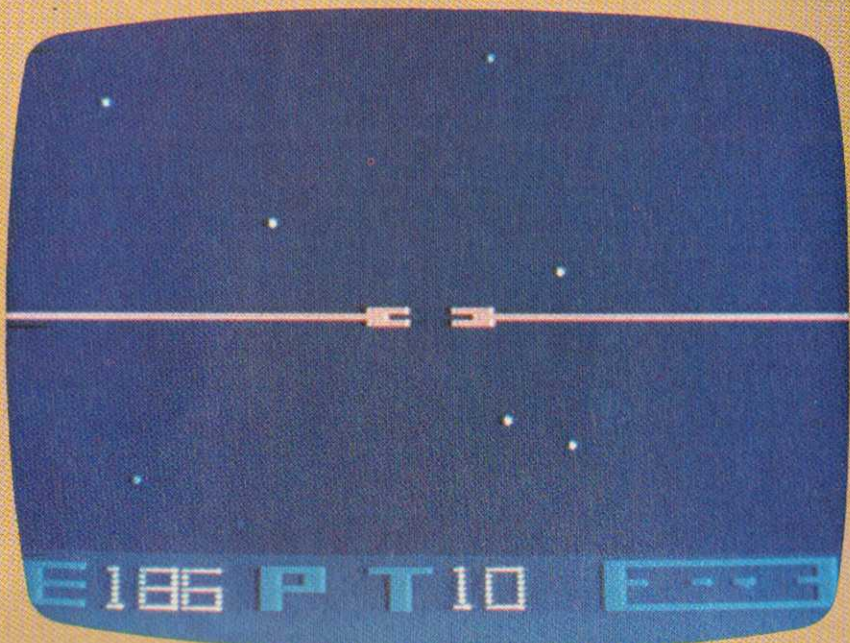
After you've played a few games of *Cosmic Avenger*, you're likely to find yourself addicted. To play an hour is to play 100 hours! □

MICRO SURGEON ★ ★ ★ ★

Designed by Rick Levine. (Imagic Intellivision-compatible cartridge. \$31.95)

By Norman Metzger

As administrative head of New York City's Mount Sinai Medical Center, I have to understand how doctors, nurses, therapists and other medical professionals think. I never dreamt my family's Intellivision console could ever help me out in this weighty endeavor. Who would?



Two views of *Star Raiders*: gunsight in the VCS version.

Imagine my surprise, then, upon discovering *Micro Surgeon*. After dealing with medical practitioners all day, it's nice to come home at night and play doctor myself.

I scrubbed up and really got into it—into the brain, that is, and the lungs, the kidneys and the intestines. I traveled through the arteries, fighting off infections and viruses—not in "vein" did I blast away at tumors, stones, tar spots and tapeworms.

First decisions: To pick a patient (there are 200 patient charts) and to identify the problem areas (brain—critical; lungs—serious). We then take a *Fantastic Voyage* into the body to operate. Next choice is the form of therapy: ultrasonar for tumors, cholesterol and stones; antibiotics for bacteria; aspirin for viruses. The player is experiencing first the clinical years in medical school and then the joy of being

emperor of the operating room, all without the turnoff of blood-letting.

Interest level is kept at a high pitch. You must get in and get out fast—time is of the essence, just as in real life. Perhaps the designer is a frustrated, would-be surgeon—all the conditions are there. If you pick a really critical patient (you have three levels of "wellness" to choose from), you reduce the time allowed for your journey through the body. A power level gauge indicates how much time you have left.

Mothers, don't let your babies grow up to be doctors. It's too expensive. Let them play *Micro Surgeon*. Let them blast out tumors in the brain by selecting the ultrasonar button. Give them the excitement of traveling through the arteries and into the heart to combat disease. Let them destroy bacteria with antibiotics (another button) as they check back on the patient's condition and the power level.

The only things missing in this challenging and educational game is the malpractice insurance factor, the Hippocratic oath and possibly Raquel Welch. □

Mount Sinai Medical Center vice president Norman Metzger teaches health care administration in New York City.

STAR RAIDERS ★ ★

Designed by D. Neubauer. (Atari VCS-compatible cartridge. \$39.95. Can only be used with CX-21 Video Touch Pad accessory.)

STAR RAIDERS ★ ★ ★

Designed by Joseph Copson. (Atari 5200-compatible cartridge. \$39.95)

By Marc Wielage

"Captain Kirk to the bridge! Red alert!" Remember that recurring line from *Star Trek*? Sure you do. So do a lot of videogame designers, who are putting together more and more multiple-screen

LOCATION	48
STATUS	FAIR
POWER	167
LUNG	CRITICAL
GALLBLDDR	FAIR
HEART	CRITICAL
KIDNEY	FAIR
INTESTINE	TERMINAL
BRAIN	GOOD
INFECTION	SERIOUS

Imagic's *Micro Surgeon*: a simulated doctor in the house.



... and a sight for sore eyes in the 5200 game.

games which simulate the viewpoint of a certain starship captain standing on the bridge of his vessel, facing interstellar attackers—a view you won't get from any apartment here on earth.

Such sights and fights are precisely what Atari's two versions of *Star Raiders* offer. Each is a scaled-down edition of the classic "underground" computer game that has been circulating among computer programmers and buffs since at least the early '70s (and the origin of which is still a much-debated mystery). Your role is that of an intergalactic pilot ordered to rid the galaxy of Krylon battleships and base stations. A battle screen depicts your forward view into space and supplies readouts of your ship's energy level, computer target control and force fields. Another screen, the Galactic Map, shows where your ship and your enemies are located. By moving the joystick to place a cursor in any sector of this map and hitting the fire button, your spacecraft springs into hyperspace to arrive at your chosen destination light-years away.

Once your ship arrives in a dangerous area, get ready for a Red Alert. The screen flashes red and an alarm sounds (you'll have to imagine your crewmembers running around in a frenzy, going to their battle stations). The fight is on. Winged enemy craft start buzzing your ship. These nasty little devils zip past like angry hornets, and you need the on-screen gun sights to effectively pin them down. Repeated hits by the Krylons weaken your ship's shields, and the energy level falls until finally you lose your ship's defenses one by one. Before it's devastated, however, and if you've been able to ration your power supply, your ship can crawl back to a friendly starbase for recharging.

Each version seems to do an adequate job of giving you the feel of a space battle without your actually engaging in one. (This from my landlubber's point-of-view, of

course.) But there are drawbacks to both. The VCS version's graphics are a little disappointing, and I find the reaction time of the joystick to be rather sluggish. (Luke Skywalker would never have been able to blow away the Death Star with this controller, let me tell you.) Also, the VCS map is simplistic and hard to follow.

The drawbacks of the 5200 version are more subtle. This version is much slicker, with very impressive graphics—such as a realistic starfield—plus a much more comfortable joystick reaction time. It also employs each of its 12 controller buttons for a specific function—everything from speeding up and slowing down your ship to turning on the attack computer and shields. This version also provides a "Long Range Sector Scan" to help you spot your ship, plus a more elaborate shipboard computer

for zeroing in on targets. There are also such nicely realistic touches as having to steer your spacecraft during hyperwarp, and having to dodge both enemy fire and runaway asteroids. I find the 5200 version to be every bit as good, in fact, as the one for the Atari 400 computer.

Both version's main drawback for me is that they not only fail to provide as much action as the usual space shoot-'em-ups, but also don't provide the challenge of a multi-board adventure game. I can see that Atari's intent with *Star Raiders* was to try to bridge the gap between these two game genres, but unfortunately, my boredom threshold was reached after only an hour or two of play.

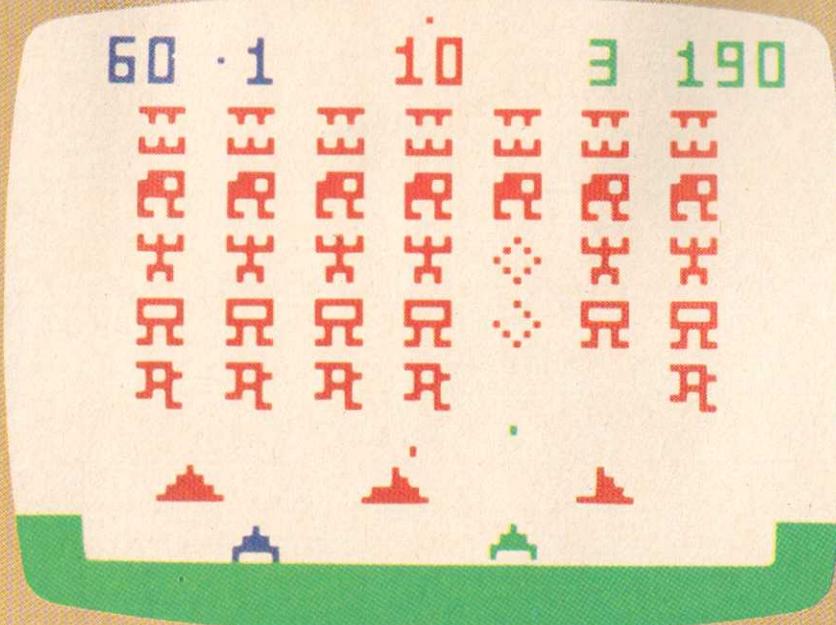
One thing's for sure: The VCS version isn't much of a bargain, since you have to fork over 40 bucks to get both the game cartridge and the necessary CX-21 keypad, which plugs into the second joystick port. For my money, there are a lot of other games that are easier to play and have just as much action as the VCS *Star Raiders* without all the trouble (Activision's *Star Master* chief among them). □

ALIEN INVASION ★ ★
Designed by Brad Reid-Selth.
(Zircon/Fairchild Channel F-
compatible cartridge, \$29.95)

By Dan Gutman

Contrary to popular belief, videogame life did not begin with Atari. In 1976, even before the first version of the VCS came out, another lesser-known system hit the stores—Fairchild's Channel F. Despite little advertising or publicity, about 300,000 people bought Fairchild's consoles. But the videogame explosion had yet to be ignited, so Fairchild hyperspaced out in 1979, discontinuing the system.

Now, at a time when even my dentist is considering starting a videogame company,



Zircon/Fairchild's Alien Invasion: Chinese eye chart?

the Channel F is back, under the wing of the brand-name Zircon (which sounds like a good name for a planet). With a substantial library (26 cartridges plus two built-in, "resident" games) and the lowest price of any game console (\$99.95 or \$69.96 if you trade in your old Fairchild console), Zircon hopes to make it with Channel F before America hits its videogame saturation point. Yet, judging from this recent and well-publicized game, Zircon may run into some problems.

Alien Invasion, which Zircon claims is "a new dimension of fun," is sadly, the same old length, breadth and width of *Space Invaders*: 35 invaders, movable laser cannon, bombs, shields—you know the score. But I can't condemn Zircon for ripping off one of the most famous videogames ever. Mattel has its version (*Space Armada*), Odyssey its (*Alien Invaders Plus*) and countless games, including *Galaxian*, *Demon Attack* and *Communist Mutants from Space*, owe their obvious inspiration to *Space Invaders*.

What I can criticize is this game's play

dancing—not exactly pulse-pounding.

It is unclear whether *Alien Invasion* was designed for a younger audience or if the Channel F system simply can't handle more complicated games. One thing is certain, though—if this is anything like the best invasion force real, live aliens could ever muster, we have nothing to worry about. □

STAMPEDE ★

Designed by Bob Whitehead. (Activision Intellivision; compatible cartridge. \$30 approx.)

By Howard Polskin

With a "giddyap!" and a "Hi-yo, silver!" you're off on your stallion, vicariously lassoing cattle in the O.K. Corral. A quick flick of your electronic rope nabs stampeding steer in one of Activision's first games for the Mattel Intellivision console.

On the surface, this appears to be a real man's game, a video evocation of the typical American boy's fantasy (at least in my generation) to become a ropin', ridin', range-bustin' cowpoke. In truth, *Stampede*

speeds from left to right across the stark video terrain. When a cow is touched by the rope, it disappears as if zapped by a ray from outer space. When three steer wind up past the cowboy, the game is over.

There are some obstacles in the game, such as cattle skulls along the trail that can trip your cowboy's galloping horse. These are easily avoided. Occasionally, stationary black cattle appear on the screen, and it takes a real Roy Rogers to nail these babies before your cowboy's horse dashes by.

Within about 10 minutes, the game loses whatever appeal it may have had. Many urban cowboys will no doubt trot away very quickly. And even cowgirls may get the blues. □

COSMIC SWARM ★★★

Designed by John Bronstein. (CommaVid VCS-compatible cartridge. \$31.95)

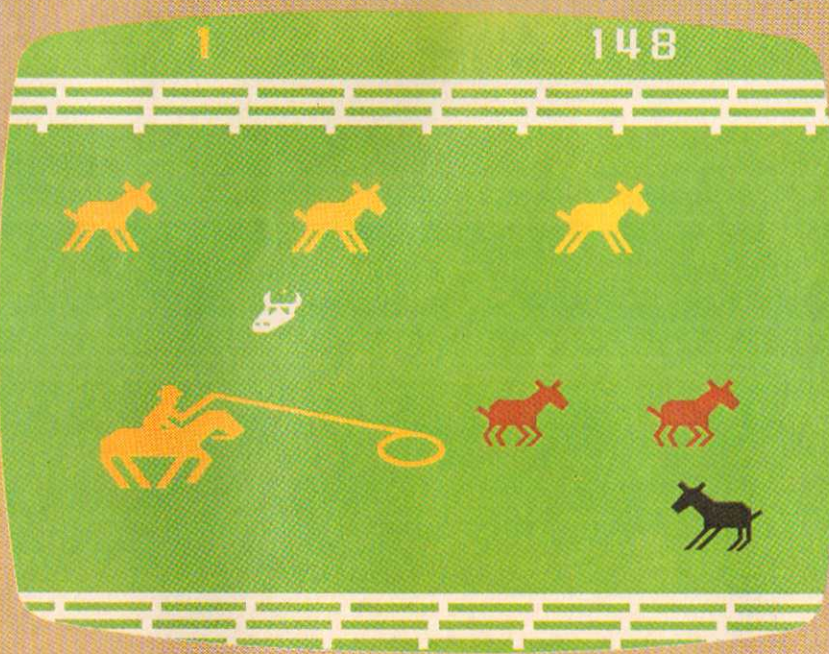
By Mark Trost

For some reason, videogame designers seem to be fascinated by bugs, be they extraterrestrial flies (as in Atari's *Yars' Revenge*) or the outer-space termites in *Cosmic Swarm*. I'm not sure what's behind this preoccupation with insects, unless the majority of videogame buyers are closet exterminators.

Cosmic Swarm is little more than a variation on the arcade favorite *Centipede*, and while it's a nice kill-the-bugs-while-avoiding-obstacles game, the instruction-book writer seemed unable to leave it at that. Instead, we're presented with a somewhat contrived scenario about the Waypoint Interstellar trade depot (never seen) which is suddenly infested with giant mineral-eating termites. The insects quickly invade the main power-conversion chamber and begin crafting nests (little more than colored blocks). Your invisible crew "is working feverishly" (to quote the instruction book), opening crates of tiny, remote-controlled planetary probe ships to be used to thwart the bugs.

Why do all these games come with such needlessly elaborate story lines? Normally, I wouldn't have any qualms about such a preamble if it actually related to the screen action, as do the scenarios in Atari's *Defender* and Activision's *Star Master*. In *Cosmic Swarm's* case, however, the elaborate explanation is pointless—a quick glance at the playing field tells you all you have to know. Simply put, you pilot (with the joystick control) a fleet of three probe ships. Each can fire two rapid shots at a time to kill the bugs, but must be constantly recharged by a refueling ship which appears about every 45 seconds.

Scoring is pretty much a single digit affair. Hitting a termite unprotected by a nesting block scores one point; hitting one protected by a block earns two. Hitting a block-bearing termite squarely on the block scores three. If you're skilled enough to do the latter, the remaining blocks turn red and can be destroyed for an additional one point



Activision's Intellivision-compatible Stampede: bum steer.

itself. On the surface, the graphics are pretty. As orange, pictograph figures on a pleasant white field, these aliens look about as menacing as Mr. Rogers. Yet the figures lack the "personality" of *Space Invaders*, leaving one wondering if you are defending civilization or reading an eye chart written in Chinese. The action is virtually identical to *Space Invaders* but less intense, so you don't have to lean forward in your chair, eyes riveted to the screen.

The sound effects, too, are primitive—your direct hits sound like soap bubbles gently bursting, and the mother ship sinks across the top of the screen with a sound that's a cross between tiptoeing and tap

Dan Gutman is the managing editor of Electronic Fun.

will probably be as fulfilling to videogamers as a plate of warmed-over quiche would've been to John Wayne.

Take the graphics. The colored, silhouette images of the horse, rider and cattle are clear and sharp. That's the good news. Unfortunately, they're about all that appear on the screen. The background is plain green. The top and bottom sides of the screen are bordered by a white fence. Visually, the game is about as appealing as a drought-struck Chisholm Trail.

The object of *Stampede* is so simple that even gamers without two feet in the mental stirrups will be able to get the hang of it quickly. Perhaps too quickly. Which means videogame boredom is just down the trail.

The onscreen cowboy must lasso the stampeding cattle as they run at varying

each. It takes 100 points to earn an extra ship.

Strategy is straightforward. You should constantly move your ship to intercept termites *before* they drop their blocks. Always attempt to hit the bug on the block so other blocks become vulnerable. Be alert to the warning siren, which means you must dock your probe ship with a refueling ship. The ship always appears in the upper right or upper left corner of the screen, so as soon as you hear the sound, look to the corners to check where you should move.

While not the most challenging game I've ever played, it is less predictable than most and always offers a surprise or two. The only real drawback is the dual-performance aspect of the fire button. When the button is up, the joystick moves the ship up, down and diagonally. When it's held down, the ship will rotate. The result: If you fire rapidly and move the joystick at the same time, you may very well send your ship into an undesired spin, but that's the price you pay for being a member of the invisible Waypoint crew. □

NIGHT STALKER ★★★

Designed by Mattel. (Mattel Electronics Intellivision-compatible cartridge. \$39)

By Howard Polskin

Night Stalker's premise seems rooted in a very bad dream. Perhaps the designer had a pepperoni pizza, three double margheritas and an LSD flashback the night before he or she designed it.

A stick-figure man—not Darren McGavin, I'm told—is caught in a maze with spiders, bats and robots who pursue him with the zeal of life-insurance salespeople trying to meet their winter quotas. The chase is accompanied by a steady thumping noise—"bom... bom... bom... bom..."—not unlike the sound of a tell-tale heart. This



Spiders, bats and things that go bump in *Night Stalker*.

is clearly not a game for people who may suffer from feelings of persecution or paranoia.

Your screen persona in this one-player game fires bullets at his pursuers. The bats and spiders don't shoot back, but can bite the man, which adds a nice touch of zoological realism. The bites paralyze him for several seconds, and he is unable to fire or to elude the dangerous robots. When he eventually runs out of bullets, your protagonist must trek to another part of the maze to find another loaded gun. During this search, he is defenseless and must desperately avoid the robots.

After a certain point, more sophisticated robots than those of the early stages enter the fray. They're both relentless and exceedingly clever in their pursuit of the man. As the game progresses, it becomes more

and more difficult to out-think and out-manuever them. In fact, it becomes nearly impossible. Novices may deem the game at this point too arduous. Keep playing. It gets harder.

Soon a white robot with a protective shield appears. Even skillful players suffer a high mortality rate at this stage (the third of five). Weeks of diligent practice barely nudge gamers into higher playing levels, where their onscreen incarnations quickly fall prey to this virtually unbeatable robotic breed.

Interestingly, the white robot forces you to be always on the defensive. That's a challenge at first, but being on the run quickly becomes a drag. Who wants to be a videogame fugitive? If we're not Darren McGavin after all, why should we be David Janssen?

Night Stalker is most enjoyable when you can be a potent offensive force, blasting the robots, bats and spiders to heaven, hell or the low-rent district of the Silicon Valley. Otherwise, you can find yourself stalking an extremely hard day's night. □

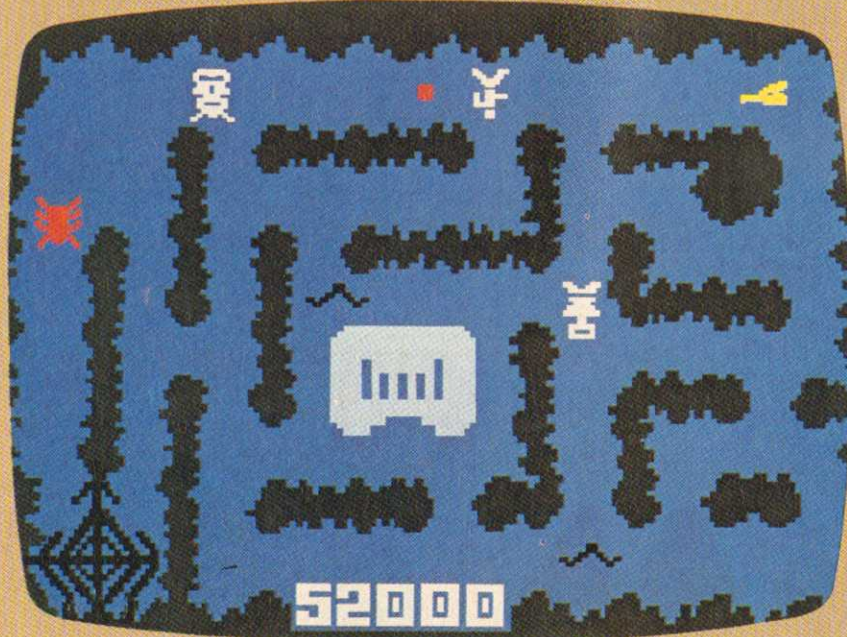
WORD ZAPPER ★★★

Designed by James Wickstead. (Vidtec/US Games VCS-compatible cartridge. \$29.95)

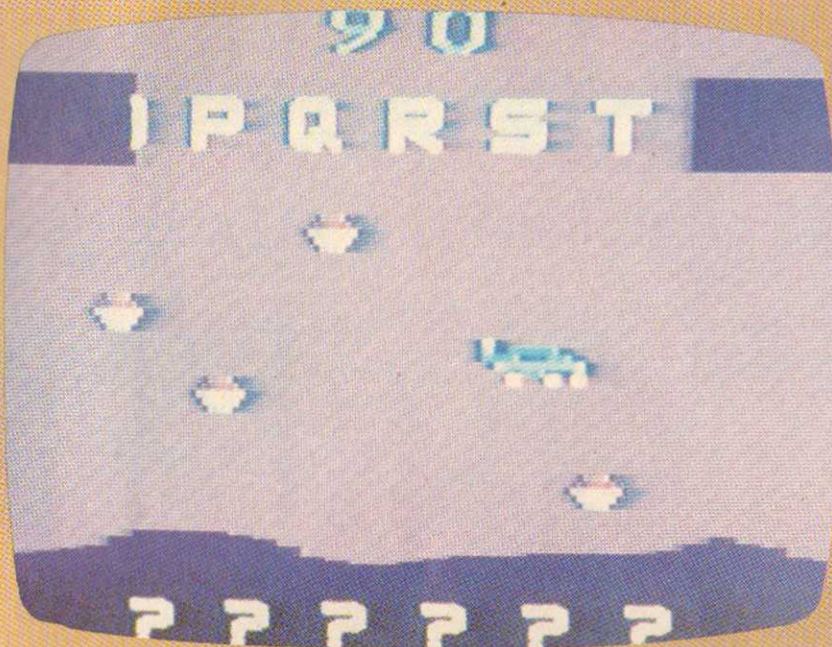
By Randi Hacker

Is nothing sacred? Now videogames are threatening a solid tradition in American education—the three Rs. *Word Zapper* promises to change readin', ritin' and rithmetic to readin', rapid fire and rollover.

Seriously, the object of this charming game of alphabet swoop is to quickly read a word generated by the game console, then, using your Zapper spaceship, buzz around and shoot out the proper letters in sequence as they scroll by in alphabetical order across the top of the screen. Not only are you racing against time, you're also being at-



Cosmic Swarm from *CommaVid*: extraterrestrial termites.



Word Zapper from Videoc/US Games: a play on words.

tacked by predators dead set on keeping your spelling skills below average.

You must battle four types of attackers: Doomsday Asteroids, which can destroy you and cancel the whole spelling bee; Scroller Asteroids which, upon making contact with your Zapper, scramble the letters for five seconds, giving you a brief taste of dyslexia; and Bonker and Zonker Asteroids which, upon impact, move your Zapper to the side, thus throwing off your aim considerably.

You may shoot out the letters and content yourself with dodging the oncoming flotsam and jetsam, or you may shoot at your asteroid attackers. (Doing the latter also succeeds in shooting out letters in a gratuitous fashion, but, as this doesn't subtract anything from your score, who cares?) Pressing the fire button without touching the joystick directs the letter laser up toward the letters and beams them down (Scotty) to the bottom of the screen.

The game requires fast reflexes and a quick trigger finger. You've got to keep one eye on the letters, anticipating the one you need (which is not all that difficult when they come in alphabetical order, but can be tricky when they're scrambled up) and the other on the lookout for Doomsday Asteroids and so forth. This amounts to a lot of shooting in several directions at a quick pace.

You get three words per game, which become progressively longer, going from four to as many as six letters. As time runs out, it gets tougher and tougher to capture the letters you need in time.

Even if it does smack of education, all this is a lot of fun. The game's graphics are colorful if not breathtaking and, for children especially, playing *Word Zapper* can be quite exciting. But I'm waiting for *Synonym Zapper*, in which you will have to battle the dreaded Thesaurus and other terrible lizards. □

VENTURE ★★★★★

Adapted by Eric Bromley and team from the Exidy arcade game. (Coleco ColecoVision cartridge. \$30)

VENTURE ★★

Adapted by Eric Bromley and team from the Exidy arcade game. (Coleco VCS-compatible cartridge. \$30)

By Marc Wielage

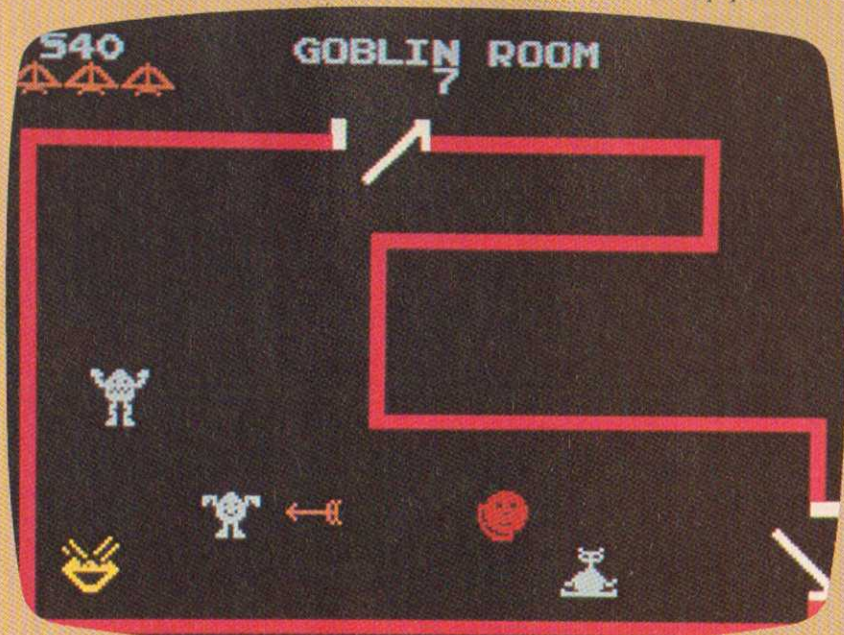
Luke Skywalker had one; so did Scarlett O'Hara, Norman Bates and plenty of other major characters throughout the history of cinema. I'm talking about a *leitmotif*—a kind of musical mini-theme designed to give each character an emotional identifier, and a staple of movie scoring since motion pictures began. So far, the subtleties of the *leitmotif* have escaped most videogames, because of the limited memories of most

cartridges. Yet in *Venture*, Coleco has managed to come up with a game that packs in at least a half-dozen brief themes—a first for any home videogame I've yet encountered.

Venture is a multiscreen maze game, with a scary setting reminiscent of a set from an old William Castle horror movie. The ColecoVision version opens with a short fanfare, and the display tells you which level you're about to start at, and how many bow-and-arrow equipped Winkies you have with which to explore the maze. The next display is a map revealing where your Winkie is in relation to four irregularly shaped rooms. By maneuvering through hallways and avoiding the five green Hall monsters, your Winkie can enter any of these rooms and attempt to retrieve a treasure to score big points.

Each room is guarded by an assortment of demons, ghosts, snakes, skeletons, spiders, trolls and dragons. In the ColecoVision version, the creatures prance and jump around in time to sinister tunes: The Skeleton Room features a xylophone-like tune reminiscent of the Disney Silly Symphonies; the Snake Room features a standard snake-charmer melody; the evil Hall monsters are accompanied by a single, grim note that evokes the very essence of horror. Unfortunately, owing to the limited memory of the basic Atari system, the VCS version lacks these musical subtleties.

The ColecoVision *Venture* provides 36 rooms spread over nine levels, with each succeeding level providing a few more Hall monsters and livelier foes. Some rooms have creatures that appear only when you grab the treasure; others have monsters that can teleport instantly from one side of the room to the other, making them particularly formidable. Each level has one especially devilish room—the Wall Room on the first level, for example, which has moving, electrified walls that can fry your Winkie



Side-by-side views of *Venture* adapted for ColecoVision . . .

in the wink of an eye. (*Venture* quite obviously owes its inspiration to the popular *Berserk*.)

In a clever twist, the evil creatures guarding the treasures are as dangerous dead as alive. If your Winkie accidentally touches a corpse, it's a goner. Fortunately, the bodies disappear within five seconds. Another thing to avoid is dawdling in a room. The Hall monsters then tend to duck inside and try to do away with your Winkie, whose arrows have no effect on these creatures.

Compared to the ColecoVision version, the VCS game is extremely dull. The walls and shapes are much too simple, the Winkie is sluggish and the sound effects routine. Not having the atmospheric music is a handicap. I realize that with only a few hundred bytes of memory, the basic Atari system itself is limited, but I can't help feeling that the Coleco designers could have done more with the VCS version. I have to say, though, that the ColecoVision *Venture* is music to my ears. □

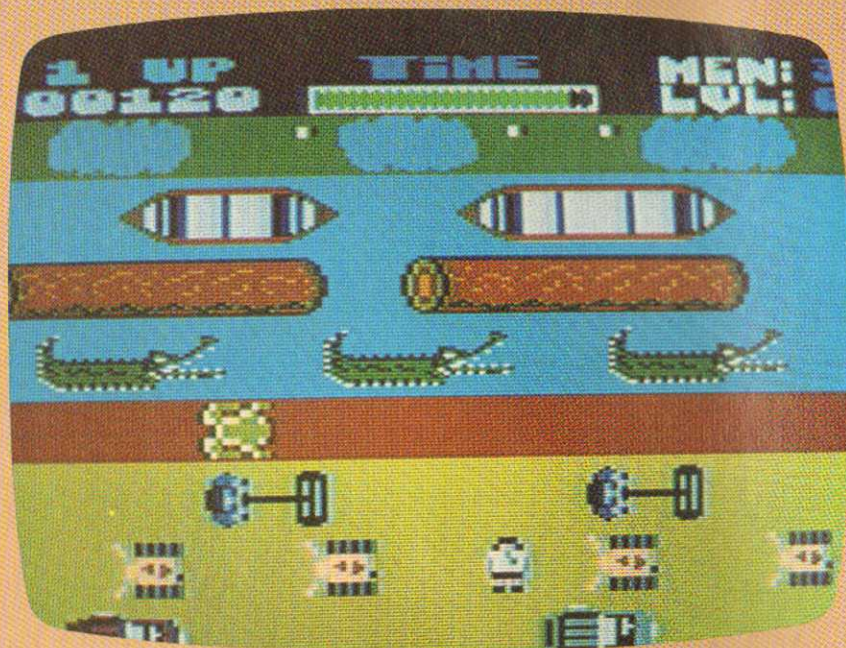
Disc/Cassette

PREPPIE ★ ★ ★ ★

Designed by Russ Wetmore. (Adventure International floppy disc and cassette for Atari 400/800 computers with 16K RAM. \$29.95)

By Sheldon Leemon

"Look, Muffy, a game for us," proclaims the smart green-and-pink cover of *Preppie*. But even if your name is Igor and the thought of Madras plaid makes you break out in hives, the odds are good you'll like this game. In a field dominated by noisy, space shoot-em-ups, which leave in their wake sprained wrists, callous fingers and frayed nerves, it's refreshing to find a game with wit, style and breeding.



Preppie computer game: between a croc and a hard place.

This is not to say that the bug-eyed gamer will turn up his or her nose at *Preppie*. On the contrary, he or she will be delighted to find that it resembles that arcade favorite, *Frogger*. But, through a little computer magic, this is a *Frogger* transformed—not into a handsome prince, but rather, into that sacred Ivy League institution, the upper-class twit. The game replaces the premise of a poor little amphibian hopping the gauntlet on a superhighway with that of an amiable dolt trying to collect golf balls without getting run over by lawn mowers and golf carts. This simple change in the story line lightens the tone and makes for better internal consistency. (Who ever heard of a frog drowning, as happens in *Frogger*?)

Like all good games, the object of the game is simple to understand, and hard to master. In the first level of play, only three

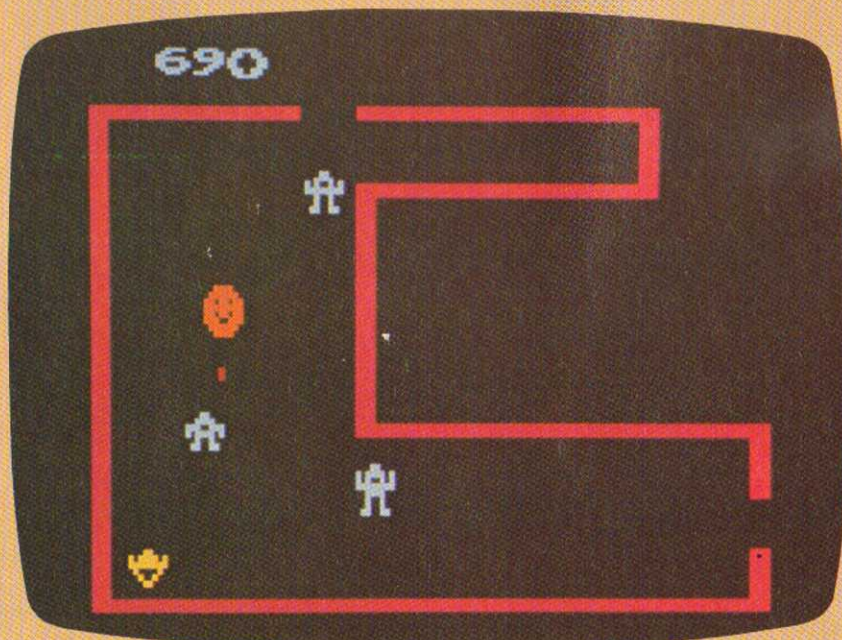
rows of mowers, moving back and forth across the lawn, prevent your simple scion from reaching the golf ball, picking it up and returning. In the next level, he must pick up an additional ball and hop from one moving canoe to another. In the third level are golf carts, and subsequent levels of play introduce tractors, logs, alligators and even a killer frog (probably angry over losing top billing). You start each level with a limited amount of time, and if it runs out before you have retrieved all the golf balls, your preppie perishes.

The graphics are not only superbly professional, but their cartoon-like style complements the game's theme. In this area, *Preppie* showcases the abilities of home computers, by presenting a multitude of medium-to-high-resolution figures in up to 20 colors at once.

Even more impressive is this game's musical accompaniment. The sound effects of most videogames are limited to irritating laser blasts and explosions. But designer Wetmore, who has an extensive musical background, has fashioned a remarkably entertaining medley of "Strolling Through the Park One Day," "Humoresque" and "Down Among the Sheltering Pines." This soothing combination helps counteract the tension induced by the game's fast pace.

Even when the action is fastest, the one- or two-player game is not fatiguing, and holds up well to repeated play. You may start the game at any of its first nine levels, which allows you to practice the difficult ones and to skip the lower levels when they become too easy. Level 10 is said to have a "special surprise" that will be revealed only to those who reach that elevated plateau. I'm afraid I've never gotten that far, so I don't know what it is, but I have gotten close enough to know that reaching it is far from impossible.

Maybe if I give it the old college try. . . . □



... and for the Atari VCS: graphic differences.

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Graphic boom for VCS players

"If that George Plimpton doesn't shut up, I'm gonna punch him right in the mouth!" That's the kind of talk I've been hearing lately from Atari VCS owners who seem to have seen one too many Mattel Intellivision commercial on TV. What they're really lamenting is the relatively limited memory of their game consoles compared to Mattel's. It's this memory—only 128 bytes of RAM—that prevents Atari VCS players from enjoying the smoother graphics and faster action of systems such as Mattel's Intellivision.

Despite the greatly improved new generation of VCS games, not that much has been done to improve the Atari game console. That is, until recently. Starpath—which recently changed its name from Arcadia—has come up with a painless, relatively inexpensive way of adding over 6K of RAM to the VCS, making it a contender that can hold its own against even the best game systems around.

Starpath's videogame system is called the Supercharger, and it's designed as a \$70 module that's approximately twice the size of a conventional VCS cartridge. This module plugs into the slot of any VCS-type console, and includes a three-foot cable that plugs into the earphone jack of a standard audiocassette recorder. You use the recorder to play back a prerecorded Starpath game cassette into the Supercharger module. After several seconds the screen lights up with a series of moving vertical lines (accompanied by a rising tone sweep).

Action-Packed Graphics

I found the system to be every bit as simple and foolproof as it is enjoyable. I had no problems whatsoever when playing back the tapes. In fact, I couldn't get the thing to screw up, no matter what volume level I used.

Moreover, based on the half-dozen Supercharger games I've played so far, I can confidently say the Supercharged games are the most action-packed I've ever seen for the VCS, with graphics that are far better than those of any comparable games. In addition, the Supercharger adds great sound effects I never thought I'd hear on a VCS. How, exactly, does the Supercharger work? Well, its designers are keeping mum on specifics though



I got Alan Bayley, president of Starpath, to explain some of the basics to me. "The graphics generator scans every line of the TV screen, not just every other line, resulting in far sharper images," Bayley said. "We also have more lifelike game characters, and I think our games ultimately provide more player interest, challenge and fun."

When I asked Andy Breyer, winner

of the '81 Atari Asteroids game competition (and admittedly an occasional spokesperson for Starpath) about the Supercharger, he said, "The graphics are definitely better than those of any other games I've played. They're challenging and have features that are unusual."

The one feature of the new Starpath game cassettes that most surprised me is their cost: under \$15 apiece. That's about half the price of most VCS-compatible cartridges. Since the Starpath cassettes contain only a few minutes of tape, they're obviously cheaper to make than conventional carts full of integrated circuits.

Communist Mutants, et al.

So far, four games are available: *Phaser Patrol* (a *Star Master*-style multiple screen game, included with the *Supercharger*), *Fireball* (an imaginative twist on the idea of the old *Break out* game), *Suicide Mission* (sort of an *Asteroids* meets *Fantastic Voyage*) and, of course, *Communist Mutants from Space* (an improved version of *Galaxian*, with several unique user-programmable features). *Phaser Patrol* offers a good example of the Supercharger's potential as far as game sophistication goes. There are two screens either of which you can call up at will. One is for plotting star courses, the other is the main screen—or, rather, the defense station.

Coming soon are adventure games such as *Excalibur*, *Labyrinth*, *Frantic*, *Killer Satellites*, *Jungle Raid*, *Clone Attack* and *Last Line of Defense*. All Arcadia games include "free" game previews and well written, fully illustrated instructions with playing hints. The company plans on releasing one game a month during 1983. □

Starpath Supercharger: an expansion module that adds better graphics and sounds to Atari's VCS.

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