

HOTLINE

THE BI-WEEKLY ELECTRONIC GAMES NEWSLETTER

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JACK TRAMIEL BUYS ATARI Less than six months after resigning as President of Commodore International, Ltd., Commodore founder Jack Tramiel stunned the computer industry by buying a controlling share in Atari. The total selling price of Atari's home computer and videogame divisions was \$240 million. Warner originally purchased Atari in 1982 for \$27 million.

According to the terms of the new agreement, Warner will be a partner in the new company, Tramiel Technology, Ltd. Mr. Tramiel also has an opportunity to purchase up to one million shares of Warner Communications stock under the agreement. Warner will retain ownership of Atari's coin-op division and Ataritel, the home communications venture.

Steve Ross, Warner's chairman and chief executive officer commented on the reasons for the sale: "During the past 18 months, WCI has spared no effort to identify and address the problems that have plagued Atari. We have concluded, however, that we must constructively channel our energies and resources to the balance of WCI's businesses."

Consumers will feel slight effects of the sale, although industry watchers predict that Atari will shift its emphasis away from videogames to the computer arm of the business. Mr. Tramiel created the marketing strategies that made the Commodore 64 a popular hit, and most analysts believe those same techniques will now be applied toward boosting Atari's position in the home computer market. Within the first week after the sale, Mr. Tramiel had already begun cost-cutting efforts, resulting in widespread layoffs of personnel in the Sunnyvale, Ca. headquarters. He also announced that his three sons, along with several former Commodore executives, would take the helm of the new enterprise.

No marketing plans or changes in product lines have been unveiled yet, but several previously-announced items have been placed on "hold" for a few weeks until the new management team can evaluate the Fall marketing strategies.

APPLE TO PLANT MORE MACINTOSHES Apple plans to double the number of Macintosh computers it manufactures by the end of this year, and is expanding its Fremont, Ca. factory for this purpose. The factory currently produces about 40,000 big Macs per month. In another announcement, John Sculley, Apple's Chief Executive Officer and president, said that a new version of the Macintosh will be introduced in 1984 with expanded memory capacity, but failed to release any further details about the new machine.

FANTASY GAME INSPIRES BOOK Here's some novel news that may be a first for computerdom. Spinnaker's new role-playing fantasy game, "Shadowkeep" is the inspiration for a novel soon to appear from Alan Dean Foster, well-known author of scads of SF books, such as "Alien", the "Spellsigner" series, and the "Star Trek Log" books.

"Shadowkeep", created by Ultrasoft for Spinnaker's new line of Trillium interactive-ware, lets up to nine players band together to search a mysterious tower. Characters can be warriors, monks, necromancers, shadowmages, or runemages, with strength, dexterity, intelligence, power, leadership and hit points, and can be male or female in four different races. The game uses high-res graphics and animation, and understands either full sentences or abbreviations, as players encounter creatures drawn from Welsh and Scottish mythology while traveling through the Land of Legends.

MCGRAW-HILL BUYS FUTURE COMPUTING McGraw-Hill has acquired Future Computing for an undisclosed cash sum, and will continue to operate the firm as a unit of the McGraw-Hill Information Systems Company. Future Computing, founded in 1980, provides market research data, analyses and forecasts on the personal computer industry, by reports, newsletters, telephone consultations, forums and seminars. Customers include hard- and software manufacturers, publishers and distributors, and others working in the computer industry.

While announcing the acquisition, Joseph Dionne, president and CEO of McGraw-Hill explained, "Sales of personal computer hardware and software last year hit \$10 billion, and will top \$40 billion by 1988, when the industry is expected to ship more than 20 million personal computers to homes and offices."

Other McGraw-Hill units currently in operation also provide information on the computer business. Datapro Research Corp. gives product information about larger computers; Gnostic Concepts supplies databases on semiconductors and parts; and various publishing divisions produce books and magazines about all parts of the computer industry.

INDUSTRY MERRY-GO-ROUND: NEW NAMES, SAME FACES It's the season for name changing, and not only for summer brides! Sierra On-Line has changed its name to Sierra, and introduced a new logo -- a circle containing a mountain. The new name and symbol are featured on all products, which have been repackaged to show off the new moniker.

Children's Computer Workshop has been retitled CTW Software. CTW Software has been returned to the Children's Computer Workshop, where it will operate as a non-profit division.

Counterpoint Software has changed its name to Springboard Software. According to R. Rand Ross, the company's general manager, the new name reflects the fact that the company "provides an educational springboard to enjoyment and learning". The company also announced staff additions, moved to new headquarters, and introduced a new money-back guarantee that promises a full refund to any customer who feels the software doesn't help improve the skills of the child using the program.

INTERPHASE TO GO MSX "Sewer Sam" and "Aquattack" will be converted to the MSX standard this summer, according to Interphase Technologies' president Steve Willey. Willey indicates that the Japanese youth culture seems anxious to see North American games, and since the MSX technology offers good sound and graphics, with either keyboard or joystick control, the games are being prepared for early shipment to the island nation.

MSX is a standard widely accepted by Japanese and some American manufacturers, which affords a degree of software and peripheral compatibility between MSX machines.

KONAMI GOES TO ENGLAND Konami of Japan has set up a British subsidiary, U.K. Konami, Ltd. According to Kenji Hiraoka, the Managing Director of the new company, "The intention is for Konami to have direct representation in Britain to promote sales of its videogames. We will continue to work through distributors, but we will also deal direct." Mr. Hiraoka, who opened the new offices in Middlesex, England on May 25, promised the Britains regular supplies of existing Konami games, and that several new games would be introduced each year.

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SCARBOROUGH SPONSORS SCHOOL SOFTWARE SUBSIDY Scarborough has announced a program to donate software to public and private schools. The campaign, titled "Be A Hero and Software A School" gives anyone purchasing a Scarborough program the privilege of donating any Scarborough educational software package to the school of his/her choice. Buy a program between Sept. 15 and Dec. 15, then complete a "donation certificate" and return it with the product warranty card and \$3.50 handling and mailing charge. Scarborough will send the program you name to the school and teacher designated.

Francis Pandolfi, Scarborough president, explained: "Although a majority of schools across the country have at least one microcomputer, all our available information tells us schools are woefully ill-supplied with quality software that teaches youngsters to use the computer for creative learning, not just drill and practice."

Scarborough programs include "MasterType", "Phi Beta Filer", "Run For The Money", "Songwriter", "Picturewriter", "Patternmaker" and "Laser Shapes", for Apple, C-64, IBM-PC, PCjr, and Atari computers.

COMPANY OFFERS DATABASE OF DATABASES Knowledge Industry Publications has a different sort of service for database users. Subscribers receive a 600-page directory, 12 issues of "DataBase Alert", indexes, binder, plus user number and toll-free hotline privileges. This allows subscribers to access online a directory of publicly available databases, with detailed descriptions of over 1800 databases from over 800 producers. Included in the \$185 annual subscription fee is \$75 worth of online access. Further use is billed at \$60 per hour, with a \$7 minimum per call.

THE THREE STOOGES GET THEIR OWN COIN-OP This is the 50th anniversary of The Three Stooges. Moe Howard, Larry Fine and Curly Howard signed with Columbia Pictures in 1934, and in celebration of this Golden Anniversary, Mylstar Electronics is introducing The Three Stooges coin-op game. The slap-stick comedians are locked in a room and must locate color-coded keys to escape. Obstacles include Beauregard and Muffy, plus an army of billy-clubbing cops, as players man joysticks to deliver slaps and throw pies at the villains. The trio are trying to rescue their brides from a mad doctor through 28 rounds that are sound-punctuated with splats, smashes and punches, plus Stooge-dialogue such as "Oh, a wise guy," "Knucklehead" and other familiar quips.

In keeping with the motif, the coin-snatcher comes equipped with three joysticks for one to three arcaders to play simultaneously.

The Three Stooges were vaudeville stars before they signed to make movies. Their careers continued until they retired in the early Seventies, although because of illness Curly Howard was replaced in the Forties by brother Shemp Howard (one of the original vaudevillean Stooges), next by Joe Besser and then by Joe DeRita.

FIRST CONVERSION KIT FOR LASER GAMES FEATURES LIVE ACTORS IN SF DRAMA Mylstar's new conversion kit turns the "M.A.C.H. 3" laser coin-op game into "Us vs. Them", a science fiction adventure. Life action film footage combines with superimposed computer graphics to create near-movie effects, as players assume roles of pilots defending the USA from alien invaders. Actors take the roles of frightened citizens and military command personnel, as the combat flies gamers over San Francisco, Chicago and Hollywood, as well as through forest, mountain and desert terrain. Arcaders use a joystick to bank the plane sideways, shoot forward or backward, and move in and out of the game's depth perspective, through four different playing angles that include profile views of the action, and even shots from behind the plane.

The secret to winning the game is said to lie inside the Alien Mothership, and the game has a special feature to allow players to add extra coins to continue a game in progress. Special sound effects, the varied visual treats, plus full orchestral score and even a built-in seat vibration help make the illusion of flight more realistic.

THE HOTSEAT

Reviews of New Products

RATINGS: 10 - Pure gold and about as good as a game could be. A rare rating.
 9 - An outstanding, state-of-the-art game.
 8 - A very good to excellent game.
 7 - A good game.
 6 - Better than average, but maybe not for everyone.
 5 - An average game that does what it promises.
 1-4 - The item has serious flaws.

KEY: The information which heads each review follows the same simple format. First comes the name of the item, then its classification and, if it's a home arcade software program, the system/s with which it is compatible. Finally, the manufacturer's name.

CRITICS THIS ISSUE: SD-Steve Davidson; AK-Arnie Katz; JW-Joyce Worley

MABEL'S MANSION/Computer Game (Apple II)/Datamost

This side-perspective action-adventure is a cousin of Datamost's much-loved "Aztec". The home arcader uses single-keystroke commands to move the on-screen hero through the three story, multi-screen house in search of treasure and excitement. Other keystrokes let the explorer pick things up, use weapons, jump, open doors and much more. The graphics are uneven; the objects in the mansion are well-rendered, but the viewpoint character is not attractive. Over all, "Mabel's Mansion" is challenging and interesting. (AK)

Rating: 7

POLE POSITION II/Videogame (Atari 7800)/Atari

This arcade-to-home translation of the coin-op driving game comes packaged with Atari's new 7800 Pro System. As such, it's a tremendous advertisement for the advanced videogame machine's capabilities. "Pole Position" fanatics who didn't encounter the sequel in the amusement centers are in for a treat -- "Pole Position II" has four new courses, more interesting scenery and better graphics than the first game! The 7800 captures all the nuances of the coin-op. (AK) Rating: 9

ASTEROIDS/Videogame (Atari 7800)/Atari

The popular thrust-fire game, "Asteroids", never caught fire on the home screen the way such coin-op hits as "Space Invaders", "Defender" and "Pac-Man" did. The main reason seems to have been that none of the home versions ever captured the distinctive visual appeal of the original's vector graphics. The programmer of this 7800 cartridge wisely didn't even try. Rather than concoct a second-rate imitation of vector graphics, the author has cloaked the exciting "Asteroids" play-action in a super-detailed set of visuals that breathes new life into a contest that some players may have prematurely consigned to memory lane. The spinning asteroids are worth the price just by themselves. (AK)

Rating: 8

MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE/Computer Game (for Atari Computers)/Parker Brothers

Robert Jaeger, as this fine cartridge shows, has come a long way since his first commercially produced game, "Pinhead", which appeared last year. Not only is this action-adventure game programmed to a loftier professional standard, but its play-mechanics are a good deal more original than that earlier effort. The idea is to work through the labyrinth, shown in multi-screen side perspective, and find the treasure hidden deep within its mysterious recesses. This cart is quite a departure from Parker Brother's usual

fare and points to an exciting new direction for that software publisher. A very fine game. (AK) Rating: 8

ELLIOT/Computer Game (for Commodore 64)/Alpha Software

This shoot-'em-up was obviously inspired by some aspects of "E.T.", though it doesn't pretend to any direct connection with the hit movie. A kid on a bicycle rides through space, steered by the joystick, and attempts to shoot falling meteors before they crash to earth as burning fireballs. At the same time, the home arcader earns bonus points by picking up a survivor on the ground and ferrying him to a waiting flying saucer. The early stages of the multiple-skill-level contest are likely to strike many blast brigaders as too slow and, therefore, too easy. Though the difficulty rating probably should increase more steeply from round to round, "Elliot" does become moderately challenging about the time that the player's score passes the 4,000 point mark. (SD) Rating: 7

ARCADE BOOT CAMP/Computer Game (for Apple II)/Penguin Software

Tutorials are a dime-a-dozen these days, but this is the first one which attempts to use the medium of electronic games to improve the computerist's abilities at -- of all things -- computer games. Decked out in a jolly military motif, "Arcade Boot Camp" gives the gamer the chance to work on five basic fields of study, each corresponding to a play-mechanic utilized in numerous action contests. Each of the fields is further subdivided into a series of increasingly harder challenges. As the player works in each field, gaining rank from session to session, overall ability to play action-oriented games is said to increase. The idea seems eminently sensible. And if none of the mini-games is an Arkie winner by itself, the overall effect is very positive. You may not take the idea of training to play games better very seriously -- and I'm not sure anyone should -- but that's not apt to stop or even diminish the fun this excellent computer program can provide. (AK) Rating: 8

COMPUTER TITLE BOUT/Computer Game (for Atari Computers)/Avalon Hill

Like even the greatest pugilists, this electronic version of the Avalon Hill statistical replay boxing game has both good points and flaws. The basis for rating the fighters, largely the same method as used in the non-electronic contest, is excellent (and seemingly accurate), the strategic options for managers are reasonable, and there are hundreds of boxers from which to choose. The down side is that the graphics are slightly crude, the messages display too rapidly on the screen for easy reading, and the "pithy comments" of the fighters are inane, if not offensive. Had a first-rate game developer knocked some of the rough edges off, this disk might have ended up as a classic. As it is, "Computer Title Bout" is exceptionally fast-paced and reasonably enjoyable. (SD) Rating: 7

PUZZLE MANIA/Computer Game (for Apple II)/Reader's Digest

"Puzzle Mania" contains seven pictures, each which can be completed in six levels of difficulty ranging from the easiest setting, in which the painting is displayed with nine missing pieces, to the most difficult, where the painting contains 36 blanks and the gamer gets only one try to place each piece before time runs out. If the jigsawer gets tired of these seven pictures, which range from low-res paintings of pleasant home-steads, to complex geometric designs, there's a provision for lifting any low-res graphic from any other disk. A paint-box option lets the gamer paint in changes or alter the colors of the on-screen pictures. In some ways, the computer is the perfect medium for puzzle-completing. The bright screen makes pieces easy to see, and there's never any worry about the cat knocking over the puzzle and losing a piece! This is a very easy program to use, since the computer won't let the puzzler place pieces in wrong spots; there are even hints available if the computerist gets stumped! Frank Messina, the creator, gets kudoes for a job well done! (JW) Rating: 8

INDEX OF REVIEWS With this issue, HOTLINE completes another year of publication. Following is an index of the items which were reviewed during this volume's twenty-six issues, all in the same easy format. First is the name of the item, then the manufacturer, and next the category of the item or (if a computer or videogame program) the system/s for which the item was reviewed. Finally, there's the issue number it appeared in.

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Mario's Cement Factory/TableTopper/ Nintendo	7	Wrestling/Handheld/Bandai	2
		Zaxxon/TableTopper/Coleco	1

MERRY-GO-ROUND Thomas Friel is the new Staff Vice President of the ELECTRONIC INDUSTRIES ASSN. CONSUMER ELECTRONICS GROUP. In addition to assisting Jack Wayman in all activities, including the CES shows, he'll be in charge of recruiting new members...ARRAYS has appointed Linda Feldman as Director of Corporate Communications & Marketing Research. She formerly served ARRAYS/CONTINENTAL SOFTWARE as Marketing Manager...SPRINGBOARD SOFTWARE has named John Paulson (founder of the company) as VP of Product Development, where he'll put his background in public school education to good use...Don Giacchetti is SPRINGBOARD SOFTWARE's new VP of Finance & Administration. He was formerly with Control Data...Karen Lansing, who was formerly the supervisor of consumer communications for 3M, is the new Director of Marketing & Creative Development for SPRINGBOARD...Steve Blattspieler has been named VP of Sales for BALLY MIDWAY. He's been associated with coin-op game manufacturers in various executive sales positions for the past nine years, and joined Bally Midway in 1983...

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