

HOTLINE

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ODYSSEY EXITS VIDEOGAMING The company that created the home arcading field back in 1970 has decided to pull in its horns while it takes its future marketing plans back to the drawing board. The Odyssey division of North American Philips has announced that it will no longer produce hardware for its Odyssey standard programmable videogame system. The publisher is expected to play out the string by marketing the already completed "War Room" and "Power Lords" cartridges for ColecoVision this Christmas season, but after that, it's plug-pulling time.

Is this the end of Odyssey as a force in the gaming world? Only temporarily. The publisher plans to keep a low profile for a little while until its R&D department pushes forward with "Operation Leapfrog", the creation of N.A.P.'s first true computer.

20TH CENTURY FOX THROWS IN THE TOWEL 20th Century Fox Videogames has left the game business, saying, "Enough is enough!" According to Fox spokesmen, the canny company didn't actually experience any heavy losses. However, the foxy powers-that-be decided that the future didn't look too bright for their brand of videogames, and that this is a good time to get out. The company, whose hit games included "M*A*S*H", "MegaForce", "Flash Gordon" and "Alien", reportedly does not have a large inventory of stock on hand, and expects to experience no large financial losses as it exits the gaming business.

EPYX BUYS STARPATH CORP. Epyx, Inc. has just purchased Starpath Corporation, the company that invented the SuperCharger. The SuperCharger, an add-on to the Atari Model 2600, was supported by a line of Starpath games using its enhanced graphic capabilities. Starpath also had recently expanded its game line to include titles for ColecoVision and the Atari computers.

Starpath plans to continue selling out its inventory of SuperChargers and SuperCharger games through the coming holiday buying season.

Through the terms of the purchase agreement, Epyx has acquired the Starpath 10-man design group headed by Dr. Bob Brown. Prior to joining Starpath, Dr. Brown was director of research and development at Atari, where he worked on several consumer products including home "Pong" and the Atari 2600 videogame system.

SYNAPSE DEVELOPING ADVANCED LANGUAGE FOR TEXT ADVENTURES William Mataga, author of "Shamus", "Shamus, Case II" and "Zeppelin", is turning his hand to a completely different type of game -- text adventures. The noted game author is currently working on concocting a new language for the presentation of text adventures, a type of game not previously produced by Synapse. Ihor Wolessenko, president of Synapse, was understandably reluctant to discuss details of this top-secret project, but he did assert that Synapse's new system would allow for adventures that include a cast of characters capable of thinking, feeling and acting with an independence never previously available in any prose quest. Noted science fiction and mystery writers are working on five games for the projected line.

E.G. HOTLINE TAKES FIRST POLL The last page of this issue of HOTLINE contains a first: our very own reader's poll. Even if you don't usually participate, please take a moment for this one; we'll really appreciate your reply!

TI ANNOUNCES NEW SOFTWARE FOR THE 99/4A COMPUTER

Although Texas Instruments is leaving the home computer hardware business, the company will continue producing software for the TI 99/4A computer, at least until the first of the new year. The company's Christmas catalog includes titles developed in its own design labs as well as versions of games for the 99/4A marketed under cooperative agreements between TI and independent software developers, and a line of educational game programs.

Among the ongoing relationships the Texas corporation has is an agreement with Data East for versions of "BurgerTime" (the sandwich-building game) and "Treasure Island" (an island adventure). TI also has an agreement with Scott Adams, and the 14th S.A. adventure, "Return to Pirate's Isle", puts players up against unexpected dangers as they use logic and ingenuity to solve the mystery. Through an agreement with Imagic, "MicroSurgeon" lets players pilot robot probes through the patient's body. Also from Imagic, "Super Demon Attack" pits the player's laser against hovering alien demons. From Sega, TI licensed a version of "Star Trek" that puts computerists in the command seat of the Starship Enterprise. TI went to Sierra On-Line for "Jawbreaker II", -- grinning gobblers chase a set of teeth as it devours its way through candy-strewn mazes. Texas Instruments obtained "M*A*S*H" from 20th Century Fox, in which gamers pilot a helicopter, pick up wounded soldiers from a battlefield, then take them to surgery.

Other titles forthcoming for the holiday buying season are "MunchMobile", from the SNK Electronics' coin-op of the same name, "U.S.S. Moonmine", challenging gamers to strategic planning for the recapture of Earth's stolen treasures, and "Sneggit", pitting chickens against snakes as they try to save their eggs.

The company has announced price reductions on most cartridges. Games now range in price from \$10.95 to \$29.95, with some educational titles costing slightly more.

DEFECTIVE MERCHANDISE PLAGUES COMMODORE

Commodore has had a little trouble bringing the Commodore 64 computer system to market. Retailers report finding a high rate of defects in the computers that hit the marketplace in the early Fall. According to the company, the percentage of defective units is less than 10%, but some dealers say they've had to return anywhere from 20% to 30% of the merchandise received because of production foul-ups. The problems seem to come from Commodore's rush to produce enough units to supply the demand for the inexpensive home computer, currently considered the hottest-selling home computer on the market.

ATARISOFT UNVEILS LINE OF GAMES FOR OTHER COMPANIES' COMPUTERS

Atari is introducing games to run on other computers, and expects to expand the line to include educational and home-management software. They'll be marketed under the name "AtariSoft", for the Apple, IBM-PC, Commodore 64, VIC-20 and TI 99/4A, as well as for ColecoVision and Intellivision. The first games to be offered are "Pac-Man", "Centipede", "Defender", "Dig Dug", "Donkey Kong", "Galaxian" and "Robotron". Computer games will retail for \$34.95 on disk and \$44.95 on cartridge, and the videogames will sell for \$40.95.

SYNAPSE INTRODUCES VARIABLE SKILL LEVELS

Don't look for the traditional, graduated skill levels on forthcoming Synapse Software games. "We're experimenting with putting more artificial intelligence in our games," explains Synapse head Ihor Wolessenko. 'Air Support' and 'Sentinel', the next two titles to appear, will feature a system which analyzes the home arcader's performance after every round and adjust the skill of the attackers to compensate. That is, the difficulty of the game soars upward rapidly for good players, but it remains relatively simple for poorer ones.

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WINTER CES TO BE BIGGEST TO DATE The Electronic Industries Assoc. is gearing up for the largest Winter Consumer Electronics Show ever, scheduled to be held in Las Vegas January 7 through 10th, 1984. Jack Wayman, spokesman for the CES group, announced EIA has received requests for 25% more floor space than last year, as a record 1,225 companies get set to exhibit their products. "Virtually every major consumer electronics manufacturer will be exhibiting in Las Vegas, including approximately 300 first-time Winter CES exhibitors," according to Mr. Wayman. The show is expected to attract approximately 85,000 people, and facilities to handle the crowd have been expanded since last year's exhibition. As in previous years, the show will fill the Las Vegas Convention Center, the Hilton, Sahara and Riviera hotels. Additionally, the convention center has a new 120,000 sq. ft. addition, called West Hall, bringing the total square footage available for the show to almost 725,000.

The upcoming show, which is for the trade only, is the 12th Winter CES to date. According to Wayman, "We will have almost every traditional manufacturer of consumer electronics products in the Show, and at the same time we warmly welcome the first time exhibitors from the computer area and the photographic companies who are moving into video."

STARCADE IS A HIT WITH THE KID-CROWD Starcade is wowing kids all over the country, judging by the ratings. The syndicated video arcade game-inspired show, viewed on Saturday morning by most of the country, is off to a strong start with a 4.1 national rating average, according to a report from Turner Program Services. Sidney Pike, President of TPS, the syndication arm of Turner Broadcasting System, says the first-run t.v. program is expected to attract even more viewers. "It's not a gimmick or fad show", says Pike. "It represents one of America's most popular pastimes and presents it in an action-packed format."

SCREENPLAY GAMES MAY WIN YOU A BUNDLE Master these games and you might end up with a bundle of cash! Screenplay is backing their two new games with a sweepstakes that will win \$10,000 in cash for two lucky computerists. "Pogo Joe" sends the gamer hopping across fields of cylinders, running from his foes. Travel with the little bouncer all the way to the 10th screen to find a secret word. In the second game, "Asylum", the gamer has to escape a maze while avoiding wacky inmates and mysterious obstacles, until he finds the secret word written on a mirror. The contest entry form asks for these secret words, then the two winners will be chosen by a random drawing from all the correct entries.

To participate, pick up an entry form from a Screenplay software dealer, or write to Screenplay, 500 Eastowne Office Park, Suite 212, Chapel Hill, NC 27514. All entries must be received by June 1, 1984, and the drawings will be held on June 30.

"Pogo Joe" is currently available for the Commodore 64 and Atari computers. "Asylum" is available for the Commodore 64, Atari, and IBM-PC computers.

GAMES STILL DOMINATE HOME COMPUTER SOFTWARE According to a report from International Resource Development, non-game home software programs will make up only one percent of the market for the next ten years. According to IRD, games have almost universal appeal, and other personal software is purchased only by a small segment of the population. Also, games are purchased on a repeat basis, while non-game software, such as income tax, investment, budget or word processing packages, tend to be one-time expenditures. However, according to IRD, it's the existence of these personal utility programs that helps influence new purchasers to buy a computer instead of a video game system.

SIMON & SCHUSTER TO DISTRIBUTE MICROSOFT PRESS BOOKS Simon & Schuster has exclusive distribution rights for Microsoft Press' computer books. Microsoft expects to release 35 titles in 1984, to "translate complex technical information into language that home computer users..can easily understand," says Alvin Reuben, Exec. VP of the new Electronic Publishing Division formed by S&S to develop, market and distribute computer software and books.

VIDCO OFFERS GAME RECORDER
AND BLANK COPY CARTS

Vidco International has a new product compatible with the Atari 2600 that gamers probably never expected to see. The company has developed a Video Game Recorder, a handheld device designed to capture an entire game program in a fraction of a second. The Video Game Recorder is used with Vidco blank "Copy Carts", and will simultaneously erase the cart while recording any other program of your choice. The Video Game Recorder sells for \$49.95, including one Vidco game, and the blank copy carts are \$15.95.

According to the company, the video game duplicator is intended for use only with their own Vidco brand game cartridges. However, the company points out that U.S. Copyright Laws allow the copying of any videogame cartridge for the purpose of creating an archival copy. Vidco stresses that, although the Video Game Recorder will work on any cartridge designed for the Atari 2600, copying a game for any reason other than the above could be contrary to the Laws.

For more information, write VIDCO, 1220 Broadway, Room 401, New York, NY 10001.

DUTCH DUGAN TO STAR
IN GAMESTAR SERIES

"Dutch Dugan in the Bermuda Triangle" is the title of the next major release from Gamestar. The company intends to follow its trio of successful sports games -- "Baja Buggies", "Starbowl Football" and "Starleague Baseball" -- with a series of action-sports contests in which a continuing character attempts to triumph in a variety of athletically-oriented situations. The first disk will have the intrepid Mr. Dugan diving for treasure in the mysterious waters which have served as the graveyard for many ships and planes.

Gamestar also intends to branch out into furnishing software for systems other than the Atari computer. President Scott Orr hopes to have Commodore 64 versions of "Starbowl" and "Starleague" out in the near future.

NCMI ASKS TREASURY
TO REVIEW DOLLAR COIN

The National Coin Machine Institute recently sent a letter to the U.S. Treasury Department, asking an early meeting to discuss the status of the \$1 coin. According to NCMI, coin-operated equipment accounted for over \$20 billion in retail sales, products and service during 1982. Two-thirds of all cigarettes sold through machines are priced at \$1 or more, and many music machines offer multiple selections for \$1. NCMI feels that wide use of the \$1 coin is vital, since paper currency accepting equipment is expensive, plus posing security problems.

NCMI urged Ms. Donna Pope, director of the Bureau of the Mint, to set up a meeting to discuss future plans to make the \$1 coin a more viable part of the monetary system, saying that the collapse of the dollar coin program was a severe blow to the vending industry.

THEY CALL IT A LEMON
BUT IT'S SWEET NEWS
ABOUT SURGE PROTECTION

Electronic Protection Devices has a surge protector that exactly fills the bill for home computerists who are bothered by line disturbances. Dubbed "The Lemon", the bright yellow solid state voltage clamping device plugs into an AC power line, then protects all computers, word processors, printers, disk drives, and computer controlled equipment from spikes or glitches that may occur due to on-off switching of motors in the vicinity (such as air conditioners, refrigerators, elevators, or almost anything that produces a temporary surge in power requirements.) It retails for \$59.95 and is just what the Game Doctor ordered if transient over voltages are causing software or hardware misfunctions in your equipment. Plug it into a regular outlet, then run the power cords from the equipment through the Lemon, to filter out all the interference.

For more information, contact Electronic Protection Devices, P. O. Box 673, Waltham, Ma. 02254.

HAPPY HOLIDAY SEASON

As we enter into the holiday season, I'd like to take this moment to wish all our readers well. Happy Thanksgiving, Happy Hannakah, and Merry Christmas to everyone of you from the entire HOTLINE staff!

INTELLIVISION'S "BURGERTIME"
LEAPS TO THE TOP OF EG POLL

Here's a first that should set the hearts of Intellivision owners (to say nothing of hearts at Mattel) to pounding with pride! "Burgertime" has leapt all the way

to the top of the list, as the country's most popular videogame in this month's EG Popularity Poll. Meanwhile, "Miner 2049er" is still the most popular computer game in the land, and Cinematronics' hot laser disc game, "Dragon's Lair" continues to be the top coin-operated contest.

POSITION	TIMES				
THIS MONTH	LAST MONTH	ON LIST	GAME TITLE	SYSTEM	MANUFACTURER

MOST POPULAR VIDEOGAME:

# 1	New	New	BurgerTime	Intellivision	Mattel
2	1	7	Donkey Kong Jr.	ColecoVision	Coleco
3	New	New	Pole Position	Atari 5200	Atari
4	4	15	Pitfall	Atari 2600	Activision
5	10	7	Ms. Pac-Man	Atari 2600	Atari
6	New	New	Q*Bert	ColecoVision	Parker Bros.
7	9	15	Donkey Kong	ColecoVision	Coleco
8	6	14	Zaxxon	ColecoVision	Coleco
9	-	13	Venture	ColecoVision	Coleco
10	New	New	Q*Bert	Atari 2600	Parker Bros.
11	2	11	River Raid	Atari 2600	Activision
12	14	2	Enduro	Atari 2600	Activision
13	3	2	Miner 2049er	ColecoVision	MicroFun
14	New	New	Time Pilot	ColecoVision	Coleco
15	13	3	Keystone Kapers	Atari 2600	Activision

MOST POPULAR COMPUTER GAME:

# 1	# 1	9	Miner 2049er	Atari/Apple	Big Five/MicroFun
2	-	20	Castle Wolfenstein	Atari/Apple	Muse
3	6	12	Choplifter!	Atari/Apple	Broderbund
				VIC-20	Creative Software
4	2	22	Star Raiders	Atari	Atari
5	7	7	Astro Chase	Atari	Parker Bros.
6	5	15	Centipede	Atari	Atari
7	New	New	M.U.L.E.	Atari/Comm.64	Electronic Arts
8	4	2	Donkey Kong	Atari	Atari
9	3	20	Pac-Man	Atari	Atari
10	New	New	Zork II	All Systems	Infocom

MOST POPULAR COIN-OP GAME:

# 1	# 1	2	Dragon's Lair	Cinematronics
2	2	3	Star Wars	Atari
3	3	6	Pole Position	Atari
4	4	6	Q*Bert	Mylstar
5	8	11	Joust	Williams
6	New	New	M.A.C.H. 3	Mylstar
7	6	4	Xevious	Atari
8	-	15	Zaxxon	Sega
9	New	New	Champion Baseball	Taito
10	9	3	Popeye	Nintendo

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's compatible. Finally, the manufacturer's name.

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

COMPUTER FOOTBALL STRATEGY/Computer Game (for Atari computers)/Avalon Hill

It's third down and twenty-five. The 1968 New York Jets are playing the 1981 San Francisco Forty-Niners. Broadway Joe Namath sees the safety blitz coming. As he's pushed out of the pocket, he fires off a quick pass to Maynard, his wide receiver. Does he make it? As in a real game, he does -- sometimes. What really matters, though, is that this strategic football game allows you to coach eighteen of the finest teams to have ever battled on the gridiron -- from the 1966 Green Bay Packers to the 1982 Washington Redskins -- and coach you will, with 21 offensive and 11 defensive plays to choose from. Of course, there are also penalties to be accepted or declined, and interceptions and fumbles to worry about. But those are the things that coaches come to expect. One thing many sports gamers have come to expect is mediocre graphics. They'll be pleasantly surprised at the first of the two screens. When the computer gamer goes through the play options, the squads line up in the different formations. The second screen features rather crude figures enacting the plays. All in all, "Computer Football Strategy" is the next best thing to being Tom Landry. (VP) Rating: 8

NIGHT RAIDER/Computer Game (for Atari computers)/Data Most

This pseudo-3-D arcade combat game puts the player at the controls of a fighter-bomber swooping low above enemy territory. The object, in this vertically scrolling program, is to shoot the tanks, fuel dumps, trains, planes and so forth which stand in the fighter's path. Particularly nasty are the tanks, whose turrets swivel ceaselessly in an attempt to lock onto the fighter as it passes overhead. The command scheme is a bit unusual, and it's not always easy to line up shots by moving the joystick forward and back while employing a side-to-side motion to steer the airplane. Still, the visuals are sensational in "Night Raider", and the action is involving enough to keep home arcaders blasting away happily for hours. (SD) Rating: 7

ENCHANTER/Computer Game (most systems)/Infocom

Those who've enjoyed the "Zork" series of text adventures -- and that's a big crowd to judge by the sales figures -- will definitely want to test their wits against what promises to be the first game of a new trilogy in the same vein as that earlier series. This time, however, the player gets to guide the fortunes of a magician instead of a sword-swinging warrior. This introduces some lively options, including the ability to cast spells to help the character out of tight spots. (SD) Rating: 8

ZEPPELIN/Computer Game (for Atari computers)/Synapse

William Mataga has done it again -- produced the kind of computer game that nails a home arcader to a chair. Having escaped from the Timelord's prison, the gamer must steer a zeppelin through multi-screen catacombs to safety. Getting out alive won't be easy, even at the easiest of the disk's skill levels, because the Timelord has quite an assortment of defenses, including flying saucers, balloons, laser gates and even the ability to cause rock slides and earthquakes. The most inventive aspect of this all-around great game is that switches which turn specific features of the cavern defense on and off are spotted around the labyrinth. When the zeppelin shoots a switch (and thereby changes its setting), it can make the game's complexion change instantly. There are also keys to get which, when fitted into waiting locks, open fresh portions of the maze and a hamburger to use as bait in luring a gigantic creature away from a key set of switches. "Zeppelin" is uncontestably one of the finest computer games published during the final quarter of 1983. A "must" for Atarians. (AK) Rating: 9

Q*BERT/Videogame Cartridge (for ColecoVision)/Parker Brothers

There are never enough games for the popular "third wave" programmable videogame system produced by Coleco, so this edition of the well-known pattern-changing contest is especially welcome. Parker Brothers' design staff has done an excellent job in preparing the bouncing block-hopper for his ColecoVision debut, and the results are sure worth it. This is a very close match to the Mylstar coin-op, and that should be enough to please most home arcaders very much, indeed. (SD) Rating: 8

BRISTLES/Computer Game (for Atari computers)/First Star

Peter the Painter, the star of this outstanding game by Fernando Herrera, is a mighty busy fella. He has to use elevators and ladders to race around the playfield, brush in hand, to paint a series of increasingly large buildings. Brenda the Brat, a computer-controlled crazy who messes up the paint job before it can dry, and other obstacles make completing this task harder than it might seem at first. The graphics are excellent -- the human player can even choose from six different on-screen characters -- and the sonic clues are as easy on the ears as they are informative. Herrera has shown an unusual ability to design a wide range of games rather than getting stuck in any particular creative rut. "Bristles" is innovative, well-programmed and, most important of all, fun. (AK) Rating: 9

MOVIE MAKER/Computer Game (for Atari computers)/Reston Software

Here's what amounts to an entirely new entertainment use for the home computer. By following the lucid instructions, just about anyone can make short animated films and run them on their Atari computer. The computerist uses the joystick as the primary order entry device, and there's no programming knowledge needed to make this exceedingly clever disk go through its paces. There are even files of ready-to-use shapes for those who aren't good enough artists to create the characters to be animated from scratch. (AK) Rating: 9

MONTY PLAYS SCRABBLE BRAND CROSSWORD GAME/Tabletop Game/Ritam Corp.

This portable computerized version of the old favorite boardgame has brought Scrabble into the electronic age. Monty has a 12,000 word vocabulary that expands to 44,000 by adding modules. It displays each word on its LCD screen, and the human player then enters the word onto a paper Scrabble board (or on his own playing board from a regular set). The game is completely self-instructing. Monty gives on-screen prompts, keeping track of whose turn it is (up to four humans can compete against the computer), their tiles, and scores. There are four skill levels. At the lowest setting, it's fairly easy to keep an upper hand over Monty, but at the top level, Monty gets a lot smarter. Monty accompanies his moves with several songs, and a pleasant personality that makes this standalone an excellent choice for Scrabble-fans everywhere. (JW) Rating: 8

