

THE VIDEO GAME UPDATE

INCLUDES

Computer Entertainer

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TWO DOLLARS

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A Critical Newsletter for the Serious Gamesman

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...And that's just
part of it!

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE VIDEO GAME BUSINESS?

This is not merely a stupid question asked by people who don't usually pay attention to the industry—our phones have been ringing off the hook with that very same question. It might not be worded exactly the same—but it's there. In fact, a typical question a caller will have is, "What's new from Vectrex, Mattel, or Coleco?" And our stock answer has to be: "nothing from Vectrex since February, nothing from Mattel since BurgerTime, and nothing from Coleco since Blackjack in May. Frustrating to the system owner to say the least! And you wonder why people put their system in a closet in total frustration?!" The following will be conjecture, theory, and educated guesses, but rest assured there is some ripple of truth in what we have to say. We are very sorry guys, but you have let us down again. You have played with our hopes and passions too many times.

The Perfect Examples

We have many gripes about the other companies, too, but the obvious place to start is Coleco. There is only one way we would be content Coleco owners: to have purchased the stock at \$8 and sold it at \$65! Yes, that is what has happened over the past 52 weeks. And why not? Coleco has "announced" the release of almost everything except a perpetual motion machine, but we are still waiting.

Item: Expansion Module #3. Announced in early February, this was a biggie! Not just to play Ultra-Donkey Kong, this was promised to be the best game system ever. The key was a micro-cassette-like memory system which could store an incredible amount of memory and give you scenes and difficulty levels once only dreamed about.

Item: Adam. A home computer with everything you could ever want in life.... built-in! One of the biggest objectives was that you never had to go to the store to buy anything else (something which has the retailers mad about as they count on you coming back). But don't let the announced price fool you. The \$600 figure is about what it will cost the stores to buy it from Coleco! (see our reprinted article from Cashbox Magazine) Do YOU think stores are in business to NOT MAKE money? And, for those of you owning ColecoVision, the add-on for \$400 is misleading. It will cost your dealer MORE THAN \$400 to BUY it. Do you think your local computer shop wants to LOSE money?

When it was announced that Adam would replace expansion module #3, avid ColecoVision owners were outraged. Whether or not they planned a home computer purchase was not the issue. They were all geared up for the Super System! Shortly thereafter, Coleco announced the module WOULD be released, but not until next year. We must ask when in 1984 - after Coleco has decided they have sold all the ADAMS they can to Coleco owners who can't wait out the eventual release of Module 3??

That brings up another problem: the memory system. Since they could not get the wafer system to work properly and/or consistently, they have switched to a different system called the Data Pack which is \$100 more (give or take a few dollars). The net result of this will be (obviously) a much more expensive expansion module IF ever released.

Guilty As Charged!

Item: Titles never released. While ColecoVision has utterly fantastic games, for every one game you can purchase, at least two other titles have been announced and not released. Vectrex and Mattel are prime offenders here also. Whatever happened to more Intellivision games (after Mattel has gotten people to fork over almost \$70 for a system which plays only three games??); whatever happened to all the games you announced in January, Vectrex - games which keep getting "bumped" one month at a time, month after month?? Whatever happened to HORSE RACING, SWORD AND SORCERER, TUNNELS AND TROLLS, DRACULA, SKIING, etc. Coleco?? While we understand that problems do arise with specific games before they reach the market and some of those problems cause the "scrapping" of certain titles before they ever reach the dealer's shelves, it seems that some companies are much more proficient than others in announcing, announcing, and announcing some more—perhaps too far in advance—and then not delivering on time, or at all.

VIDEO TAKE-OUT'S TOP 10

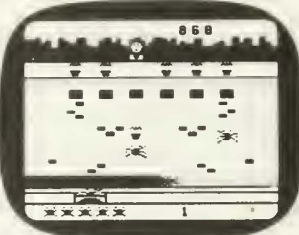
1. ROBOT TANK (ACTV-2600)
2. WHITE WATER (IMGC-INT)
3. FROGGER (PB-5200)
4. KANGAROO (AT-2600)
5. MINER 2049ER (BIG5-5200)
6. COUNTERMEASURE (AT-5200)
7. JUMPMAN JR (EPYX-AT COMP)
8. LOOPING (COL)
9. DONKEY KONG (AT-COMP)
10. ENDURO (ACTV:2600)

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NEW Computer Entertainer

CRACKPOTS (★★★½/★★★★) is a game for one or two players (alternating turns) in which you play the role of Potsy, an urban rooftop gardener who attempts to crush attacking hordes of bugs with pots of

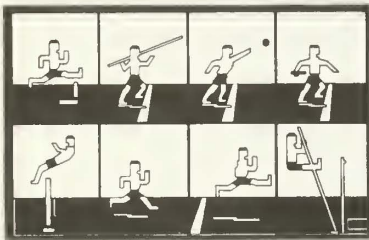
petunias. You move Potsy back and forth along the roof of his apartment building, pushing your joystick button whenever you want him to heave a flower pot over the edge. The creepy-crawlies swarm out of the curbside sewer vent and make their way up the building. Each successive wave of insects moves faster and in different patterns: some crawl straight up, others creep diagonally, and some have defensive moves that would be envied by a pro football quarterback! Potsy has to be quick because disaster strikes if six bugs scamper into his apartment windows. At this point a single bug—most likely a termite—zooms across the bottom floor, causing the entire building to drop one level. As the building loses more levels, Potsy has less and less time to demolish the waves of bugs. The game ends when Potsy's high-rise becomes a one-story flat



Fun for Kids

The graphics in this first Activision game from designer Dan Kitchen are bright, colorful and very cute. The fine detail in the legs of the crawling bugs as they scramble for the windows is especially good. It looks like a simple little game at first, but it rapidly becomes a frantically-paced contest between Potsy and the bugs. This is one of those games that will send children into delighted giggle-fits, although it will be too difficult for very young kids. Even though the action is fast and challenging, CRACKPOTS is not a game that will appeal to teens and adults beyond a few casual plays, because they will lose interest. However, children who have developed good video game skills will have a lot of fun with it. Recommended for Children. (MSR \$31.95)

THE ACTIVISION DECATHLON (★★★★/★★★★★) is



another triumph of design from David Crane, who is best known for PITFALL. This game is a video recreation of the most grueling of all Olympic contests, complete with all ten different events for one to four players. The game begins with a rendition of the Olympic musical

theme, as a lone runner carries the torch along the track within the Olympic stadium. Players have the choice of competing in the sequence of all ten events, or they may train on individual skills that need a little work. The events include the 100, 400 and 1500-meter races, 110-meter hurdles, shot put, javelin and discus throws, plus the pole vault, high jump and long jump. All events require skill and timing, which is typical of video games, but they demand something new for armchair athletes: strength and endurance. Merely pushing the joystick in one direction won't move your on-screen athlete at all. You must *pump* the joystick rapidly back and forth to build up and maintain speed and power, while your actual performance is measured against maximum potential by a gauge at the bottom of the screen. This action creates a lot of stress on the joystick (hope you have a sturdy one), not to mention what the 1500-meter run can do to your arm and shoulder muscles! (We recommend using a joystick with a short "throw" for this game. It's less tiring, and you'll achieve higher scores.)

Accuracy and Realism

THE ACTIVISION DECATHLON was designed with obvious emphasis on accuracy and realism. In all events involving running, the on-screen athlete moves fluidly, arms pumping away, while his shadow moves along the track beneath him, and his running shoes make slapping sounds on the track's surface. The graphic rendition of Pitfall Harry was praised for its cartoon-like animation, and the DECATHLON athlete is better yet. We especially enjoyed the graphic effects in the wind-up for the discus throw: the athlete

actually appears to be spinning as he gradually moves toward the line to release the discus. The entire game is played according to Olympic procedures. The DECATHLON athlete has but one chance for his best time in the races. (Elapsed time is shown at the bottom of the screen.) However, he gets three tries in each of the jumping and throwing events. In these events, you must pump the joystick during the approach and then choose the right moment for the jump or throw by pressing the firing button. If you press the button too soon, the jump or throw will be short; too late, and it's a "scratch." This is the way it works in actual Olympic competition—just ask Bruce Jenner, former Olympic Decathlon gold medalist, who will be appearing in commercials for this game.

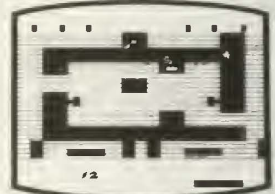
Even considering the use of an 8K chip, instead of the more usual 4K chip, David Crane has crammed a lot of game into one cartridge. Not only do we get ten different events and cumulative scores for up to four players in a game that demands great skill and timing, but we also get exercise! This is the ultimate video sport game for the Atari 2600.

Recommended. (MSR \$34.95)

TUTANKHAM (★★/★★½) is based on the Konami coin-op



game in which one or two players become archaeologists exploring the mazes of King Tut's tomb, seeking treasures and avoiding supernatural creatures. Four vertically scrolling screens represent burial chambers of the tomb. With only a limited supply of ammunition to shoot any creatures that emerge from their nests to kill him, the archaeologist must explore the maze and capture the key to the next chamber. In a tight spot, he can activate one of three laser flashes to destroy every creature on the screen temporarily. When he enters the next chamber, his ammunition is replenished, but he doesn't earn an extra laser flash until he completes all four chambers of one level. (There are four levels.) While he moves through the chamber mazes, he can gather some of Tut's treasure for points, such as precious jewels, amulets and other artifacts.



Not Like the Coin-Op

Anyone who purchases this game expecting it to look like the arcade game on which it's based will be sorely disappointed. Graphics are fairly bland, and you'd never guess the game's title just by looking at the TV screen. Fortunately, there's a little more similarity to the coin-op in the play action, such as the challenging moments requiring quick thinking when the supernatural creatures attack. However, there really isn't enough similarity to make this a must for fans of the arcade TUTANKHAM. It's not a bad game, but it is another of those that might be more favorably judged on its own merits with a non-licensed title. Since it bears the name of a popular coin-op, purchasers have every right to expect more faithful adherence to the original.

Not recommended. (MSR \$39.95)

OUT OF CONTROL

Avalon Hill has told us they will ship a new 2600-compatible game in October named OUT OF CONTROL. In this game, you will control your spaceship through a racetrack in space—around pylons, etc.. Once through the course, you must hit ten different objects with the ship and then go through a docking sequence. The game will feature 14 different "tracks" with two speed variations. A second game, SHUTTLE ORBITER, is also planned for October. This is a multi-screen, timed contest where you control a space shuttle in orbit around earth and you must build a space station. It involves docking with an orbiting factory so your astronaut can get pieces for the space station, and then rendezvous with the station to add the piece(s) you've brought. It will feature 4 play levels.

CRITICALLY SPEAKING...ATARI 2600-COMPATIBLE

Q*BERT (★★★ 1/2 / ★★★★★) is the first home screen adaptation of the nutty but lovable coin-op hit by Gottlieb. You control Q*bert, the funny little character with the long snout, as he hops around a pyramid of cubes, changing the colors of their surfaces as he goes. The bad guys in this cute contest all have distinct patterns and personalities. The Red Ball (advanced game only) bounces onto the pyramid from the second tier of cubes; if it bonks Q*bert on the head, the "swear bubble" (!!!) lights up as Q*bert loses a life. The Purple Ball is similar, but it becomes Coily the Snake when it reaches the bottom of the pyramid. Coily follows Q*bert but can be lured to jump to its death. Q*bert hops aboard a flying disc at the right moment. Sam is harmless to Q*bert, but he changes cube colors back to their original hue; bonus points are awarded for running into him to stop his progress. The Green Ball is helpful: running Q*bert into it will cause all the nasties to freeze for a few moments, allowing Q*bert a mad dash to change cube colors without interference. As in the arcade game, you have to be very careful not to hop Q*bert right off the edge of the pyramid!

Great Play Action

Amazingly little has been lost in the translation of Q*BERT for the Atari 2600. The graphic rendition of the pyramid of cubes is quite good, with only the bottom row of the original deleted due to the change from vertical to horizontal screen format. The flying discs are simple lines. All the crazy characters are quite recognizable, and Q*bert even cusses when he's bonked! This game plays very much like the original, especially once you become accustomed to the joystick control. The player is instructed to hold the stick so that the base looks like a baseball diamond, with the firing button at the top. When you do this, the new diagonal directions are equivalent to the normal up-down-left-right directions of the joystick held in the usual manner (firing button upper left). If you're a Q*bert fan—and who isn't—you'll definitely want this game for your collection. It looks more like the original than we thought possible on this system, and play action is great! Recommended. (MSR \$42.95)

WALL BALL (★★★★/★★★★★) from Avalon Hill Video

Game Company is one of those games in which you bash bricks out of a wall with a little ball—but it's not like any game of this type that we've played. The instruction booklet describes it as "a fairly simple, straightforward sort of game." Straightforward

is, but simple? No way! This game's brick wall sits at the far end of a rectangular room, and the joystick-controlled ball can bounce off the floor, ceiling and either of the side walls on the way to or from the brick wall. You have the feeling that you're standing behind a clear, glass wall at the near end of the room, and you move your rectangular racket anywhere on that wall in an attempt to hit the ball. Missed balls appear to go "splat" against the near wall, as if they were overripe tomatoes.

As many as 99 balls will bounce toward you in each game, depending on the difficulty level selected. You must knock out 7 of the 72 bricks with those balls to win the game and advance to the next level. If you get very good at WALL BALL, you may be able to complete a four-game set, or even a five-set match (20 games, 20 brick walls). Each set comprises three standard games and one "eliminator" game in which the bricks jump around.

Challenge and Frustration

A good feeling of depth is achieved with receding lines, but there's nothing otherwise remarkable about the graphics in WALL BALL. The designer has achieved an excellent simulation of the brringy, bonking sound of a hard rubber ball as it hits walls or racket. However, the buzzer that greeted us every time we missed the ball became annoying. This game is more notable for its challenging and sometimes frustrating play action.

The instructions explain in detail the interaction between the ball's angle of flight and the portion of the racket ("sweet spot" or frame) used to hit it. Initially, our biggest problem was hitting the ball at all, much less worrying about the niceties of strategy and placement. With practice, we were better able to judge the flight of the ball in the room, and the game became very involving. To simplify matters, there is a means of straightening the ball's path from racket to wall, a "smash" achieved by holding down the firing button when the racket hits ball. With slight vertical or horizontal adjustments of the racket between shots, it's then possible to eliminate rows of bricks methodically. We had a lot more fun, though, when we let the ball go for itself and tried to work the angles. WALL BALL is good for hours of concentrated, coordination-testing play. Especially for fans of Breakout-type games who find that those games have become too easy, this would be a great addition to the game library. Recommended. (MSR \$30.00)

KANGAROO (★★★ 1/2 / ★★★★★) is a perfectly charming



translation of Atari's own popular arcade game. It has three of the original coin-op's four screens and can be played by one or two at a time or advanced level. In the first screen (the easiest one), Mother Kangaroo hops and climbs along stylized representations of tree limbs and ladders to rescue

her baby from the monkeys. On the way up, Mama 'Roo feasts on fruits and avoids apples thrown or dropped by the mischievous monkeys. Since she happens to be a boxing kangaroo, Mama can also punch monkeys for extra points. Near the top of the screen, she can jump up and ring a bell that will cause another variety of fruit to appear on the tree. The bell can be rung up to three times per screen; each successive variety of fruit is worth more points. There are two ways to accumulate points on each screen: keep ringing bells and have Mother Kangaroo climb up and down the tree for lots of fruit points, rescuing the baby only when time is about to run out; or, go straight for the rescue of the baby and earn bonus points for beating the timer.

The second screen is more difficult, requiring the technique of "super leaps" to span the gaps between broken logs. Timing and placement are critical, or poor Mama will fall to her death. The monkeys are just as nasty as ever, and there is more fruit to eat. It will take most gamers a while to reach the third screen, but it's a combination of ladders, branches and broken logs requiring a well-planned strategy to complete.

A Charmer

Graphically this game is a pleasant surprise. Though the background settings are fairly plain, the really important parts—the characters—are extremely well drawn. Mother Kangaroo and her baby look just like kangaroos are supposed to look. The monkeys aren't quite as good, but they are recognizable. In the hands of a good designer, the Atari 2600 is capable of a lot more than anyone thought possible, and KANGAROO is yet another of the really good arcade translations that have been coming out of Atari this year. The music is wonderful, and game play is remarkably close to the coin-op original. This is one of the "personality" games with enough solid challenge and playability to keep it interesting long after the novelty of the cute characters has worn thin. KANGAROO is a charmer that appeals to adults as well as kids.

Recommended. (MSR \$37.95)

POLE POSITION (★★★★/★★★★★) comes from the highly successful arcade game and it's a beauty! Graphically stunning, Atari has done a fine job of translating this driving game to the 2600. It consists of two races: the qualifying lap and the Grand Prix. In both races, you will race against time and other cars. The longer you race and the more cars you pass, the more points you score. Joystick in hand, you begin by shifting into low gear (up on the joystick handle). As you gain speed, you shift down into high and put your face to the wind. Get through the qualifying lap by finishing it in 73 seconds or less and don't crash into any cars. Then head for the Grand Prix and race some more. If you fail to beat the Race Timer on any lap, your car stops.

Great Game

Atari has done it again with this newest entry. The colors are vibrant, and your race car is a fine rendition of the Formula One racing car. Although the other cars are a bit boxy in appearance, as you pass them, they take on the look of another race car, and we didn't find this detracted in any way. Your joystick gives you a great "feel" of the road and is very responsive to your every command. This has all the excitement of the arcade game and shares the top racing spot with Enduro for the 2600. Recommended (MSR \$37.95)

CONGRATULATIONS!

Congratulations are in order to AVALON HILL GAME COMPANY which is celebrating its 25th year in business!! In this volatile world of gaming, we feel a tip of the cap is in order.

SOLAR STORM (★ ★ ★ 1/2 ★ ★ ★) is a two-screen invasion game for one or two players (alternating turns). The object is to save your planet from incineration as it is attacked by ships and pelted by falling debris from the explosion of a far-off sun. A paddle controller maneuvers your laser ship back and forth above the scintillating surface of the planet, while crazily zig-zagging Solar Flares, Landers, Sun Spots and Sizzloids careen toward the planet. Joining the solar debris are the Deltoid and Shield Blasters, which shoot single flashes of proton energy. You must destroy both Blasters and solar debris quickly, because each one hitting the planet will increase its heat level. (Heat indicators on the screen change color and grow taller as the planet is hit repeatedly.) In the second screen, earned by attaining certain point levels, your paddle controls your shooting angle from an orbital platform in the center of the screen. A bonus ship is earned by hitting at least five cruising fleet ships during a limited time. The game ends when the planet overheats and explodes—even if you still have ships in reserve.

Speed and Action

SOLAR STORM has brilliantly colored graphics enhanced by a black background. The look is flashy, particularly in the first screen. We had some difficulty in rating this one for game play because it is one more invasion game, of which there are tremendous numbers already available, and we do consider originality in evaluating game play. Though it doesn't offer an original concept, SOLAR STORM is an exceptionally challenging game of the type. There are more opportunities for strategy than is typical of invasion games, due to the differing heat values of the various ships

and pieces of solar debris. Earning extra ships is not a matter of simply amassing points, either—you really have to work for them. SOLAR STORM is obviously aimed at the fans of straight-out speed and action, who love nothing better than to be challenged to the maximum of their abilities. It's not for everyone, but those who like this kind of challenge will be very happy with this game.

Recommended. (MSR \$29.95)

MOONSWEEPER (★ ★ ★ ★ / ★ ★ ★ ★) is a superbly well-designed space game for one or two players. It's a two-stage rescue mission in which you must survive the dangers in the orbital range of the sun in Star Quadrant Jupiter² to land on one of the hostile moons, and then cruise the lunar surface to rescue six stranded miners. In the opening sequence, you pilot the U.S.S. Moonsweeper back and forth at the bottom of the screen, avoiding or shooting at Aurora Flares propelled from the scintillating sun, along with orbiting Space Bullets and comet-like Photon Torches. When cornered, you have the option of activating the Moonsweeper's Forcefield Shield to prevent losing your ship to the inevitable, explosive collision (shield power must be used sparingly; its use subtracts points from your score.) While avoiding all the galactic fireworks, you must pilot your ship near enough to an orbiting moon that the ship's automatic pilot will take you to rescue altitude on that moon.

Rescues and Obstacles

Your ship flies so low that it casts a shadow on the lunar surface. In addition to rescuing miners who wave their arms frantically, you must avoid or shoot the Tavers that appear at the horizon, gradually becoming larger as your ship draws near to them. A distinctive



sound warns of the approach of alien Launcher Ships well above the surface of the moon. Simply firing your rocket-missiles straight ahead has no effect on these saucer-like ships; you must pull back on the joystick while firing, and your missiles will arch upward into space. The Launcher Ships release armed Surface Destroyers which dance back and forth across your flight path, firing at you and capturing miners. Especially on the more difficult moons, you may have to face more than one Surface Destroyer at a time, giving you very little time to think, much less get into position to rescue miners. Periodically, a Satellite will cross your path well above the lunar surface. It won't attack, but it can be destroyed with one of your upward arching climbing missiles for lots of points. If you can rescue six miners without losing your ship, you've done well—but not well enough. To collect a nice bonus, you must fly through a series of Accelerator Rings to gather enough speed to break away from the moon's gravity. You must be alert, though—some groupings of Accelerator Rings require a zigzag course, Surface Destroyers may still be hanging around, and Towers may star in your flight path. Play alternates between the orbital and rescue sequences until you've lost all your ships, signalled by a few bars of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot!"

A Winner

Even with the scores of space games already available for the Atari 2600, Imagic has just proved that it's possible to produce a new one that is original, graphically exciting, and satisfyingly complex to play. Most gamers would agree that Imagic's designers have shown a flair for beautiful graphics, and Moonsweeper's no exception. Great care is shown in the details of sparkling Aurora Flares and Photon Torches in the orbital sequence, the excellent feeling of depth achieved in the rescue sequences, and the rendition of saucer-like Launcher Ships, mobile Surface Destroyers, and the rocket-shaped missiles fired by the Moonsweeper itself. Play action is very involving. This game should be enough to spark the interest of even the most skilled player, with its demanding gauntlet of dodge-and-shoot sequences. Moonsweeper is a winner! Recommended. (MSR \$39.95)

AMIGA POWER PLAY

Amiga has picked up three games previously available through U.S. Games for release in one of their Power Play Arcades. In what appears to be a very solid packaging concept, GOPHEE, EGGOMANIA, NAME THIS GAME (to be named prior to release) and SCAVENGER HUNT (not out of a U.S. Games license) will be put together on one cartridge and will retail around \$35. The Power Play Arcade 2, geared towards young kids, is scheduled for the latter part of September. In addition, Power Play Arcade 1 which we talked about last month, will also be available around the same time. This is a package of three 3-D games including GHOST ATTACK, HAVOC, and GENESIS. Power Play Arcade 3, available at the end of October, is a package of war games for older kids. Included in this package are SAC ALERT, STRAF (a Zaxxon-type approach), and DEPTH CHARGE.

EXPLANATION OF RATING SYSTEM:

★★★★—EXCELLENT

★★★—GOOD

★★—FAIR

★—POOR

First set of stars—Quality of graphics

Second set of stars—Quality of play action

Any game for a given system is compared only to other games for that system. In other words, all Atari and Atari-compatible games are judged separate from Intellivision and Intellivision-compatible games, etc. The same system is used for computer software reviews.

SOLAR FOX (★ ★ ★ 1/2 / ★ ★ ★ 1/2) is a challenging game based on the Bally/Midway coin-op for one or two players. You control a Solar

CBS Electronics

Where the excitement never ends

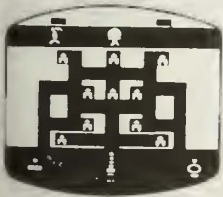
Fox Starship which must capture solar energy cells from cell matrixes ("racks"). There are twenty different, geometrically arranged racks of cells, and the object is to maneuver your Starship over each cell to capture its energy (clear it from the screen), while avoiding the fireballs shot by two Sentinels. After the sixth rack, each cell is double and must be passed over twice to clear it from the screen. Speed is a factor: if you clear a rack before the words "Skip-A-Rack" at the bottom of the screen disappear, you'll skip the next rack, yet earn all the points available from the skipped rack. (The cruising speed of your Starship can be set fast or slow, and the joystick firing button then acts as a brake or accelerator, respectively.) After each fifth rack, one of six special Challenge Racks (pictured) will appear. If you clear the rack before the word "Challenge" disappears, you'll earn extra points, and one letter of a mystery word will be revealed. Fortunately, the Sentinels do not guard the Challenge Racks, because your time here is extremely limited. Easier, "Parent-Play" versions for one or two players do not include the Skip-A-Rack feature or Challenge Racks, and they are played only on the first six racks with fewer fireball attacks



One Tough Game!

Although the graphics in SOLAR FOX are quite plain, they are extremely clean and crisp. Even the words on the screen are clearly readable. Game play is solidly challenging, requiring skill and sharp reflexes to complete the racks quickly while avoiding the fireballs. The game looks simple enough, but appearances can be deceiving—this is one tough game! With a total of 26 different racks, it will take most players a long time to exhaust the possibilities of this game and discover the mystery word. Recommended. (MSR \$39.95)

BLUEPRINT (★ 1/2 / ★ 1/2) is a one or two-player game based on the Bally/Midway coin-op. You play the role of "Our Hero," who must save the fair Daisy Damsel from the clutches of nasty Ollie Ogre. At the beginning of the game, pieces of the Contraption you'll need to destroy Ollie are scattered among houses in the neighborhood. Your job is to recover the pieces in the proper order, placing them within the blueprint until the



Contraption is finished. The job is dangerous, because bombs are hidden in some of the houses, and you must dispose of them quickly in the bomb pit. You must also watch out for the fiendish Fuzzy Wuzzy, who wanders around the neighborhood and will eliminate your character on contact. Once the contraption is completed, you move to the second scene where Ollie chases Daisy across the top of the screen as you determine the Gun Power of your Contraption by pushing the joystick forward. Fire the Contraption at Ollie. If you miss, you may have enough time to prime the Contraption to shoot again. If you hit Ollie, you'll receive bonus points and one letter of the 8-letter hidden password, then move on to the next neighborhood to build your Contraption again.

Blocky Graphics

The title screen for BLUEPRINT represents the best of the graphics. Unfortunately, the game itself has rather blocky, primitive characters that might have been acceptable a couple of years ago, but are inferior to typical results achieved by designers for this

system today. We found the game boring and repetitive, and the constant music got on our nerves rather than creating a pleasant background for game playing. There is a tendency to assume that any simplistic game that bores an adult may be suitable for very young children. However, we doubt this game will hold the attention of even small children.

Not Recommended. (MSR \$39.95)

BANK HEIST (★ ★ 1/2 / ★ 1/2) is a single-player maze game with a theme that represents a lack of social responsibility: the object is to rob as many banks as possible while increasing your score by blowing up police cars. (One must assume the cops are in them, since they're driving around when you let loose with the dynamite.) This theme certainly won't make the game a hit with parents.



Driving your getaway car, you move through four different mazes representing four towns. Banks are scattered through the mazes; simply run over one to rob it, and a cop car will materialize in its place. When a cop car comes a little too close for comfort, drop a stick of dynamite from your car's tail pipe. The cops will disappear, and another bank will appear. You have to watch your fuel, though—it's depleted by time and by using dynamite. If you rob nine or more banks before leaving the maze for the next town, you'll earn a bonus getaway car and be able to fill your entire gas tank. Difficulty switches allow the choice of dumb or smart cops and random or set order of bank appearance.

Graphic quality is mixed: getaway and cop cars look fairly good, though the cars have a tendency to blink when several are moving at once. The mazes themselves are graphically uninteresting. It's still possible to create a new maze game that offers exciting play action and something different to set it apart from the crowded field. However, there are already too many like BANK HEIST—just change the plot and the shape of the moving characters, give it a new name, and you have a "new" game that plays pretty much like half a dozen others.

Just Another Maze Game

Not Recommended.

LASER TECHNOLOGY

As we mentioned in our last issue, laser technology opens an entirely new feel to video games. Those of you who frequent the arcades may be aware of a new arcade game, DRAGON'S LAIR, which uses the laser technology beautifully. Designed by Don Bluth, the ex-Disney animator who created last summer's *The Secret of NIMH*, it marries classical animation and computer technology to create a marvelous new kind of game. The technology was developed by Rick Dyer of Advanced Microcomputer Systems and uses a high-resolution laser disc to create the 3-D images. The scenario is Dirk the Daring's search for the captive Princess Daphne. You will fight dragons, attempt to get through passages, fight off enemies, etc. Interestingly, Coleco has purchased the home rights to this game and plan to have it available sometime in 1984.

Murder Anyone??

Meanwhile, we can pass more information on about the scenario of MANY ROADS TO MURDER, which we first told you about last month. As a reminder, this is the second in a series of interactive games for use in your home laser disc. Once again, it will be your task to help detective Steve Cavanaugh solve another murder. This one is set two years after the original MysteryDisc, *Murder, Anyone?* in November, 1938. An old college buddy walks into Cavanaugh's New York office and asks for help. What begins as a simple matter soon becomes murder as the detective and his assistant race from a Harlem jazz spot to the Brooklyn Bridge to a private explorers club in search of the Murderer, Motive, and Method.

As in the first MysteryDisc, there are 16 different plot lines and solutions for the viewer to investigate.

Look for our review coming up within the next two issues.

It's easy to sit here and rip apart Coleco, Mattel, and Vectrex—that is NOT our intention. It is merely the fact they make a perfect example. WHAT'S NEW FOR ODYSSEY? WHY is Atari running behind on 5200 releases suddenly? What about ALL THOSE PEOPLE who purchased a Texas Instruments TI/99 4A computer because of the promised wealth of software only to be able to balance their checkbooks and little else? It's no surprise "high-tech" has a low rating on the opinion surveys.

Brilliant Marketing

IF.... Coleco is pulling off the most brilliant marketing strategy of the decade, then hats off to them. You can't argue with success! Their Wall Street stock is riding high and looks strong, while Warner Communications (Atari) is posting all-time record losses and THEIR stock is only worth ONE THIRD of what it was last December.

From our comfortable chairs in North Hollywood, California, the answers SEEM easy. Take the bull by the horns and design SUPERIOR games without compromise. Regain consumer confidence by hiring a staff of competent programmers to translate good games for all the various game & computer systems. And, don't announce fancy titles until they are "in the bag"!

A year ago, almost every company felt good about themselves. Employees were proud to say "I work for....." Well, how about management that has CONFIDENCE in the video game market and is willing to give some pep talks and bid for programmers

Continued on Page 76

We read this article with interest and felt we should reprint excerpts because everyone is talking about the ADAM. Although this article is geared toward the retailer, we felt there are so many important facts here, that you would enjoy reading it. By the way, CASHBOX is a leading industry trade magazine and this excerpt is reprinted with permission of Cashbox from their July 23, 1983 issue. We thank them for allowing us to share this with you.

Dealers Cautious On Coleco's ADAM

by Jeffrey Ressler

LOS ANGELES — It's no secret the home video game software market, faced with over-saturation of titles and a shakeout of manufacturers, has suffered over the past few months while the home computer field has been abuzz with impressive activity. With so many record retailers feeling they've been "burned" by gamemakers on returns, dating, fill, profit margins and other crucial areas, how many music merchants will be interested in stocking home computer equipment? This question is particularly apropos considering the fact that Coleco Industries, creators of the innovative and tremendously successful ColecoVision game unit, plans to bow its complete family computer system known as ADAM during the fourth quarter giving consumers a keyboard, memory console, letter quality printer and software package for around \$600 (or \$400 if the consumer already owns a ColecoVision game player).

Although Coleco firmly believes its "bundling" of computer devices into one complete system will revolutionize the industry, competitors and other skeptics are asking if Coleco can produce the item on time, in sufficient quantities, and with few defects. In particular, some critics are voicing concern that the high-speed digital data pack drive used in the memory console is unproven, the printer is too noisy, and the software support may initially be slow. Another bone of contention raised by some retailers is the proposed markup for the ADAM, which is reportedly quite small despite the "nice profit window" touted by Coleco during the unveiling of the product at the Summer Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago held in June.

Several retailers and distributors who asked not to be identified were irate over the dealer cost of Coleco's ADAM system and the profit margins that could be garnered from sales of it. Preliminary advertising repeatedly stressed the fact that the

total stand-alone computer system was "designed to retail for one package price of \$600 or less," while the ColecoVision ADAM expansion module that hooks up to previously purchased game units would be available "for only about \$400." Yet some merchants have expressed concern that the wholesale price of the stand-alone system to non-mass-merchandise dealers could fall in the \$560-\$570 range, while the dead cost of the expansion module to dealers might be approximately \$415, leaving little, if any, profit margin. Of course, since the ADAM systems are not on the marketplace yet, official Coleco price policy is not available regarding the ADAM line. However, the company stated it has received solid commitments from retailers for 500,000 units of the home computer system, which could ship as early as the end of next month if all goes according to schedule.

One Southern California distributor of electronic equipment whose accounts include several record outlets said the price structure on the ADAM "may be too hard for anybody to deal with." He speculated the retail price of the system might be upped by about \$100 to offer retailers greater sales incentive and remarked that even a \$700 ADAM would be a good deal for consumers. "It looks like it's going to be an excellent product," said the distributor, who requested anonymity. "The only way Coleco can prevent it from taking a big market share would be really poor treatment of the people who are going to be distributing, selling and buying it. I would think between now and the time ADAM actually hits the market, Coleco will make clear what they want to be doing, and the product should sell itself. (Even if the retail price was over \$600) It's still going to be less than competing computer systems and should do more. There's a lot of interest in the ADAM by a lot of our accounts, and it's something people are looking towards as being big this Christmas."

BITS AND BYTES

★ A new company on the horizon called SUNRISE SOFTWARE plans entry into the game and computer software field. Among those planned for Fall release are PROFESSOR SMYTHE'S MATHERCISE (cassette and disc for the Atari computers) which is an exercise in speed and accuracy in math; MAYAN MYSTERY (also for the Atari computers) which is a multi-screen adventure/shoot 'em up; and NOAH AND THE ARK, a maze game designed for the Atari 2600. Sunrise tells us they also have plans for ColecoVision, TI 99/4A, and the Apple computers and hope to have additional games announced and available before Christmas.

★ HES is packing a \$5 check, good toward the purchase of any HesWare product, in all boxes of GRIDRUNNER, beginning August 1 and running through January, 1984.

★ Parker Bros. has decided to put two titles on "hold". They are INCREDIBLE HULK and LORD OF THE RINGS.

★ Atari has put their newly announced VOICE RECOGNITION SYSTEM on "Hold" for the 2600.

★ Fox Games has changed the title of an upcoming 2600-compatible title from "Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea" to CRASH DIVE, scheduled for release later this summer.

★ Coleco has put a "hold" on its 2600-compatible version of TURBO. It has not been determined as to whether the title will eventually ship or whether it will be shelved.

★ Datasoft has licensed CANYON CLIMBER to Thorn EMI for translation into the TI99/4A format.

★ Meanwhile, TI is busy picking up licensing deals. They have just picked up Broderbund's huge success, CHOPLIFTER, and another hit, DAVID'S MIDNIGHT MAGIC, along with Sierra On-Line's successful, JAWBREAKER. No release dates are set yet for the 99 4/A.

★ Telesys has decided to leave the domestic market and is actively marketing its games, including new titles, overseas in the PAL format.

★ Sirius Software has just released BUZZARD BAIT, an action game for the Apple II and IBM PC with a suggested retail of \$39.95.

★ Atari has just released the suggested list price on their 600XL computer coming this fall. It will be \$199.00. (See our COMPUTER ENTERTAINER for complete comparison chart for the Atari computer line.)

★ Roklan has formed a development division to adapt both new and existing Roklan software product for the IBM PC. The probable first title to be made available will be a game of Pool, RACK 'EM UP!

★ Sierra On-Line plans several titles for the IBM PC in the third and fourth quarter including JAWBREAKER, DARK CRYSTAL, and LUNAR LEEPER.

CRITICALLY SPEAKING..ATARI 5200-COMPATIBLE

POLE POSITION (★★★★ / ★★½) is, by now, one of the most familiar arcade titles around and a big hit with driving fans everywhere. This home version is a winner and will make a strong addition to the 5200 line. In this version, you'll find the analog joystick ideal as you maneuver your Formula I race car through the course. Your lower set of fire buttons act as the



accelerator and the upper set act as the brakes. The graphics, in typical 5200 fashion, are stunning, and you truly have the feel of sitting low in your race car. In fact, as we began negotiating the track at a faster and faster speed, we could feel the ex-

hilarating effect of actually "driving" the car.

Pole Position vs. Turbo and Enduro

Inevitably, Pole Position will be compared to ColecoVision's Turbo and Activision's Enduro as the three must be considered the premiere driving games currently available. Each game has its special merits and features. Turbo, of course, is the most "realistic" due to the Driving Module; however, it is more a "24 Hours at LeMans" due to the scenery changes. Enduro, while also set at a racetrack, pits you against other cars more than the track itself.

A True Driving Challenge!

Pole Position is you against the challenge of the track and the clock. And it is truly a challenge! We had great fun "shifting" from low speed to high speed, accelerating through the straights and decelerating through the turns (and braking when we were suddenly in the turn before we knew it!). The course is tough and you will find yourself in several "spin-outs" before you become proficient. It will keep you occupied for many hours as you learn more about the track and work to get your speed up and make it through more and more laps. If you like driving games, this is a must! Recommended (MSR \$39.95)

MS. PAC-MAN (★★★★ / ★★½) has reached the 5200 format and, graphically, it's a real winner! The detail is extremely good, from the effect of Ms. Pac-Man's being "eaten" by the ghosts, to the fruit, and the cute intermissions scattered throughout. Once again, however, as in Pac-Man for the 5200 (see our review in the December, 1982 issue), the problem here is the analog joystick. We found ourselves frustrated time after time as we tried to negotiate corners, watching helplessly as Ms. Pac-Man got "caught" and the ghosts closed in. Other than the joystick

problem, however, the game is totally charming and fun to play. Atari has done a fine job of translating the hit arcade game to the home screen. In order to play the game properly and truly enjoy it, we would recommend either purchasing one of the third party joysticks promised shortly, or the new Atari 5200 joystick which is in production currently.

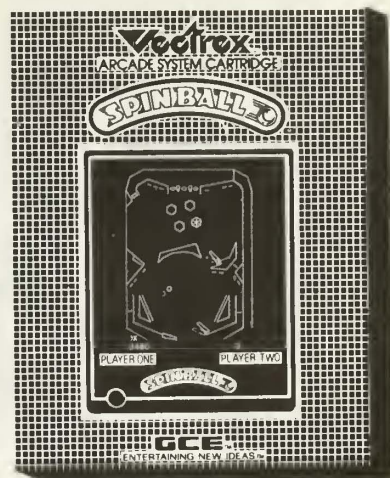
Recommended (MSR \$39.95)

WIN CBS GAMES

CBS will launch a contest in September where you can win a free WINGS cartridge. Look for specially-designed game pieces in your local newspapers and magazines. If the game piece matches the outside of the WINGS game package, or a counter card at your local participating dealer, you mail in a proof of purchase and the game piece to CBS and get a full refund. Runner-up prizes of WINGS t-shirts and Commander hats will also be awarded.

MOVED??? Don't forget to let us know so you don't miss one important issue. For the fastest change, either send us your mailing label, or copy the numbers on the top of it and we'll do the rest

CRITICALLY SPEAKING..VECTREX



SPINBALL (★★★★ / ★★½) is a video pinball simulation for one or two people with more than the usual amount of player control. Each game consists of five balls propelled one at a time into the bi-level playing field. There are two sets of left and right flippers, one set near the top of the field and one at the bottom. (Both left flippers are operated by one controller button, both right flippers by another.) Before sending a ball into play, the amount of tension on the plunger spring is adjusted by the joystick. While the ball is in play, the joystick is used to control hitting or "jucking" the pinball table. As in the real thing, hitting the joystick too often within too short a period of time will "tilt" the machine and cause you to lose the ball in play.

Active Simulation

The playing field is filled with all kinds of nifty targets, each with its own distinctive sound when hit. There are the usual bumpers and spinners, plus special targets for multiplying bonus scores. One we especially enjoyed was the Ball Splitter, a star-shaped target that splits your ball into two balls when hit. What fun we had with two balls bouncing around the screen! In general, we found this to be a very active simulation with more player participation than in some video pinball games. Nothing can be more boring than sitting there with a controller in your lap, watching a little ball go crazy all by itself for minutes on end. Fortunately, that doesn't happen in SPINBALL. Graphics are not spectacular, but they portray the elements of a pinball game adequately. If you enjoy pinball games, you'll have a lot of fun with this one. Recommended.

WICO UPDATE

More details are available now regarding the 5200 Analog Joystick/Keypad combination. The joystick will feature heavy-duty potentiometers for precise speed and directional movement, plus two leaf-switch-activated fire buttons. The joystick will be switchable from Analog to self-centering. The separate keypad is a 12-key button cluster with fast-action, tactile feedback switches plus three auxiliary momentary selector keys for functions such as "start", "restart", and "pause". The units will be sold together at a retail of \$49.95. This combination item has a planned release date of November.

5200 Analog with Adaptor

For those of you who are happy with your ColecoVision keypad, Wico will also offer the same 5200 Analog joystick, *without* the keypad. The joystick will feature an adaptor so you will have the use of the ColecoVision keypad for selections. This unit, retailing for \$34.95 should be on your dealer's shelves within the next two or three weeks. Both new items will feature a two-year limited warranty from the manufacturer.

CRITICALLY SPEAKING..INTELLIVISION-COMPATIBLE

THE DREADNAUGHT FACTOR (★★★ / ★★★½) gives

IMAGIC

the fan of space games yet another chance to save a doomed planet. Peaceful Terra is threatened by space-faring behemoths from distant Zorbax, the Dreadnaughts. Your job is to pilot one ship at a time from your fleet of ten Novaray Hyperfighters armed with laser bolts and strontium bombs. Leaving from a stargate, your ship flies through black, starry space to meet the first of the Dreadnaughts. These gigantic warships are reminiscent of the awe-inspiring Deathstars from the *Star Wars* movies, and your Hyperfighter looks pitifully small in comparison. (The entire Dreadnaught is larger than your TV screen.) The object is to avoid being hit by the Dreadnaught's fearsome fire-power as you make multiple passes over it, disabling and finally destroying the ship before it can reach Terra and launch a planet-destroying mega-missile.



Armed to the Teeth

Each Dreadnaught is armed to the teeth: large and small cannons fire rockets and trackers, towers discharge clusters of long-range trackers, large and small launchers fire even more trackers, and five silos have their deadly mega-missiles aimed at Terra. Some weapons installations are vulnerable to your laser bolts, while others must be bombed. The Dreadnaught's inexorable progress toward Terra can be slowed by bombing its engines, and its rate of fire can be decreased by shooting all the command bridges. The only way to destroy it altogether is to bomb all 16 of the ship's energy vents. Seven difficulty levels are provided, from "Practice" (only one Dreadnaught whose weapon fire never hits your Hyperfighter) all the way to "Impossible." They aren't kidding about that seventh level: the fleet of Dreadnaughts numbers 100, and they hit you with everything they've got from the outset!

Shooting, Bombing and Strategy

Graphics are pleasantly colorful, but not elaborate. The planet Terra rendered in cool blue and green decorates the left side of the screen before the real action begins. The Dreadnaughts come in five different configurations, all of them green with multi-colored weapon installations which fire various kinds of hot pink-red blasts at your Hyperfighter. Play action involves a good blend of shooting and bombing action with strategic planning. Since it's impossible to knock out all 16 of the warship's power vents on one pass, you must decide which Dreadnaught features to destroy first. We enjoyed the "David and Goliath" feel of the contest between tiny Hyperfighter and gargantuan Dreadnaughts—when you finally demolish the warship, you feel you've really accomplished something. You may have saved many a video planet in other games, but you've never saved one from anything quite like these Dreadnaughts! It's also satisfying to play a game you can play to win, and not just amass many thousands of points. One of the best features of this game is its exceptionally wide range of difficulty levels, making it appropriate for players of all ages and skill levels.

Recommended. (MSR \$39.95)

MUSIC AND YOUR VIDEOGAMES

Ever notice how many of your games use classical music when a composed piece of music is used? Well, there's a very good reason for that. If the game makers used contemporary music, they would have to pay royalties to the songwriter. Classical music is in "Public Domain", which means that it can be used without any royalty being due to the composer (or his descendants). Alfred Hitchcock Presents used this avenue with "Funeral March of a Marinette" (in fact, more people now know this piece as the theme from Alfred Hitchcock and would have trouble coming up with the actual title). PEPPER II from Coleco used this same music; BUZZ BOMBERS from Mattel (out next month) uses "The Flight of the Bumble Bee", which is, of course, very appropriate to the game. DEMON ATTACK for Intellivision (from Imagic) uses "Night on Bald Mountain"! Imagic also uses a Wagnerian theme in ICE TREK, and the list goes on! If you "listen" to your game library, we bet you can come up with several more examples!

CRITICALLY SPEAKING..ACCESSORIES

PROSTICK II (compatible with Atari 2600, Atari computers, Commodore 64, and VIC-20; also available packaged with an adaptor for use with TI 99/4A computer) and **PROSTICK III** (compatible with ColecoVision) are the latest in a line of video game accessories from Newport Controls.



Both Prosticks share the same smallish base, indented on the sides for comfortable holding in either right or left hand. The stick itself is a medium-length hefty steel shaft topped with a black plastic ball. With their outward look, internal leaf spring construction and 5-year warranties, one has the feeling that these are verysturdy joysticks, built to withstand hundreds of spirited playing sessions.

Unique Features

There are two unique features: the "Switchable Gateplate" and the arrangement of firing buttons. The Switchable Gateplate on both Prostick II and III allows the player to choose between the standard 8-position joystick placement and a 4-position placement which eliminates all diagonals. (Switching is easily accomplished by lifting and turning a small plastic collar at the base of the joystick shaft.) The 4-position setting is ideal for maze games, slide-and-shoot games, or any games in which diagonal moves are unnecessary or undesirable.

Prostick II has two soft-touch firing buttons on the front vertical surface of the base. One is ideal for right-handed players, the other for lefties, and they are designed for the index or "trigger" finger. Prostick III has incorporated the dual firing functions necessary for several ColecoVision games into a "Tri-Fire Bar" on the front vertical surface of the base. Equally suitable for right or left-handed players, the long bar controls one firing function at each end. Pressing the center of the bar activates both functions simultaneously. The cord for Prostick III has a built-in Y-adaptor so that the ColecoVision keypad remains connected for game selection functions.

Good Performance

In actual game playing, both Prostick II and III performed very well. They were comfortable to hold, with the reassuring, solid feel of a well-made joystick. The Switchable Gateplate is an interesting feature that will be very appealing to game players who have difficulty feeling the difference between diagonal placements and straight vertical or horizontal placements of a joystick. It's probably not necessary for the video game veteran, but less experienced players will find it helpful on maze games and the like. We play hundreds of games, and we didn't notice an appreciable difference in control or scores between the two settings. Firing with the index finger (Prostick II on Atari, Commodore, and TI games) tends to be faster and less tiring than using thumb power. The Tri-Fire Bar on Prostick III finally let us play all our ColecoVision favorites with a "real" joystick—what a relief to ignore that stubby little knob and the firing buttons that eventually make your hand ache! These are solidly-made joysticks that are easy to control in a wide range of games. Particularly for TI 99/4A and ColecoVision owners who really need to replace the original equipment controllers, the Prosticks would be an excellent choice.

Recommended (Prostick II MSR \$24.95; 29.95 w/TI adapter. Prostick III MSR \$29.95)

MYTHICON INTRODUCES BUDGET LINE

MYTHICON has entered the Atari VCS software field with a new approach. They will introduce three 4K VCS games at a RETAIL of \$9.95 in packaging which will lend itself to being put into supermarkets, book stores, etc. The first games are STAR FOX, an outer space game in which you must recover crystals while avoiding aliens, and FIRE FLY, a multi-screen space game in which you must help the good bugs rid the planet of evil creature-machines sent to destroy the cities. SORCERER casts you as a good Sorcerer who must destroy evil forces trying to destroy the planet.

Later this fall, they plan to work on 8K games for the VCS, also promised at a lower price point.

GAME CLUB INFO

We have received many requests from our readers on information on how to join the various game clubs offered by the manufacturers. We've gone to work to uncover all the details of the clubs that are out there and will, over the next month or two, pass along that information.

Vectrex

If you have recently purchased a Vectrex game unit (GCE), you have probably already found the card inside the box regarding the Vectrex Owner's Club. If you purchased your unit a while ago, or threw away the card, here's the information.

The Vectrex Owner's Club is *Brand New* and they are working on their first newsletter. There is no cost to join, nor are dues charged. You must either send in your warranty card, or write to Vectrex Owner's Club, 233 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA and provide the serial number of your Vectrex unit. In addition to a quarterly newsletter regarding new releases, gaming tips, etc., the club will offer special discounts to its members, including items unavailable through other sources such as carrying cases for your Vectrex, etc.

Intellivision

Eligibility for the Intellivision Club is by purchasing any Mattel Intellivision cartridge. Then, send a check or money order for \$2.50 along with the membership form which comes in every cartridge package (the address is on that form). As a member, you receive a wallet card and membership certificate, in addition to a quarterly newsletter, INTELLIVISION NEWS. That newsletter also previews new games, gaming tips, and generally what's going on at Mattel.

Activision

Activision has taken a different slant on their club and we know there are several of our readers who have already "earned" their way into its ranks.

For those of you who aren't familiar with the Activision Club, you must earn your way in by reaching pre-determined score levels for the various games. For instance, the largest club is for PITFALL where the eligible score is 20,000 points. When you reach the point level needed, you must send a photograph of your score. Once verified, you automatically become a member and earn a patch for the game you have qualified for. Many players have earned multiple patches by reaching the level on several games.

For information regarding the clubs, you can call 1-800-633-GAME (or 1-415-940-6044 inside California).

CRITICALLY SPEAKING..VIC 20

CROSSFIRE (★★★/★★★½) by **Sierra On-Line** is a familiar title which has now been translated for VIC-20 owners, and it's a good one. The premise is deceptively easy—the aliens have landed and you must fire at them on a cross-grid while they are firing back at you. With a limited supply of ammunition, you must dodge their bullets as they are moving at you from above and both sides. Dart in and around avoiding them, while trying to make each shot count. As the game wears on, the aliens move faster and faster, firing more rounds of ammunition. When you get low on your missiles, you can replenish by running over a grid mark. You begin with 35 missiles and, for each screen cleared, you will receive 5 fewer missiles until you reach the minimum of 15 missiles.

Addictive

When we sat down with this one, we figured on a few rounds to test it out and then we'd walk away. Well, we found ourselves, two hours later, still firing away, using every piece of game strategy we could muster, to beat the aliens. Rather than the typical shoot-'em-up which merely encourages you to aim and shoot, Crossfire forces you to use strategy as you dodge, save bullets, and try to stay alive to "save the city." This one makes a nice addition to anyone's VIC-20 library. (Cass)

Recommended. (MSR \$29.95)

UPDATE ONE ON ONE



RANDY GLOVER, JUMPMAN DESIGNER

In the past few months, The Video Game Update has presented interviews with game designers for home game systems. During the Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago in June, we met an extraordinary computer game programmer! His name is Randy Glover and he works for Epyx, one of the major computer software companies. Epyx is currently known to many game players as the "Jumpman" company, and Randy designed both Jumpman AND Jumpman Jr. Randy is now Manager of Product Development for Epyx—making him similar to the character he created, jumping the ladder of success. We managed to catch up with him again at the Epyx offices in Sunnyvale, California for an informative chat.

VGU: We heard you were currently working on a new project. What's going on?

RANDY: Working is right! Right now I'm working on Jumpman Jr. for the Commodore 64.

In The Beginning

VGU: What in the world gave you the idea for such a great game as the original Jumpman?

RANDY: What really prompted it was my desire to learn the Atari computer. I had just purchased one and wanted to learn all the ins and outs of it. It was my first graphically and sound oriented machine. I was trying to emulate Donkey Kong in the sense that I wanted to make a man run and climb. That's how the whole thing got started—putting the Atari to use, seeing if I could do that type of thing.

VGU: I imagine, as is the case with many people, you had a computer, learned "BASIC" language, and graduated to the next generation computer.

RANDY: Right.

VGU: Did you continue writing in "BASIC" or did you move to assembly language right away?

RANDY: I jumped into assembly language right away.

For Those Who Can't Master The Game

VGU: When you were writing the "Jumpman" game, what gave you the idea for the "random" feature?

RANDY: That was to give people the ability to see screens they wouldn't normally see. Some people can't beat certain parts of any game. Out of 30 levels if you're not a really good player, you might not be able to beat half the screens. I didn't think that was fair, because one of the things I liked about putting in all the screens was the surprise! So with 30 screens and the "randomizer" you could play for a while and get to see some of the levels you wouldn't otherwise be able to play. Also, it was to create a little more interest if you got bored of playing: just try "randomizer" and see what you get!

VGU: One of the things we noticed and liked about the original Atari Jumpman is that all screens are so smoothly connected, rolling from one screen to the next. Obviously this was intentional. Why did you do it this way?

RANDY: That was a last minute add-on. Prior to that, they flashed up. So, first, I had a piece of music I wanted to put in the game. Secondly, I thought the appearance of the levels coming "right at you" wasn't necessarily the best way. So, because they were buildings, it made sense to make it look like you were climbing up a building, or the building was shifting down to see the next set. And, it gave me a chance to put the music in.

RANDY GLOVER interview continued on page 78

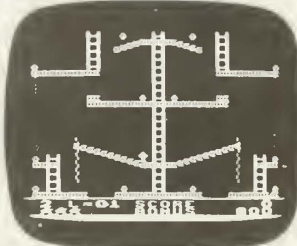
Computer Entertainer

CRITICALLY SPEAKING..ATARI COMPUTERS

JUMPMAN JUNIOR (★ ★ ★ / ★ ★ ★ 1/2) is a wonderful sequel to the superb JUMPMAN (disk/cassette) game which was reviewed in our May, 1983 issue. Since Junior is in cartridge format, anyone with an Atari computer can play. In

EPYX
COMPUTER SOFTWARE

your role as apprentice to Jumpman, you must drive back the enemy Alienators by defusing bombs they've scattered throughout the 12 levels of Jupiter Command Substation. This is accomplished by touching the bombs while you run, jump and climb through each of the game's 12 screens. JUMPMAN JUNIOR can be played solo, or you can invite one to three friends to join the fun. There's a choice of eight speeds for your Jumpman. Although all players take turns with the same joystick, each may select a different speed, which allows for a degree of handicapping when players aren't equally skillful.



Twelve Screens

The game opens with a brief introduction to each of the 12 screens. Watch closely, because that's the last time you'll see most of them for a long time! You start on the first screen, "Nothing to It," with four Jumpmen, where you will learn the basics of maneuvering your on-screen character. It goes easily enough as Jumpman climbs and jumps, until the Alienators' bullets start seeking him out. The bullets have a nasty habit of moving along a straight line and then turning to catch Jumpman just when you think he's safe. On the second screen, "Electrocution," Jumpman sizzles and slows down temporarily whenever he hits an electrified spot on this level's structure. On the "Dumbwaiter" screen, Jumpman does more riding than climbing, but his jumps must be timed perfectly. (This screen seems to be the first plateau, because most players will find it considerably more difficult than the first two.) Each level is labeled at the bottom of the screen—from Hellstones through Hurricane (the 12th screen), and some are reminiscent of screens from the original 30-screen wonder, JUMPMAN. After completion of each level, you'll earn bonus points for each Jumpman left.

One of the Best

As in the original JUMPMAN, graphics are clean and crisp but fairly simple. There is excellent use of music between screens, and Jumpman goes through some great moves when he falls. One noticeable graphic difference between this game and JUMPMAN is the lack of smooth, scrolling connections between levels. However, we don't feel that the more abrupt scene changes detract from the game. JUMPMAN JUNIOR is a very good game to play, offering challenge, surprises, and whimsical touches. While JUMPMAN offered the option of random-order playing of the screens, this game requires conquering the levels in order, one at a time, in order to play them all. If you can survive all 12 screens—possible, but unlikely—the game continues with the screens presented in random order. If you like climbing games, this is one of the best available. (Cartridge)
Recommended. (MSR \$39.95)

PINBALL CONSTRUCTION SET (★ ★ ★ ★ / ★ ★ ★ ★) by Bill Budge is one of the first games to come from **Electronic Arts**, and it's an auspicious start. The first thing which catches your eye with this company's product is the lavish packaging. Reminiscent of record albums, the packaging features four-color art, a brief background of the designer (referred to as electronic artist) and "liner notes."

Entertaining Liner Notes

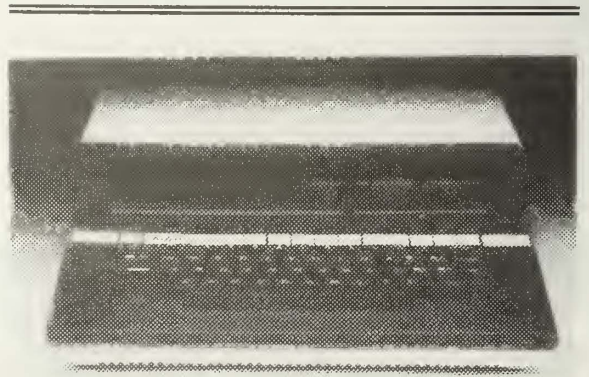
Normally, we wouldn't even comment on what's written on the outside of the package, but the liner notes on this, as well as other Electronic Arts games we have just received, are entertaining and, in many cases, incredibly humorous! For instance, in this game, which is a build-it-yourself pinball game, the back of the package points out the various pieces you use to construct your pinball field. When pointing out the bumpers, they tell us, tongue in cheek, "if you love bumpers (so do we), litter the board with them. Pump up their point value. Impress your friends." In describing the alley you construct, the packaging tells us "This alley's killing your score? Plug it up. Nothing says this game has to be difficult."

The Ultimate Computer Pinball Game

First, let us not dismiss the fact that this is a bonafide pinball game, and a darn good one, too! As you gaze upon the opening screen, your index finger (portrayed by a symbol resembling just that) guides you up, down and sideways. In the lower right hand corner is the symbol for your computer disk. Moving the "finger-cursor" down to this point and releasing the fire button will get you going on one of five ready-made games. That's a very nice feature, but you will want to come back and design your own.

Custom Pinball

One good sign of any game or computer program is the ability to run the program without too much documentation until you can get yourself comfortable with the A-B-C'S. Electronic Arts encourages you to NOT read the directions... go for it! So, you are all fixed and ready to go with as many bumpers and flippers as you want (or can fit on the screen). You can use the paint-brush/magnifying glass combination to color your screen with all sorts of fancy designs. Then comes what they call "The World Functions:" you control gravity, time, kick, and elasticity. This also enables you to change Newton's Law of gravity without the penalty of "TILT". The next phase might be the "Logic Diagram" where you can change such things as music, bonus points, etc. You really get the impression of building a true pinball machine, but you are truly creating a video pinball game with all the elements. Make it as hard or easy as you wish. We added a few elements, proceeded to play and went back and added more. The possibilities are absolutely endless! If you only buy one pinball game for your Atari computer, this one *Must* be the one! (48K Disk)
Recommended. (MSR \$40.00)



1450XLD

LEARN TO TYPE AT HOME

Sirius has just released TYPE ATTACK on disk for the Atari computer line. The game teaches typing skills in a fast-action arcade-style game. It includes 39 pre-programmed lessons designed to follow standard typing course format, in such a way that the player automatically learns typing conventions and concepts while playing the game. (MSR \$39.95)

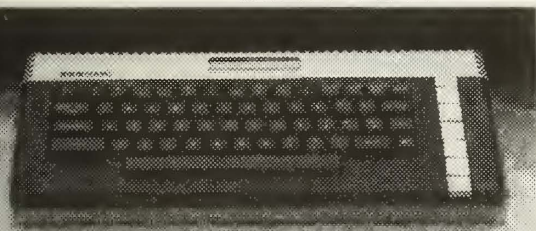
ATARI COMPUTER COMPARISON CHART

As promised, we are providing a comprehensive comparison chart which includes not only the new line of Atari computers scheduled for release this year, but also the current line of 400, 800, and 1200XL. We think you'll agree that this will give you a good idea of what the various units offer. Suggested list prices on the new computers are not available yet. We will pass those figures along as soon as they are available.

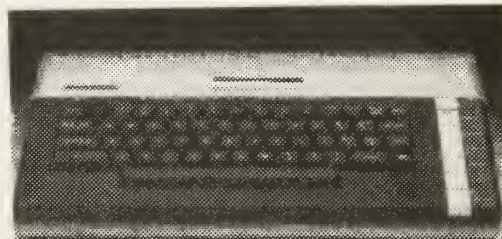
FEATURE	400	600XL	800	800XL	1200XL	1400XL	1450XLD
Standard RAM	16K	16K	48K	64K	64K	64K	64K
Maximum RAM	48K	64K	48K	64K	64K	64K	64K
ROM Operating System	10K	14K	10K	14K	14K	14K	14K
BASIC Language Built-in	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Expansion Bus	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Full Stroke Keyboard	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Number of Keys	61	62	61	62	66	66	66
HELP Key	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
International Characters	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Function Keys	4	5	4	5	9	9	9
Self Diagnostics	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES
Built-in Disk Drive	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES
Built-in Modem	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Built-in Speech	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Cartridge Slots	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Controller Ports	4	2	4	2	2	2	2
CP/M Option	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Monitor Output	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Graphic Modes	9	11	9	11	11	11	11
Text Modes	3	5	3	5	5	5	5
Detachable RF Cable	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES

STANDARD CAPABILITIES OF ATARI HOME COMPUTERS

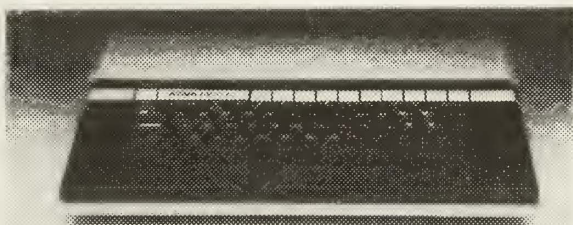
Screen Display	40 x 24	Third Party Software	2000+
High Resolution	320 x 192	Number of Colors	256
Custom Chips	GTIA, POKEY, ANTIC	Number of Independent Sound Channels	4
ATARI Software Titles	250+		



600XL



800XL



1400XL

CRITICALLY SPEAKING..ATARI COMPUTERS

BLUE MAX (★★★★/★★★★) is a magnificent World War I flying game in three-quarter perspective for a solo pilot. In this game you play the role of a real-life hero: Max Chatsworth of the Royal Air Force in command of a biplane fighter/bomber. (Chatsworth became known as "the Blue Max" in 1915 when the Axis offered the Blue Max decoration—the highest flying medal—to any pilot who could shoot down this dauntless fighter.) The game begins with your biplane on the runway, preparing to take off into the dangerous skies of Europe at war. Skimming low over green countryside and blue river, you fly a strafing run to knock out a few anti-aircraft installations. Enemy planes fly above you from ahead and behind as you climb to bombing altitude to knock out a few buildings, bridges, ships and assorted vehicles. Several of your targets explode with a satisfying blast, but suddenly an enemy plane comes at you, flying at the same altitude! With lightning-quick reflexes, you fire away with your machine guns, and another Axis plane bites the dust. In the meantime, you've caught some stray ack-ack yourself, and the screen's damage display shows a fuel leak and decreased maneuverability. All will be well if you can only keep the bomb gear and machine guns in one piece until you can reach a friendly runway to land for repairs. You manage to knock out a few more targets and sustain damage to your guns before you hear the welcome beep indicating that you can land. A quick refueling, repairs, and then you take off again, returning to the fray.

A Superlative Game

BLUE MAX is a superlative game in every way. The graphics are stunning, using the diagonal movement and three-quarter perspective first seen in the arcade game *Zaxxon*. **BLUE MAX** does the best job yet of translating the depth and 3-dimensional feel of this graphic treatment for the home video screen—including the various translations of *Zaxxon* itself. Sound effects are excellent, from the mood-setting "Hail Britannia" at the opening to the engine sounds and explosions. The game itself is great fun to play and loaded with challenge. (Your first big hurdle: landing the plane without crashing.) The plane maneuvers beautifully, whether you opt for Normal Control (push joystick forward to climb) or Reverse Control (pull back to climb), which is the way real planes operate. After an hour's practice, you should be a regular ace, having a great time exploring the game beyond its first level. At that point, we'll bet no one can tear you away—not for dinner, not for bedtime, not even for your favorite TV show. (32K Disk, Cassette; Cartridge available soon.) Recommended. (MSR \$34.95)

JUICE! (★★★½/★★★½) by the designer of *KID GRID*, Arti Haroutunian, is a fun-to-play game from *Tronix*, in which you must make the Juice flow—the electric kind, not orange or grapefruit! Your on-screen character is Edison, the kinetic android, whose only aim in life is to complete circuits. All you have to do is to guide him from square to square on the boards, and he'll make all the right connections. A cast of bouncing characters attempts to keep him from completing his task. Nohms and a Capacitor start at the top and hop down the circuit board until the Nohms jump off the end. The Capacitor then evolves into a Killerwatt that chases poor Edison around the board, but it can be tricked into jumping off the edge if Edison can hop onto one of the special transporter squares at the right time. (Contact with Nohms, Capacitors or Killerwatts will cause Edison to melt.) Flash, the lightning bolt, appears later in the game to disconnect everything in its path. Recharge is the one helpful character in the group. If Edison can touch Recharge, all the nasties will be temporarily frozen, and he can connect circuits unmolested for a few moments. There are six difficulty levels, each consisting of three boards and a nearly impossible bonus round. Bonus points are awarded for completing any board in less than the allotted time. At higher levels, Edison must jump on squares more than once to complete the circuits, and it becomes even more difficult when one jump too many erases a piece of the circuit!

Addictive

The music is good, the graphics colorful, and the perspective gives some feeling of depth to the screen. Each circuit board is a parallelogram, creating the illusion that objects moving from top to bottom are not only moving down, but also toward you. Of the characters, Edison is the cutest. In fact, he reminded us a little of

C3PO in *Star Wars*. Even though this game looks nothing like *Q*bert*, the play mechanics of hopping diagonally from square to square while avoiding jumping enemies will remind you of the popular arcade game. However, **JUICE!** is not a clone of the coin-op, though it is just as much fun to play. The varying layouts of the circuit boards and semi-predictable movements of the bad guys allow for the use of strategy and some pattern playing. Especially at higher levels, play action is fast and fascinating. **JUICE!** is one of those addictive games that keep you playing "just one more time." (32K Disk, Cassette) Recommended. (MSR \$29.95)

TARGET PRACTICE (★★★/★★½) is a shooting gallery game by *Gentry Software* for one or two players at any of six skill levels. Accompanied by appropriate carnival music, the game provides the expected array of horizontally moving targets: orange elephants, white ducks, pink bunnies, red and blue rotating happy/sad faces, bulls-eyes and diamonds. The farther away the target, the more points earned for hitting it. The aim is to earn the maximum number of points with a limited number of bullets. (The higher the skill level, the fewer bullets in your supply.) If you clear the gallery, a single bear lets you take pot shots for bonus points.

Cute and Colorful

The graphics are cute and colorful, and the music adds to the carnival midway atmosphere. (The music ends once you start shooting at targets.) There is no premium for speed since there is no time limit, so this is a game to be played in a leisurely fashion. With its old-fashioned theme, this game is not for everyone, but it would be an easy-going introduction to computer games for young children and nostalgic adults—and it's economically priced. (16K Disk & Cassette packaged together.) (MSR \$16.95)

MR. COOL (★★★/★★★★) is a single-player game from *Sierra On-Line*, and play action is reminiscent of the arcade hit, *Q*bert*. You control Mr. Cool, an ice cube-shaped little blockhead who hops up and down a pyramid of 28 hot plates, turning them to the same color as the screen border. Below the pyramid is the furnace that spawns fireballs and hot springs. The fireballs streak horizontally across the screen from both sides at every level except the uppermost hot plate, and the hot springs start at the top, bouncing randomly down the hot plates and into the furnace. Contact with a fireball or hot spring causes Mr. Cool to melt instantly. Once every round, you can hit the joystick button for 15 seconds of Super Cool Time: fireballs turn to snowballs and hot springs become cold. Mr. Cool can now absorb these frigid characters for extra points and a possible spare cube.

Fun to Play

Graphics are a bit on the spare side, especially when the inevitable comparison to the coin-op, *Q*bert*, is made, but the characters are cute and well-drawn. The game is a lot of fun to play once you get used to the diagonal joystick movement required. While there are some similarities to the well-known arcade game, there are differences as well. Mr. Cool cannot jump off the edge of his hot plate pyramid, nor is there a means of luring any of his chasers off the pyramid. Since the fireballs enter from either edge of the screen, the bottom corners are particularly dangerous spots for Mr. Cool to linger. Gamers who enjoy the challenge of *Q*bert* will find **MR. COOL** to their liking. (8K Cartridge) Recommended. (MSR \$34.95)

ATARI GOES TO THE OLYMPICS!

Atari, the official videogame company for the Summer Olympics, will launch several tie-ins with the upcoming games, beginning this Fall. In addition to special packaging and back-to-school promotions, they will also announce their own "VideOlympics" where the winner will receive a trip to the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles next summer.

Create Olympic-Themed Games Yourself!

For those of you who would like to take a crack at designing for APX (Atari Program Exchange), Atari will be running a contest through APX asking for Olympic-themed games. If you come up with a winner, you could find your game distributed through APX for the Atari computers. For further information, contact APX at P.O. Box 3705, Santa Clara, CA 95055 or watch your favorite computer store for upcoming details.

What's Wrong With...continued from Page 70

who will design new games as popular as *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, etc. How about some teamwork? The companies who are doing that right now (and have never stopped) are rolling right along, thank you. We think a lesson could be learned.



LIFESPAN (★★★/★★½) offers a most unusual concept for a quintet of single-player games encompassing the human life cycle. The first game represents birth: a spiral of light gradually fills the screen, accompanied by a rhythmic, pulsing sound. Five Character Types emerge from the spiral, and the goal of LIFESPAN is to acquire all of them before your life comes to an end. No skills are tested in the first game, but you can participate by manipulating the joystick and firing button to add free-form music to the underlying rhythms. In the second game, Childhood, the five Character Types bounce around a playpen, and you must trap them in the corners with building blocks. The more you trap, the greater your lifespan for the remainder of the games.

Adulthood

In the Opportunity Gates game of adulthood, your on-screen Travel Character (TC) hurtles through space searching for a good opportunity (one like your Travel Character in shape and/or color). If you stop soon enough after sighting an appropriate opportunity, you may enter its gate and be sent to the next game, Situations and Conversations. Here you are a stranger in a new Situation: you enter a grid filled with tiny creatures who form chattering, like-minded groups. Your goal is to become like them by making contact with periodically appearing Common Interest Squares. Contact enough squares, and you can enter one of the Conversations. Lines of acceptance will connect you to your fellow creatures after a few seconds, and then you're ready to play the final game.

The Experience Corridor is a 3-dimensional tunnel full of dark Worries, Fears and Doubts which knock away pieces of your TC with each collision. As you speed through the Corridor, touching one of the slower-moving Hopes regenerates your TC. If you can survive the trip with part of yourself intact, a second Character Type becomes part of your TC, and an aura surrounds it, which indicates that you are becoming a more complete person. If you can play well, LIFESPAN repeats the Opportunity Gates, Situations and Conversations, and Experience Corridor games until you collect all five of the Character Types first glimpsed in Childhood. At this point, your TC's aura explodes into a full-screen light and sound show as your reward for completing LIFESPAN successfully.

Unique Theme

Graphics of the various games in LIFESPAN range from average (Childhood) to very good (3-dimensional effects in the Experience Corridor), but the overall impression is positive. It's the concept behind this cartridge that we found engaging. The idea of representing the stages of life as a series of video games is certainly unique—although we've known people who approach life itself as if it were a game! Each of the games is entertaining and different from the others, but we found Situations and Conversations to be our favorite. (Even though there are no skills to be tested, we must admit a certain fascination with the Birth Spiral; it's fun to watch the swirling lights and experiment with the music!) We especially liked the fact that the designer has allowed the option of practicing any of the games separately, a good technique for improving your performance in the entire set of games. Some may find the theme a bit pretentious for a video game, but we applaud the originality and adventuresome spirit behind this unique game. (Cartridge)

Recommended. (MSR \$44.95)

SPIDER QUAKE (★★★½/★★★) is a colorful game from Gentry Software, an economically priced new line from Datasoft. In a scenario reminiscent of *Frogger*, Eddie Eight Legs, the Spider, must dodge highway traffic, then make his way through an earthquake zone, across a river, and to his home in a mountain cave. This single-player game opens with that familiar tune from childhood, the sad tale of a spider that keeps trying to make its way up a water spout. Eddie Eight Legs scrambles to make his way through moving openings in a wall at the bottom of the screen. As soon as he crawls onto the two-lane highway, horns honk at him 'til he reaches the comparative safety of a green belt. This turns out to be a rumbling earthquake zone, and he is toppled if he runs into one of the shaking trash cans. From the earthquake zone, he

must make a few agile moves onto floating logs in the river (swimming frogs and snakes would love to have a spider for lunch), and then off on the other side and into the mountains. Poor Eddie must deal with a very unstable environment: even the mountains move back and forth! If Eddie reaches the cave at the edge of the mountains, the player is rewarded with a brief chorus of "Home, Sweet Home." Along the way, bonus points can be earned by having Eddie gobble some of the flies that are constantly buzzing around. But don't let him stay too long in any one zone, because a nasty vulture will come after him. There are five levels of difficulty (Richter Scale 2-6), each one faster than the last.

Cute as a Bug

SPIDER QUAKE is as cute as a bug, from its brightly colored graphics display to the animation of the crawly blue spider and the excellent sound effects. It's great fun to play, offering enough range of difficulty to suit beginners and more advanced players. We were a bit puzzled by one aspect of the game, though. The instructions state that a bonus spider is awarded at 2000, 21,000 and 29,000 points, but we couldn't earn more than one extra Eddie. You start with three spiders, and once you've led each one to its cave, that's it—none of them comes back for another chance. (In games of this type, it is unusual to "lose" a creature once it is brought safely to its goal.) We managed to lead four (all three original spiders plus one bonus Eddie) to the cave in several separate games, eating plenty of flies along the way, yet our best score was only about 4000 points. We had earned the maximum points for getting four spiders safely through each section and into the cave; it just didn't seem possible to eat enough flies to reach 21,000 points and earn a second bonus spider. This quirk will frustrate more advanced players, but it does give the game a definite ending, which may be better for younger, less experienced players. We think kids will enjoy this game, and it's an excellent value. (16K Disk & Cassette packaged together.) Recommended for Children. (MSR \$16.95)

STARBASE FIGHTER (★★½/★★½) is a single-player space game from Gentry Software. With a choice of three difficulty levels and a fleet of three, five or seven ships, you take off from your Home Base Satellite and fly through an asteroid field looking for the Enemy Satellite. Most of the asteroids are lined up vertically, with each strip moving as a group, but in the opposite direction from columns of asteroids on either side of it. In addition to squeezing between the moving asteroids, you must watch out for enemy ships that will fire on your ship. Once you find the Enemy Satellite, fly in through the bottom to enter the Enemy City, a craggy-surfaced horizontal tunnel with stationary gun emplacements at top and bottom. Shoot at enemy ships that follow you through the tunnel, and shoot out the gun emplacements until you reach the Alien Brain at the end of the tunnel. Then you must fire at the moving wall surrounding the Alien Brain to get a clear shot. Once the Brain is destroyed, it's back to your Home Base Satellite where you must dock before advancing to the next, more challenging round of play.

Economical Alternative

Graphics in STARBASE FIGHTER are colorful, but not otherwise inspiring. The Enemy Satellites are the best-looking part of the game. Play action is necessarily slow at the beginning level, more challenging at intermediate, and downright hectic at the advanced level. The game is straightforward, and it's reminiscent of the earlier stages of space game design. It would have commanded some attention for its speedy action (at the advanced level) a couple of years ago, but it seems unsophisticated when compared to the newer space games available now. However, STARBASE FIGHTER is a very economical alternative to the typical \$30 to \$40 computer game. (32K Disk) MSR \$14.95)



Back issues are available for most issues of THE VIDEO GAME UPDATE (no copies left of Vol. 1, Number 1,2, and 3). Send \$2.00 for each back issue you wish. Buy any four for \$6.00 and any six for only \$9.00. Make certain you have a complete set!

VGU: Was it a lot harder to design it that way?

RANDY: Well, of course, it would have been easier to just flash it on the screen, so it took a little digging-in to make it work. But it was worth it; it looks very nice.

VGU: We agree. Two of the hottest climbing games for the Atari computers right now are your Jumpman (disk) and the Miner 2049er (cart). The Miner cart has 10 screens, no small task in itself. The Jumpman Jr cart has 12!! Is that a matter of memory (ROM) within the system?

RANDY: It's as much as you can fit into the system. When I first started on Jumpman Jr. I wasn't sure if I could get 8 screens or 15 screens or what, based on the ROM in the cartridge. On the Miner cart, it probably takes more memory for one screen, thus only 10.

Music, Music, Music

VGU: Do you do all your own music as well as graphics?

RANDY: Yes.

VGU: Are you a musician as well?

RANDY: Not really. I used to dabble in it when I was younger, and I can carry a tune, but I can't really play anything.

VGU: ...except the Atari.

RANDY: True... if the computer can play it, so can I. But, seriously, those tunes I picked out of my head. They sounded nice and I just programmed the numbers into the computer.

Commodore & Atari Similar

VGU: The latest version of Jumpman you're doing for the Commodore—how close is that to the Atari version?

RANDY: Pretty much the same. The graphics look different because the Commodore has some additional graphics capabilities. So the man has a shirt and pants, rather than the white overalls. But basically it's very close. The same levels, the same gameplay, the same music.

VGU: We noticed on some Commodore 64 translations of Atari games, the graphics look somewhat nicer. Why is that... or do you agree with that?

RANDY: I agree and disagree. Graphically, one of the reasons is they have 8 sprites, while the Atari has only 4 character missiles. And their sprites can be multi-colored (as many as 3 in a sprite) so you can give your objects more detail. That's where I think it has the advantage. Where I DON'T think it has the advantage is that your colors are not selectable. You have 16 fixed colors. With the Atari you can choose from 128. On the Atari you can match up the colors and get nice contrasts. If you don't like the blue you can make it brighter or darker. On the Commodore if you don't like the blue, you can only change it to green or some other color.

A Pocketful Of Pixels

VGU: Is programming a game using pixels a harder way to go?

RANDY: Yes, but not unworkable. That's like doing a drawing with a bunch of dots. Instead of drawing a line, you draw dots. And, you can either turn them on or turn them off. A line is comprised of 10 dots in a row. So, it can be tough. A lot of games use pixels and high resolution graphics modes, so they can get a lot of color and a lot of detail.

VGU: What does your new job as Manager of Product Development entail?

RANDY: It basically entails keeping track of what is going on here as far as what projects are being developed, who's working on them and how they're coming along. Also, I check on outside acquisitions when people send in a lot of games and say "here I've got this great new game for the Atari or TRS-80" and I look at those and do a preliminary evaluation. And, of course, in the meantime, I work on a lot of other projects that are coming from Epyx.

VGU: What can you work on as far as other projects. Can you work on an Atari project over here, then an Apple IIe project over there, I mean what is YOUR limitation.

RANDY: I work on EVERYTHING that needs to be worked on. I'm pretty flexible. I used to work on the TRS-80 quite a bit, then Atari. I came to work here and quickly learned the Commodore. Generally once you really know one pretty well, you can understand another within a few weeks.

Assembling Ones And Zeros

VGU: We've noticed with home computers using BASIC language, each is really different in its own translation of BASIC. What about assembly language, is that pretty much straight ahead on all computers?

RANDY: The assembly language for the Commodore and Atari are the same. The difference between the two is only in where you put things like sounds, colors and how to control them. In a sense it's like BASIC on the Atari. You set the colors with a particular command. On the Commodore you do it a little differently. The same type of rule applies in machine and assembly language.

VGU: We notice that you, as well as other designers, use the term "machine language" and "assembly language" as if they were the same. What is the difference?

RANDY: When people talk about machine language they are talking about punching in commands in ones and zeros, which is something that nobody does these days. When they say assembly language they refer to using an "assembler" which creates the ones and zeros. In both cases the program runs the same. You actually generate the same numbers, but you generate them in different ways.

VGU: How does someone become a programmer.. or CAN someone "become" a programmer these days?

RANDY: Well, they have to be able to handle it. Some people look at a computer for hours and hours on end and don't understand it. Some people can sit down and read a manual and understand it and learn and want to learn and can pick it up almost automatically. Some people, no matter what, just can't get the knack of it. Secondly, you MUST go to school or just dig in and learn all you can about the machine, learn BASIC, learn assembly. These days if you are going to do any game programming you have to learn assembly, because BASIC is much too slow. If you submit a game which is programmed in BASIC, it's already one strike against it.

VGU: Do you run into people with great ideas who can't program well—or the reverse—people with great programming skills but problems coming up with good ideas?

Don't Call Us, We'll Call You

RANDY: Yes, I talk to a lot of people who are just designers and the best they can do is come up with very good creative ideas, with no inking or knack or whatever to put that into an actual working product. And you have the others, possibly from the business area of programming. They are good programmers, but when it comes to creative ideas they have a mental block.

VGU: Are you, or is your company open to getting ideas sent to them by the end users. In other words, if someone has a good idea for a game, do they send it to someone like yourself or do you just work in-house?

RANDY: We are open if a person sends in an idea, but unless it is really unique probably nothing will happen. If they have something that they are working on they stand a much better chance. When you get the product done, things that were only on paper may not look the way they were intended. Some people submit good ideas that are physically impossible to do. Companies like to see projects that are done or close to being finished. That way they can get it on the market that much faster.

Too Much, Too Soon?

VGU: Do you think the marketplace is suffering somewhat from overly anxious companies that want to release a product that is finished, but not really polished.

RANDY: Yes! Many companies will do that. It might not be a matter of not being completed, it's a matter of quality, really. It takes standing back and looking at a game and saying "is this really quality or is it not, and if it's not, let's take the time to make it such." I think A LOT of companies just say "we have it. It might not be Quality, and we might not sell a lot of them but we'll sell some". I suppose you could say that is okay but you don't do your company image any good and if it's not a good quality game, people will be taken to the cleaners—I know I have!

Ram vs. Rom

VGU: I think we all have. I know I have asked this of many other people but for those who continue to ask US each month, we have one more favor to ask, and that is to explain the differences between RAM and ROM. We know we have beaten the issue to death, but it seems as though once a day (at least) a reader will drop us a note with that one simple question.

RANDY: Sure. ROM would be something like a book. You have information IN the book but you can't change it. It's there, and that's that. RAM is the same book with blank pages. You can write in it, erase it, you can change it, and put something else in there. ROM basically is always the same, RAM is changeable.

VGU: So a video game is either a disk or a cartridge or a cassette of pure ROM, anywhere from 2K to 16K, and no RAM?

RANDY: Yes, usually 16K would be the most you can handle.

VGU: Randy, we have enjoyed speaking with you and hope we can get together again after your next brainstorm (ala Jumpman III) and have another nice chat.

RANDY: Sure, thank you.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT!

Roklan will be developing games based on Ripley's *Believe It Or Not*. The games will tie in with the Ripley's cartoon characters and will be an extension of the ABC Television show.

Right now, Roklan is in the process of designing and programming games for the Atari VCS, Intellivision, and ColecoVision, with future intentions for games compatible with the Atari, Commodore 64, and Apple computers. We understand they will introduce their initial three games at the Winter Consumer Electronics Show scheduled for January.



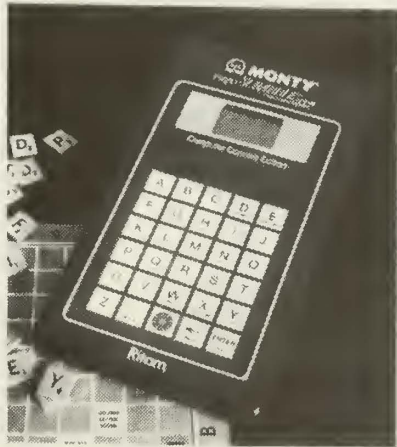
MONTY PLAYS SCRABBLE brand crossword game from **Ritam Corporation** is a revolutionary portable computer console allowing one to three humans to play the classic SCRABBLE game against a friendly, but fiercely competitive, computer opponent. Ritam produces MONTY under license from Selchow & Righter, the company that introduced SCRABBLE 31 years ago. With 33 million active SCRABBLE players in the U.S. alone, it's a safe bet that many of them will be delighted at their first opportunity to play their favorite game when no opponent is available.

MONTY is small enough to hold in your lap and operates on AC or batteries. The console has a 12,000-word vocabulary which may be increased to 28,000 or 44,000 words with the optional Advanced Vocabulary Modules. (The "average" person's vocabulary is said to be about 5,000 words.) You may play with a standard SCRABBLE board and tiles, or you may use the game-and-score pads provided (great for use when traveling). MONTY

is the perfect gentleman: he allows you to decide whether he will draw the tiles or not, and you can always go first, if you wish. MONTY "thinks" about each move for a few seconds at the easier levels, up to about four minutes at the highest level with both vocabulary modules working. (We've known human players who take longer than that!) His move is shown in an LCD window which displays an 8 by 4-letter portion of the board. You must record his move, and he will add the score. MONTY will prompt you when it's your turn, and you enter your move on the alphabet keys of the console, subsequently positioning the word in the LCD window. Can't think of a good move? Ask MONTY for a hint—he always obliges, and at his highest skill level, regardless of the level you've chosen. If you make an especially good move, MONTY will congratulate you and play a short tune! (The sound can be eliminated, if desired.)

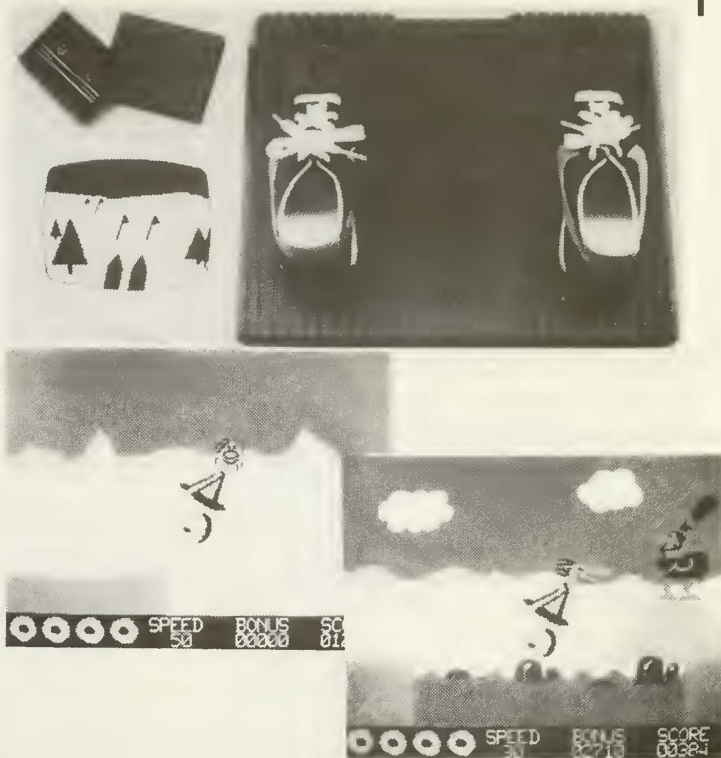
We played with MONTY for hours and hours at all four skill levels, with and without the advanced vocabulary modules, and we're hooked! Anyone who loves a good game of SCRABBLE, as we do, will be delighted with MONTY's prodigious skills. MONTY has been programmed to play an extremely tight, strategy-oriented game, always going for double and triple letter and word scores whenever possible. If you're a fan of the game, you'll find that MONTY forces you to play better than you've ever played before. If you consider yourself a good SCRABBLE player and work a lot of crossword puzzles, as we do, you'll definitely want the additional challenge MONTY can offer with the full 44,000-word vocabulary. For anyone who loves SCRABBLE and doesn't always have a partner, MONTY is a must!

Recommended. (MSR \$149.95, console; Advanced Memory Modules \$29.95 each)



(Editor's Note: SPOTLIGHT is a new feature that will appear whenever we receive a product worthy of special attention.)

COMING NEXT MONTH...



AND LOTS OF SURPRISES !!!

MAZE MASTERS SHIPS

HES is shipping MAZE MASTER for the Commodore 64, which features magic swords, arcane wizardry, fearsome monsters, and a brainteasing riddle. In the game you can create up to three characters, each of whom is either a wizard or warrior, to travel the depths of a five-level dungeon in search of the treasure. Characters are defined in terms of strength, intelligence, dexterity and constitution.

Divided Screen

In this game, your screen is divided into three windows. The left half shows the corridor or room ahead to a distance of 20 feet, or 40 feet if a light source is available. The right window displays text to describe situations and objects encountered by the player's party of characters. At the bottom of the screen, there is a status window showing the amount of injury sustained by the party and the amount of treasure accumulated. (MSR \$39.95)

Laser Zone for VIC-20

The second new game from HES is LASER ZONE, a game which pits your two laser bases against succeeding waves of alien attackers while requiring you to simultaneously manipulate separate cannons. (MSR \$34.95)

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AVAILABILITY UPDATE

(Based on projected release dates given to us by the manufacturers. May change without notice)

ATARI 2600

JULY
x-Bank Heist (FOX)
x-Blueprint (CBS)
Crackpots (ACTV)
Deathstar Battle (PB)
Death Trap (AH)
Frogger (STP)
x-Jungle Hunt (AT)
x-Kangaroo (AT)
x-Moonsweeper (IMGC)
x-Porky's (FOX)
Power Grip (WICO)
Proline Joystick (AT)
Q*Bert (PB)
Rabbit (STP)
Rush Hour (CVD)
x-Solar Fox (CBS)
Stronghold (CVD)
AUGUST
Battlezone (AT)
BurgerTime (MNTWK)
Cosmic Commander Power Arcade (MB)
Crash Dive (FOX)
Fathom (IMGC)
Flight Commander Power Arcade (MB)
James Bond 007 (PB)
Joyboard (AM)
Kool & Pitcher Man (MNTK)
Mr. Do (COL)
Off Your Rocker (AM)
Pole Position (AT)
Popeye (PB)
River Patrol (TGV)
SAC Alert (AM)
Spike's Peak/Ghost Manor (XON)
Springer (TGV)
Sweat (STP)
Thunderground (SEGA)
Time Pilot (COL)
Trackball (AT)
SEPTEMBER
Decathalon (ACTV)
Donald Duck Speedboat (AT)
Hop To It (IMGC)
Kick-Man (CBS)
Krull (AT)
Mad-Netter (CM)
Omega Race (CBS)
Party Mix (STP)
Pogoman (CM)
Sir Lancelot/Robin Hood (XON)
Star Trek (SEGA)
Super Cobra (PB)
Surf's Up (AM)
Targ (CBS)
OCTOBER
Adv of Pink Panther (ODY)
Alpha Beam (AT)
Big Bird's Egg Catch (AT)
Bump & Jump (MNTK)
Cookie Monster Munch (AT)
Dig Dug (AT)
Dumbo's Flying Circus (AT)
Ewok Adventure (PB)
Fall Guy (FOX)
Joust (AT)
Moon Patrol (AT)
Mountain King (CBS)
Out of Control (AH)
Power Lord (ODY)
Power Play 1 (AM)
Power Play 2 (AM)
Rocky & Bullwinkle (MNTK)
Shuttle Orbiter (AH)
Sky Blazer (BRO)
Survival Island (STP)
Sword of Saros (STP)
Tunnel Runner (CBS)
Wings (CBS)
NOVEMBER
Buck Rogers (SEGA)
Front Line (COL)
Miss Piggy's Wedding (AT)
Pigs in Space (AT)
Power Play 3 (AM)
Snoopy & Red Baron (AT)
Sorcerer's Apprentice (AT)
Tarzan (COL)

ODYSSEY

OCTOBER
Powerlords

INTELLIVISION

JULY
Buzz Bombers (MAT)
Mission X (MAT)
AUGUST
Blueprint (CBS)
Donkey Kong Jr. (COL)
Dungeons & Dragons Tarmin (MAT)
Empire Strikes Back (PB)
Joystick w/keyboard (WICO)
Popeye (PB)
Solar Fox (CBS)
Turbo (COL)
Tutankham (PB)
Wizard of Wor (CBS)
Zaxxon (COL)
SEPTEMBER
2600 Adaptor (MAT)
Dreadnaught Factor (ACTV)
Gorf (CBS)
James Bond 007 (PB)
Omega Race (CBS)
One-Player Baseball (MAT)
Q*Bert (PB)
Super Cobra (PB)
Wings (CBS)
OCTOBER
Beezoo (IMGC)
ECS Keyboard (MAT)
Kick-Man (CBS)
River Raid (ACT)
NOVEMBER
Domino Man (CBS)
Madden Football (CBS)
FALL
Controller w/joystick (MAT)
Fathom (IMGC)
Master of Universe (MAT)
Moonsweeper (IMGC)
Motocross (MAT)
Pinball (MAT)
Scooby Doo (MAT)
ATARI 5200
JULY
Blueprint (CBS)
Gorf (CBS)
K-Razy Shoot-Out (CBS)
x-Miner 2049er (BIG5)
Mountain King (CBS)
Wizard of Wor (CBS)
AUGUST
Analog joystick (WICO)
Kangaroo
Ms Pac-Man
Pole Position
Springer (TGV)
Tac-Scan (SEGA)
2600 Adaptor
SEPTEMBER
Jungle Hunt
Omega Race (CBS)
Polaris (TGV)
Popeye (PB)
Q*Bert (PB)
Space Dungeon
Star Trek (SEGA)
OCTOBER
Berzerk (Voice)
Choplifter (BRO)
Dig Dug
Domino Man (CBS)
Fathom (IMGC)
Joust
Madden Football (CBS)
Moonsweeper (IMGC)
Omega Race (CBS)
Realsports Baseball (voice)
Satan's Hollow (CBS)
Serpentine (BRO)
Solar Fox (CBS)
Vanguard
Xevious
Wings (CBS)
NOVEMBER
Battlezone
Buck Rogers (SEGA)
Congo Bongo (SEGA)
Jawbreaker (SOL)
Moon Patrol
Pengo
Road Runner
Sport Goofy
Super Cobra (PB)
Tempest

COLECOVISION

AUGUST
Buck Rogers (COL)
Destructor (COL)
Miner 2049er (MIC)
Mr. Do (COL)
Omega Race (COL)
Popeye (PB)
Q*Bert (PB)
Quest for Tires (SOL)
Rocky (COL)
Roller Controller (w/Slither)
Sub Roc (COL)
Super Action Controller (w/Baseball)
SEPTEMBER
Air Defense (ODY)
Dino Eggs (MIF)
Dragonstomper (STP)
Escape from Mindmaster (STP)
Frogger (PB)
Frontline (COL)
Globe Grabber (MIC)
Joystick w/keyboard (WICO)
M*A*S*H (FOX)
Phaser Patrol (STP)
Powerlords (ODY)
Quest for Tires (SOL)
Scraper Caper (MIC)
Super Action Football
Super Donkey Kong (COL) *
Super Donkey Kong Jr (COL) *
Super Zaxxon (COL) *
Time Pilot (COL)
Time Runner (MIC)
* indicates data-pak for use in ADAM ONLY
OCTOBER
Apple Cider Spider (SOL)
Cavern (ODY)
Crisis Mountain (MIF)
Fall Guy (FOX)
Fathom (IMGC)
Frogger (PB)
Lunar Leeper (SOL)
Moonsweeper (IMGC)
Porky's (FOX)
Sammy Lightfoot (SOL)
Super Gorf (COL) *
Wing Wars (IMGC)
NOVEMBER
Domino Man (CBS)
Frenzy (COL)
Frogger (SOL)
Madden Football (CBS)
Mountain King (CBS)
Rock And Ropes (COL)
Super Cobra (PB)
Super Smurf (COL) *
Super Sub Roc (COL) *
Super Time Pilot (COL) *
Tarzan (COL) * Tutankham (PB)
Wargames (COL)
Wings (CBS)
DECEMBER
Jawbreaker (SOL)
Learning With Leeper (SOL)
VECTREX
JULY
Bedlam
Fortress of Narzod
Spin Ball
AUGUST
Spike
Web Wars
SEPTEMBER Heads Up Soccer
Star Castle
OCTOBER Batter Up
Dark Tower
Polar Rescue
Pole Position

ATARI COMPUTERS

JULY
Abracadabra (TG)
x-Blue Max (SYN)
x-Dark Crystal (SOL)
Dragonstomper (STP)
x-Fun With Art (EPYX)
Gateway to Apshei (EPYX)
x-Jumpman Jr (EPYX)
x-Lifespan (ROK)
Paris in Danger (MIC)-Disk
x-Pooyan (DS)
Scuba Dooba Doo (GAM)
Star League Baseball (GAM)

AUGUST

Air Strike II (DM)
Blueprint (CBS)
Cannonball Blitz (SOL)
Chess (PB)
Cosmic Tunnels (DM)
Dimension X (SYN)
Escape from Mindmaster (STP)
Football (MIC)
Jet Boot Jack (DM)
Juice (TRO)
Monster Mash (DM)
Night Raiders (DM)
Paint Wizard (DM)
Q*Bert (PB)
Quasimodo (SYN)
Roundabout (DM)
Springer (TGV)
T.G.I.F. (MIC)
Topsee Turvee (DM)
Venus Voyagers (DM)
Wiz N Roo (DM)
Zeppelin (SYN)
SEPTEMBER
Learning With Leeper (SOL)
M*A*S*H (FOX)
Popeye (PB)
OCTOBER
Domino Man (CBS)
Kaboom (ACT)
Lunar Outpost (EPYX)
Oils Well (SOL)
Pitstop (EPYX)
Porky's (FOX)
River Raid (ACT)
Sammy Lightfoot (SOL)
Solar Fox (CBS)
Wings (CBS)
FALL
Cargo Bay (BRO)
Death in Caribbean (MIF)
Fall Guy (FOX)
Polaris (TGV)
Rom's Revenge (EPYX)
Silicon Warrior (EPYX)
Swat Rescue (EPYX)
NOVEMBER
Quest for Tires (SOL)
Risk (PB)
Super Cobra (PB)
VIC-20
JULY
A.E. (BRO)
Frogger (PB)
Fun With Music (EPYX)
Princess and Frog (ROM)
Salmon Run (SYN)
Seafox (BRO)
Typo (ROM)
Whiz Kids (ROM)
AUGUST
Frogger (SOL)
In The Chips (CS)
Polaris (TGV)
Q*Bert (PB)
Repton (SIR)
Springer (TGV)
Tac-Scan (SEGA)
OCTOBER
M*A*S*H (FOX)
Porky's (FOX)
NOVEMBER
Buck Rogers (SEGA)
Congo Bongo (SEGA)
Popeye (PB)
Sammy Lightfoot (SOL)
Super Cobra (PB)
Tutankham (PB)

COMMODORE 64

JULY
Astroblitz (CS)
Choplifter (BRO)
Deadline (Com)
Fuego (UMI)
Grand Master (UMI)
Morgol (SYN)
Motor Mania (UMI)
Renaissance (UMI)
Save New York (CS)
Starcross (COMM)
Suspended (COM)
Zork I,II,III (COMM)

AUGUST

In The Chips (CS)
Juice (TRO)
Mr. Cool (SOL)
Pennant Race (UMI)
SEPTEMBER
Alice (UMI)
Apple Cider Spider (SOL)
Cannonball Blitz (SOL)
Creepy Corridors (SOL)
Death in Caribbean (MIF)
Sammy Lightfoot (SOL)
Scraper Caper (MIF)
OCTOBER
Fun With Art (EPYX)
Jumpman Jr (EPYX)
Learning With Leeper (SOL)
Lunar Leeper (SOL)
NOVEMBER
Gateway to Apshei (EPYX)
Oils Well (SOL)
Pitstop (EPYX)
Q*Bert (PB)
Quest for Tires (SOL)
TI 99/4A
AUGUST
Miner 2049er (TGV)
Porky's (FOX)
Q*Bert (PB)
Springer (TGV)
THIRD QUARTER
Buck Rogers (SEGA)
Entrapment (TI)
Fall Guy (FOX)
M*A*S*H (TI)
Moondust (CS)
Mo?ne (TI)
Porky's (FOX)
River Patrol (TGV)
Sneegit (TI)
Star Trek (SEGA)

COMPANY NAME CODES

ACTV - Activision
AH - Avalon Hill
AM - Amiga
AT - Atari
BRO - Broderbund
CBS - CBS Electronics
COL - Coleco
COMM - Commodore
CS - Creative Software
CVD - CommaVid
CM - Computer Magic
DM - DataMost
DS - DataSoft
EPYX - Epyx
FIR - First Star
FOX - Fox Games
IMGC - Imagic
MAT - Mattel
MB - Milton Bradley
MIF - Microfun
MNTK - M Network
ODY - Odyssey
PB - Parker Bros.
PDI - Program Design Inc
ROK - Roklan
ROM - Romox
SIR - Sirius
SOL - Sierra On-Line
STP - Starpath
SYN - Synapse
TG - TG Products
TGV - Tigervision
TRO - Tronix
VEC - Vectrex
XON - Xonox

(x = indicates shipped to retailers by our press date (may not be in national distribution, however))

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