

THE VIDEO GAME UPDATE



A Critical Newsletter for the Serious Gamesman

Vol 1, #4

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Two Dollars

Thanks to everyone for such phenomenal response to our "search for a name..." contest. Since you took the task seriously, we decided to do the same! So, our congratulations go out to 14-year-old (he celebrates his 15th in July) Freeman Leung of Newport, Rhode Island. Freeman submitted many ideas, among which "The Video Game Update" was chosen. Freeman has a sister and brother who compete with him for time on the family Atari unit. His favorite games are "Kaboom" and "Pac-man". One of his arcade favorites is "Centipede". For his efforts, Freeman won a \$25.00 gift certificate from Video Take-Out. Thanks to everyone who made this a terrific contest. Just as we thought, there are a lot of creative folks out there.

When writing this newsletter, we worried about giving you too much information--so much that you would be totally confused. But those of you to whom we have spoken, have indicated you want to know everything that is going on.

We are also aware of the reputation we have been fast gaining as the #1 game source & our reputation for knowledge.

As you can see from this newsletter, several new companies have jumped into the game arena with more coming. We feel it is important that you feel you can look to us for guidance on what to buy & what games to stay away from.

We want to fill you in on current releases and new products, many of which were shown at the recent Summer Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago.

In the months to come, we will be adding other features such as a reader's forum and much more. If there are areas you would like to see us cover, let us know. Meanwhile, we'd like to hear your comments about games & related products you like, dislike and any game-related thoughts you'd care to pass along to us.

Overall, what we see....

more attention to sound & realism

more player involvement where you have to react & plan strategies

many manufacturers jumping in over the next several months & several disappearing (remember Fairchild?)

We will do the best we can to steer you right!



Defender (★★★★/★★★★) is now available. We have just seen 4 new games for the 2600. "Frog Pond" (★★★½/★★★★-November) is a really cute game for kids as the frogs attempt to catch the flies. Scheduled for July is "Demons To Diamonds" (★★½/★★) (formerly "Hot Rox"). In October, Atari will be issuing two new cartridges called "Swordquest" and "Earthworld". (both ★★★½/★★★★-we were not able to get hands-on play with them.) These are "Dungeons & Dragons" type cartridges. These two cartridges will come with comic books like "Yar's Revenge" had which will contain clues which might lead you to discovering one of 5 different prizes hidden around the U.S. There will be 4 jewelled vases containing precious stones (each vase valued at \$25,000) and one vase (the grand prize) will also have precious stones worth \$50,000. It will be up to you to read the clues correctly to lead you to the discovery of any one of the 5 prizes.

The Supergame (The 5200) ...What can we say besides WOW!! Enhanced graphics & a phenomenal hand controller highlight this new master unit. The narrower controller (to help ward off "Atari Wrist"), very sensitive joystick & responsive keypad are terrific. The good news is that it ships in October; the bad news is there will be so few until January that just a few will be put in some of the major department stores for Christmas. Some of the games to be available for this unit (your cartridges from the 2600 are not compatible) include Missile Command, Soccer, Super Breakout, Space Invaders, Galaxian, Star Raiders, Pacman, Asteroids, Defender & Centipede. All of the games have superior graphics, play action and sound. (All cartridges we saw rate 3½ to 4 stars in both graphics and play action). The unit has room for several plug-in modules. We saw an add-on that is incredibly exciting called "Trakball" (no release date yet). This unit does one heck of a job simulating the controller you've been using in the arcades!!!

FLASHES FROM ATARI

Atari has announced a joint venture agreement with George Lucas, creator of Star Wars. By the terms of the agreement, Lucas will separately staff approximately 100 people who will produce cartridges exclusively for Atari!

Atari has made an agreement with Steven Spielberg of "Raiders of the Lost Ark" and "ET" fame to have the right to make cartridges from any of his productions.

Atari has exclusive rights to develop cartridges under the direction of Sesame Street.

Atari has exclusive rights to all the Disney characters.

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 & Atari-compatible games are judged separately from Intellivision and Intellivision-compatible games, etc.



is doing terrific things. Their first 3 games are big sellers & wait 'til you see what's coming!!

First, for Intellivision... "Demon Attack" (★★★★/★★★★)-this is the hot game available for Atari, only enhanced. You will love this one! "Atlantis" (★★★★/★★★★) is another winner as alien spacecraft bombard the underwater city of Atlantis. You man the defense installations, firing missiles with your crosshair sights. In this version, the battle rages on into night, including searchlights, for even more realism! "Micro Surgeon" (★★★★/★★★★) is reminiscent of the classic movie "Fantastic Voyage" where a team of surgeons were "shrunk down" & injected into the patient's body. Here's your chance to do the same as you navigate the blood stream outmaneuvering white blood cells attempting to destroy you as foreign matter. Remove a brain tumor, blood clots & more. Also coming, "Swords & Serpents" (★★★½/★★½) an adventure game set in a maze-like dungeon where you run into silver, diamonds, dragons, gargoyles & a wizard. "Beauty & the Beast" (★★★/★★½) features the big bully who has the girl at the top of a building & it's you to the rescue climbing floor by floor dodging angrily tossed boulders. The higher you go, the harder the going.

Cartridges for the Intellivision system will ship around Oct./Nov. (we've found Imagic to be extremely on time in their shipping dates.)

Coming from Imagic for Atari....

Atlantis (★★★★/★★★★-July) Similar to the Intellivision version with a slightly different twist. Survivors of Atlantis show up in another new game, "Cosmic Ark" (★★★/★★★-July). Your mission is to seek and save. And, in August, 2 more games. "Riddle of the Sphinx" (★★★/★★★) is an adventure game where you wander thru the desert, seeking to solve the riddle. This is a good game for strategy enthusiasts. The second is "Firefighter" (★★½/★★★) where you must save a man from a burning building.

Need we say more...Imagic is among the very best!! (Plans in the works for games for the Atari 400/800 computer).

The quality of Activision games continues with the announcement of their september releases. **ACTIVISION™**

First, for you starved Intellivision connoisseurs...the first 2 games for your master unit!! The first is "Stampede" (we did not see this one so we can't rate it) similar to the popular Activision game that has been available for Atari, and a brand new game, "Pitfall" (★★★/★★★). In this game, you will seek out the treasures of an ancient civilization hidden deep within a forbidding jungle. You'll have to swing through trees, jump over bottomless pits, & journey through underground passageways--and avoid the perils of crocodiles, cobras, quicksand & scorpions. This one should be very popular

On the Atari front, "Pitfall" (★★★/★★★) will also be offered, as well as "Megamania" (★★★/★★½) This game has you in a space nightmare fending off multiple waves of celestial dice, spinning bow ties, flying widgets & even hostile hamburgers!!

Activision continues to show it is a major force in games!!

SOME OF THE OTHER COMPANIES JUMPING INTO GAMES:

Spectravision (Atari-Compatible) initially shipping 2 games---"Planet Patrol" (★/★) & "Gangster Alley" (★/★) within the next few weeks. As you can tell by the ratings, both games are very simple.

Vectrex - A totally different system with games only compatible to itself. This unit uses its own screen (no TV Hook-up) interesting concept in that games are similar to several arcade games in their "pencil-line" graphics. Color is achieved through an "overlay". Suggested retail will be in the vicinity of \$179. (★★★/★★½)

Tryom - Another new entry with a totally different master component. Non-compatible with anything on the market. The games shown (about 4-5) were simple versions of some of the earlier Atari games such as Breakout, Baseball, Football, etc. (★/★) with not even a brochure for prospective dealers at the trade show, we wonder about their capability to survive in this highly competitive game market.

Emerson - Still another new master component, this one is called "Arcadia 2001". Again, cartridges are not compatible with units now available. We saw games similar in play to cartridges such as "Space Invaders", "Missile Command", "Soccer", Etc. (★/★)

Tigervision (Atari-Compatible) - Games with names such as "King Kong" (★/★) & "Jawbreaker" (★/★★½). More games planned but we were not able to see them.

Commodore Max is offered by the Commodore Vic-20 Computer people. This is a new computer unit combining a game unit, music synthesizer & computer which accepts a basic language cartridge. Suggested list will be around \$180 and will be available in small quantities before Christmas. Several interesting games will be made available & this unit gives you the ability to program your own games!

Vidtec (formerly U.S. Games) (Atari-Compatible) - Simple graphics & extremely simple play. (All games we saw rate ★/★)

Telesys (Atari-Compatible) - We didn't see it but their first game is "Fast Foods" where hamburgers, pizzas & shakes shoot across the screen. The player catches them in his mouth racking up calories instead of points. Interesting concept.

Fox Video Games (Atari-Compatible) - Initially 4 games coming this fall including "Fast Eddie" (★★/★★½) a "Donkey-Kong" type game. "Worm War I" (★★/★★★), "Deadly Duck" (★★/★★½), and "Beany Bopper" (★★/★★★). We'll have to see more before we get too excited about these.

Data Age (Atari-Compatible) - 5 games planned—initial games are "Warp Lock", "Sssnake", "Survival Run", "Encounter At L-5" and "Airlock". Scheduled for 4th quarter, we were not able to get hands-on playing time. From what we saw though, we have to rate the games ★/★.

Colecovision will make a strong bid in the games market based on what we saw. Many of the graphics we saw make some Intellivision games seem pale! This is due to increased screen ROM (read only memory) capacity. It can play cartridges up to 32K rom whereas other systems are limited to only 4K or 8K ROM. It will also be able to display nearly 50 moving objects on screen simultaneously, far more than any other game system. That's the good news. The bad news is that, although planned for July shipment, this unit will be in extremely short supply. By the way, the hand controller, although not our favorite, features keypad, joystick, firing buttons & speed control. Planned for August is an expansion module to allow the use of Atari-compatible cartridges. Contrary to what we had heard, they will not be offering an expansion module for Intellivision cartridges. "Donkey Kong" (★★★★/★★★★) is included when you purchase the master unit & they have virtually duplicated the arcade version. Now, for everything else they plan...

Most games they manufacture will be made for 3 systems....Their own (Colecovision); Atari & Intellivision. Virtually without exception, The versions made for Colecovision are far superior in both graphics & play action to those they will make for the other 2 systems. Case in point is "Donkey Kong." We rate the Colecovision version as excellent; Atari version we rate ★★/★★ and Intellivision ★★½/★★½. The othr Atari/Intellivision games coming are (we have not seen them for rating)...."Venture", "Lady Bug", "Carnival", "Zaxxon", "Turbo", "Cosmic Avenger", "Mouse Trap" and "Smurf Action".

Several cartridges in the works for the colecovision master component. Many of the games were not in "finished form", but we will do our best to rate what we saw (several were not ready for viewing yet). First, in games for the young, "Smurf Action" (Aug.), & "Smurf Play & Learn" (Aug.). For the sports fan, "Baseball" (Oct.), "Football" (Oct.), "Horse Racing" (Oct.) and "Blackjack/Poker" (Oct.).

Several others, including "Tunnels & Trolls" (Oct.), a role-playing game for 1-4 players (★★★★/★★★★); "Venture" (July), a game where you control Winky on his expedition to claim treasure (this one based on the popular arcade game); "Mouse Trap" (Sept.) (★★★★½/★★★★½), a maze game based on the Exidy arcade game; "Cosmic Avenger" (July) a futuristic air and sea battle; and "Space Fury" (July) (★★★★/★★★★) features a furious space battle. Take a breath, and we'll go on...

"Carnival" (Aug.) features a shooting gallery; "Spectar" (Oct.) where you must direct an armoured car through a tangled maze, negotiating sharp turns & high speeds; "Lady Bug" (Oct.) has you directing a lady bug though a maze avoiding evil insects and poisonous skulls; and "Ripcord", a daring sky diving game.

And, saving the best for last, we cannot say enough for the Coleco version of "Zaxxon" (we saw in unfinished form) (Aug.). If what we saw is anything close to what is going to be available, this one is a must for your collection (★★★★/★★★★). They have totally captured the look and play of the arcade game, including the 3-dimensional look. As soon as we know more about the home version, we will pass it on. Another one we found very exciting was "Turbo" (★★★★/★★★★) which is included with their "expansion module #2". You will be outfitted with an actual steering wheel and gas pedal which plugs into the Colecovision master unit!! What great fun!!

All in all, we were very impressed with what Coleco is doing and we are anxiously awaiting more information and the actual unit for more complete testing.

PARKER BROTHERS (Atari-Compatible) We were impressed with what we saw. Parker Bros. is committed & obviously has some good designers. First to come, "The Empire Strikes Back" (★★★★/★★★★ scheduled for 7/1) pits the player's joystick-controlled snow sled against giant imperial walkers. "Frogger" (★★★★/★★★★ scheduled 8/1) is based on the popular arcade game. You must guide your frogs across a busy highway & a treacherous river. We enjoyed this one.

Plans for the future look promising..."Spiderman" (we did not see cartridge) based on the popular comic strip, planned for October. "Amidar" (did not see) based on the arcade game, scheduled for Nov. In December we should see "Reactor" (★★★★/★★★★--cartridge was not in finished form, however), where players are trapped inside a nuclear reactor. And, in the 1st quarter of '83, plans include "Super Cobra" (★★★★/★★★★--unfinished cartridge); "Sky Skipper" (did not see); "Tutankham" (★★★★/★★★★) a search for lost treasure in a pyramid; & "James Bond Agent 007" (no cartridge shown at show).

We feel Parker Bros. will make a positive mark on the games market.

Intellivision "Sub-Hunt" (★★★/★★) Out in very limited quantities. "Space Hawk" (★★★/★★). "Also just shipped. Scheduled for July include "Reversi" (★★★★/★★★★), a strategy game; "Frog Bog" (★★★★/★★★★--great for kids); and "Utopia" (★★★★/★★★★), another strategy game. The "Tron" games ("Deadly Disc" & "Mazatron"--both ★★★★★/★★★★) are set for August. These are based on the disney film coming soon. Scheduled for sept. Is the voice synthesis module & compatible cartridges (★★★★/★★★★); "Dungeons & Dragons" (★★★★/★★★★) & "Night Stalker" (★★★★/★★★★½). "Night Stalker" was released in June in all extremely small quantity but they are holding the main release for a national campaign in Sept. "Chess" (★★½/★★) has been bumped to November & we did not see "Pinball" or "Card Fun" at all (maybe cancelled?) We expect, as traditionally has been the case, the cartridges to be shipped in extremely small quantities nationally.

By the way, although the keyboard was once again shown at the show, still no plans for national release (only available as "tests" in Seattle & New Orleans)--we wonder, with the release of so many small, inexpensive computers, if this unit will ever make a national release!?

Intellivision has renamed their cartridges for Atari. Formerly called "Breakthrough", they will be released under the name of "M Network". The first games are scheduled for release in July. They are "Baseball" (★★/★★); "Football" (★½/★★), "Astroblast" (★★/★★) & "Space Attack" (★★/★★). You will be disappointed if you are looking for Intellivision-quality graphics & play with these games. In our opinion, these are nothing more exciting than anything on the Atari market already. They will have a "Tron" game a little later in the year, with fairly good graphics.

ACCESSORY UPDATE

Intell-a-stick is a modification for your Intellivision unit which will give you a joystick. The unit is fairly easy to install (you must remove 4 screws from your hand controller). This item will take the place of the disc on the controller. There are certain games which this item is much better suited for than others (for instance, "Space Armada", "Astrosmash", & "Star Strike"). **Warning**—if your unit is still under warranty, installing the Intell-a-stick could void the warranty.

"The Grabber" is simply a round, hard-plastic knob, (similar to a gearshift knob in a car) which are easily pushed on to the top of your Atari Joystick control to give you a better grip. Easy-on and easy-off, we found this little item helpful for additional control of your joystick. (sold in pairs.)

CRITICALLY SPEAKING...

One of Mattel's latest games, Space Hawk (★★★/★★) is something of a let-down after their exciting Star Strike (★★★★/★★½). You control a hunter alone in deep space (a vaguely man-shaped object in the center of your screen) whose chief target is the white Space Hawk. Your hunter must also contend with deadly gas bubbles, comets and amoebas by either shooting at them, thrusting away under backpack rocket power, or disappearing momentarily into hyperspace. The game is basically Astrosmash in mid-air: you may find yourself losing points faster than you gain them when you're new to the game. Sound effects are quite similar to Astrosmash, also. If you're not determined to own every new release, try a few rounds before deciding to buy this one, if at all possible.

Atari's June release, Defender, (★★★/★★★★) is a much more faithful rendition of the arcade favorite than Pac-man was. Atari has done a better job on the graphics for this one, as well. This is a good game for those who love shoot-em-ups: guide your Defender above the city, shooting madly at attacking aliens (whose off-screen movements you can monitor on the scanner). You must also prevent the aliens from kidnapping humanoids (those you don't save become deadly mutants). A popular feature of the arcade game, the "smart bomb," is part of the cartridge version. Better-than-average Atari graphics and challenging play options should make this one a favorite.

Appollo's initial releases for the Atari system, Spacechase (★/★) and Skeet Shoot (★/★) didn't exactly take the video game world by storm, but their games are improving. Lost Luggage (★★/★★) pits you against an airport baggage carousel spewing suitcases wildly which you must catch before they hit the ground, causing your "unmentionables" to float through the air. Play action is quite similar to Activision's Kaboom, although joysticks are used rather than paddles. Unfortunately, Lost Luggage lacks much of Kaboom's charm achieved through excellent graphics and sound effects. Space Cavern (★★½/★★★) is the best entry from Appollo we've seen yet. This is a genuinely fun game of the general "Space Invaders" type in which your space man must shoot at attacking Electrosauri (subterranean inhabitants of a mysterious planet). The addition of Shaggy Marsupods (which look like sinister relatives of Pac-Man) attacking randomly from the sides of the screen give the game playing an extra challenge and enough real difference from other games of the type to make this one a worthwhile addition.

The very best of the new releases are Activision's superb Starmaster and Chopper Command (both★★★★/★★★★) Starmaster is a game to challenge the most sophisticated player, with enough features to make total mastery a long-term proposition. Chopper Command offers plenty of action in a horizontally scrolling, shooting and strategy game with best-ever graphics for the Atari system and realistic sound effects. There are currently three games available with the horizontal action: Chopper Command, Defender (both excellent games) and Vidtec's (formerly U.S. Games) Space Jockey (★★½/★★½). The latter is an ill-conceived game pitting your space ship against such enemies and obstacles as jet and prop planes, balloons, tanks, trees and houses (tanks and trees in space!!--are they kidding?).

VIDEO TAKE-OUT'S THE TOP 10 SELLERS

- 1) Defender (Atari)
- 2) Demon Attack (Imagic)
- 3) Starmaster (Activision)
- 4) Chopper Command (Activision)
- 5) Yars' Revenge (Atari)
- 6) Pac-Man (Atari)
- 7) Star Voyager (Imagic)
- 8) Haunted House (Atari)
- 9) Trick Shot (Imagic)
- 10) Barnstorming (Activision)

COMING IN THE MONTHS AHEAD

- . . .book reviews
- . . .reader opinions & comments
- . . .and much, much more...

©1982 Video Take-Out. \$24 annually in U.S. funds for 12 issues, published monthly, distributed by first class mail. Outside U.S. (except APO/FPO) add \$4 annually.

Send payment to: Video Game Update, 12115 Magnolia Blvd., #126, North Hollywood, CA 91607.

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