

THE VIDEO GAME UPDATE

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A Critical Newsletter for the Serious Gamesman

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Two Dollars

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A NEW GAME CARTRIDGE

We understand the frustration of readers who expect a game out at a certain point and find that it's bumped again and again. To give you a little insight as to what happens, let's take you through the life of one fictitious game cartridge so you can understand SOME of the things that can go wrong.

Initially the designer had an idea for a great new adventure game and took the idea to his bosses who agreed that he should go to work on it immediately. So, he did and ran into problems with the program he had not anticipated. Meanwhile, the marketing and promotion department was anxious to start PRE-selling the cartridge, and pushed for a promised release date. They got that date and now start the wheels into motion. Meanwhile, the designer "a perfectionist by nature and necessity", has not been making the progress hoped for; however, by now, a release date of approximately four months down the line had already been given out and the game fanatics were ALREADY calling every store looking for it. They figure, if they've HEARD about it, it MUST be out!

The first "bump" in release schedule has already happened - and there is a problem with the packaging. The marketing department isn't quite happy with it. They are the ones paid to make certain that the game will LOOK as appealing as possible for the "spur of the moment" purchase. Bump Number Two takes place. The game consumer is getting more and more impatient because he doesn't know what's happened and there have been rumors that someone has seen the game in a store somewhere. It must be out and the retailers don't know what they are talking about!! Meanwhile, back at the game manufacturer, slow but steady progress is being made. The programmer has now worked on the game and is happy with it, presenting it to the COMPANY! It is possible at this point that the game MIGHT be "SCRAPPED" and never come out for a variety of reasons. But for this story we won't have that happen. It's a "GO"; but before going into production, testing must take place. At this point, a few minor "glitches" are found in the programming of the game. Bump Number Three is just about to take place as it goes back to the programmer for adjustment. After all, it's much less expensive to make the changes now than after production and shipping has taken place. Meanwhile, out at the retail store, the clerks are being stampeded by avid game customers "where IS the game as it was promised three months ago???" Back at the manufacturer, the programming problems are being worked out, the packaging has been approved, advertising campaigns are rolling out and everything is back on schedule (a new schedule); however, the instruction book has come back from the printer all wrong!! Bump Number Four is taking place, much to the disappointment of everyone. Meanwhile, actual production of the cartridge itself has begun. After a few units come off the line, it's evident that there is a problem with the cartridge shell. Bump Number Five and the customer cannot figure out what happened to that game that his game store told him that they were SURE they would have in stock a month ago. The stores are not notified by the manufacturer of the problems that have been encountered and the distributor doesn't know much more. He keeps asking the manufacturer's salesman who only knows it's been bumped but doesn't know (or cannot tell) why. Finally, four to five months after the initial planned release of the game, the company begins shipping. Because the game is late, and the company wants to be able to say the game is out, they ship the minute they get some off the production line instead of "stockpiling" in their warehouse until they have enough to ship the entire country. VOILA. Two or three areas and a few national accounts such as MONTGOMERY WARD STORES receive MINIMAL amounts of the game. Frenzy sets in as the gamer KNOWS it's out as he knows someone who got it somewhere. The phone calling begins - every store and mail order house he can think of only to find that the stores that got it in have sold out already! Not daunted, he continues to call but soon finds that the cartridge can't be found. So, he waits for that second shipment following a week or two later.

For the case of the fictitious cartridge, we have thrown in all sorts of delays and, in many cases, not that many things happen to a game in its early life. However, there are many factors that go into the making of a game and, frustrating as it is to you, it can help you to know that many of the problems that occur are unavoidable.

One of the things we've noted in the weeks since the CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW in January, is MANY games from SEVERAL companies have been bumped. We have to wonder if, after the various "spies" from some of the companies went to some of their competitor's booths, they realized that some of the games that were on display in January, were inferior and should be redesigned, at least to a point, to be competitive. The manufacturers realize that mistakes are extremely costly and the game buying public has more to choose from than ever before and they are not purchasing games just because they are put on the dealer's shelves.

Yes, games really are being pushed down and down the calendar and it seems as if NOBODY really knows WHEN something will release. We've noticed that Coleco is one company that slows their release schedule, but so far it has paid off in a big way. It's the Law of Supply and Demand! If they have it and you don't, you want it. Again, we say "so far" this has worked. But a more realistic way of thinking is that ColecoVision owners are SO frustrated, they just might give up the wait, and buy a computer or forget the whole thing. One of the Video Game Update owners was an avid Intellivision devotee, until he kept being told the next game would be here "maybe next week" or "perhaps next month". His own PERSONAL interest in Mattel is now gone, and his hobby is computers! It's too bad, 'cause he'll never know the voice of the "good old boy" screaming "BOMBS A-W-A-YYYYY"!

ZIMAG I WANT MY MOMMY (★★★/★★★) is a cute, single-player climbing game designed for children eight years of age and under. The child plays the role of a Teddy bear who wants his mommy because he had a bad dream. Teddy starts at the bottom of the screen with no apparent way to reach the big, red apple at the top. Above him is a series of horizontal beams, and there is a nasty dream demon traveling back and forth on each one. On each level, there are two flashing dots. If the child maneuvers Teddy over a flashing dot and pushes the firing button on his joystick, a stardust ladder will materialize. Teddy can climb up or down these ladders to reach the various levels. Once the child has built all the ladders and climbed the top one to reach the apple, Teddy appears at the bottom of the second and final screen. Mommy waits at the top of this screen, and Teddy must again build all the stardust ladders and climb to the top, while avoiding the dream demons. In both screens, mommy sends an occasional kiss bouncing back and forth across the levels. If Teddy can run into a kiss, he'll have extra strength for a few moments which will allow him to knock out a nearby dream demon. A timer at the top of the screen keeps track of how long it takes to get Teddy to his mommy. The lower the number, the better the child's score in this game. This is a fairly simple game, appropriate to the age group for which it's designed, though it may be a bit too difficult for very young children. Graphics are very colorful, and there is an appealing musical theme at the beginning of the game. Recommended. (MSR \$19.95)

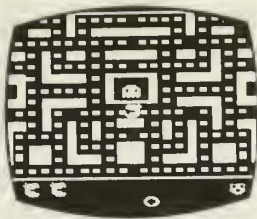
COSMIC CORRIDOR (★★½/★★★½) is a space game for one player with some features that make it a little different from the typical run of outer space shoot-em-ups. Your ship travels through a vertical corridor—"hostile space between the edges of the galaxy." The corridor has very jagged walls, and you can move your ship anywhere within the open space between them. The screen will scroll vertically in either direction while your ship is under attack from an extremely varied group of outer space monsters and alien ships which may appear from above or below your position at any time. Naturally, all of these meanies fire on your ship. Unfortunately for you, their firing patterns are anything but predictable—aliens may fire vertically, horizontally, or even diagonally, and their blasts can ricochet off the craggy walls of the corridor! Your ship has the ability to fire in any of four basic directions (a combination of joystick control and firing button), so the action can get fast and furious. There is no way you'll survive, even starting with six ships, without using the constant fire option. Because of this, we found that one of the joysticks with a firing button on top of the stick was easier to manage for this game. This is a fairly tough game even on the easiest variation, but there are three more variations that are successively more difficult. For the masochistic game player, setting the difficulty switch at "A" makes your ship much wider and easier for the aliens to hit. There is definitely enough action in this game to challenge the most experienced arcade aces. Graphics are very colorful, especially when you last long enough that the corridor turns black, but most objects are blocky. Sound effects are appropriately other-worldly. But play action is where this cartridge really shines. Many gamers will also enjoy the chart of "average" and "excellent" scores printed in the instruction booklet because they'll have an idea of how good their score really is. Recommended. (MSR \$19.95)

DISHASTER (★★½/★★) is a game based on a unique concept: the circus act in which someone keeps plates spinning atop long poles is brought to the home video screen. In this single-player game, you control a little girl who runs back and forth along the bottom of the screen, going from pole to pole as she tries to keep all the plates spinning and avoid having any of them crash to the ground. If you notice that a plate is wobbling, you must bring the girl near enough to its pole that she can reach out and start it spinning again by pressing the firing button on your joystick. If you don't quite make it in time, you can still save the plate by having the girl stand underneath to catch it. If a plate crashes, it will be replaced by one of the four spares you have in reserve at the start of the game. Points accumulate according to the length of time you can keep from breaking all your dishes. Although it's not mentioned in the instructions, you can earn more spare dishes with each 10,000 points, up to a maximum of eight spare dishes in reserve at any one time. There are four game variations giving you a choice of working with six, eight, ten or twelve spinning plates. Obviously, the game becomes more difficult the more plates you have spinning at once. In the

more difficult variations, we found it helpful to keep the firing button pressed down constantly. In this way, you can react more quickly, and you only need concentrate on positioning the little girl near the pole with the dish most likely to fall next. Graphics are serviceable, even if not too exciting. Falling plates become rectangles as they drop. The little girl looks quite good, but she affects a very strange motion in one leg whenever she starts a wobbling plate spinning again. The few musical phrases that repeat incessantly as you play become extremely annoying, to the point that we finally turned the sound off. What seemed like an interesting concept when we read the instruction booklet rapidly became boring and repetitive when we actually played the game a few times. Not recommended. (MSR \$19.95)

TANKS BUT NO TANKS (★★/★★) is a tank warfare game for one or two players with two difficulty levels for each version. The player must defend his base at bottom center of the screen from attack by enemy tanks. (When two play, they take turns defending the base.) The first setting is a maze with corners and walls to hide behind, and the enemy tanks start at the top of the screen, making their way toward your base at the bottom. (This part can take a while.) You have five tanks for defending your base, but you're definitely outnumbered by the twenty tanks the enemy is sending your way. If you're foolish enough to venture out into the maze to go after the enemy, you can be sure that one of their tanks will sneak in and annihilate your base, along with any tanks you may have in reserve. The easiest method to defend your base is to stay close to it and simply ambush the enemy tanks as they appear around corners. If you clear the first screen, the second provides only a small island in the center to hide behind. In the third screen, there are no barriers at all to the enemy's progress. At first we didn't quite understand the meaning of the game's title. Then we noticed that the instruction booklet describes the enemy's vehicles as "phantom tanks that disappear and reappear at will." It seemed to us that it was not so much a matter of the tanks disappearing and reappearing as it was of objects on the screen blinking a lot. Graphics in this game are extremely simple and rather blocky, with the exception of the tank the player controls, which looks quite good. The game may be of some interest to those who love war games, but we became bored with it after a few plays. This was at least partly because of some extended periods of time with very little to do but watch the enemy make its laborious way to the player's base. Not recommended. (MSR \$19.95)

PARKER BROTHERS STAR WARS: JEDI ARENA (★★★½/★★★½) is the second in the series of licensed games that began with the successful **EMPIRE STRIKES BACK** cartridge, and it looks like another hit. The game is based on the scene in the movie, *Star Wars*, in which Luke Skywalker begins his training as a Jedi Knight by using his Lightsaber against the Seeker, a robotic orb that dances back and forth in mid-air. The game screen presents an overhead view of the arena, with red and blue Jedi Knights wielding Lightsabers and positioned at the top and bottom of the screen, respectively, while the Seeker moves randomly across the middle of the screen. The Knights can be directed by two players with paddle controllers, or one player can challenge a computer-controlled Knight. Each Knight is shielded by a protective force field, which the opposing Knight will attempt to penetrate by directing laser bolts from the moving Seeker so that portions of the force field are knocked out. Once a laser bolt is directed through an opening in the force field, one round of combat is over. Each Jedi Knight has the opportunity to use both offensive and defensive strategy because the Lightsaber is used both for aiming laser bolts at the opponent's force field and for fending off the bolts directed at him. Periodically, energy in the Seeker builds to such a point that it literally goes wild, zooming around the arena and shooting laser bolts at both Knights. During this period, only defensive play is possible. Unlike many video games, this one offers a true ending once either Knight wins three rounds, which is signalled by the familiar *Star Wars* theme. To vary the challenge, the game may be played at any of three different speeds, and there's even a version with an Invisible Seeker. This game is an example of very good use of a movie-based concept to create an original game with effective visual and sound effects. This one is a must for all *Star Wars* fans. Recommended. (MSR \$34.95)



MS. PAC-MAN (★★★½/★★★★) is an excellent translation of the Bally Midway arcade hit that should please even the most disillusioned buyers of last year's Atari PAC-MAN. Everything about this game is an improvement over last year's cartridge, from much better graphics to faster, more responsive action. Just as in the arcade version, MS. PAC-MAN travels through four different mazes while being pursued by the ghosts—Inky, Blinky, Pinky and Sue. True to the coin-op original, even the escape tunnels on both sides of the screen occupy different positions in each maze. And the bonuses in this game are not the square, yellow "vitamins" that nourished PAC-MAN: MS. PAC-MAN gets to snack on genuine floating fruit! The succession goes from cherries to strawberries, oranges, pretzels, apples, pears and bananas, all with identical point values to their arcade counterparts. If you're really involved in a ghost chase when one of these bonuses enters the maze from a tunnel, there's no danger of its disappearing without your seeing it because each one is accompanied by a distinctive plunking sound as it bounces across the maze. Another welcome addition is the sound effect that accompanies the ghosts in their blue, vulnerable state. There is much less danger of munching a ghost just a moment too late with this audible cue. In addition to the single-player arcade version of MS. PAC-MAN, there are three easier game variations on this cartridge offering one player the chance to battle it out with one, two or three ghosts instead of the usual four. Rather than displaying game variation numbers on the screen, Atari has opted to represent the variations pictorially (cherries for the arcade version, and one, two or three bears for the easier games). This is a nice touch for small children and others who would rather not have to refer to the instruction booklet to know which variation they're about to play. While play action is delightful in MS. PAC-MAN, graphics are the real bonus for players starved for a more realistic home version of an arcade favorite. There is just the slightest amount of flickering, but it's not at all objectionable. The ghosts are well represented—even their side-to-side eye movements are visible. (Note: MS. PAC-MAN can sometimes move right through a ghost if he's not looking in her direction.) Every fruit is colorful and easily recognizable. Altogether, this is an extremely well-done game that should be a very big hit for Atari. Recommended. (MSR \$37.95)

ATARI WORKING ON SECRET PROJECT?

We are hearing from "informed sources" that Atari may be working on its best kept secret since PONG. While only some Atari people will admit to "something in the works", the FALCON PROJECT, as it seems to be known on the inside, is said to be "the most original product design to come along in over ten years"! As soon as we learn more about this interesting development at Atari, we will pass the word on to you.

A NOTE TO COLECOVISION OWNERS: we read recently in another video game publication that Tigervision cartridges cannot be played in the ColecoVision Expansion Module Number 1, which was designed to accept all games compatible with the Atari 2600. When we reviewed this module (January, 1983 issue), we tried a full complement of Atari and Atari-compatible cartridges in it, including THRESHOLD, JAWBREAKER and MARAUDER by Tigervision, and we had no problems with any of the three. We tried them again after reading this notice and still had no difficulties. As far as we can tell, Tigervision cartridges are definitely compatible with the Coleco Expansion Module Number 1.

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EXPLANATION OF RATING SYSTEM: ★★★★★=EXCELLENT ☆
 First set of stars--quality of graphics ★★★★★=GOOD ☆
 Second set of stars--quality of play action ★★=FAIR ☆
 ★=POOR ☆

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 & Intellivision-compatible games, etc. ☆

CENTIPEDE (★★★/★★★★) is another translation from the arcade and it's based on Atari's own coin-op hit. A mushroom garden cultivated by a colony of elves in an enchanted forest is infested with pests—a giant Centipede, a poison-spreading scorpion, a frisky spider, and a dive-bombing flea. You play the role of Oliver, one of the elves, who has found a magic wand that can shoot sparks to eliminate pests in the garden. In this single-player game, you start with three magic wands as a segmented Centipede starts snaking its way back and forth through the mushroom garden, gradually making its way from top to bottom of the screen. (Extra magic wands are awarded for each 10,000 points you earn, and they're announced with a musical fanfare.) You are represented by a small rectangle with complete mobility throughout the lowest quarter of the screen. The general rule as you shoot at the Centipede is to go for the head whenever possible, because it's worth more points than the body segments. As the attack waves progress, the main Centipede is composed of fewer and fewer segments, and there are more detached heads, giving you more, separate targets. If you reach Wave 8, there are nine independently moving heads! While you're busy attacking the Centipede, a spider will frequently jump onto the screen from either side, and it will bounce around, attempting to eliminate a magic wand. You can shoot the spider for a varying number of points: the closer it is when hit, the more points you'll earn. If you shoot away too many of the mushrooms in your immediate vicinity, a flea will drop straight down, planting more mushrooms as it dives. It can be shot, but it must be hit twice to make it disappear. The final pest, the scorpion, will appear only after you've reached 10,000 points. The scorpion moves straight across the screen, poisoning every mushroom it touches, unless you can knock it out with your magic wand before it exits. The Centipede will plunge straight through the garden toward you when it touches one of the white, poisoned mushrooms, so it's very important that you eliminate the scorpion whenever possible. Fortunately, each of the garden pests makes a distinctive sound when it comes on screen, so it's not too difficult to be aware of what's happening at all times. In addition to this standard arcade version of the game, there is an easy game, noted by a small teddy bear in the corner of the screen, which is suitable for beginners and small children. In the easy game, you do not lose a magic wand when a spider or flea touches you, and the Centipede always attacks in a single formation without any detached heads. Game play in the standard version is incredibly close to the original arcade game, and even the sound effects are remarkably similar to the coin-op. The fact that the game is controlled by a joystick detracts very little, although your hand will probably become tired holding the firing button down. If you have a Wico Trackball or plan to purchase the track ball that Atari will be releasing for its 2600 VCS within a few months, you can nearly duplicate the arcade action at home—movement is smoother and more controllable than with the joystick. (Your firing hand doesn't get worn out, either!) The graphics in this game are somewhat better than you might think possible, considering the limitations of the unit. There is a really terrific title screen with the Centipede undulating above a colorful Atari symbol. In the game itself, the mushrooms are represented by squares. This may be a disappointment to some, but it doesn't hurt the superb playability of the game a bit. The Centipede, spider, flea and scorpion are all very similar in appearance to their arcade counterparts, and the entire game is quite colorful. Unless you own an Atari 5200, this version is a must for fans of coin-op CENTIPEDE. Recommended. (MSR \$34.95)

Some good news for COMPUTER BUFFS (or more importantly FUTURE Computer Buffs), next month we will feature a comprehensive comparison chart for TWELVE of today's most popular home computers!!!! The highlights will include:

Built-In ROM & RAM
 Expandable RAM
 Number of colors
 Resolution (pixels)

....and that's only a PREVIEW of the chart! So.. if you or someone you know is looking for a computer, be sure he or she signs up before our next issue (April).

Intellivision

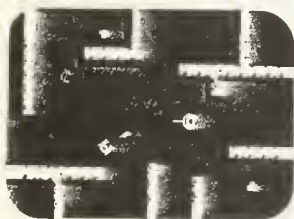
CRITICALLY SPEAKING... Intellivision-compatible

TRON SOLAR SAILER (★★★½/★★★½) is the third game from Mattel based on a theme from the Walt Disney movie, *Tron*, and this one is designed to be used with the IntelliVoice module. It's a fairly complicated single-player game in which your ultimate goal is to destroy the Master Control Program (MCP) by overloading it. The game comprises two phases, Solar Sailer and MCP Center, and your role is that of Flynn, designer of the video game in which he is now trapped. The initial

phase, Solar Sailer, is difficult to visualize because your playing field is actually a series of eight concentric rings, which are called Tracks, within the computer. (The MCP is at the center of this circle of concentric Tracks.) The circle representing the computer's interior is divided into eight pie-shaped wedges, which are called Sectors, and an Input/Output (I/O) Beam cuts through each Sector from the outermost Track 7 to the innermost Track Zero (the MCP). What you see on your screen in the Solar Sailer Phase is a small part of one Sector of a Track, with a series of right-flowing and left-flowing beams along which the Solar Sailer travels. Because the Track is circular, you can travel right or left (counter-clockwise or clockwise) to reach a particular Sector on the Track. The fact that you're looking at a flat, rectangular screen can make it difficult to visualize just where you are at any time. All Tracks are populated by Grid Bugs and cannon-firing Tanks, and you'll encounter Recognizers that have a nasty habit of picking up your Solar Sailer and depositing it in a more distant Track once you reach Track 5 or closer to the MCP. The first phase is handled in stages: the computer will give you a destination Sector and an I/O Beam access number for each stage, and you MUST remember these numbers! As your Solar Sailer moves along the beams to your destination Sector, you must avoid the fire from Tanks, and you can shoot at them and the Grid Bugs for points. Remember, too, that your Solar Sailer has a limited amount of energy—the voice of Tron will let you know your energy levels. Whenever you want to know your exact location, the voice of Yori is at your service. Once you make it to Track Zero, Phase Two begins, and the screen changes to the heart of the MCP Center. There's a definite three-dimensional effect as you look into a series of receding squares. MCP data transmissions fly out at you in the form of zeroes and ones. At the bottom of the screen is an eight-digit binary Override Code, and you must quickly capture flying digits with your maneuverable Bit and enter them into the correct display position in time to overload the MCP. The voice of Bit will tell you whether or not you've placed the correct digit in the correct location. As complicated as this may seem as you're reading it, we've given a somewhat simplified explanation of the game. Once again, this is an involving and intellectually challenging game of the type for which Mattel is well-known. Graphics are colorful and crisp for the most part, particularly in the second phase of the game. Recommended.

IMAGIC

SWORDS & SERPENTS (★★★★/★★★★) is a must for the Intellivision owner hungry for a true fantasy-adventure game—the kind with mysteries to be solved, treasures to be found, and evil creatures to be battled. Most game players are familiar with adventure games for one person, which, of course, this cartridge provides. What is truly unusual about **SWORDS & SERPENTS** is the ability to provide all this fun for two people in a cooperative game! In the single player version, you take the role of the Warrior Prince as he searches the four levels of the Fortress of the Sinister Serpent

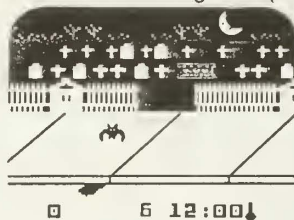


SWORDS & SERPENTS

(formerly the ancestral castle of the Prince's family) to find treasures, to battle Phantom Knights and Red Sorcerers, and, with luck, to confront the deadly Serpent himself. Armed only with a flashing sword and magic armor, the Warrior Prince must wander through seemingly endless corridors and chambers, descending to lower levels when he finds the key and the staircase. Each time the prince descends, the Serpent sends out more Phantom Knights and Red Sorcerers, and the quest

becomes more difficult. As he Prince gathers treasures, he must periodically return to the first level to deposit them in the treasure chest, for he can carry but six treasures at a time. In the two-player versions, the Warrior Prince is joined by Nilrem, faithful Wizard to the Royal Court now in exile. The Wizard can cast magical spells to assist the Prince, and he is able to read scrolls scattered throughout the four levels of the Fortress. Some of these scrolls will transport both Wizard and Prince magically to another section of the same level, and others contain various magical spells, which Nilrem can add to his arsenal. (The Warrior Prince can also read the scrolls, but he cannot acquire any of the magical spells.) This long-awaited game fulfills every promise of its advance billing, and then some—we were totally enchanted with it. The instruction booklet provides just enough information to get you started in this game, but not so much as to give it all away. A map is provided, but only for the first level, and there's a great deal you'll have to discover for yourself. The graphics with their overhead view of the Fortress are excellent, and there are some great sound effects, such as the metallic clank when swords clash. This is a game to return to again and again, each time for many hours of solid, intellectual gaming fun. Recommended. (MSR \$34.95)

DRACULA (★★★½/★★★½) is a great idea in role-playing: you have a chance to star in your own horror story! In the single-player version, you play Count Dracula as he attempts to bite enough victims to keep his strength up during the time between midnight and six a.m., when he must return to the grave. (Two people can play separately, taking turns playing Dracula, or they may decide to play different roles at the same time, one being Dracula while the other portrays Dracula's intended victim.) Whichever version you play, the scene opens at midnight in a graveyard. Dracula's crypt opens to the accompaniment of the Bach musical theme we all associate



with monster movies, and the Count transforms himself into a bat. When the bat reaches the sidewalk that passes by the cemetery, he turns back into Dracula and strolls along in search of victims to bite. Fortunately for him, there are plenty of insomniac joggers around, though they're not always easy to catch. When Dracula runs out of available joggers, he can knock on the doors of houses which face the sidewalk, and a few inhabitants will be foolish enough to come to the door. Dracula can return to his coffin anytime he's ready, but if he can do so *after* he has bitten the number of victims allotted for that night and *before* five a.m., there is a bonus score added to your total. (The sky turns pink at five as a warning that six a.m. is approaching soon.) On his way back to the cemetery, Dracula can be slowed down if the white wolf bites him. If the vulture swoops down and catches him while he's in his bat form, the game is over. Sounds fairly easy so far, doesn't it? It isn't really tough until cops enter the game, but at least you'll get the warning of a whistling tune just before one appears. The cops give Dracula a hard time by throwing stakes at him to slow him down, and they can really make pests of themselves! Dracula has a special trick for the cops, though. He can turn one of his victims into a zombie for a short time and then direct the zombie to go after a cop. Directing both Dracula and zombie at the same time requires using both controllers, but it's not difficult once you've done it a few times. The game becomes progressively more difficult each night Dracula survives, as his quota of victims increases and the obstacles (cops, vultures and white wolves) appear more frequently. This is a delightful game to play, and its effect is not particularly violent in spite of the subject. Overall, the graphics and sound effects are quite good: the houses and cemetery are well done, and the occasional forks of jagged lightning across the night sky followed by thunderclaps add just the right ominous touch. Only Dracula and the vulture leave something to be desired graphically because they're a bit blocky, but they're acceptable. Recommended. (MSR \$34.95)

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COMPUTER GAME UPDATE



In a move that will further insure the future of the 2600, Atari has announced the introduction of MY FIRST COMPUTER, a keyboard that connects OVER the existing VCS (see pictures above). With a suggested retail of under \$89, this could become an ideal way for the average family to start their young ones into the wonderful, and not-so-scary, world of computers. Our suspicion is that this is a better way yet for the computer-resistant adult to become comfortable. The specifications on this small unit are impressive for its cost. It offers 8K RAM* (see below) which is more than the computers Atari is positioning themselves against (Timex-Sinclair 1000 with 2K RAM; TI 99/2 with 4.2K; and Commodore VIC-20 with 5K). Additional features include a 56-key typewriter style keyboard (upper and lower case), built-in BASIC computer language, a full-color display (you WILL need a color TV), and an EXPANSION PORT which will accept additional memory (up to 32K).

Several low-cost peripherals such as printers and disc drives are planned down the line.

**-For those of you not into computer jargon, RAM is "random access memory", as opposed to ROM "read-only memory". You could consider any electronic device with a FIXED memory, such as a calculator, to be ROM. It will perform only what the designer told it to do. RAM, on the other hand, is the capability to allow variables and store the variables into memory banks. With the calculator, the device is ROM, you (the operator) are the RAM. RAM, as it pertains to computers, should be as HIGH a number as possible. The "K" which follows means THOUSAND.*

For those of who DO understand computer language, we are starting to give some of the young ones (who are just now learning about computers) a lay of the land with a moderate amount of explanation. Please bear with us as we stop once in a while to explain what we mean to the novice.

Once you connect MY FIRST COMPUTER to your 2600, you can continue to play your standard VCS-compatible games, as well as a new library of computer software titles featuring enhanced graphics and game play. At this point, Atari has not announced any of the software titles or availability; however, a wide variety is under development, with emphasis on home management, education, personal development and a new line of games. Those games promise enhanced graphics because of the additional memory built into the computer. Through its expansion port, the computer can connect with a standard portable cassette recorder to store and recover data. The system is also designed to work with MODEMS* and other peripherals. However, its main purpose at this time is to introduce the computer to the novice. By the way, delivery to your local dealers SHOULD begin sometime in the Fall.

**-A MODEM is a device which hooks your computer into a regular telephone line whereby you can speak with other computers, as well as gaining access to services such as THE SOURCE®, a service where you subscribe and, via telephone MODEM, receive news stories, features, electronic mail and even classified shopping from your home computer terminal!*

Atari also has plans to introduce a keyboard unit for the 5200 later this year. No details or delivery date is available at this time.

TEXAS INSTRUMENTS ADAPTOR PROBLEM

Texas Instruments has discovered that under "certain unusual conditions" there is a possibility that the TI 99-4A AC9500 transformer could fail, posing the threat of electrically shocking the user or damaging the computer. Current owners of the computer will be located by warranty cards and will be sent a transformer adaptor cord that will protect the user from possible hazards. All TI 99-4A computers in retail stores will be equipped with an adaptor cord and new transformer and a green label will be put on the box to let the purchaser know that the problem has been taken care of. Shipments of new computers will be delayed while the company equips them with the adaptor cord or new transformer. If you own a TI 99-4A and did not turn in your warranty card (or have moved), you can call any of the following toll-free numbers to receive your adaptor: 1-800-858-4565; 1-800-527-3550; 1-800-858-4069; 1-800-858-1802.

COMPUTER SOFTWARE NEWS

GAMESTAR is announcing several new sports-orientated computer games for the Atari 4/800. For those of you not familiar with the company, they specialize in sports games for computers and currently have BAJA BUGGIES, a 3-D racing game, available. Available shortly will be STARBOWL FOOTBALL (24K cassette/disk) where you can play directly against the computer or another opponent. The game will feature 196 play possibilities, penalties included, with a full kicking game. (MSR \$31.95) Also planned is STAR LEAGUE BASEBALL (24K) where you will have a one or two player option. (MSR \$31.95). Later in the year, they will introduce the "ultimate sports fan", DUTCH DOOGAN. Planned as a series, "ADVENTURES OF DUTCH DOOGAN", it will be geared to older teens and adults. The first in the series will feature Dutch Doogan as SCUBA DOOGA DOO, scuba diving and the like in the Bermuda Triangle. Extensive use of animation is planned.

MICROCOMPUTER GAMES is coming with a new Atari 4/800 game shortly. It's about a "loveable moth", and it's called GYPSY. In this one, you're a happy-go-lucky bug in the garden of your dreams and you've spotted a particularly delicious tree in which to settle down and do some serious munching. But look out! Before you have a chance to sink your teeth into the foliage, be prepared to face enemies on all quarters. Nearby grazes the infamous Flying Ant of Tasmania. He's busy at his own work. If you disturb him, he will give you a nasty bite. And look out for the Poisonous Mushrooms at the foot of the tree. Also in pursuit is the Fandango Bee and the Locknest Spider who spends most of his time dangling from his sticky silk thread. Eat as long as you can as each leaf section is worth points. The nectar from the flowers of Ook are also worth points. This game will be made available in 32K diskette at \$26.00 and 16K cassette at \$21.00. A version for the TI99/4A will be available later in the Spring.

Three new Atari 4/800 compatible games are coming shortly from PDI (Program Design Inc.). The first, CLIPPER: AROUND THE HORN IN 1850 finds you sailing a great Clipper Ship from New York to San Francisco with all the dangers inherent in clipper travel in the 1800's. You can maneuver your sail up and down, avoid storms, underground reefs and potential mutiny if you didn't bring enough supplies aboard. Voice narration is optional in this disk and cassette game.

ANDROID will be made available in 40k disk only and is a five level maze game which promises to be very complicated. With bombs hidden in the walls (not to mention the slime, earthquakes, and more) you will have to make your way through trying to pick-up treasures. This one also has optional voice.

STAR CRYSTALS is an adventure game which takes place on the distant planet of Croga. Their scientists have discovered crystals which could solve the Earth's energy problems crystals that can capture and greatly amplify solar energy, producing abundant, clean and safe power. Intricate defense systems have been built on the planet's surface to protect the underground crystals. It's your mission to overpower those systems and maneuver a spaceship through the caverns within the planet. Once you obtain a crystal, you must carry it back to the surface. The more crystals you retrieve, the more difficult the game becomes. The cassette version requires 16K, and the disk version requires 24K. (MSR: 29.95)

New from EPYX is JUMPMAN. The player takes the role of Jupiter Jumpman, last-resort secret weapon against the enemy Alienators who have infiltrated Jupiter headquarters and planted bombs on all 30 levels. The player must defuse the bombs with wit, speed and only seven lives. Scaling ladders, girders and ropes that provide access, you face obstacles such as bullets, robots, dragons birdmen, flying saucers, and dozens of other perils. Even if you manage to avoid THESE obstacles, crumbling girders and vanishing escape routes may block the goal. The game has five difficulty options and eight speed adjustments. An optional random mode can be used to increase the difficulty by preventing the player from knowing which of the 30 levels he has to scale next. JUMPMAN will be available soon on 32K disk for the Atari 4/800 and later this Spring for the Commodore 64.

CRITICALLY SPEAKING. . .

INTELLIVISION-COMPATIBLE

COLECOVISION

COLECO **MOUSE TRAP (★★★★/★★½)** is based on the Exidy arcade game in which you control a cheese-chomping mouse that runs around a maze while being chased by cats and an occasional hawk. Four skill levels are available for one or two players, with the main difference between levels being the speed and intelligence of the pursuing cats. The mouse is directed through the maze by the control disc, and three buttons on the keypad open and close sets of color-keyed doors in the maze. Once you become really familiar with this game, it's great fun to trap cats behind changeable doors and make good your escape at the last possible moment. A fourth button is used to change your mouse into a dog so that he can bite cats. (This is only possible if your mouse has collected one or more bones in the maze.) In all but the easiest skill level, a hawk (complete with appropriate birdlike sounds) flies through the maze periodically, and your only defense is avoidance. In the center of the maze, there is an "IN" box which is useful for escaping the hawk, because your mouse will be instantly transported to one of the maze corners if he enters this box. The "IN" box can also be useful for escaping from cats, but there is the danger of being transported to a corner where more cats are waiting. Each maze has a bonus prize for extra points, and there is also a bonus for completing each maze. This is a very impressive game graphically, with its very bright colors and well-drawn characters. The musical background is pleasant enough at first, but it becomes monotonous during long playing sessions. (Coleco has thoughtfully provided a button on the keypad to turn off he music.) Where this game really falls down is in play action. Maze games are definitely not a strong suit for the Intellivision, and MOUSE TRAP is no exception. We tried playing this game both with the standard Intellivision disc controller and with one of the add-on joystick-type controllers, and it was a frustrating experience with either. We found that movement was often sluggish, and sometimes it seemed nearly impossible to direct our mouse into the right opening or keep it from sliding right into a cat. We rated the earlier Coleco versions of MOUSE TRAP for their own and the Atari 2600 systems very highly, so the fault may lie more with the Intellivision system than with Coleco's programmers. Nonetheless—not recommended.

COLECO **DONKEY KONG, JR. (★★★★/★★★★)** is more than just a worthy successor to DONKEY KONG's immense popularity—it's a better game game with enough complexity to keep the player interested over a longer period of time. Based on the arcade sequel by Nintendo, DONKEY KONG, JR. for ColecoVision loses very little in translation to the home video screen. In this game sometimes referred to as "Mario's Revenge," the big, bad ape from the first game has been captured and caged by mean Mario, and Junior tries his best to save papa. In the Coleco version, there are three basic screens that are repeated in varying order: a jungle mission in which Junior swings from vines, a chain mission in which he pushes keys up to unlock portions of papa's cage, and a jump board mission with moving platforms and chains. The only screen from the original arcade game that's missing here is "Mario's Den," but the home version is still plenty challenging without it. In the first screen, Junior climbs vines one or two at a time, hops between islands, and attempts to avoid the menacing Snapjaws that Mario sends to keep him from reaching the key at the top of the screen. The key unlocks papa's cage and sends Junior on to the next screen where he must climb hanging chains to gradually unlock his father's cage. In this setting, the Snapjaws are joined by the Nitpicker Birds that fly back and forth across the screen, and it can be difficult keeping Junior out of their way. Fortunately, in both the first and second screens, fruit hangs on some of the vines and chains, and Junior can bonk these pests with a well-timed touch of the right fruit. If you survive these screens, Junior returns to the vine screen with the addition of a few more opponents—grab that key once more and it's on to the jump board mission. In this setting there are stationary and moving platforms, as well as chains, some of which move on a conveyor belt, and flying Stookybirds get in Junior's way. In all but the easiest skill level, the Stookybirds drop eggs in an attempt to impede Junior's progress. This screen takes some studying to figure the logistics of just how you're going to be able to get Junior to the top to rescue dear old dad, but it can be done! In all screens, Junior has only a limited time to reach his goal, so there's plenty of pressure on the poor gamer. We like this game a lot more than DONKEY KONG, if only because Junior has a more varied repertoire of moves at his command than Mario did in the first game. Junior not only climbs and jumps, but also swings gracefully between vines or chains. The degree of animation used in Junior's moves is truly amazing, making the game almost as much fun to watch as it is to play. This character comes very close to the feeling of a good cartoon hero. Graphics are colorful, and the familiar music from the arcade version is present. Altogether, DONKEY KONG, JR. is an excellent game and probably one of the very best of the climbing type available for any home game system at this time. Recommended.

COMING NEXT MONTH...

EXCLUSIVE VIDEOGAME COMPARISON CHART

COMPUTER BUYING GUIDE
REVIEWS OF MANY NEW GAMES
...plus some super surprises!



VECTREX continues to quietly make important inroads in the video game business as they have announced several new innovations for their unit. First, a full stroke keyboard with "user friendly" keys for easy data entry will be coming later in the year. Initially six programs will be made available for the keyboard: BASIC Programming; Learn LOGO; Develop Your Own Video Games; Music Basics and Composition; The Solar System; and World Geography. In addition, a SUPERCHARGER is planned. This unit gives added expandable memory (RAM & ROM) that converts Vectrex into a high powered computer. By January, 1984, word processing will be added to the unit capable of generating a full 8-1/2 x 11" page of text (80 columns by 40 lines) suitable for home use. Also by January, look for their Drawing set which will print graphics for business, engineering, scholastic, and other purposes. By the way, the Touch Screen we talked about in the February issue will not be available until SOMETIME in 1984.

And, as you look for the new Vectrex cartridges to be released over the next couple of months, note that there are two title changes. WEB WARP has been renamed WEB WARS, and PINBALL has been renamed SPINBALL.

Our "Flash from Coleco" drew tremendous phone calls over the past couple of weeks and it's obvious from those phone calls that there is a bit of confusion regarding the Super Module No. 3, wafers and current cartridges. If you are happy with your ColecoVision now (and the system is terrific the way it is), don't even worry about the Super Module. If, however, you are an arcade fanatic and want to have the "ultimate" arcade experience at home, then you should purchase the Module (available around Fall) and then purchase the wafers. This is where our readers are confused. To use the Super Module and the wafers, you do NOT use your existing cartridges. In other words, if you have ZAXXON now, but later buy the module and the SUPER ZAXXON wafer, you will NO LONGER use the cartridge. You will NOT have to purchase BOTH the cartridge and wafer to use the module, only the wafer. Also, not all ColecoVision games will be made into wafers. The company will make decisions as to which will gain the most graphically (and gameplay-wise) and those will make it to wafer. If you plan to purchase the Super Module, you may want to hold off buying some of the cartridges at this point as you could end up with a "double" purchase. By the way, there has been one major change regarding the release of the Super Module. Originally plans called for SUPER DONKEY KONG and SUPER GORF to be packaged with the unit. Coleco feels it will be a more exciting package by including SUPER BUCK ROGERS PLANET OF ZOOM and SUPER GORF instead. We have one serious concern about this new "module and wafer" library. As most of you know, Coleco has been seriously behind schedule in their cartridge releases (as we go to print the only new game which has released since TURBO is DONKEY KONG JR. which has shipped in VERY small quantities) and our obvious question is how will they handle cartridges for ColecoVision, wafers for the Super Module AND GEMINI (see February issue) and not fall EVEN FURTHER BEHIND?

In all regards, it appears Coleco will at least have to hire on a larger staff or farm out more of the work to keep everyone (especially YOU, the ColecoVision owner) as happy as possible. It really would be nice to see them start making their target dates (or coming close).



Atari will be introducing the ACCESSORY TEST CONSOLE shortly to be found at many Atari dealerships where you can go in and, at no charge, check out your Atari system for problems. In addition, they will have a JOYSTICK REPAIR KIT available at a suggested retail of \$4.50 so you can fix your Atari joystick yourself after the heat of battle.

Meanwhile, an update on the various controllers coming for the Atari 2600 and 5200. The 5200 TRAK-BALL has been moved up to a late March release and the 2600 version is still planned for June. REMOTE CONTROL joysticks are planned for the 2600 in March (retail 79.95). Playable up to twenty feet from the VCS, the remote system consists of left and right joysticks, each on separate frequencies transmitting signals to the VCS for fast response. We saw a prototype of this remote unit and we were somewhat surprised to find that the unit looks identical to the Cynex GAME MATE 2 which we reviewed in our December, '82 issue!

Coming for children three to seven, is the ATARI KIDS' CONTROLLER, a 5 x 7 keyboard. The twelve keys are large and easy to press and feature overlays for the various Children's Computer Workshop games (see previews on Page 6 of our February issue). To give you a sense of how the overlays work, in OSCAR'S TRASH RACE, the overlay simply consists of pictures of four trash cans color-coded to match the cans on the screen, making it easy for the child to grasp the relationship between the controller and the game. This unit is very easy for the child to hold in both hands and gives them a good introduction to controllers without totally frustrating them.

In addition to tie-ins with Peanuts and Walt Disney characters, Atari has also signed an agreement with Henson Associates, the creators of the MUPPETS. Watch for Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy, among other popular Muppet characters!

Another new game company on the horizon, this one is **THE GREAT GAME COMPANY** who have licensed a number of Television game shows for eventual translation to the video game screen. Among those titles planned are THE JOKER'S WILD, FAMILY FEUD, WHEEL OF FORTUNE, JEOPARDY, TIC TAC DOUGH, THE PRICE IS RIGHT, and PAS-SWORD PLUS. Initial plans call for 2600-compatible cartridges and you won't see any on their dealer's shelves until at least this Summer. In speaking with a representative from that company, The VIDEOGAME UPDATE was told the first two games planned are FAMILY FEUD and THE PRICE IS RIGHT. They hope to introduce some of the same games later on for ColecoVision, Atari 4/800, and the TI 99/4A.

Those of you interested in purchasing Intellivision-compatible games made by Coleco will notice a recent addition: these games now carry a warning sticker stating "Not for Use with Intellivision II." We spoke with a Coleco spokesperson who reaffirmed that these cartridges are NOT compatible with the newer Intellivision unit. We were not able to learn from Coleco the exact reason for this incompatibility. We were told repeatedly that Coleco is "looking into the problem." We also checked with Mattel, and they are aware of the problem. In fact, Mattel has just completed testing of ALL existing Mattel cartridges plus Intellivision-compatible cartridges made by Activision, Imagic and Coleco in the Intellivision II, and the Coleco games are the only ones that do not work in the unit. As soon as we know more, we'll let you know.

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AVAILABILITY UPDATE

(based on projected release dates by mfrs. May change without notice)

ATARI 2600-COMPATIBLE

FEBRUARY

x-Advs of Tron (MNTK)
x-Air Raiders (MNTK)
Cosmic Corridor (ZIM)
x-Crypts of Chaos (FDX)
Dishaster (ZIM)
x-G.I. Joe (PB)
I Want My Mommy (ZIM)
x-Jedi Arena (PB)
x-Ms. Pac-Man (AT)
x-Phoenix (AT)
X-RealSports Football(AT)|
x-Sequest (ACTV)

MARCH

Centipede (AT)
Earth Dies Screaming(FDX)
Entombed (USG)
Frankenstein's Monster(DA)
Immies and Aggies (ZIM)
Kypheus (AP)
Dink (ACTV)
Piece 'D Cake (USG)
Pizza Chef (ZIM)
Polaris (TGV)
Pompeii (AP)
Raft Rider (USG)
Shootin' Gallery (IMGC)
Sky Skipper (PB)
Squosh (AP)

APRIL

Escape From Argos (IMGC)
Flash Gordon (FDX)
M*A*S*H (FDX)
Meltdown (FDX)
Miner 2049er (TGV)
RealSports Soccer (AT)
RealSports Tennis (AT)
Strawberry Shortcake (PB)

MAY

Dolphin (ACTV)
Fall Guy (FDX)
Grovers Music Maker (AT)
Keystone Kapers (ACTV)
Mr. Bill (DA)
9 TD 5 (FDX)
Springer (TGV)

SECOND QUARTER

Burgertime (MNTK)
Enduro (ACTV)
Galaxian (AT)
Jungle Hunt (AT)
Kangaroo (AT)
Plague Attack (ACTV)
Robotank (ACTV)
Super Cobra (PB)

THIRD QUARTER

Dig Dug (AT)

INTELLIVISION-COMPATIBLE

FEBRUARY

x-Swords & Serpents (IMGC)
x-Tron Solar Sailer (MAT)

MARCH

Chess (MAT)
Dracule (IMGC)
Ice Trek (IMGC)
Nova Blast(IMGC)
Vectron (MAT)

APRIL

Frogger (PB)
M*A*S*H (FDX)
Meltdown (FDX)
Truckin' (IMGC)

MAY

Fall Guy (FDX)
Mission X (MAT)
Tropical Paradise(IMGC)
9 To 5 (FDX)
Safecracker (IMGC)
Shootin Gallery(IMGC)
White Water (IMGC)

ATARI 5200-COMPATIBLE

FEBRUARY

x-Centipede
x-Countermeasure

MARCH

Qix

APRIL

RealSports Baseball
RealSports Tennis

SECOND QUARTER

Dig Dug
Jungle Hunt
Kangaroo
Pole Position
Space Dungeon
Vanguard

COLECOVISION

In an attempt to get release dates from Coleco, we have been told only "first or second half of the year" on all new games. We hope this does not mean the ColecoVision owner will have to wait months for each new game. We also assume Coleco would attempt to please the ColecoVision OWNER before the Atari or Intellivision owner

FEBRUARY

x-Donkey Kong Jr.(CDL)

MARCH

Earth Dies Screaming(FDX)
Spacemaster X-7 (FDX)

APRIL

M*A*S*H (FDX)

MAY

Fall Guy (FDX)
9 To 5 (FDX)

ODYSSEY

MARCH

Atlantis (IMGC)
Demon Attack (IMGC)

ATARI 4/800

FEBRUARY

Cat-nip (ZIM)
Collision course (ZIM)
x-Demon Attack (IMGC)
Gypsy (MIC)
Nineball (ZIM)
Dix (AT)
River Rat (ZIM)

MARCH

Android (PDI)
Boulders & Bombs(CBS)
Clipper: Around the Horn(PDI)
E.T. Phone Home (AT)
Jumpman (EPYX)
Kerplow (ZIM)
Mountain King (CBS)
Duest for Inca Gold (ZIM)
Starbown Football (GAM)
Star Crystals (PDI)
Time Trials (CBS)

APRIL

Dig Dug (AT)

SECOND QUARTER

Scuba Dooba Doo (GAM)
Star League Baseball (GAM)

VIC-20

FEBRUARY

Demon Attack (IMGC)

MAY

Atlantis (IMGC)

Company Name Codes:

ACTV - Activision
AP - Apollo
AT - Atari
CBS - CBS Video Games
CDL - Coleco
CVD - CommaVid
DA - Data Age
EPYX - Epyx
FOX - 20th Century Fox
GAM - Gamestar
GGC - Great Game Company
IMGC - Imagic
MAT - Mattel
MIC - Microcomputer games
MNTK - M Network
ODY - Odyssey
PB - Parker Bros.
PDI - Program Design Inc
SPCV - Spectravision
STP - Starpath
TEL - Telesys
TGV - Tigervision
ULV - Ultravision
USG - U.S. Games
VEC - Vectrex
VV - Venturevision
ZIM - Zimag

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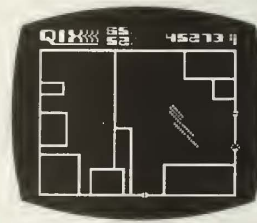
QIX (ATARI 5200)
DONKEY KONG JR (COL)
CENTIPEDE (ATARI 2600)
SWORDS & SERPENTS (IMGC)
MS. PAC-MAN (ATARI 2600)

Additional information on Coleco's SUPER GAME MODULE No. 3

VIDEO TAKE-OUT'S TOP 10 SELLERS

1. MS. PAC-MAN (AT 2600)
2. RIVER RAID (ACTV-2600)
3. CENTIPEDE (AT 5200)
4. PHOENIX (AT 2600)
5. DONKEY KONG JR (COL)
6. REALSPORTS FOOTBALL (AT 2600)
7. SPIDER FIGHTER (ACTV-2600)
8. ESCAPE FROM MINDMASTER (STP-2600)
9. DRAGONFIRE (IMGC-2600)
10. DEFENDER (AT 5200)

CRITICALLY SPEAKING... ATARI 5200-COMPATIBLE



QIX (★★★★★½) brings the Taito arcade game home for owners of the Atari 5200. This version offers four skill levels for one or two players, with two levels easier than the arcade game and one more difficult than the coin-op. QIX is a video game quite unlike any other—no aliens to shoot, no mazes to travel, no treasures to find, and nothing to climb. The field of play is a blank rectangle in which a multi-colored, whirling helix (the Qix) roams around. (There are two Qix in the rectangle from the third game screen on.) You control a marker with the ability to block out portions of the rectangle. As your marker claims an area, it is colored in blue if you're drawing fast lines, in brown if you're drawing slow lines. (Slow draws earn more points than fast draws.) If the Qix intersects one of your lines (called Stix) before you've enclosed an area, you lose one of your markers. Depending on the skill level at which you're playing, there is a variety of other opponents you'll run into. The Spax travel around the perimeter of the screen, and collision with one of them will also cost you a marker. After a period of time, the Spax can become Super Spax, which will follow your marker by venturing onto your Stix—watch out, because collision is deadly! The Fuse will crackle its way toward your marker should you hesitate in your drawing of lines, so you can't even stop to think! In addition to all these opponents, you must deal with a time limit on each screen, the amount of time varying with skill level. At each skill level, you're given a "threshold" score to beat, expressed as a percentage of the total area available. The threshold score varies from 50% at the easiest level to 85% at the most difficult (75% in the arcade version). Initially, this struck us as a silly game, but we rapidly became hooked as we explored various strategies for dealing with the Qix, Spax, Super Spax and Fuse. We also found that the idea of drawing on our TV screen became very appealing. Graphics are somewhat spartan, as they are in the original coin-op game—the arcade graphics are duplicated beautifully in this version. The game grows on you and becomes addictive. Of course, one of the great advantages is saving all those quarters! Recommended. (MSR \$31.95)

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