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VIDEOGAMES

What's new in home videogames

DANNY GOODMAN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

THIS YEAR HAS SEEN THE INTRODUCTION of a confusing array of new home-videogame systems, as well as enhancements for existing systems, calculated to attract literally millions of new players to the home-videogame market. If you are one of those facing the potentially emotional decision of which system to buy, this new monthly column will be just what you're looking for. In this first one, we will look at some of the things to consider as you twiddle the controllers at the video counter.

Hardware

Game players today demand more realism from their systems. For sports and similar games that means the ability to input more strategy as well as realistic character, playing-field, and action graphics. In arcade-type games, players demand graphics that approach the color and detail of the high-resolution coin-operated units. While the home color-TV receiver cannot match the resolution of an arcade monitor, a home TV does an admirable graphics job with systems like Coleco's (200 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010) *Colecovision*, Video Technology's (68 Sung Wong Toi Road, Tokuwan, Kowloon, Hong Kong) *Creativision* (which was scheduled for December 1982 introduction), Arcadia's (324 Martin Ave., Santa Clara, CA 95050) *Supercharger* for the Atari (1265 Borregas Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086) *VCS*, and Atari's *5200* deluxe system. By way of comparison, the *5200* has the same graphics resolution as Atari's *400/800* home-computer systems.

One system that can produce true arcade-type graphics is the cartridge-programmable *Vectrex* vector-scanning home-game from General Consumer Electronics (233 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401). That is the only home system, at least until now, capable or reproducing the outline-formed characters used in such arcade games as *Asteroids* and *Tempest*. To accomplish that feat, the game uses its own vector-scanning video monitor (more on the *Vectrex* system next month).

The newer systems all use all-in-one hand controllers. As the *Intellivision* controllers proved, a keypad used in conjunction with a joystick or direction-control disk, is an effective way of communicat-

ing with the game computer. The Atari *5200* also allows you to vary speed using the joystick; for instance, the faster you push the joystick to the right the faster your screen character moves to the right and so on. The effect here is similar to using an arcade-style track ball (such as those found in games like *Centipede* or *Missile Command*).

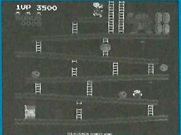
All manufacturers now realize that the success of their systems depends largely on the amount of games available for it. And if there is one undisputable fact about home-videogames, it is that there is more support for the Atari *VCS* than any other system (and perhaps more than for all of them combined!). The reason is simple: game-cartridge developers have many millions more hungry *VCS*-users to satisfy than users of any other home system. But that large existing library can prove to be a considerable obstacle to any new system that is introduced. After all, few buyers would be willing to invest in a new system with little support, considering what else is on the market. What Coleco has done to offset that problem is come out with a system adapter that will allow their *Colecovision* system to use Atari *VCS* cartridges, and Atari is planning to introduce a similar adapter for their own *5200* system sometime this year.

The introduction of those adapters makes sense for many reasons. First of all, any new system will have only a modest offering of its own games at the outset—one company can do only so much in a limited time. With adapters, the unit is immediately usable with an already existing library of cartridges. Next, for the game owner wanting to upgrade to a more advanced system, a substantial investment in game cartridges (usually much more than the actual cost of the console) won't be wasted when switching to a new unit. If all home game-consoles featured adapters for most other systems, the consoles could compete solely on the basis of features such as controllers, computer add-ons, creative graphics, sound effects, and the like.

There is also suddenly an interest in serving what is known as the videogame hardware aftermarket—otherwise known as add-ons for your videogame. Electronic speech modules (*Intellivision*, *Odyssey 2*, and Atari *5200*) and hand controllers of all kinds (mostly for the *VCS*) are already

joining game organizer-type cases and cartridge racks on your dealer's shelves. Many of the newer systems provide expansion connectors for future add-ons. As with computers, expandability means that a system will be able to grow with you, as well as with changing technology.

**Coleco's
Donkey Kong
for Colecovision**



CIRCLE 101 ON FREE INFORMATION CARD

	Donkey Kong	Coleco								
GRAPHICS	[Progress bar: 10/10]									
SOUND	[Progress bar: 10/10]									
EASE OF LEARNING	[Progress bar: 10/10]									
CHALLENGE	[Progress bar: 10/10]									
VALUE	[Progress bar: 10/10]									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Poor	Fair				Good			Excellent	

Coleco's *Colecovision* comes packaged with the home version of the most popular non-combat arcade game since *Pac-Man*: *Donkey Kong*. The game looks simple—move your mustache character, named Mario, up various ladders and ladders to rescue a "fair damsel" who has been abducted by the fierce Kong. But successful execution requires split-second coordination, plus an eye for mazes. In that regard, Coleco's cartridge is no different from the original.

Players of the arcade game will be quick to tell Coleco's from the original, however. For one thing, there are only three different boards, instead of four (the easy Mud Factory scene is gone). But

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VIDEOGAMES

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even so, the game is perhaps the most true-to-arcade home-videogame cartridge around.

The graphics are outstanding. You not only can see Mario's mustache, but the lattice work in the bright pink girders is crisp, and the color variations and contrast (the black background helps), like Mario's brown coveralls, and the white streaks to indicate cylindrical objects, are unlike that found on any other home game I've seen. And the sound package includes the familiar background rhythm, whistle-like tune when Mario hops over barrels, and more.

One or two (alternating) can play at a time and there are four levels of difficulty; the easiest one starts you off with five Marios, the rest start with three. Completing skill level one (the easiest one) requires rescuing the girl five times. The sequence of board scenes is Ramps, Rivets, Elevators, Rivets, and Elevators. At level one you also get 1000 extra bonus points, which gives you more time to navigate the trickier obstacles (the bonus points decrement as time ticks away) The game can be reset from the hand controllers.

While it's not hard to learn what *Donkey Kong* is all about, the newcomer, nevertheless, will need a lot of practice to get the hang of running and jumping over the moving and stationary obstacles (make a mistake and you lose your Mario). You'll also discover several areas that can be tricky; especially watch out for the edges of girders (Mario can easily fall off to his demise) or the area around Kong.

The Elevators board is the most difficult to get used to. Arcaders may be interested to know that the bouncing hammer obstacles are replaced in the home version by an extra flame at the girder levels surrounding the girl.

While some of the charm of the original—like Kong's grabbing the girl between boards and watching the girders collapse in the Rivets board—had to be sacrificed for the smaller memory of a home game, Coleco managed to keep some of the "cute" effects (Mario can pick up the girl's scattered personal belongings for bonus points) and interest of the original where it counts; while you're playing the game. This first offering for *Colecovision* is certainly a good omen for the rest of their library.

**Activision's
Pitfall!
for Atari**



CIRCLE 102 ON FREE INFORMATION CARD

Pitfall!	Activision									
GRAPHICS										
SOUND										
EASE OF LEARNING										
CHALLENGE										
VALUE										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent			

I wouldn't have believed it could come from an Atari VCS if I hadn't been watching it with my own eyes: a comic-book human character is running across a jungle-like scene, swinging on vines over a pond, leaping over pit-like traps, climbing up and down ladders, and finally tip-toeing across a lagoon on the heads of hungry crocodiles.

The game is *Pitfall!* from Activision (3255-2 Scott Blvd., Santa Clara, CA 95051), and the character's name is Pitfall Harry. What Harry is doing is searching the jungle for as many of the lost treasures of Enarc as he can in twenty minutes without giving up his own life to scorpions, quicksand, and those darned crocodiles, to name a few. Every time he runs off the screen, a new scene appears with different hazards—in fact, 256 different scenes have been programmed into the cartridge.

Design of this solitary game is attributed to Activision's David Crane (thus the

treasures of Enarc) and is one of the most original and graphically interesting VCS cartridges available. The sound package even includes an electronic Tarzan call while Harry swings on a vine. The novice player will need some time to get the coordination down to run and jump for swinging vines, race over vanishing pits, jump over several obstacles, and gingerly dance across the crocodile lagoons.

What's most interesting about this game is that no matter how good you get at avoiding obstacles, you're never quite sure that you haven't missed some underground passage shortcut (jump over scorpions down there) or have found the fastest way to overcome an obstacle (like making it over the crocodile lagoon in one mad rush while the crocodiles' mouths are shut). Expert players will be glued to the set for hours, experimenting and memorizing successful patterns.

You'll have to work hard to reach the first treasure (a money bag)—perhaps a minute and a half—but the longer you keep Harry alive, the quicker he'll find the others (rings, silver/gold bars, etc.). So be prepared for a twenty-minute adventure each time you reset.

Also available from Activision is a version of *Pitfall!* for Intellivision game systems. Although the graphics might be a letdown when compared to other Intellivision games, the game play certainly won't be. *Pitfall!* is a stimulating adventure game on any system. **R-E**

