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GUIDE

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Local Programs Dec. 4-10, 1982

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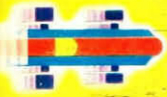
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VIDEO GAMES

A SHOPPER'S
GUIDE TO
1982'S BEST



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The Best Video Games of 1982

This year's new systems and cartridges come closer than ever to bringing the thrills of the arcade to your home set

By Len Albin

It makes no difference whether you've been naughty or nice; chances are that Santa will be dropping off a video game under your tree this year. It's almost un-

deserving of one's holiday dollars. And, as expected, we found plenty of new interchangeable cartridges for the well-established "TV-hookup" hardware, plus a

few battery-operated "self-contained" (or "hand-held") games. But best of all, 1982 brings us no fewer than *three* new sophisticated game systems—i.e., hardware. (Of course, the best games of previous years—such as Mattel's "Major League Baseball" cartridge [\$30] or Atari's "Space Invaders" cartridge [\$32]—still have a devoted following.)

It's a new pantheon of cheap thrills and one which, incidentally, doesn't include any of the games playable on full-fledged "home

computers." Those cerebral appliances—such as the Commodore VIC-20—can store information and process data well enough, but their games tend to lack the slam-bang intensity that the top video-games systems offer.

Unlike home computers, the best video games provide nearly unlimited mindless enjoyment—at least enough to make you



ColecoVision's "Zaxxon."

avoidable. Not only is there a staggering proliferation of new games this year, but some of them are the best ever designed for home consumption.

Recently, we plunged into the retail video jungle in order to find the games most

Len Albin is the author of the book "Secrets of the Video Game Superstars."

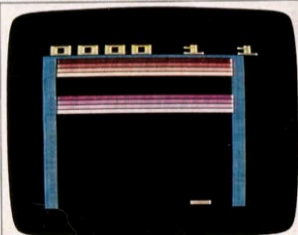
skip meals. And if the game is a dud, no amount of fancy hardware will salvage it. For example, the mildly popular *Odyssey*² game system includes a computer keyboard—which looks impressive. Unfortunately, the cartridges available for the system, by and large, still produce yawns. Many *Odyssey* owners may consider trading up this season.

So, with our electric bill seriously in arrears, here's a roundup of the best that the blip-mongers have to offer this year. All prices are approximate retail.

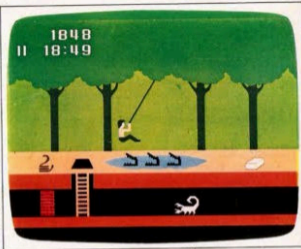
Atari's 5200 game system (\$250 for basic hardware): Though Atari's five-year-old Video Computer System (model 2600) has been America's most popular game system for some time, the relentless Atarian empire decided to reinvent the wheel—by developing a system with more computer power. The result is a color-TV-hookup unit that provides stunning graphics, sound effects and action.

Besides the "Super Breakout" cartridge (free with unit), the 5200 will have 10 other cartridges (\$31.95 or \$39.95 apiece, sold

Atari 5200 system's "Super Breakout."



separately) by early '83. These include the arcade favorites "Centipede," "Defender" and a superior version of "Galaxian." However, the game of choice—as



Activision's "Pitfall!"

always—is "Pac-Man." It's rendered by the 5200 in a scrunched-down horizontal format, but otherwise it's faithful to the arcade original.

Coleco's ColecoVision game system (about \$189 for basic hardware): "They got the arcade game!" exclaims the hyperactive teen in the

ColecoVision TV ads, and though he seems delirious, he's basically correct. This color-TV-hookup unit, for which Coleco will have 12 cartridges (\$30 each) by year's end, does a yeomanlike job in copying coin-op software and bringing it into the home. Teens who once cruised shopping malls looking for "Venture," "Lady Bug" or "Zaxxon" will find them among ColecoVision's best →

cartridges, and the arcade classic "Donkey Kong" is thrown in as the free cartridge with the purchase of the system.

General Consumer Electronics' Vectrex game system (\$200): If a revolution breaks out in your household when someone wants to play video games during ABC's *World News Tonight*, then consider the Vectrex as a way to restore a ceasefire. This superb unit simply doesn't have to be hooked up to a color TV; it contains its own special 9-inch black-and-white monitor. Technically, it's not a TV screen but a "vector display." This sophisticated picture tube doesn't rely on horizontal scan lines as a normal TV does. Instead, a vector display can produce an image wherever it wants, and the result is ultra-sharp silhouette images.

Thanks to this monitor, almost every Vectrex cartridge (\$30 apiece, sold separately) is a distinct pleasure, and each includes an overlay for the screen to enhance the visuals. The best are "Scramble," a perfect vector-display version of the old arcade war horse, and "Solar

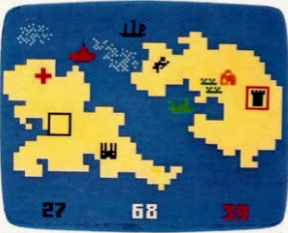
for use with Mattel's Intellivision system): While the competition strives to bring arcade action home, Mattel continues to woo the cerebral video buff—as symbolized by their TV skill, George Plimpton. And those deep thinkers will be engrossed by this one- or two-player submarine-warfare game. After deploying your U-boat on a map of some uncharted ocean, your mission (as captain) is to sink the enemy convoy before it makes an amphibious landing on your homeland. Your view is through a periscope and there's an enormous menu of controls for attacking and maneuvering. All told, "Sub Hunt" sessions will likely last several hours.

Mattel's "Utopia" cartridge (\$39, for Intellivision): The splendid one-or-two-player game makes you instant dictator of an "island kingdom" and your job is to provide for the general welfare of your people by planting crops, building hospitals and schools and so forth. These government programs are paid for by spending the "gold bars" in your treasury. After each round (or fiscal year, so to

speak), your prowess as strong man is rewarded with a point score, which measures the happiness of your people. But if you do nothing, rebels will appear and destroy all progress. "Utopia" should delight anyone who enjoys *The MacNeil/Lehrer Report* on PBS.

Atari's "Defender" cartridge (\$38, for use with Atari 2600): This breakneck-paced war game, a classic in video arcades, has been brilliantly adapted for Atari's original system. Some compromises have been made—for example, your ship must fly beneath the

planet's surface in order to use a smart bomb. But it's still the same humanitarian game of saving your humanoid allies before they're kidnaped into space—or, if you will, "humanoiditarian." →



Mattel's "Utopia."

Quest," a space-battle game where laser blasts bend around the gravitational pull of the sun.

Mattel's "Sub Hunt" cartridge (\$30,

Atari's "Berzerk" cartridge (\$32, for Atari 2600): Here's a simple, mindless game for video buffs aged 8 to 80—and IQ's in the same numerical range. The game's main idea is to shoot it out against a gang of robots inside a maze—much like Wyatt Earp and the Clantons did at the OK Corral. It's a violent mess, of course, but this cartridge serves up nearly the original arcade version of "Berzerk," and nobody ever said it wasn't very exciting. Earlier this year, a young man in Indiana who was playing the coin-op "Berzerk" died of heart failure.

Imagic's "Demon Attack" cartridge (\$32, for Atari 2600): These "demons" are antisocial beings like the aliens in "Space Invaders," except that they dance and weave instead of advancing in a parade-like phalanx. Sometimes, they'll split into two aliens when hit by lasers. It's superior action and sound effects for earthlings who missed the point of "E.T."

Activision's "Pitfall!" cartridge (\$32, for Atari 2600): In this distinctly pastoral game, the object is to steer your man through a tree-lined countryside littered with obstacles—such as a pond stocked with alligators—in order to reach the treasure. Plenty of well-timed leaps are required, and, in a pinch, your man can grab a swinging vine or scurry through a tunnel. Meanwhile, children can pretend they're archaeologists on the trail of the ark. New Yorkers can pretend they're walking through Central Park.

Parker Brothers' "Frogger" cartridge (\$30, for Atari 2600): Though the graphics are a little sloppy, this is a fine home-video version of the fascinating arcade game. Your task is to lead an urban frog—one hop at a time—through five lanes of city traffic and then over five lanes of debris floating down a river. Finally, the frog reaches his home in the swamp. Along the way, the poor beast must dodge gators and snakes, too, but he is entitled to pick up the "lady" frog on his way home.

Atari's "E.T." cartridge (\$40, for Atari 2600): After seeing the motion picture "E.T." 14 times, there's no more suspense left—unless you bring home this one-player cartridge. Here, the lovable E.T.

won't make it back to his ship unless you get him there. The main idea is to steer E.T. through six different screens in order to find three "phone pieces" before his "energy" runs out. Meanwhile, it's certain that your patience won't run out—if you're a kid. (Adults may prefer to wait for a game based on "My Dinner with André.")

Vidtec's (U.S. Games) "Word Zapper" cartridge (\$30, for Atari 2600): Distracted parents who worry that video games are the reason why Johnny can't read may settle for this game as a compromise. Call it "Shoot 'n' Spell." After a word is flashed briefly on the screen, the child is asked to spell it again from memory by shooting individual letters from a moving alphabet. Fortunately, the words are drawn from an alien language called "English."

Starpac Corporation's (formerly Arcadia) "Supercharger" attachment (\$70, for Atari 2600): This device, which slips into the cartridge slot, isn't a game but an extra dose of computer memory. Specific games are sold separately (\$15) on audio cassettes, so you'll also need a tape recorder or deck. Among the best are "Phaser Patrol," a strategy-filled space-war game (free with Supercharger), and "Communist Mutants from Space," which should be self-explanatory.

Mattel's "Star Hawk" (about \$33): This first-rate portable provides an on-screen view of what a pilot would see looking out of his cockpit, and your mission is to fight enemy aircraft. It's all supposed to take place in space, but "Star Hawk" seems more like a jet-fighter game. Not only does your craft take off from a runway, but you can still see a horizon at an altitude of 99,000 miles.

Coleco's "Pac-Man" (\$60): Three variants of the famous maze game are packed into this table model, including regular "Pac-Man" and "Head to Head Pac-Man" (with two little gobblers, for each of two players). The only thing lacking is a button to turn off the sound effects, which are very shrill. They might not bother you—but if you play this game on a 747, other passengers may force you to deplane somewhere short of your destination. **END**