ADAM

THE ADAM FORUM

by Paul Pappas

The big news this month is ADAM's resurgence in the home computer market. Although abandoned by its creator four years ago, ADAM continues to grow and prosper due to the diligent efforts of small, dedicated companies who recognized ADAM's potential when the "big boys" cut and ran. When the home video game market resurfaced as a viable commercial entity, Telegames USA re-released most of the ColecoVision game cartridges. These games sold so well Telegames released a clone of the ColecoVision game unit, the Personal Arcade.

At least one major software developer has expressed interest in producing new games for the ColecoVision, and a major electronics retailer has expressed interest in producing new hardware. Interest is the first step, but it's not enough. Your voice must be heard so interest may be converted to action. Read on to determine what you can do to help establish a new and better future for the ADAM.

Gentlemen, Start Your Pencils— Part Two

Recently I listed an excerpt from a letter by ADAM user Charlie Smith, detailing his letter writing campaign designed to improve the position of ADAM products in the retail mass market.

Charlie wrote again with the news Activision expressed an interest in creating new games for the Coleco-Vision, if sales of software and the Personal Arcade from Telegames USA continued to increase. Of course, we already know there is a ready and willing market for new game software. Why not write Activision and let them know? Letters from user groups and dealers will carry even more weight. Write, do not call, Activision, 2350 Bayshore Frontage Rd., Mountain View, CA 94043.

In a similar vein, American Design Components expressed to me a definite interest in reproducing existing and creating new ADAM hardware, including the ADAM itself. ADC has contacts with former Coleco employees, making such a task easier and more likely than might be imagined. Long wished for items like a "real" 80 column color video board are well within the realm of possibility. In order to make a final decision, ADC needs to know what items (remember, both existing and new) ADAM users would like to see and what they consider reasonable prices. We may never have a chance like this again, so I strongly urge every ADAM user to write ADC and make their "wish list" known. Be sure to include the price you are willing to pay for each item. Please be realistic, as new equipment will obviously cost more than used. Letters from user groups and dealers will carry even more weight. Write, do not call, Gary Lawrence, c/o American Design Components, 815 Fairview Ave., Fairview, NJ 07002.

Media Conversion On A Budget

Does this situation sound familiar? You learn of a dealer selling copies of an excellent CP/M program for low, low prices. The only catch is the software comes on disks for a different CP/M system. No problem, just send the disks to a dealer who can convert other CP/M formats to ADAM CP/M

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number 26-3148) offers a wide variety of math exercises in an educational manner and is ideal for use by youngsters between 6 and 10. Lessons are available in three different areas, and a math gallery, which continues the last type of practice, give the user the opportunity to score points.

In addition to the math gallery, lessons are available in Arithmetic, Fractions, and Algebra. Problems in addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and comparisons are available in Arithmetic. Fraction lessons include addition, subtraction, and comparison problems. Algebra lessons offer problems with addition, subtraction, and "mixed problems."

A Homework lesson allows you to create math tutor problems and then load or save them to a cassette recorder (with proper connector). There is also an option with Math Tutor that allows you to select five different levels of skill.

Parents searching for a CoCo program that helps them teach mathematics will find Math Tutor well worth the investment.

My favorite game of the four released program packs is Tetris, The Soviet Challenge. According to the program's manual, Tetris was invented by a 30-year old Soviet researcher name Alexi squares, to a 2 by 2 arrangement of the squares and everything in between. It's up to you to rotate these arrangement of squares so that they tightly fit amongst each other. As these squares fill a complete horizontal line on the screen you score points and that line disappears. If you leave an open square, chances are it will never be filled.

As the game continues and the skill level increases, you'll notice the shapes dropping at a faster rate and makes the game even more of a challenge. I played the Tetris (catalog number 26-3163) for nearly two hours and was able to go from Level 0 to Level 5 (out of 10 levels), so with some practice the game is challenging, yet not a pushover. You'll probably find hours of fun taking on the Soviet Challenge.

The two other arcade-type program packs are specifically for the Color Computer 3. Super Pitfall is a far cry from the Pitfall you might have seen running on your cousin's Atari game system. Using a high resolution sixteen color screen, the program takes advantage of palette color switching and fast machine language routines which offers excellent graphics movement. As with its predecessor, Super Pitfall (catalog number 26-3171) takes you through various caves and obstacles

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format. No problem, except for the conversion price. As anyone who ever utilized such a service knows, an almost universal trait is ridiculously high prices.

An alternative is one of several MSDOS commercial programs which can format and copy numerous disk formats, but most are expensive and don't support ADAM CP/M. For some time I searched for a cost effective means by which ADAM owners could take advantage of CP/M software on different disk formats. The search is over.

ADAM user Richard Colleps recently sent me a copy of 22Disk by Chuck Guzis of Sydex. 22Disk uses an IBM PC compatible to format and copy numerous CP/M disk formats, including (thanks to a request by Richard) ADAM CP/M. Of course, only a few ADAM owners also own IBM PC compatibles, but with the current popularity of MSDOS such machines are easy to find. It's a safe bet most ADAM owners know at least one person with an IBM PC compatible.

By the time this reaches print (or shortly thereafter) 22Disk will be available on both the American People Link and CompuServe ADAM forums. However, please note this software is not free, but Shareware. The software may be freely distributed and tested for evaluation purposes, but you must pay a $15 registration fee if you decide to use the software. The fee entitles you to the latest version of 22Disk

(mailed to you) with upgrades only $2 each. Considering $15 is just a bit more than some dealers charge to convert a single disk, the fee is more than fair. If you decide to use the software, or just want to order it direct, please send a check for $15 to Chuck Guzis, c/o Sydex, 153 North Murphy Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086. Be sure to list whether you require 5¼ or 3½ inch disks.

New CP/M Software

Michael Richards of Cranberry Software Tools (P.O. Box 681, Princeton Junction, NJ 08550-0681) recently wrote requesting help with ADAM CP/M disk formats. Michael's letter is excerpted here.

"Our company is one of the few firms in the U.S. that still actively supports the CP/M user community with new applications software. Each week we get several inquiries from ADAM owners interested in purchasing our software for use with the CP/M 2.2 mode of the machine."

"Unfortunately, we have to turn these users away for one simple reason: we have no information whatsoever on the ADAM CP/M floppy disk format."

"We would really like to extend our services to the ADAM user base. We hope that you can supply the information we need to achieve this goal. Thanks very much for your assistance."

I recently sent Cranberry Software Tools the specifications for ADAM CP/M disk format, so it is only a matter of time before they can directly serve

the ADAM community. If Cranberry Software is willing to go the effort to offer software in ADAM CP/M format, the least ADAM CP/M users can do is write for a catalog. After all, we should be willing to support companies that are willing to support us. Nuff said!

New ADAM Catalogs

Several ADAM dealers have released new catalogs, but two are especially worthy of closer inspection. Telegames USA [Box 901, Lancaster, TX 75146, (214) 227-7694], by far the largest supplier of ColecoVision games and accessories, released a new catalog containing several "new" (i.e. just re-released) games and their ColecoVision clone, the Personal Arcade.

MW Ruth [3100 W. Chapel Ave., Cherry Hill, NJ 08002, (609) 667-2526], traditionally publishes the largest ADAM catalog of any dealer, with this year being no exception. The catalog contains over 18 pages of small print, two column listings of ADAM hardware, software, books, and public domain programs from a wide variety of sources. Best of all, the catalog lists the products by developer, making it a virtual reference to well over 90% of all ADAM products.

For a copy of these catalogs, call or write the respective company with a request for information about their ADAM products.

Puget Sound ADAM Newsnet

The Puget Sound ADAM Newsnet is published monthly by the Puget Sound ADAM Network [22607 S.E. 322nd, Kent, WA 98042, (206) 886-1167] PSAN is an active ADAM user group whose newsletter may be the best value of any currently published.

Each issue of PSAN contains approximately eight pages of news and reviews, nicely laid out in a two column format. Subscriptions are a mere $5 annually and includes twelve issues of PSAN. PSAN charges only two dollars over postage costs for their well written, informative newsletter. Why not take the plunge? In fact, if you have a modem you might try PSAN's Up An ADAM BBS at 206-859-2018.

Temple Of The Snow Dragon

A new ADAM company, Digital Adventures [P.O. Box 35, Ocean Springs, MS 39564-0035], recently released their first product, Temple of the Snow Dragon ($22). TSD is a graphic text adventure utilizing forty column text mode and hi-res graphics (rumored to be produced with Digital Express' PowerPAINT and related products). TSD is the first of a triology of related text adventures.

For those not familiar with text adventure games a short explanation is in order. Text adventures use text descriptions and the player's imagination to set the scene and describe the events which take place. Some text adventures, like TSD, also use graphics to enhance the game and provide clues, but the main emphasis is on the text

description. Typically, the player is asked to complete a quest or solve a mystery. The player indicates his actions by entering commands in the form "verb noun," such as "go south," "open door," or "drink potion." Most text adventures take many hours of diligent effort (and a few false starts) to complete, and as such are best suited for those who enjoy solving problems as much as playing games.

The first thing I noticed about TSD was the professional appearance of the product. Shrink wrapped with a red ribbon holding two disks and instruction manual together, the professional appearance is completed by the graphics (the Snow Dragon) on the manual cover and disk labels. Each TSD has a unique serial number, and a pull-out postage paid registration card is included in the back of the manual. The program is not copy protected in the usual sense, as you may freely make backup copies. However, every 32nd time you run the program you are prompted for a personal access code. You are sent the code on receipt of the registration card, an excellent reason to fill out the card and send it in.

While the manual does contain all the information you need to play the game, don't expect a reference book on TSD. As the manual points out, most of the real fun in a text adventure game comes from solving the puzzles you encounter. But don't fret, all is not lost should you become stumped. The manual contains a list of somewhat arcane hints, designed to be useful only after completing certain sections of the adventure. But most important, Digital Express' "Nibbles & Bits" newsletter will publish a column devoted to Digital Adventure's games entitled "Conquering The Dalark Challenge." About the only thing more fun than playing a good text adventure is discussing your adventure with a fellow player, and now that fellow player can be halfway around the world. The manual does contain a rather lengthy overview of all three adventures, a portion of which is listed next.

"The Overlord of Dalark has spirited your betrothed away to his mountain retreat. There to be kept imprisoned until the oath of servitude is freely given, as is prescribed in the holy book of Tamchal. For even though the soul can be destroyed, it cannot be taken. Persuasion may be used. But the soul must be freely given. Once this vile ritual is consummated with the sacred wine of Tal, the soul of your beloved will be forever bound to the service of the Evil Overlord."

"News has spread throughout Drumeria that the Dark Overlord was responsible for the murder of the royal family. He has announced his intention to adopt your beloved and ascend to the throne of Drumeria, for it seems that you were to wed the last living person with blood ties to the royal family."

"The Evil Shaman must be stopped. But he is a most inaccessible foe. His fortress in the Dalark Mountains is well protected. The base of the mountains is patrolled by the Dragon of Dalark. It is rumored he is over twenty feet tall and not only breathes fire, but is also capable of spitting sharp ice crystals with deadly accuracy. The entrance to his fortress is guarded by the Devastator of Souls. Who, as his name implies, has the power to devastate the soul of his foes with a glance."

Good grief! Would you believe it gets worse? Did I mention the Overlord himself is a powerful wizard? Or that a kindly old sage told you you must obtain three magical items, a shield, sword, and cloak if you ever wish to see your beloved again? Your first quest is to obtain a shield which can withstand both fire and ice, the shell of a Snow Dragon egg. By the way, bring back the yolk if you can, the sage can use it to make the shell invulnerable in normal combat. Fortunately, the sage knows of an abandoned temple in which still resides a Snow Dragon and his keeper. Quickly lad, off with you. Your beloved's life depends on a successful adventure!

After loading the game, a two screen overview of your adventure is displayed, followed by the graphics window in the top half of the screen. The bottom half is used for commands and text descrip-

tions of the action. The graphic window contains many elements in addition to a picture of the current scene. Two columns on the left display icons representing any treasure you found. A single column on the right does the same for your weapons. Just to the right of the weapons display column is a power meter. The indicator will rise and fall in relation to your physical condition. The bottom center contains three display blocks labeled "Contents," which contain the icons of any items in the current scene that may be taken by the player. All the icons are listed in the manual. Your accumulated wealth is displayed to the left of Contents, with the number of vanquished foes displayed on the right. A compass is displayed just above the Contents area, and always points north. The compass is not vital to maintaining a map of your exploits (and you better draw a map as you go), but certainly makes it easier.

TSD has a few additions to the usual text adventure commands. Several commands like "fight" or "go south" are defined as keyboard macros. For example, to go north simply press the up arrow key and the command "go north" is loaded into the command buffer. Perhaps the greatest difference lies in the fight commands. Most text adventure games determine victory in a fight solely by the weapon used or armor worn. In TSD, besides choosing a weapon, you must press the <INSERT> and <PRINT> keys rapidly in succession. The faster you press the keys, the higher your power indicator and the better your chances of victory.

TSD allows you to save a game in progress, and I suggest you do so before making any move which you believe might be fatal. It takes a bit longer but eliminates the frustration of starting back at square one. In fact, I suggest you save your game at regular intervals, because you never know what's around the corner. After about an hour of play I "drowned" in a trap, and was forced to start over.

My only complaint about the program is its need to access the tape/disk each time a scene description is dis-played, even if the scene has not changed since the last command. This rapidly grew annoying on the disk version, I can only imagine the delay caused by tape access. I recommend the current scene description be held in memory, eliminating much of the delay caused by tape/disk access.

I found TSD a well designed, clever, and visually appealing text adventure. No doubt I will spend many hours vanquishing evil and filling my pockets with treasure. If you already enjoy text adventures, or are intrigued by the concept, TSD will provide you with hours of enjoyment, and a chance to continue the adventure in future games. TSD is also available from Digital Express [P.O. Box 37, Oak Hill, WV 25901, (304) 465-1341].

In The Queue

Late reports indicate Big John will sell Orphanware, but retain the rights to and continue to repair/develop disk drives. A new, technically oriented ADAM newsletter developed in part by Big John is in the works. Look for reports on these and other issues of importance to ADAM users in future editions of "The ADAM Forum."

I want to take a moment to thank the many ADAM owners who write me with comments, ideas, and requests for information. If you request a reply and enclose a S.A.S.E. (you must enclose a S.A.S.E. for a reply), you may not hear from me as soon as you would like. Sometimes the demands of my career make quick replies impossible, but rest assured every proper request receives a personal reply. Thank you for your understanding, and keep those letters coming.

I am always happy to hear from fellow ADAM users. Contact me via U.S. mail in care of the Triangle ADAM Users, 2623-A Yanceyville St., Greensboro, NC 27405-4407. Due to the volume of mail I receive, you must (no exceptions) enclose a S.A.S.E. if you want a reply. I may be reached by E-Mail on American People Link (PAP-PASPM), CompuServe (72277,3303), or FIDO Net's ADAM Echo (151/2), or in care of Computer Shopper. ●