

INSIDE COLECO'S ADAM

By NEIL SHAPIRO

Is This the Next Generation?

For a while it seemed it would be harder to adopt an Adam computer than one of the same company's Cabbage Patch dolls. But those lucky enough to take Adam home have found it worth the wait.

The Adam is a complete computer and game system, sold as a package containing a keyboard, computer unit with tape drive, a printer and a built-in ColecoVision. Those who already have a ColecoVision can buy the keyboard, CPU, tape drive, and printer as an all-together expansion add-on for that popular videogame machine. No matter how you buy it, most home arcaders will find that Adam expands their gaming horizons as well as introducing a whole new world of computing applications.

Assembly took less than a half-hour from opening the box, and most of that time was spent reading over the setup manual. Adam, after all, is a computer and this reviewer just didn't expect the initial setup to go as

easily and smoothly as it did.

The printer plugs into the side of the main tape/memory unit. There's only one way to plug it in, only one possible location. The keyboard attaches to the main unit with what appears to be a coiled, modular phone cord; it snaps in at both ends. A coaxial cable goes from the back of the main unit to the usual game/TV switch attached to the television's VHF antenna terminals (or another outlet can be cabled directly to a video monitor). Plug the ColecoVision-style controllers into the main unit and that's the set-up. (A special tray may be snapped into the side of the keyboard to keep one of the controllers handy).

Turn on Adam — the switch is located on the back of the printer — and you're ready to begin. Without a cartridge or a tape plugged into the main unit, the screen first comes up as a sort of electronic typewriter. The printer keeps pace with whatever the operator types. A touch of a key puts Adam into a special word processing program, but more on that later.

If you're like me, the first thing you'll do is to play the included data pack game **Buck Rogers: Planet Of Zoom**, the first of Coleco's "Adam Super Game Packs." The digital tape, which is thinner than the usual cassette variety, is placed in the tape drive bay before starting the unit. When the Adam is on with the cartridge slot empty, the tape automatically loads.

Loading speed is slow compared to systems that use a floppy disk



A color bar displays time remaining.



Zoom down trenches with Buck Rogers!

machine, such as the Apple IIe and the Atari 800, but it sure does beat the snail's pace of an unmodified audio cassette player.

Just as with most ColecoVision cartridges, the gamer chooses between one- or two-player modes at various skill levels from a menu. As always, this is done by pressing the membrane-keys on the ColecoVision-style controllers.

The controllers are the first, and perhaps expectable, disappointment to a gamer whose hands automatically cramp up just thinking about ColecoVision controllers. Except for color, they are exactly the same as on the ColecoVision console. It's short throw



In *Buck Rogers: Planet of Zoom*, gamers must guide their ship through a number of different playfields.

joystick on the same hard-to-hold, rectangular base. The Adam also accepts Coleco's new, better-designed and more advanced controllers, including the trackball.

But you won't have long to think about that, because the game quickly comes up screeching with the first screen of action in this multi-screen game. You'll be flying Buck's fighter down a long, *Star Wars* sort of trench. The left side button on the controller is your warp speed accelerator and the right button fires your fighter's lasers.

High speed is of the essence, because the rate of speed is one of the factors scored in the game. As you hurtle down the trench you'll have to

outmaneuver and attempt to destroy enemy ships coming at you, whizzing by and even attacking from behind. Flying saucers that look a little like celestial fried eggs, bouncing tripeds that look more like fighter-stomping aliens than highly maneuverable kamikaze ships, and streamlined enemy planes will all try to make this first screen your last.

The animation of the tunnel whizzing by is absolutely top-notch, and the gamer's fighter is shown with great attention to detail. There is, however, a flickering quality to the onrushing enemy hordes that remains throughout most of the game. While this first "Super Game" does have

many features that enhances it beyond a cartridge game, the animation is sometimes less than gamers have come to expect of ColecoVision. We doubt that this is in any way related to Adam's capability, as Adam plays all ColecoVision cartridges to the usual high standards.

After a preset amount of time (shown as a bar at top of screen) action moves to the next screen. This second screen shows up in various guises two more times during the program. Players guide the fighter on a screen overlaid with a colorful lattice design of diminishing stripes which gives an illusion of distance. Enemy missiles and flying saucers spi-

ral from the distance, changing in size to increase the illusion of perspective as they shift and dance about.

Then, the third screen (my own favorite) is a challenge to maneuver the swiftly cruising craft between futuristic, towering cities. Players have to quickly gauge both speed and distance to avoid crashing into a twenty-first century balcony. And, meanwhile, the usual enemy flying saucers harass you. In this screen, the animation of the towers coming toward you is superb.

The fourth screen is a repeat of the striped second screen, but now with enemy mines added to the oncoming arsenal. Beyond this screen, the fifth screen is a trench as in the first screen. But, in this fifth screen, the trench now has colorful walls which block the path.

More outstanding graphics and animation are visible on screen six, as the gamer must steer under rapidly



Huge bridges limit maneuverability.

approaching bridges while avoiding enemy tanks, planes and a new enemy called the walker. The next screen, the seventh, is yet another repeat on screen two, the stripes giving illusory distance this time helping to mask the approach of cratered asteroids as well as enemy ships.

The eighth screen brings players the surface of the planet called Zoom, where they must dodge aliens of all varieties. The background moves, giving the illusion of a horizon stretching around all of 360 alien degrees.

Past this, on screen nine, the gamer sights an approaching alien command ship. The middle of the ship is a Space Warp tunnel and the mission is to enter that tunnel. But first, the ship's four engines must be shot out — and the rest of the alien armada is downright angry! But once inside the tunnel, screen ten takes the ship screaming down a psychedelic corridor of rapidly shifting and colorful lights. Finally, through the tunnel, a reward screen awards a new fighter and starts the

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game again at a higher level.

And, for earning a high score, players are asked to enter that score in an arcade roll of honor. The joystick spells out names, and the computer will store it on the same digital tape as the game.

All in all, we found *Buck Rogers: Planet Of Zoom* to be an exciting foretaste of Adam's gaming future. We expect that later games will use the digital tape much as many computer games use a floppy disk to do such additional things as allowing Adamites to choose a screen at will, modify and store levels, and perhaps even change the playing field. Possibilities are endless.

Of course, gamers don't have to wait for more tapes to keep enjoying this system as a game. We tested at least two dozen ColecoVision cartridges and all of the ColecoVision expansion modules and controllers on Adam with fine results. It seems to be absolutely and perfectly compatible with the previous system.

And, let's not forget that when the gaming is over, the fun is really just beginning because Adam is also a complete computer. While it would take a separate article to detail Adam's computer personality (and Electronic Games will be doing that soon) it's worth just mentioning a few of the other things that Adam can do.

Adam's built-in word processor will not make anyone a best-selling author (unless they have such talent), but it makes everything from school reports to home correspondence far easier to create. Basically, the word processor allows you to write on the video screen. Then, on the video screen, you use some of the easy-to-learn commands to do such things as delete words, move words to other parts of

the document, and generally get everything the way it should be. Only then do you print it out, so that your printed copy has no mistakes.

The printer itself is what computer dealers call a "daisywheel" printer. It gives a high-quality printout that looks as if it came off an electric typewriter, no "dotty" looking matrix type here. The printer, however, is noisy and somewhat slow, but for everyday use these are acceptable tradeoffs for having access to such accepted-everywhere type style.

A tape-loaded BASIC language will also have Adam users programming their own, if they wish. Anyone who has used Apple Inc.'s "Applesoft BASIC" will have no problem learning Coleco's "SmartBASIC", as the two are very similar. (But similar does not mean the same, and it would be impossible to use Apple tapes or disks. Also, as Coleco's graphics are different from Apple's, most Apple programs

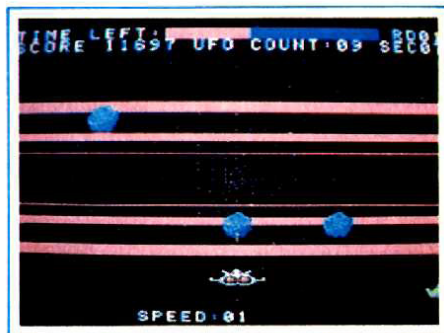


The battle continues on the planet.

cannot be used anywhere near as-is, even typed in on the Adam.)

One drawback to Coleco's SmartBASIC is that most graphics and all sound commands seem to have been left out. Coleco promises that, by the time you read this, new programs will be available which will allow the at-home programmer to access Adam's graphics and sound.

All in all we think that the Coleco Adam ushers in a whole new realm of fun to the gamer and also satisfies the computer user. ☺



After the asteroid screen, Buck fights a starship and enters the warp tunnel.

