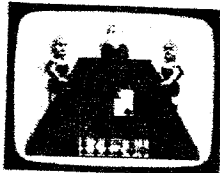
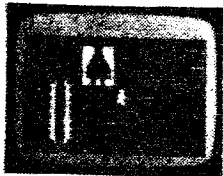


CRITICALLY SPEAKING... INTELLIVISION-COMPATIBLE

INTELLIVISION ROYAL DEALER (★★★★½/★★★★½) is a great cartridge for the avid card player who doesn't always have a friend or two handy when he or she wants to play a few games of Crazy Eights, Rummy, Gin Rummy or Hearts. This is also a good way to learn these games without putting your friends through the agony of waiting for you to make each carefully considered move. Without explaining all the specific rules for each card game, to which Mattel adheres, we can say that playing against one to three computer-controlled opponents can be a lot of fun. Each game starts with the sound of cards being shuffled, and then the hands are dealt to you and your poker-faced female opponent(s). You have the expected abilities to draw and discard, and you can also rearrange your hand at any time (with no one to complain that you're holding up the game). Graphics are quite good, although it might be nice if your opponents would occasionally move a little—or change their expressions—or something! But if you enjoy or want to learn any of the card games offered on this cartridge, it would be a worthwhile addition to your collection. Recommended.



Royal Dealer™



Tron™ Maze-A-Tron™

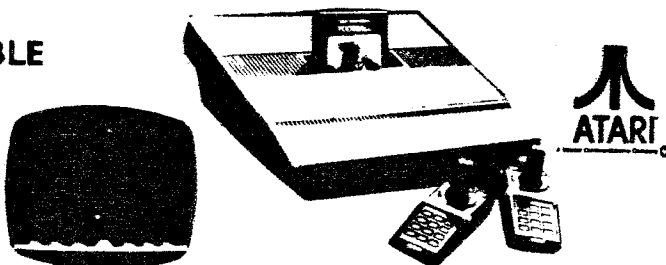
TRON MAZE-A-THON (★★★★/★★★★) is another of the type of game Mattel does so well, a complexly satisfying mental and physical challenge. This is the second game in the series of three inspired by the Disney movie, TRON, and it's far better than the first release, TRON DEADLY DISCS. A warning: this is not one of those games that you can play without becoming thoroughly familiar with the instructions. Your task as Flynn, the daring young programmer, is to find and disable the Master Control Program (the MCP) before it can gain what it seeks—control of the human race. The game is played in rounds of two phases each. Phase One is the scrolling Circuit Maze in which you store up energy and zeroes as you move Flynn through the Maze. You must find the computer RAM (random access memory) Chips and clear them to zero as quickly as possible while avoiding Recognizers (guards of the MCP), Force Fields between ROM (read-only memory) Chips, Zaps (electric impulses in the circuit wiring that drain energy if you touch them), and Bus (circuit wiring that forms the maze). Phase Two is the MCP, a very nasty character indeed. You must find pairs of numbers (Bit Pairs) in the two center columns that match the Bit Pair at the top of the two outer columns that enclose the MCP. At the while, the MCP will fire laser blasts to discourage you. If a Bit Pair in the central column Bit Stream makes it to the top without being matched, you'll "pop the stack". For those who like to know how far they can go, there are twelve levels (two phases per level), and each moves faster than the one before. The computer will keep score up to 9,999,999 points, which should be sufficient for the most masterful of MCP dismantlers. Recommended.

CRITICALLY SPEAKING...

ATARI 5200-COMPATIBLE

SPACE INVADERS (★★★★/★★★★½) is, of course, one of THE all-time classic video games, and this latest version is just gorgeous. We like it even better than the original Taito America coin-op game! We hardly need to describe the game itself, with its columns of marching Invaders, because everyone has seen this game in one incarnation or another. The Atari 5200 version has more colorful and better drawn Invaders than any we've seen, and the sound effects add just the right sense of urgency as the Invaders get closer to your Laser Cannon. Once you reach Wave Four, the Invaders begin to mutate before your eyes, even going through a Crystalline Stage. If you hit a Crystalline Invader, you don't get any points, so you have to be more careful with your shots. Nearly everyone who owns an Atari 2600 has this classic in his or her collection, and we think most owners of the new Atari 5200 will want its version. Recommended (retail \$39.95)

MISSILE COMMAND (★★★★/★★★★) is a simply dazzling version of the game already familiar to arcaders and owners of the Atari 2600. In fact, we've found a new favorite in the Atari 5200 library! Your job is to defend the six cities on the planet Zardon from the Krytolian invasion by firing antiballistic missiles (ABM's) from your central Missile Base. The enemy attacks your cities and missile base with interplanetary ballistic missiles (IPBM's) multiple independent re-entry vehicles (MIRV's), smart missiles, killer satellites, and bombers. This game can get very tough very quickly as incoming missiles branch out if you don't hit them soon enough. Bombers and killer satellites also drop missiles if they're not destroyed early, and it can get pretty frantic with all that enemy firepower branching and multiplying all over the screen! You'll probably be fascinated, as we were, by the look and sound of the realistic explosions of the missiles the first few times you play the game. Just don't get so carried away that you lose cities to the enemy! Recommended (retail \$39.95)



PAC-MAN (★★★★/★★★★) has all the musical and visual charm of the arcade game by Bally Midway that has captured the fancy of millions. No more flashing ghosts, folks, and all the little "fruit" prizes you expect to find are here in this version. There are even intermission cartoons scattered here and there. With all this good news, why didn't we give this version of PAC-MAN a higher game-play rating? The analog joystick that we like so well on most of the games can be a drawback in this one. Because this joystick does not snap back to a centered position when released, it can be tough to turn corners exactly when you want to. In the heat of the chase, you can think you're pushing straight up on the joystick, and find out that you're actually pushing the upward right diagonal. This you find out after the ghost demolishes your PAC-MAN, and you look down at the joystick in your hand to see where it's REALLY pointing. While we feel that a real PAC-MAN fanatic will gradually overcome this problem with a lot of practice, it may be discouraging to the casual player. This criticism aside, the game is totally charming and lots of fun to play. One feature that's very helpful to the player who really wants to study his game is the "Pause" button on the hand controller. When you can see that your demise is eminent, you can hit "Pause", freeze the game action, and study your options—something you certainly cannot do on the arcade game. Recommended (retail \$39.95)

A WORD ABOUT CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENTS...

As we hear from our readers, one fact surfaces over and over again...the Game Manufacturer's Customer Service Departments which many of you call on a regular basis for game news DO NOT, AS A RULE, HAVE THE CORRECT INFORMATION ON WHEN GAMES ARE SHIPPING! These folks are there to help you with problems that you may be encountering with your master unit, cartridges, etc. and they are not kept up-to-date on release schedules (which can and DO change constantly). Some of you have told us how you have called every week to find yourself being given totally different information (a cartridge HAS shipped, a cartridge has NOT shipped, it's on your dealer's shelves, etc.). Case in point...without naming the manufacturer, now. one reader called 2 weeks ago asking if a particular cartridge had shipped (one that was due out around November 1). He was told, "yes, it's in the stores next week". He called us to see if we knew anything. As it happened, we had spoken with the company that same day (a marketing rep we speak with all the time) and we were given a fairly firm release date of "the first week in December". MORAL...the folks in Customer Service MEAN well, but they simply do NOT have the up-to-the-minute information. Continue to call if you wish but understand that it's difficult at times for even the Sales and Marketing departments to have the dates and, obviously, getting the word to the Customer Service department is one of the lower priorities of the company.

The playfield is nothing more than a maze with an empty rectangle in the center. This is the fortress in which your hunter seeks refuge from prehistoric beasts—pterodactyls, trachodons and so forth. Your hunter has to shoot at them while avoiding the deadly yellow Sssnakes that slide gracefully across the screen and with no respect for the laws of physics, pass through the impenetrable fortress walls. (So much for asylum in legendary worlds.)

While traveling, your hunter can shoot, but with limited firing power. The hunter can only shoot up when in the upper part of the rectangle, shoot down when in the lower part and right and left . . . guess where.

Prehistoric monsters are confined to the outer area and can be destroyed. Sssnakes, on the other hand, are invulnerable to your hunter's fire. As there is very little else to do, however, you might as well have your hunter shoot at them. Although the directions say that a Sssnake, when hit, will break apart into its cube-like ssegments, this is not strictly accurate. Sometimes it does. Sometimes it doesn't. It's hard to figure out what it takes to break a Sssnake up (other than a good joke, that is). You can do the same thing each time, but whether or not it works seems to be up to the Sssnake.

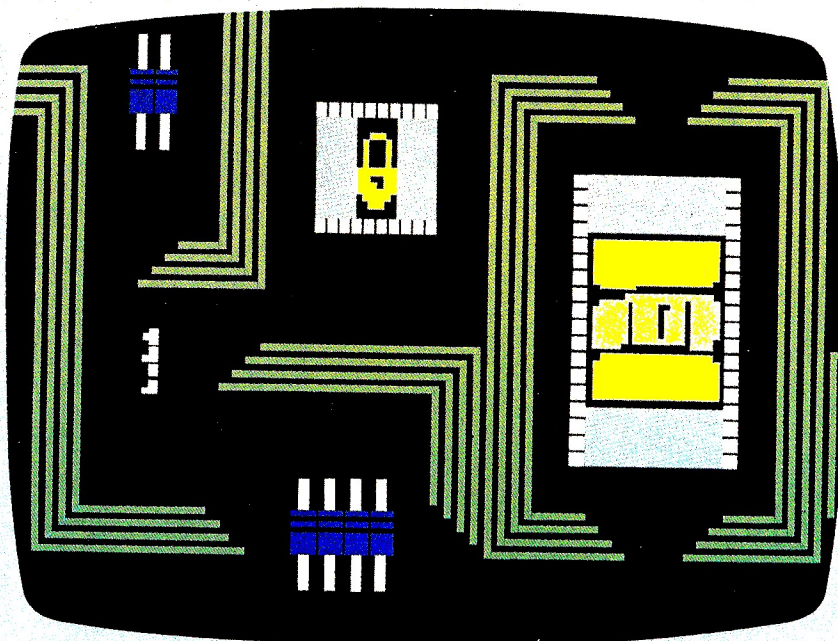
The game is dull. The graphics are nondescript. In addition to the rather sparse accommodations found in the fortress, the Sssnakes are nothing more than yellow boxes following one after the other like so many obedient elephants. In fact, *Sssnake* should really be called *Sssquares*. □

TRON MAZE-A-TRON ★ ★

Designer uncredited. (Mattel Intellivision-compatible cartridge. \$30)

By Howard Polskin

This may be a good game, maybe even a great one. But I have to confess that I'm not really sure how to play it. For three hours, I



Mattel's Tron Maze-a-Tron: What does this maze mean to you?

tried to learn how. I read and re-read the instructions, and never even got close to understanding them. That's a lot of time to invest in trying to learn the basics of a game. Call me a quitter, but I've about given up.

That's not say that it's a bad game (or that I'm stupid—I've played virtually every Intellivision game ever designed and have reviewed several). In fact, *Tron Maze-a-Tron*'s level of conceptual sophistication and game-playing difficulty may be a distinct plus for videogame masters seeking a challenge on a par with senior trig at M.I.T. But to average weekend gamers, *Tron Maze-a-Tron* goes several steps beyond casual playing.

For starters, the instruction booklet spans 28 pages and reads like the difficult parts of the Torah. There are many key points I feel

are inadequately described.

Another reason for the complexity of the game is its confusing plot structure. *Tron Maze-a-Tron* is really two games in one. The first phase stars Flynn, the hero programmer wandering around the bowels of a computer seeking computer chips that will enable him to force a confrontation with the evil Master Control Program. This confrontation takes place in the second phase of the game if you're lucky enough to survive the first phase. I wasn't.

In this one-player game, you control Flynn, who runs realistically through a beautiful circuit maze inside the computer. Here, Mattel's visual artistry is evident. Mattel's uncredited programmers have really given this game the look, feel and even sound of what it must be like to be transported into a computer.

Well into the maze, Flynn haphazardly stumbles across the goal of his journey through the computer: the random access memory (RAM) chips. They take a long time to find. And it takes a longer time to describe what Flynn must do to them to reach the second phase of the game.

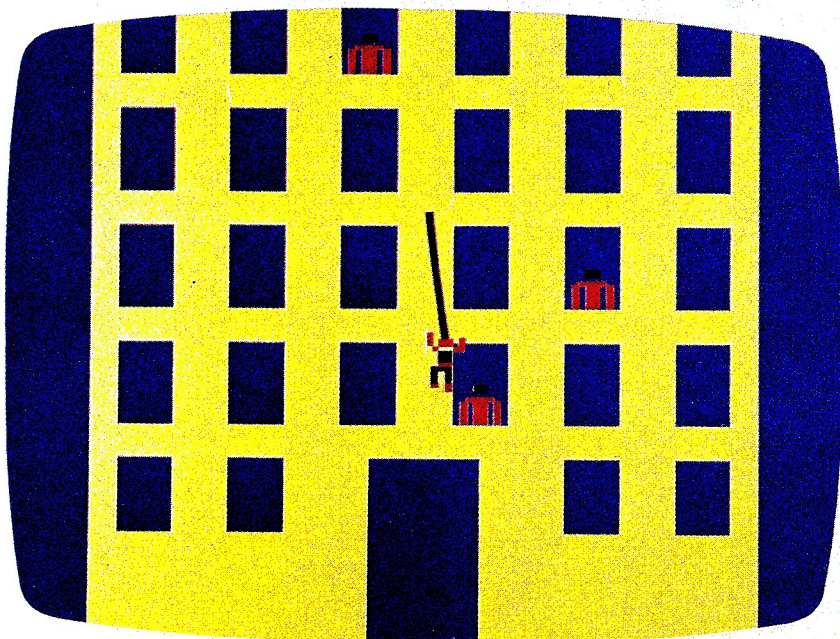
The object of this final phase? Once again, the instructions are too oblique to fathom. If half the brainpower that went into designing this game were applied to writing the instructions, this might be a hell of a game to play. I, for one, never got far enough to find out. □

SPIDER-MAN ★ ★ ★

Designed by Laura Nikolich. (Parker Brothers VCS-compatible cartridge. \$28.95)

By Robert Greenberger

I guess after Atari gave us the *Superman* videogame, it was only a matter of time before the current game adaptamania led to other superheroes. Marvel Comics' Spider-



Parker Brothers' Spider-Man: web slinger on bomb-laden tower.