Peanut Butter and Jelly Guide to Computers

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price you pay for this versatility is the necessity of learning to program the computer rather than just putting a cartridge in the slot. And of course, the micro will cost more.

With some of the games being advertised nationally as home computers, many people wonder just what differentiates the sophisticated game from the simple computer. Two things - it is a computer if it has an input system for letters and numbers (e.g. a keyboard) and if it can be programmed by the user. None of the 1977 games had these features, but several companies are now conspiring to screw up our distinction. Microelectronic Systems Corporation is marketing a "video game" called INTERACT in 1978 that uses removable cartridges to store programs, and it has a numerical keyboard and joystick for input. The company calls it a personal computer and plans to offer a program library that includes a variety of games as well as home and business applications in areas such as maintaining sales records, inventory control, income tax, and computer assisted tutoring. The user does not have to learn BASIC but must take the programs as they are, without being able to modify them to suit individual needs.

INTERACT is a fourth generation game that is as much of a computer as it can be and still be a game. It uses an 8080 chip and, at about $250, is a choice to consider if you want to be a consumer and have no interest in creating your own programs.

Two other systems which are similar to INTERACT are the Home Library Computer by Balley, an established manufacturer of slot and pinball machines, and the Apple II. The Home Library Computer has a Z-80 microprocessor and provides the user with a wide variety of games and educational programs. The thing even has sound built into the games. When you shoot your opponent in a gunfight it plays taps. Balley also promises a raft of peripherals in the future - items such as a standard typewriter keyboard, more memory, and a cassette tape system. Its price is about $300 through JS & A National Sales Group, a well known mail order firm.

As it stands, the Home Library Computer is a promising video game. The Apple II is just the opposite; it is a microcomputer which also has very good game capabilities. Apple II has an excellent keyboard, comes with a powerful BASIC built in, and has the ability to read from and record onto cassette tapes. That is the stuff computers are made of! Apple II also comes with two paddles to make it easier to play games