

Electronic and computer games are sweeping the toy market this season, with some merchants finding that they just can't keep enough of them in stock. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Computer games sweep fancy of Yule shoppers and toy buffs

By MARY GNEWEK

The advice to toy buyers is to shop early this Christmas season and be prepared for mass shortages of some of the most popular toys.

Headliners in this year's collection can be described in one word: Electronics. From calculator football games to computerized tic-tac-toe,

electronic toys are the hottest items on the market today.

MIKE ZAMLER, co-owner of Toy Town, 31530 Grand River, says he gets 500 calls a day from parents inquiring about two of his biggest sellers: Parker Brothers' Merlin, a computer game with seven functions including tic-tac-toe and blackjack, and Milton

Bradley's Simon, a round game with blinking lights and sound.

"The demand is unbelievable. We still have both games in stock, but there's going to be a shortage," Zamler says.

Both Simon and Merlin are new on the market, but one second-time-around toy doing equally well this season is Mattel's electronic football game. The handsized digital game, a bit larger than a calculator, only needs one player.

Zamler says last year's big selling television screen ping-pong game has made way for more advanced toys.

"THESE TOYS ARE real computers made by Texas Instruments. They are programmed computer games, more advanced than ever."

Other popular electronic gadgetry games include Battletstar Galactica (like the computer football game but

the opposing teams are battleships); Comp Four, a memory game of numbers; and robots. The recommended ages for players on most electronic games are 8 years to adult.

Even dolls are more mechanized today. Toy Town's two top sellers manufactured by Fisher-Price are Baby Heartbeat, with a pulsing heart, and Baby Wet and Care, who develops a rash that can be treated with play medicine.

SALLY NEWKIRK is toy buyer for the Sherman Drug Co. in Farmington Hills, which stocks many of the same products as Toy Town.

Newkirk said the Simon game is the hottest seller in her store this year.

"I could sell a thousand of them if I had them. It's a fun party game. The object is to try and outwit Simon. He tells you what to do."

The toy is less than one foot in diameter and divided into four discs that flash different color sequences. The player must repeat the color sequence back into the computer. The toy sells for \$30.

BESIDES ELECTRONIC, toys traditional dolls are popular.

"Dolls are selling better this year. We're already on our third shipment," she said. "The Madame Alexander top of the line collectables are doing well."

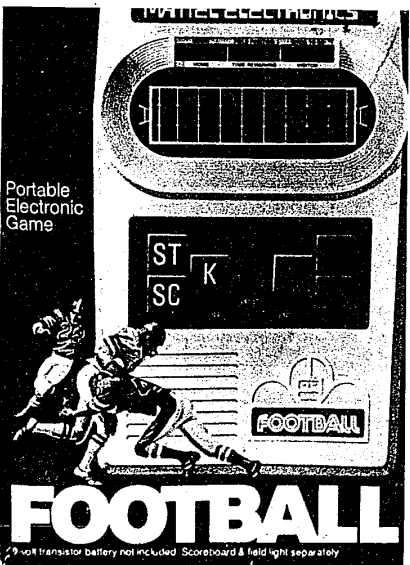
The eight-inch dolls, imported from Europe, sell for \$13.95. Complete lines of "Fairy Tale" and "Little Women" series are available.

ONE STORE NOT swept up in the electronic craze is Joe's Hobby Shop in downtown Farmington.

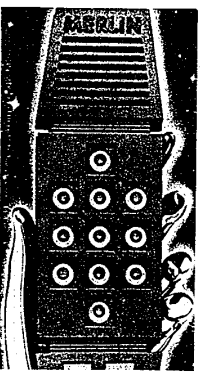
"We cater more to adults, though we sell model trains and road race sets," says manager Tim Pilon.

According to Pilon, the toy craze hobbyists are caught up in this year's adventure games.

"Fantasy figures from Tolkien's Lord of the Rings are the main characters. Also, figures from Star Wars and other battle situation-type stories," he explained.



The armchair quarterback now can get in the action with this version of electronic football. (Staff photo)



Merlin is one of the most popular games this Christmas season. (Staff photo)

Puppet world comes alive at libraries

Take about 45 puppets, add a generous number of children and step back for a minute.

The results are bound to be entertaining.

While the youngsters create personalities for their puppets, they're also learning to express themselves and think about their place in the world of animals and people.

To encourage imagination and expression, the Farmington Library and the Farmington Jaycettes installed a wooden puppet tree and 45 hand made animal puppets in the children's room.

Children will be able to take the puppets home in a canvas tote bag.

Although children can't read a puppet, the activity dovetails with some of the selections available at the library, according to librarian Jill Locke.

By using the hand puppets, the young readers will be able to put into action what they've seen in books, according to Ms. Locke.

"It's not unusual as far as our philosophy, really," said Ms. Locke. "It's good for children to express themselves. It helps them to develop a vocabulary which in turn helps them in their reading."

PUPPETS help children work together in a group. For the shy child, puppets are an avenue which leads to acting without being scared.

"People are looking at the puppet

and not at him," said Ms. Locke.

Reading about a stage isn't the same as using one, Ms. Locke said.

The puppet tree, which looks like a modified version of the old-fashioned hat rack, stands next to the puppet stage used in library programs. Now, the stage is taken over by youngsters introducing each others puppets as they pretend they're on television.

"And now, my favorite guest, Big Bird," pipes up one childish voice behind a grey rabbit puppet.

Regulars to the children's library anticipated the little scenario every time they caught a glimpse of the puppet tree.

"We kept it in our storage room and whenever we had the door open we had kids peek in there. It drew them like a magnet," said Ms. Locke.

The puppets were purchased by a Jaycette committee consisting of Claudia Heinrich, Harriette Reed, Delilah Tretinik and Leslie Weimeir.

THEY were inspired to collect the puppets last year when Margie Tamm, a puppetmaker, took part in the Jaycette's annual craft fair.

Future plans for the children's libraries in the Farmington area include a similar puppet tree for the Farmington Hills branch. The Jaycettes also donated the tree house, which stands in the Farmington branch's children's room.



David Tretinik, of Farmington Hills, reaches out for another puppet from the Farmington Library's selection. Soon, children will be able to take puppets home from the library, much like books. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

THE INSIDE * ANGLE

SOME SAD NEWS from the Farmington branch library on Liberty. The library is mourning the loss of one of its friends in the children's section, Patsy, the hamster. Patsy was a sprightly 2 1/2 years old when he succumbed to wet-tail, a digestive disorder, early last week. Noting that hamsters aren't known for their intelligence, librarian Jill Locke said of Patsy that he really had some sort of sensitivity. "When the Farmington Training Center children came here, he put on a show for them," she said. "He wasn't hammy around other children." Patsy already has been replaced by a four-week-old hamster of undetermined sex and unknown name. But that doesn't mean Patsy is forgotten. "He led a good life," said Ms. Locke.

HOW MANY BOOKS do you think were taken out of the Farmington libraries between Nov. 13 and 18? That was the question asked during a recent contest conducted by the library system during last month's Children's Book Week. More than 200 children participated in this special event. The wide range of guesses were from 66 to 900,000. Children up to 15-years-old offered their estimates. Taken out at the Farmington branch were 3,587. The winners at that branch were Christy Hicks, Steven Mahlborg, Rich Gaine and Carl Geyer. At the Farmington Hills branch, 5,262 materials were circulated during that week. Winners were: Sherise Jolicoeur, Diane Hahn, Adam Ebner and Pat Siders. The winners were awarded with a paperback book.

FREE IMMUNIZATIONS will be given at the First Methodist Church, Warner and Grand River from 9 a.m. to noon Dec. 14. Immunizations for measles, German measles, mumps, polio, diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough are available. A parent or guardian must accompany a child younger than 18 and bring any previous records for immunization.

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR when the Farmington Goodfellows turn their attention to the less fortunate families in the Farmington community to insure "No Children in Farmington Without a Christmas." The Goodfellows are asking for help for their annual Dress Drive and Boys Shirt Drive. Needed most are individuals to make a permanent press dress or boy's shirt for elementary school-aged children. Or, if one prefers to make a donation, a \$7 contribution will buy a dress and only \$4 will buy a long sleeve school shirt. Dresses and shirts should be delivered to 33928 Oakland, Farmington before Dec. 15. Those wishing to contribute may send checks payable to the Goodfellow Dress and Shirt Drive to the same address.

THE ANNUAL GOODFELLOWS canned food drive will run until Dec. 8. Students from North Farmington High School will be collecting canned food during this week to support the local goodfellows program. All clubs and organizations at North Farmington will be lending their support to this all-school drive. North Farmington annually sponsors two families with clothing, toys, games and groceries. The National Honor Society of North Farmington is coordinating the efforts of the various school clubs and organizations for the Goodfellows Drive. People wishing to donate canned goods may do so by bringing the canned foods to North Farmington High School, 32900 Thirteen Mile, east of Farmington Road. A large box in the front lobby of the school will be made available for receiving the goods.

DEADLINE

Material submitted for the Inside Angle, 2170 W. Nine Mile, Southfield 48034, should include the name and phone number of the sender, and should be typewritten if possible. Items should be received at least one week before publication.

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