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VIDEO BUSINESS

J.D. extends time frame for Choices

By Earl Patte

Choices Entertainment's ambitious plan to craft a large, publicly held retail chain by acquiring at least 19 regional video chains is expected to become a reality by the summer, according to analysts and the chains involved.

The first step is the completed merger of Choices with J.D. Store Equipment. John Maiorillo, chairman of Choices and founder of J.D. Store, said earlier that he expected the deal to be consummated by Feb. 12. He acknowledged last week, however, that the deal will not be



■ John Turturro stars as a contestant in *Quiz Show*, coming to video from Hollywood Pictures on April 18 (prebook March 27). See page 8.

completed by then. He would not give a new deadline and discounted the significance of the delay. He declined to comment further, citing securities law.

Retail executives who at continued on page 12

NewLeaf stops music but not games

By Betsy Scala

Blockbuster Entertainment Group is cautiously optimistic about introducing electronic videogame delivery to retail stores, but plans for manufacturing music product in stores have been scrapped.

NewLeaf Entertainment, a

joint venture of Blockbuster and IBM, last week said it won't use its electronic delivery technology to create audiocassettes and compact discs on demand in stores, as it had planned since its inception.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

LIVE

LJV's Home Video division only offers the standard *Surgeon's Cut* VHS tape. Marketed to moviegoers, it features all the alternative version. LIVE was offering retailers two versions of box art: the standard version showing the Surgeon ring hovering over a cyborg in seen in the theatrical and video trade ads; and a second version featuring stars Kurt Russell and James Spader. The alternate version had originally been requested by Blockbuster Entertainment (V.D. 2/7/95). Based on the response from distributor and retailers who believed the gun-driven pack-

continued on page 8

MCA tries \$15 cure

Flintstones' repriced; Jurassic' next?

By Betsy Scala
and Wendy Wilson

MCA/Universal Home Video is trying to breathe new life into surplus inventory of holiday titles *The Flintstones* and *Beethoven's 2nd* with a repricing program that could be a prelude to a similar effort for *Jurassic Park*.

Last week, Uni Distribution Corp., the distribution arm of MCA, told distributors that, beginning immediately, *The Flintstones*, *Beethoven* and

Beethoven's 2nd will carry a new suggested retail price of \$14.98 each. The first two titles were priced at \$19.98 during the holidays; the third carried a \$24.98 retail price.

Each title will qualify for returns under their original program terms: 20% return allowance for the *Beethoven* movies and 30% for *The Flintstones*.

MCA will begin accepting returns for *Beethoven's 2nd* on continued on page 12

NBA Jam sequel stands to excel in slow quarter

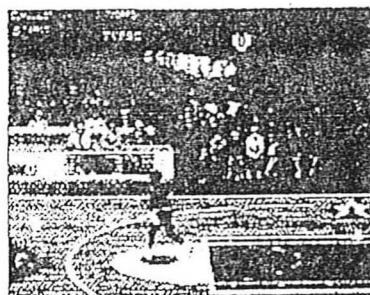
By Jane Greenstein

Retailers looking for hit videogames this quarter don't have far to look. Acclaim's *NBA Jam Tournament Edition* will hit stores on Feb. 23. After that, however, marquee titles will be in short supply.

Typically, the number of game releases slows down after the holiday barrage. About 300 games were released for the Christmas season just past.

This year, however, another significant factor in the relative dearth of highly anticipated 16-bit titles is that many game publishers are focused on the next generation of game machines,

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■ *NBA Jam Tournament Edition* videogame offers a roster of 100 players.

THIS WEEK:

PAGES 10-11: *HOME BOX OFFICE* (MOVIES)
 12: *THE FLINTSTONES* (HOME BOX OFFICE)
 13: *BEETHOVEN'S 2ND* (HOME BOX OFFICE)
 14: *QUIZ SHOW* (HOME BOX OFFICE)

QUOTEABLE:

"It's only everyone but four publishers [Acclaim, Electronic Arts, Nintendo, Sega] is looking to test the cartridge market." Analyst's report on the game market issued by investment banking firm Alex, Brown & Sons

OPENING SHOTS

Searching for research

With video software retailing around for almost 20 years, market research has never been a hotter topic than it is now. Why? One, this is a mature industry that has long since turned from an order-taking to an order-making mentality. Studios strong in sell-through, in particular, have benefited from research-driven marketing strategies. Two, for those on the front lines, wholesalers and retailers alike, numbers are seen as ammunition in the competitive wars. Ever more challenging market conditions, such as higher rental-product costs and price slashing on sell-through titles, demand more copious use of funds, which requires more analytical planning. Three, with the hot air of new technologies breathing down their necks, everyone in the distribution pipeline wants to stay alert to the nuances of consumer behavior and do what is necessary to bias that behavior toward packaged media. *** That said, we're dumbstruck by some forms of research, such as ranking studio market share according to wholesale unit shipments. If returns and unsold copies aren't factored in for sell-through product—and if the creative accounting used to disburse co-op and other marketing funds isn't factored into studio revenues on trade sales of both rental and sell-through copies—such rankings are questionable benchmarks that tend to misrepresent the marketplace. *** Readership studies have told us what retailers need most is detailed market data on consumer rental and purchase patterns. For more on this topic, see publisher John Gaffney's comments on page 60. □

VB Kudos of the Week • To the North Carolina chapter of the Video Software Dealers Association, for effecting a change in the state's property-tax code that will save each store approximately \$400 a year in taxes.

Reader Gripe of the Week • Jim Healy of Lake Mathews Video in Lake Mathews, Calif., isn't sending any valentines to Warner Home Video for moving the street date of *Natural Born Killers* from Jan. 24 to Feb. 14. Healy says Valentine's Day was more crowded with at least five big releases, despite Warner's explanation of "a crowded January market."

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Volume 15, Number 7. Printed in U.S.A. February 17, 1995. © 1995 by Chilton Publications. All rights reserved. Video Business (USPS 576990, ISSN 0279-571X) is published weekly except May 26 and Dec. 29 by Chilton Publications, a Capitol Cities/ABC Publishing Group, 825 Seventh Ave., New York, NY 10019. Paid subscription rates for non-qualified readers: \$70 1 yr. U.S.; \$150 Canadian; \$190 foreign air mail. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Video Business, P.O. Box 7805, Riverdale, NJ 07677-7805.

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TIPSHEET

KIDS MAKE MUSIC, MUSIC,
MUSIC

Color, 45 min., VHS \$14.95
Available now
BOGNER

With much more on its mind than simply entertaining small children on a rainy day, this invaluable instructional video effectively shows parents how to channel a child's natural bent for noise-making into a substantive learning experience. Instructor Lynn Kleiner leads a group of children through 16 mostly original songs, encouraging them to experiment with percussion instruments (triangle, tambourine, maracas, bells and so forth) and accompanying movements. The goal is to teach kids about rhythm, cadence, harmony and the musical scale in a play-filled atmosphere. The tape ends with a brief advisory discussion for parents and comes with audiotape (\$7.95) and parent/teacher guide (\$8.95). Recommended for children ages 2 to 5.—Catherine Catchpole

THE BIG PLANE TRIP

Color, 45 min., VHS \$12.95
Available now
Narrator: Elizabeth Marshall
Director: William VanDerKloot
LITTLE MAMMOTH MEDIA (800-KID-VIDEO)

This chronicle of a transatlantic trip from booking the flight to touring a different country offers a truckload of information in a well-organized package. Supported by animated graphics and on-screen descriptions, the child narrator quantifies various elements of the flight, from how many tons of cargo and fuel the plane will carry to the number of passengers and the amount luggage stowed. Included is such information as how pilots and flight attendants train. The camera also goes behind the scenes to look at how a flight's laundry is handled and how meals are prepared. Safety issues are a constant undercurrent. Children ages 3 to 8 will be fascinated. A short bonus section covers Switzerland, the destination of the flight.—L.MacA

MUSIC**NEW WAVE HITS OF THE 80s:
JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH,****VOL. 1**

Color, 35 min., VHS \$24.98
Available now
A*VISION (RHINO)

Are we ready for '80s nostalgia already? Well, Rhino believes we are and has created a fun trip down memory lane for anyone who danced the night away in smoky, video-monitored clubs or simply soaked up lots of MTV during the cable channel's early years. Viewers will be amused by the cheesy note struck for Bow Wow Wow's "I Want Candy"; titillated by the sexy elegance of Duran Duran's "Girls on Film" (the uncensored-with-nudity version); puzzled by the goofy storyline of Thomas Dolby's "She Blinded Me With Science"; and engaged by the energy of "Come On, Eileen" by Dexy's Midnight Runners.—B.G.

**RETURN FIRE**

Platform: 3DO, \$49.99
Available now
PROLIFIC PUBLISHING

Content: *Return Fire* is a strategy game that takes the popular war genre one step further by including lots of action and mass destruction. The goal is to capture the flag of the opposing side, played by either the computer or a human opponent. *Return Fire* sports a 3-D look that gives one the impression of blowing up a toy train set. The game is presented in Dolby Surround Sound, featuring orchestral music that makes the game a joy to play. Whenever the helicopter appears on the screen, "Ride of the Valkyries"—the music used in *Apocalypse Now*—is heard.

Bottom Line: *Return Fire* surprised many 3DO owners by showing up on the shelves without a lot of pre-release hype. This sleeper title may be the so-called "killer app" the 3DO needs to boost sales of the system. The game play is addictive and infinitely entertaining in two-player mode. Perhaps the best two-player game since *Street Fighter II*.—Chris Gore

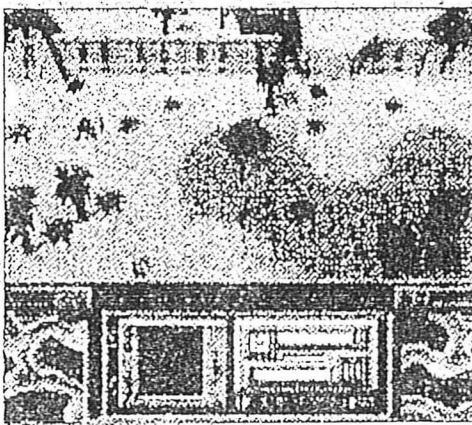
CLUE

Platform: CD-i (digital video cartridge required), \$49.98
Available now
PHILIPS MEDIA (BT PRODUCTIONS)

Content: In this electronic version of the classic board game, one to six players roll an onscreen die, move around a virtual game board, and gather information to solve a murder. Players move the cursor over objects in each

room to find clues, watch "flashback" videos of events from the fateful night, and interrogate witnesses, taking notes in order to make an accusation to win the game; each player gets three tries. There are three storylines to choose from.

Bottom Line: A '90s update of *Clue* may sound like a good idea, but when you take away the real game board and the personal interaction of direct player-to-player questioning, there isn't much left. Where the original version has players eliminating possibilities and checking them off a supplied list, the disc version piles false leads and meaningless details into an unattractive heap. The only real advantage here is the single-player mode, in which one participant can try to solve the mystery alone. Fortunately, the original Parker Brothers board game is still available.—Ken Korman



Return Fire, "Killer application" for 3DO?

METALHEAD

Platform: Genesis 32X, \$59.99
Available March
SEGA

Content: The 32X is still lacking in break-through software, but *Metalhead* could be the answer. This *BattleTech*-style robot game allows the player freedom of movement around a very realistic city where each mission leads to a new level. Lots of interesting weapons and enemies to blow up.

Bottom Line: *Metalhead* is a welcome addition to the growing line of 32X titles. Owners of the 32X accessory will become addicted to the long hours of play. The smooth texture-mapped graphics really show off what the Genesis upgrade can do. The sound is still lacking, but game play is the thing, and *Metalhead*'s entertaining missions have that in abundance.—C.G.