# Games microchips play

By SUSAN WEAVER
Register Staff Writer

It's been said more than once that the difference between men and boys (or women and girls, for that matter) is the price of their toys.

While most people who buy home computers have graduated from the shoot-'em-up, zap-'em-good motivation that seemingly dominates the video games crowd, it has been observed that most home computer owners *do* invest in a game or two for their system.

After all, who ever said technology, learning and fun couldn't mix?

The advantage of playing games on a home computer is that the games can be much more challenging — more complex — than those programmed into less sophisticated equipment. Computers can be programmed to "think," and thus make ideal game opponents.

According to Don Brown, a game designer with CE Software, affiliated with Computer Emporium in Des Moines, home computer games can be grouped into three broad categories:

● Arcade games: Featuring flashy graphics and fast action, these games are primarily hand-eye coordination-oriented. They are based on games made popular in video arcades, such as Pac-Man and Space Invaders.

● Strategy games: Players have to *think* when they play these games, similar to the way in which board games such as Risk and Monopoly are approached.

● Role-playing games: These games feature a "hero" figure whose actions are controlled by the human player. The player *tells* the computer — usually by typing in English sentences or sentence fragments — exactly what he wants the hero to do (for example, "Drop all but the dagger").

Many of the games that can be played on today's home computers evolved from a game entitled "Adventure" that was designed several years ago, Brown says. "Adventure" was a puzzle that could be solved only one way. Playing it was no piece of cake; it took the average participant 30 to 40 hours of solid playing time to win the game, Brown notes.

Now, Brown explains, home computer games have been developed that can be solved in more ways than one — and, in most cases, *lots* of ways.

In many fantasy games, he says, "creatures will act [one way or another] depending upon how you treat them."

Some games can be played on only one brand of computer, but many have been "translated" and made available for several computers. Some of the games available include:

ZORK, produced by INFOCOM. ZORK formerly had a kind of "fan club" — a "Users Group" — headed by a college student; players of ZORK could join the club and purchase clues to aid them in their game playing. The ZORK Users Group is defunct, but INFOCOM soon will be providing maps and clues for all their games.

Another fantasy/adventure game is SwordThrust — a series of seven games Brown designed for the Apple home computer, but which also soon will be available for the IBM and possibly other computers with disc drives.

Of course, for those computer owners not interested in fighting dragons or exploring dungeons in a fantasy setting, there are other equally challenging, fun options.

The games "Deadline" and "Witness" are crime dramas in which the hero (that is, the player) is a crime-solving detective.

If there is a trend in the games being designed and manufactured for home computers, Brown observes, it is that "barriers are breaking down, arcade and adventure games are coming together."