Guide to some great last-minute gift ideas

TOMORROW is the last shopping day before Christmas and the town is no doubt going to be filled with people rushing round trying to find last-minute presents.

Here are a few suggestions for computer buffs.

Starting with the most basic, a box of discs is ideal for somebody just getting into computers. Or even for the person with heaps of discs stored in lots of separate boxes it is better to get them together in a larger file system.

The disc file boxes will hold from 10 to 100 discs and some come with a lockable lid for privacy. They are also dust-free and even have dividers so you can file under headings.

If the buff hasn't a disc drive, you could still buy him storage systems for his cassettes from an audio shop.

☐ This desktop file holds 50 discs.

Books always go down well. One bookshop which deserves a mention just through sheer diversity of range is the Rellim Technical Bookshop.

Looking through the window gives one an idea of the range available. Rellim is not biased towards any machine. Most of the popular machines and some of the not so well known ones are all supported.

If you are after a rare book, then specialist stores will often concentrate on books for

one major machine. Apple stores carry a good range of books and so does Bruining Headlam for Commodore.

☐ ☐ ☐

For game players who like the action-type "wham-bang-shoot-'em-down", a joystick upgrade would go down well.

Joysticks range from $12 for a fairly basic one up to $60 for the top of the range indestructable-type. These deluxe joysticks are faster and deadlier than the cheaper ones.

For example, the Wico Trackball is different and, once learnt, really fast.

☐ ☐ ☐

If you get annoyed at your enthusiast friend constantly plugging and unplugging wires into the back of your television, then get a video TV switchbox.

Then you can switch from computer to TV without messing round with wires all the time. Turning from TV to computer or video is just a flick of one switch.

☐ ☐ ☐

Some dealers around town have special Christmas offers. Bruining Headlam Computers is offering a Commodore cartridge pack. For $50 you receive five top quality cartridges which include games and business programs.

☐ ☐ ☐

The Backgammon Shops are offering the Phantom chess computer – the one that moves its own pieces – for $499. It used to be $899 and after Christmas the price will rise to $799.

Definitely a bargain at half the price, but only while stocks last.

The Phantom has 12 levels of skill and a help function if you are stuck for a move.

☐ ☐ ☐

If software is what you are after, no matter what machine, the Soft-

ware Centre (Hay St next to Cinema City) might be a good place to check out.

On the shelf it has a wide range of software for the IBM PC, Apple and Commodore 64. If it is not there, then the centre can order it for you from some of its many overseas sources.

☐ ☐ ☐

VicWest, the West Australian dealer for Oct-Soft, has some good things going.

A new program just in is White Lightning, which is called the game programmers' ultimate tool, it seems.

It is a programmer's aid to produce a very powerful programming system.

It is ideal for creating games. And, once written, the game does not need White Lightning to run again.

☐ Phantom computer chess . . . the amazing computer that moves his own pieces automatically.

Apple Digicard scores top marks in schools

APPLE Computer Australia has announced an Australian-developed computer networking system for schools.

Called the Digicard, the system, which was developed by MacLannigan, Wright and Associates, has unofficialy become a relevant standard in Australian schools.

The networking system was designed for the Apple 2 personal computer, which is believed by Apple to account for more than 50 per cent of computers in Australian schools.

Using cable linking, up to 28 Apple 2 computers can be connected to the system. The tutor can simultaneously provide a class with identical programs and still allow students to work at their own speed.

Only one piece of software, one printer and one disc drive is needed for a class of 20 students.

Two modes

The Digicard system consists of one master control unit, which consists of two disc drives and connections to the students' machines and a printer, and a slave unit.

The slave unit, which is attached to each networked Apple, includes a master switch which allows alternative use of each computer.

The network operates in two modes – simultaneously or sequentially.

When simultaneous mode is used, the network machines can all access the master computer at the same time. While in sequential mode, each student has access to the master unit in turn.

The Digicard system will be sold through Apple dealers nationally in special educational bundles called Eight-Packs.

Each Eight-Pack will include the master controller, eight Apple 2 computers, monitors, 80-column cards and Digicard slaves and cables for an education price of $12,995.

Normally this system would cost $15,750.

Zenji: It's weird but wonderful

THE game company, Activision, is one of the most successful in creating computer game hits.

Top games over the years include Pitfall, River Raid, Pitfall 2 and, this year, the all-time big winner, Ghostbusters.
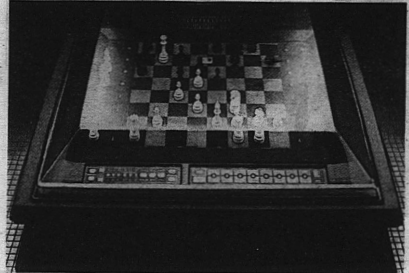
One game that this talented company has created but which has not hit the big time is Zenji. It is perhaps one of the most underrated Activision games – but that is understandable because the game instructions are weird.

The object of the game is to connect all elements to a pulsating source while avoiding desires and illusions and not running out of time.

This is a mind game based around Zen.

The player controls a head which constantly spins. Using this head you must negotiate the complex maze system and emerge from it.

Reading the instructions, the game appears to be rather strange and aimed at players with deranged minds.

The sounds are equally weird but the graphics are stunning.

If you like maze games, you will love Zenji. It is cassette-based for Commodore 64 and sells for $29.95.

☐ Zenji . . . an exciting Christmas game.

Is Christmas on your computer programme?

Everything you need in Computer software packages, advice, expertise, literature, and hardware add-ons in almost any computer language. This year, make it a computerised Christmas.

The Software Center.

Shop 8 Cremorne Arcade 576 Hay Street, Perth: Tel: 325 8471