As you can tell this is an impressive suite of programs and not only because of the price. I cannot believe that anyone will be disappointed in this package and there must be a number of users of other programs who wish that it had been released before they made some expensive mistakes. The only thing that I would like is a set of function keystrips but you can always make your own!

Ratings Table:

SOUNDS	N/A
GRAPHICS	N/A
DOCUMENTATION	80%
VALUE FOR MONEY	100%
OVERALL	100%

|	
Title	Elite
Publisher	Acornsoft
Machine	Model B/ Electron
Price	£14.96 cassette, £17.95 disc, £12.95 Electron

As I spin uncontrollably towards Diso, my cargo of exotic liqueurs and wine already lost, scooped up into the hold of a pirate ship, the sound of lasers on the hull of my Cobra Mk II ringing in my ears, I know that another attempt to join the Elite will be over in a matter of seconds.

Elite, Acornsoft's brand new space fantasy simuation can, and will, take its players into the fantasy world of deep space, the world brought to us by countless science fiction writers, and now by two Cambridge undergraduates from Jesus College. Elite is flexible enough a game to allow the player to live out a number of roles within its solar systems and galaxies. Be a trader, the quiet life, a pirate, a bounty hunter, a miner, or as likely, a combination of all of these. If you wish, you can even become a hermit on some lonely asteroid. That however would be a waste of your considerable investment in buying Elite.

The justification for paying at least £12.95 (the Electron monochrome version) for Elite, is that this game will plunge you into another world. Three lesser games for the same price could

not hope to compete with the comprehensive challenge to the player's tactical, trading and space fighting skills presented by Elite. You might well hone your laser aim with Vortex and test your financial acumen with Planetfall, but Elite offers the chance to combine the lot.

The package includes a bulky flight manual, with a training section for new pilots, guidelines to the sort of political systems, alien life forms, industrial and agricultural economies the trader will encounter. As in the game itself, there are humurous elements in the planet descriptions owing much to the authors' acquaintance with the Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy. The owner of Elite also gets a handy reference guide to the keyboard functions and the other space ships which he will encounter. There is a poster with some of these same ships and a detailed "Observer's Guide" in the manual. Space ship spotting is an important part of the trader's skill.

Front View
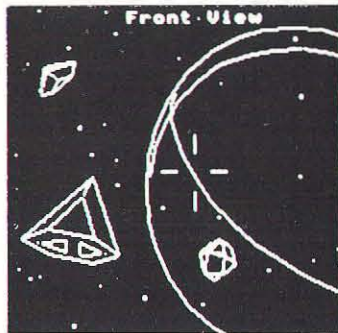
Finally, the game is accompanied by a book called The Dark Wheel. It is based on the game (rather than the more usual reverse situation) and picks up on many of the details, distances, prices, ship performances, which form the world of Elite. The story is a powerful one, the revenge of a father's death, and helps push the player's imagination over the boundaries of keyboard and monitor into the dark void and whirling stars of the game.

Elite was written using the BBC Assembler, the final code being generated from a number of source files. This method has resulted in some very impressive 3D graphics, a split screen, and

the storage (in tokenised form no doubt) of a considerable amount of information. The space craft and Coriolis stations are conveniently geometric shapes and are drawn using a hidden line algorithm in the two colour mode window. Beneath the window and in four colours, the status window provides information on ship position in relation to other craft in the area, compass heading and readouts on energy banks (which supply the all important protective shields, fuel, lasers and so on). Your initial Cobra Mk II is supplied with one forward laser and three missiles. Part of the skill in playing Elite is trading successfully enough to be able to afford various items of equipment for your ship. Docking computer, scoop, mining, beam or military lasers, front and rear, anti missile device and intergalactic drive are just some of the possibilities. The latter is necessary to reach the other seven galaxies. This seems to be necessary if you wish to become "Elite".

Front View
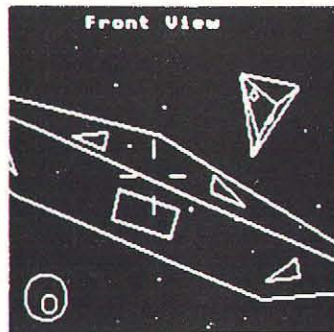
Your initial status is "Harmless" progressing to "Most Harmless" (another Hitchhiker reference) and on to the top of the range, Deadly and Elite itself.

Acornsoft are running a competition with a £100 prize each month up to March, when there will be a final. So far no-one, either the programmers themselves, or those at Acornsoft, knows of anyone who has achieved Elite status. The top end of Dangerous seems to be the current high score. A challenge indeed.

The function key plays an important role in the playing of the game, accessing various sources of information on market prices, available goods on the space station with which you are currently docked (you don't actually visit any planets), an inventory, personal status (including your standing in the eyes of the police!), plus local and galactic navigation charts. Within the galaxy it is possible to pinpoint any star and get information about it. Your local chart shows the solar systems to which you can travel with you seven light year range.

When you have made your choice, your ship goes into Hyperspace (Witch space as it is sometimes called). Space skips or jumps can then be made (providing no other ships are in the area) towards the target planet. Once in orbit, docking has to be achieved with the Coriolis station for trading to take place. Be warned, market prices fluctuate and some illegal goods, narcotics and slaves, will have the police Vipers down on you in an instant. Pirates will also prefer the more valuable cargoes so it pays to take it easy and play it safe until you can build up some reasonable defensive capability.

Every player will find his or her own niche within the world of deadly Thargoids (their fear glands surgically removed), of radioactive cargos, of heavily armed Boas (all ships are named after snakes), of gripping the joystick in an attempt to target your already armed missile on a pirate Mamba, reaching for the M key at the same time, and the feeling of elation as the credits you have earned as bounty are flashed up on the screen. And still you must do your best not to relax, as the rear viewscanner reveals a yet more deadly foe.

Elite is not a game without fault. For instance, stars do not travel through transparent planets, not even in space fantasies. Programmers can only do so much. The Elite package recognises this and provides the compensating factors of imagination. You are much too busy trying to match the revolution of your Cobra with that of the space station to worry about details. The differences between cassette and disc versions on the BBC are not matters of importance, frills like quick graphic scenes inside the space station, although there is disc accessing for launch from docking and for Hyperspace.

As well as game functions the keyboard also allows access, when frozen with Copy, to various game playing subtleties, key response, sound on and off and so on. There is even a Bitstick option for those lucky enough to have access to the graphics joystick. You can save your status to disc or tape, Adventure style.

Well, the escape capsule ejected safely and my insurance has provided another Cobra. Time for another mission, another attempt to achieve Elite status. It seems a long way off. I may never make it. But it doesn't stop me trying. It's worth it.

Ratings Table:

SOUNDS	90%
GRAPHICS	90%
DOCUMENTATION	100%
VALUE FOR MONEY	80%
OVERALL	95%
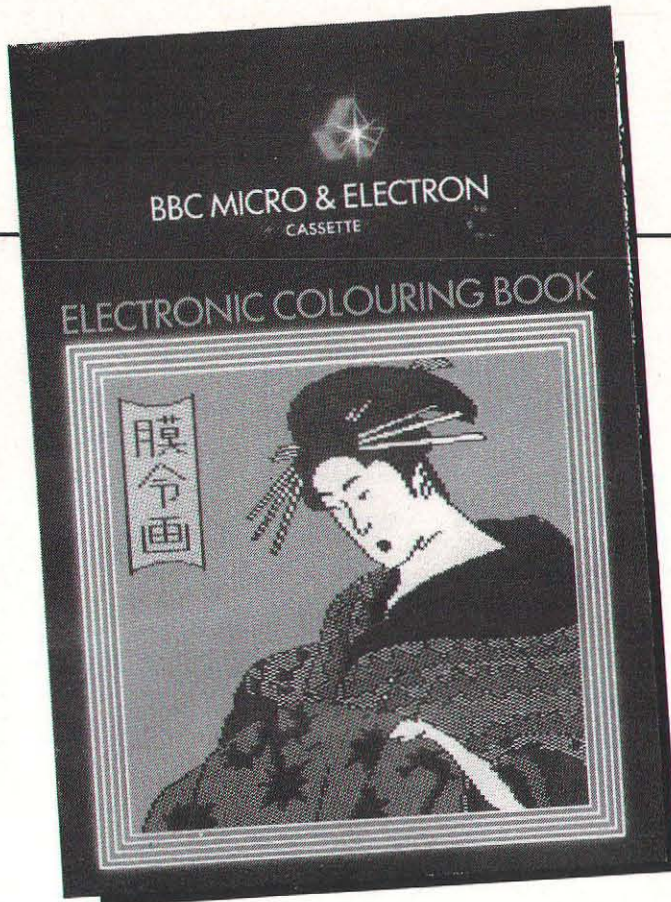
Title	Electronic Colouring Book
Publisher	Addison-Wesley
Machine	Model B/Electron
Price	£9.95

The electronic colouring book is a very attractive package indeed and to some extent a useful tool for drawing and colouring screen pictures on your Beeb or Electron. The tape contains the control program and 18 examples of what can be achieved. These picture files include stunning pictures of snakes, a butterfly, fruit, racing car and so on. The packaging uses one of these drawings. Kimono.

First and foremost, Electronic Colouring Book, as the name suggests, demonstrates what can be achieved by colour mixing the palette of BBC and Electron, and by changing the logical assignation of the available eight static colours.

The screen displays a blank white background sketching sheet and a menu of colours along the right hand edge. The bottom option is DRAW. The cursor can be moved with joystick or cursor keys to make the choice of current colour or DRAW. This

final option proved difficult with the joysticks I used since the calibration did not allow the cursor to stretch into the extreme bottom right hand corner. Cursor keys will suffice anyhow. To fill an area, all you have to do is hit P or fire. The fill routine uses the new PLOT commands from BASIC 2 and are impressively fast.

Drawing involves fixing the cursor with F or fire, moving to the end point and fixing again. Each stage can be deleted by going back to the DRAW symbol. Paint can be deleted with D and the whole screen cleared with C if you have really made a mess. When you have finished a drawing or you want to go to bed, the drawing can be saved to cassette as two files. You are only prompted for one but the picture is saved as drawing and colour in separate parts. When loading back in, the drawing file is read first and then the colour if you wish.

When you have got the colour sorted out, there remain a couple of very interesting options still open. E allows you to experiment with the basic colour settings, so that you can choose from your own palette. The numbers one to eight instan-

taneously change one of the basic colours. This facility is great fun. You can tap away on the keys stimulating all kinds of colour combination. And if you hit upon something you like, it can be save. R restores the original colouring, so don't worry. B swaps background colour (white to black). This gives a sort of negative effect, since all the black lines drawn go white and the colour mixes are similarly effected. Great fun.

Now we encounter the one major problem with the Electronic Colouring Book. In all the very good documentation, I expected to find information about how to *SAVE a screen, or some means of retrieving files from outside the program, or a built-in printer routine (not difficult to implement one would have thought). I searched in vain. Unless you are a dab hand at screen photography, you will have to lead your unbelieving friends or relatives to the computer, or else break into program to send it off to your own routine, which is difficult to do, and Addison-Wesley would disapprove strongly.

It may be illogical but the best way to currently make use of computer graphics is through hard copy, and the lack of print facilities spoils the excitment a bit. To be able to draw complex pictures and then not use them in other programs is also frustrating.

The above criticism of the program does not take away the fact that the Electronic Colouring Book is a friendly utility, with which it is easy to get impressive looking results. This should appeal to children and those of us adults without a grain of artistic talent. The artist who came up with the example pictures certainly has that talent and they are almost worth the price of the cassette themselves. The one thing that seems to keep people glued to a computer screen for any length of time is colour graphics and this program allows the user to produce some very nice examples. A shame that the facilities are not there for showing them off to a wider audience. I'm sure that a child who had created something with the Book would like to take it home to Mum.