of a simple adventure game. The objective is to sail a ship from Athens to various islands in the Aegean Sea, all the time avoiding rocks and storms. On reaching the safety of a port, the name of the island is displayed and a cryptic message appears at the bottom of the screen. The player must then decide whether to explore the island: a correct decision will be rewarded with treasure, such as the shield of Achilles; a wrong guess and the ship is sunk by a mythical creature, such as a Gorgon.

Classical scholars may be a little disturbed to discover that the game does get a few things wrong: the Minotaur, for example, is just as likely to appear on Delos as on Crete. The game makes no attempt to explain the significance of names or

Number Tumblers

places: a child is hardly likely to gain even a rudimentary classical education from this cassette. It is unlikely that the game would hold a child's interest for long, since the graphics and format are uninteresting and repetitive.

Designed to develop skills in mental arithmetic for eight- to 12-year-olds, Number Tumblers (Fisher-Price, £9.95) has the speed and feel of an arcade game. A series of numbers is displayed at the top of the screen, and the player has to arrange numerical and arithmetical symbols on the faces of a set of dice to create a mathematical expression that equals one of the numbers. The game is fast and enjoyable, has bright, well-designed graphics, and should provide a real incentive for a player to improve his or her mental arithmetic skills.

Kindercomp (Spinnaker, £9.95) is intended for children aged between three and eight. The aims of the package are to introduce young people to computers and develop artistic skills. The package consists of a series of different exercises for the child to use.

This package was originally written by Dr Doug Davis for his daughter, presumably as an entertainment. Unfortunately, Kindercomp gives the impression that it consists mostly of tricks with the computer — the sort of thing that most programmers design when learning BASIC and discovering the capabilities of the machine. For example, one of the options is 'Names'. The user is invited to input a name, or short sentence, up to 15

Kindercomp

characters in length, which is then produced in assorted colours and sizes all over the screen. The effect is very attractive, and to a child unused to computer graphics will appear visually stunning. However, there appears to be little educational value in the program, since any group of letters will provide the effect.

Kindercomp is unlikely to keep a child occupied for very long. The programming tricks are amusing but soon become repetitive. It is the sort of package that is likely to keep a child constantly occupied for three days or so and then never be used again.

The last package we looked at is designed for very young children. Alf In The Color Caves (Spinnaker, £9.95) features an amusing little character who slips and slides through a variety of colourful and variously-shaped tubes to a room at the bottom of the caves. Using a joystick or the keyboard, the child guides him through the caves, and if he is steered safely past a set of fast-moving ominous pairs of eyes, the user is rewarded with the spectacle of Alf doing a delightful little dance. Then he is sucked up a tube to ground-level again to begin another descent.

We have looked at only a few examples of the burgeoning range of educational programs aimed at youngsters. In the next instalment of the course, we will examine a further sample of currently-available packages.

Alf In The Color Caves

SCREEN SHOTS BY IAN McKINNELL