Retrogaming Times

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Table of Contents

01.	Commercial Vault by Adam King
02.	Vectrex Game Reviews by Dave Mrozek
03.	The Many Faces of Wizard of Wor by Alan Hewston
04.	Sites of the Month
05.	Holiday Game Idea
06.	Broken Controllers by Fred Wagaman
07.	The TI 99/4A: The Games that Never Were by Jim Krych
08.	The Centurion Missions by Jim Krych
09.	Letters to the Editor
10.	MAME Reviews
11.	Conclusion

COMMERCIAL VAULT

by Adam King

The Christmas season is always a magical time for the videogame industry. Companies release their top products, gaming magazines balloon to three times their size, and holiday-themed commercials fill the television airwaves. Since this is the Christmas issue of RT, I found a Christmas style ad for the vault. This commercial is for (stay with me) E.T. for the Atari 2600. We all probably heard the story on how Atari paid $21 million for the videogame rights to E.T., only to make it the worst flop ever.

There's not much dialogue in this ad. On Christmas Eve, a couple of kids are going to sleep for the night, and shortly after ET comes in the house, decked in a Santa suit (you don't actually see his face). He walks over to a pair of presents that say "Elliot" and "ET" on them, and what does he get? Why, the E.T. videogame. He puts it in the family's Atari 2600 and starts to play just as the kids wake up and run down to see him. Then the announcer says, "Only from Atari, made especially for systems from Atari, the videogame that lets you help E.T. get home, just in time for Christmas. Happy Holidays, from Atari."

PICTURES

"Go to sleep kids. Santa will be here, or maybe someone else..."

"Oh no. Aliens are landing."

Santa sure got a lot smaller this year.

"Just what I always wanted: an insult."

"I'm sure they won't mind if I borrow their VCS."

"He's here! E.T. is here!"

"We're sorry, Mr. Speilberg."

Of course the biggest irony is the man that designed E.T., Howard Scott Warshaw, also designed the awesome game Yar's Revenge. Can someone tell me what happened?

I have something to ask to all you gamers out there. I have plenty of commercials for the vault, but I can always use more. Therefore, if you have any videofiles of commercials or know of some websites that carry them, please let me know. It can be for any game system or title. My email is Hal_3000@rocketmail.com. (Please do NOT suggest commercial-archive.com. They seem to have problems there.)

Well, until next month, enjoy this holiday season. Feliz Navidad!

Vectrex Game Reviews

By the David Mrozek, The Video Game Critic
www.videogamecritic.net

Dark Tower (CGE 1983) D
There aren't many adventure games for the Vectrex, but Dark Tower attempts to fill that void. You view the action from just behind your warrior, who looks a bit like Marvin the Martian. As you move through the forest, different types of trees scale smoothly as you walk towards them. Hidden in the woods are chests, keys, and bags of gold. The goal is to collect all four keys and attempt to solve the puzzle of the Dark Tower. Initially I was really drawn in by the smooth scaling scenery, excellent sound effects, and the whole treasure hunting aspect. There's really nothing else like this on the Vectrex. The weakest aspect of the game is the action, or lack of it. There's really only one action sequence, which repeats over and over until you can't bear it anymore. In it, your warrior is looking down a corridor, with Minotaur warriors peeking around corners and throwing fireballs your way. You need to shoot a certain number of Minotaur to escape. It's kind of fun the first few times you play it, but you'll be thrown into this stage literally dozens of times. The rest of the game involves wandering aimlessly trying to gain objects and extra lives. Then there's the matter of this "plague" business, which randomly kills you dead in your tracks. I haven't made it to the Dark Tower yet, and I'm not convinced it's worth the effort. This is an innovative game, but it gets too tedious after a while.

1 player

Bedlam (GCE 1982) B
9/2/2001
It's very rare that I stumble across a game with as much originality as Bedlam. Its closest relative is probably Tempest, but there are more than enough unique features to set the two apart. In Bedlam, you control a ship in the middle of a star-shaped "vector". Your job is to shoot enemies that approach you from each vertex. You can't move your ship; you can only rotate it. For emergency situations, you get one smart bomb per level. Clear a level,

and you're whisked off to a more challenging screen. The first few stages are pretty uneventful, but in later levels, things start to get crazy. The vector begins to shrink, leaving you less room for error. Fortunately, you can push the edges back out by shooting them. Later stages feature ROTATING vectors. This not only makes the game more difficult, but it can make you dizzy as well. If you're tired of all the copycat shooters, Bedlam is like a breath of fresh air.

1 or 2 players

Berzerk (GCE 1982) D-
9/2/2001
What happened here? Blasting killer robots has never been so dull! Berzerk is an old favorite of mine, and I especially enjoy the Atari 2600 version. But this version is sluggish and downright laborious to play. Graphically, even your character looks sloppy. The enemy robots have the rotating eyes, but they look more like octopuses. The only thing that looks good in this game are the robot explosions. Berzerk basically plays like the arcade game, but lacks the excitement. Your man moves slowly, and the robots don't seem very interested. The graphics are subject to intense slow-down and flicker when many robots are on the screen. In addition, there's a weird bug that can result in some outrageously high scores. I'll pass on this one.

1 player

Birds of Prey (John Dondzila 1999) C
9/25/2001
John Dondzila is "the man" when it comes to bringing classic arcade games to the Vectrex, but this adaption of Phoenix misses the mark somewhat. Just like the arcade classic, you face two stages of small birds, two stages of large birds, and finally the huge mother ship. The first stage is tough because your missiles don't move very fast. Fortunately, you can take out some of the birds with your shield. The second stage is my favorite because you get double-shots, which makes it easier to clear the screen. Both large bird stages are nearly identical. But unlike the arcade game, you can't shoot off their wings, and you have to nail them DEAD CENTER to kill them. These levels are long and tedious. At least the birds split into meaty chunks. The mother ship stage is somewhat of a letdown; it looks kind of junky. Instead of shooting away at the hull, a huge hole is already there for you. A fleet of birds is present to defend it. It's nice to see a childhood favorite on the Vectrex, but this failed to bring back old feelings.

1 player

Mine Storm (GCE 1982) A
9/2/2001
This brilliant Asteroids adaptation, which is built into the Vectrex system, is really reason enough to pick up a Vectrex. The smooth graphics, non-stop action, and high level of challenge will keep you coming back for more. The buttons are used to fire, thrust, and engage hyperspace. But instead of asteroids, you shoot at floating mines. You can shoot rapidly, and the screen is often filled with star-shaped explosions. When certain types of mines are shot, they will send a secondary object your way, so you have to stay alert! Also beware of the flying saucers, which make a beeline right for you! Hyperspace is often the only option. The only problem with this game is a programming bug that causes it freak out after level 13. But to make it that far would be a major accomplishment.

1 or 2 players

Clean Sweep (GCE 1982) F
9/15/2001
I think I'm going to be ill. There are good Pac-Man clones and there are bad Pac-Man clones. This is a bad one. In some ways it's downright appalling. In the idiotic background story, you are a vacuum in a maze, and robbers are pursuing you. There are four special rooms in the corners of the bank that allow you to "supercharge" and turn the tables on the robbers. Okay, it's not very original, but is it fun? Hell no! First off, this game is long and moves slow as molasses. I couldn't wait for it to end! Even worse, you vacuum can only

hold so many "coins", so you have to return to the center of the maze to empty yourself periodically. But perhaps the worst travesty is the Pac-Man sound effects. They're good, but shamelessly stolen from a MUCH better game.

1 player

Be sure to check out my site at www.videogamecritic.net for 1400 more reviews.

The Many Faces of...Wizard of Wor

By Alan Hewston

"Fight me! I am the Wizard of Wor!" Per your request here's a popular title that my predecessor already reviewed. See Retrogaming Times issue #8 for Doug's Many Faces of Wizard of Wor. BTW, congratulations go out to Doug & Elizabeth Saxon, who were wed in November.

Wizard of Wor (WOW) as noted in the Digital Press guide is one of the best simultaneous 2-player home video games from the era. Inside the dungeons of the Wizard of Wor, you became a Worrior whose goal is to defeat the Wizard by going deeper and deeper into his dungeon. But you never defeat the Wizard - he keeps coming back and the levels repeat with no end. WOW is similar to Berzerk, in that you move within the realm of a powerful being, and enter his many screen-sized mazes (dungeons) and shoot at his minions. But that's where the comparison ends. All movement by Worriors and Worlings is limited to only 4 directions and you cannot exit the maze, but must defeat all the monsters to advance. There is an escape door that opens and closes randomly, but always in the same place on screen. It works like the tunnel in Pac-Man, but anyone can use it, after which it closes again. The most significant feature is that of 2 player simultaneous action. WOW may have been the maze shoot out game - which in that era, culminated with the 4-player game Gauntlet.

Each level begins with the Worriors outside of the maze with 10 seconds to enter willingly, or be forced into the dungeon. You only fire one laser blast at a time, until it hits a wall, Worrior or Worling. So plan each shot carefully. There are about 17 different maze patterns, 14 of which are random. [I only found 16 of them on the C64 and Bally - got tired replaying] The other 3 mazes are special dungeons used at levels 4, 8 and 13 (11 on Bally). Level 4, "The Arena" has an open area in the middle, level 8, "The Worlord Dungeon" has only 6 sets of walls to hide behind, and level 13, "The Pit" is composed of NO walls, and nowhere to hide. An extra life is awarded to you the first time that you reach the Arena and the Pit. The levels repeat, and so every so many levels you reach the Arena and then Pit again. There is no time limit, but each level becomes increasingly more difficult with the monsters reaching their top speed sooner and sooner. To help you on your mission, you have a radar screen that displays the locations of all Worlings, visible and invisible. The name or number of each level is also provided.

OK so what is a Worling? They are your enemy, and 4 of the 5 species of Worlings appear in every dungeon. Six Burwors (blue) await you inside each maze – but they are slow and always visible. As you vanquish the Burwors, they are replaced by Garwors, who when defeated will be replaced by Thorwors. Garwors (yellow) are faster and are NOT visible unless you are in the same corridor. Thorwors (red) are smarter and faster still and likewise not always visible. As the levels increase, more Garwors and Thorwors will begin play along with the Burwors. Once all of the 3 basic Worlings are destroyed, the Wizard's winged beast, the Worluk appears (actually starting in level 2). The Worluk does not intend to stay very long and makes his way to an escape door – ending the level. If it's shot, you'll earn a "Double Score Dungeon" – the next level. After Worluk is gone, the Wizard himself may engage you in a battle to the death. Of course he never really dies, just shows up later on. The Wizard only shoots in two directions fore and aft, but he's firing constantly. He teleports in, moves for a few seconds and then teleports back out. After a brief delay, he teleports back in again, usually a bit closer to one of the Worriors. As with the other Worlings, if you shoot the Wizard, he and his shots vanish and can no longer harm you. Shooting the Wizard will also yield a Double Score Dungeon.

For more information on Wizard of Wor see:

http://147.208.187.228/popopedia/shows/arcade/ag1169.php

Arcade Game Designed in 1980 Bally Midway (Tom McHugh & Dave Nutting)

Classic Home releases: Apple II (Jorn Barger), Atari 2600 & 5200 (CBS), Commodore 64 ('83 CBM) and Atari 8 bit ('84 Roklan, Joe Hellesen & John Wagner). Rumor Mill: CV & INTV (CBS announced plans), Vic 20 (CBM – unreleased). Unlicensed: Bally Astrocade ('82 Bob Ogden)

Categories: Gameplay, Addictiveness, Graphics, Sound & Controls

CBS had an offer similar to Activision. Mail in a photo of your TV screen (Atari 2600) with a high enough score to receive in the mail a Wizard of Wor, "Worrior" medal.

Disqualified: Apple II (N/A)
Once again I apologize for not having this system. Most likely it'll be the only classic system I'll never find a cheap stash. Plus, I have no more room to add a disk-based system in my overflowing game room.

Disqualified: Bally Astrocade (42)
This system was often the odd man out - never having the rights to make an official release of a popular arcade game - but sometimes went ahead anyhow: Making the only home versions of 280 ZZZAP and Dog Patch (with same Bally programmer from arcade to home?); and also very decent versions of Galaxian, Space Invaders, Clowns, Sea Wolf, Space Fortress and Muncher (this last one was involved with the various Pac-Man lawsuits). Anyhow, many people consider "The Incredible Wizard" not only the best home version of WOW but also the best Astrocade game ever made - so I've got to include it here. As the only Astrocade entry in this column, I'll do everything but give it the medal it deserves.

The Gameplay is very nice (8), and includes all the major elements save for a pause. Also missing are the names of the special levels, and the Worluk and Wizard do not show up on the radar. This is the only version that offers 3 levels of difficulty. 3 of the above mentioned 14 generic mazes are slightly altered on the Bally version. Maybe Bally is correct & the C64 & Ataris are wrong? The most significant difference is that only the Astrocade gives you a Quadruple Score Dungeon if both Worluk and Wizard are shot. I've forgotten/did not check if the arcade did this or not. An extra life is earned for every Pit encountered, which occurs every fourth level after the first one. The Graphics are wonderful (9), the best of the lot, with the most detailed and colorful sprites. The Sound is nice (8), in fact the effects are second to none. But quite noticeably missing is the heartbeat (for lack of a better term) of the Worlings. The racing heartbeat adds tension and drama to the game as it beats faster and faster. The Controls are superb (9), but only once you've become comfortable with them. This may take some time, and they are harder to fix and keep in working order than most. The Addictiveness is great (8), but loses a bit due to the controls and lack of a pause button.

Have Nots: Atari 2600 (34)
Only the Atari versions were released by CBS. The Gameplay is fine (6) adding the A/B switch to give the game 2 levels of difficulty – the others do not. But the Gameplay is

missing too much; no pause button, and only 2 dungeon maze patterns – making it very boring, very fast. Why didn't they add (CBS famous) expanded RAM to give us a few more patterns or at least the Pit. Other differences are: having no timer and 20 seconds to enter the maze, instead of 10; the escape doors are not random, but open and then close every three seconds; and the extra life is earned at 10K - since there is no Pit. The Sound is OK (6) but all effects are weak, or completely missing. The Graphics are decent (6), er uh, boring, but do not detract from play. The Controls are perfect (10). The Addictiveness is fine (6) but suffers from the boredom of only 2 mazes. A great 2600 game, but a big step down from the rest.

Bronze Medal: Atari 5200 (40)
It is weird that this version was made by CBS, and the 8 bit version by Roklan. Could this be the only exception to the 8 bit and 5200 games all being the same? Well the games do appear to be the same, save for CBS on the title screen here. So all 8 bit scores apply, save for the Controls which are impressive (8), for the 5200, and the Addictiveness which is enjoyable (8). This is the only version that my Worrior went right through a Worling - probably due to the analog "features" of moving, stopping, firing and switching directions that only the 5200 can offer.

Siver Medal: Atari 8 bit (43)
It misses the gold, probably due to lesser, albeit, pretty good Graphics (7). They're just not as sharp and detailed. The Gameplay is superb (9) with all of the elements in place, and adding a choice of starting lives 3/5/7 – unique to this version. Too bad they did not offer a change in difficulty, and/or a way to select different starting levels. After the first Pit, there is another one every 6 levels. The Sound is impressive (8), and as in all versions, the Wor national anthem (also heard on Pitfall) is played before each level. The Controls are perfect (10), and the Addictiveness is great (9) – so you can count on playing this version many more times. The 8 bit port is available on cart and I'm pretty sure it was originally on disk as well.

Gold Medal: Commodore 64 (44)
To be honest, I expected this to get a better score. Digital Press reports that this version was programmed to include the voice of the Wizard, but only heard if you have the "Magic Voice" add-on device. Darn, that doesn't help too many of us. The Amiga version did have the voice of the Wizard. The Sound is outstanding (9), and would be a 10 if the Wizard's speech were Included. The chirping of the final few Worlings (also found on the Bally) is somewhat haunting. The Gameplay is very nice (8), and includes all the elements seen elsewhere, save for any option for number of lives or difficulty. The Graphics are crisp (8), a very close second only to the Bally. The Controls are flawless (10). The Addictiveness is fantastic (9), and you'll love to try just one more game. This version is available on cart and disk, but since my cart is not working, I could not verify if they are identical. (See C64 Tapper)

OK, now if CBM would have programmed WOW to allow you to alter the background colors, as they did in Omega Race (another Bally/Midway title), just imagine playing invisible Wizard of Wor. Every level would look like the Pit. You'd really have to fire a lot to see where the walls are to find the best place to "hide". I betcha that would be an easy hack job to do, and hope that if someone does it to write and tell me, I'd love to have that version on disk. Wouldn't everyone? How about a Wizard of Wor construction set?

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With apologies to those Amiga fans out there. I'm only covering the official (licensed) home releases on these classic (joystick era) machines: Apple II, Atari 2600, 5200, 7800 & 8 bit computers, Colecovision/Adam, Commodore 64, Vic 20, Intellivision, Odyssey II, TI 99/4A, and Vectrex. Other systems either came out after this era, (NES, SMS, ST, Amiga, PC's), or did not have many official releases (Bally Astrocade, CoCo, APF, Emerson and Fairchild), or were overseas and hard for me to review (Sinclair Spectrum, MSX, Amstrad, and Fountain). Sorry if I've yet to cover your favorite game, but some versions are harder to come by and I really do not want to rely on emulation. Good news is that one of you is going to help expand my frugal Amiga collection, so maybe some day I'll do a Many Faces

of in the Bit Age Times.

Come back next month when I review the Many Faces of Gorf, (another Bally/Midway title split by the same 3 companies, CBS / Commodore CBM / Roklan), on the C64, Vic 20, Atari 2600, 5200, Atari 8 bit and joined by Colecovision.

(Alan Hewston, still looking for the Vic 20 fans who can trade or sell me versions of Frogger, Galaxian, Defender, Dig Dug, Battlezone, Moon Patrol, Miner 2049er, Tutankham, Mountain King and Doom (just checking if you are reading this) for this column, can be reached at Hewston95@stratos.net or if you want to trade http://members.core.com/~hewston/Hewston_vg.html)

Sites of the Month

Burgertime Tabletop
Being a big tabletop fan, I was thrilled to find this little site. It deals with the Burgertime tabletop, which now moves up my want list! Check out this cool little tabletop that will probably forever elude me.

http://www.geocities.com/fn0384/burgertime.htm

Handheld Game Museum
While I was in the mood for handheld games, I decided it was a good time to put a link to one of the most extensive and enjoyable sites for handhelds. If you are a fan of any of these great little games, then this site is for you! With breakdowns by manufacturers and tons of photos and basic information about handhelds, tabletops and more! Check it ou!

http://users2.ev1.net/~rik1138/index.html

Holiday Video Game Idea

If there is one thing that classic games is missing, it is a Christmas game. Granted, video games in general are missing out on holiday games. With Santa being public domain, it is odd to think there are almost no Christmas games. Well, I have an idea for one that hopefully someone will pick up on and make (paging Tim Snider....paging Tim Snider).

The game would be based on the classic Rankin/Bass holiday special, "The Year Without a Santa Claus" and would be in the vein of Dragonfire. For the first level, you would have to run up and get past the Burgermeister (no, it is not a Burgertime sequel). As you made your way across the screen, he would be throwing fireballs at you. Once you get through, you would have to go around and grab up all the presents for the kids, before the Heat Miser hits you. Then you repeat, but this time it is the Freeze Miser (one screen is blue instead of red and they stuff they shoot is blue instead of red)

You have to excuse me if I am getting the story confused, it has been awhile since I have seen the great movie! But you get the idea. So maybe someone with some programming skills will make this or Frosty or Rudolph into a video game and give us some holiday cheer.

Broken Controllers

By Fred Wagaman

Who hasn't had this happen to them ?

You've read about and are looking forward to a game. Maybe it's based on a franchise you like. Or maybe just the story line has piqued your interest. Or the pictures in the magazine look purty.

You shell out the bucks the day it hits the store.

You pop the game in the machine, get thru the introduction, grab the controller and…it sucks.

Not the graphics, or the story, or the action or the sound.

No. It's the control.

Maybe the buttons are configured weird (with no way to reconfigure them). Maybe the main character doesn't respond well to your command. Maybe he responds too well and is jumping around like he (or she) has a rabid mongoose in his (or her) pants.

In the end, what do you end up with ?

Broken controllers.

To me, after the concept and scope of a game is defined, the next thing that should be determined is the control.

On the Vectrex, one of the first games that took advantage of the analog capability of the joystick was Hyperchase. The speed you moved left or right was based on how far you moved the joystick. Crash after crash after crash makes this one of the most frustrating games in the Vectrex's library. I credit a lack of experience programming for analog to this game's problems.

We're all familiar with the Atari 5200 controller. Here it was the hardware, not the game that made things frustrating. It didn't help that some of the games that could have used the analog stick to their advantage ignored it.

Then there is game design. Sometimes it is those platform games that have a series of jumps that if you are one pixel too far to the left, you won't make it and one pixel too far to the right, you fall before you can jump. First person perspective games with jumps also run into the "how close am I to the edge" problems. Shadows of the Empire for the N64 is an example of this. Game designers also seem to throw nearly impossible feats of finger dexterity into games to make them last longer and to otherwise cover up boring sections. Tomb Raider did this. If you played this game, ask yourself, "How many times did I die trying to make that jump ?"

Did it really add anything to the game ? Or did it just frustrate you ?

Another area of problems with design is enemy logic.

Sometimes enemies are soooo dumb that the designers make up for it with volume. Doom is a good example of that. But hey, they're demons, so their I.Q. isn't supposed to be at Mensa level anyhow. Shooting games like Gradius and it's kin do this as well.

(Some of the new games have smarter enemies that work as a team, dive for cover and the like that give them an almost human response. First person shooters as group games

are more popular than single player versions because the enemies are more challenging than computer opponents.)

My most recent encounter with frustration is Evil Dead:Hail to the King for the Dreamcast. You get one life. It's hard to find ammo (or fuel) for your more powerful weapons. Your enemies respawn. (That is to say that they come back when you kill them). The ability to save the game is rare. After playing this for fifteen minutes, I wonder not just if anyone could get through this game, but WHY anyone would bother. The game has more of a learning cliff than a learning curve. Much as I hate to admit it, I went out and got a Gameshark just so I could get through this game. I set it up that the enemies couldn't hurt me. Yeah, I know, that's cheating. Sue me.

But this brings me to the next problem. Poor design. Obscure puzzles. Non-logical thought processes. Doing things that make no sense.

I remember an early adventure game in which you had to get bat guano at the beginning of the game to use later. If you missed it, you could not go on. I vaguely remember something in the original Leisure Suit Larry about scraping gum or bird poop off of a car's windshield at one point in the game. And you needed it later. Tough luck if you already saved the game after you were in that area. If you missed it, there was no going back unless you restarted the game. Evil Dead has many of these types of things.

Why would I bother with that game ? Well, I like the movies. I like the concept. I'd like to finish the game. Get my money's worth. I paid for the game, why shouldn't I see the whole thing.

Maybe I can do it without smashing my controller.

(*Fred has been playing games for over 25 years and actively collecting them for over 10. The 2500 + games that he has takes up most of his home office and living room. He lives in Denver, PA with his understanding wife Jennie, his 6 year-old, button-loving son, Max and his 2 year-old, 4th player, Lynzie. If you've experienced game frustration, he'd like to hear about it at fcw3@mail.ptd.net).*

The TI 99/4A
Programs that have never been

by Jim Krych

First of all, a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all our readers out there! I hope and pray that your times with friends and family are truly a blessing and full of wonderful memories!

I had hoped to start a series on the SNUG cards, but that will have to be postponed until I can get contact with Michael Becker and get that information straight from the expert himself.

We have all wished for programs that were written for our computers, and were for some reason or another, never done at all. They can range from utilities to games, and not necessarily in that order either! Since I prefer games, let's start with those first.

Games That Have Never Been: First and foremost, I am surprised that a clone of Wizard of Wor was never done for the TI. The graphics of the VDP are pretty close to the Commercial Mode of the Astrocade chips, and, speech could have been used. Even if on a disk, or the side carts that allowed 24K, this would have been an excellent port.

Robotron:2084! Was this ever made? Does it exist in a prototype collecting dust in some programmer's shelf?

How about, Galaxian? Or Defender II? Venture and Ladybug could have been ported as well. And, I am surprised that a version of Asteroids, with the sprites designed to look like vector graphics, was never done. Or, a version of Missile Command! And, Battlezone.

Two other arcade games that come to mind are Omega Race, and Solar Fox. And, in the same mind as W.O.W., Gorf too.

And, some good sports games would have been preferred. A much better version of soccer and football would have been very welcome.

With all their original titles, the company that is most noticeably absent is Activision. Unless there WERE plans and then the plug was pulled on the TI 99/4A.

Utilities That Have Never Been: One of the greatest disappointments is that despite being given a free SuperAMS card, Tony McGovern never wrote a version of Funnelweb that would have taken advantage of the extra memory. This would have been a great feature for the 40-column users. Those of us lucky to have an 80-column upgrade were blessed to have 128K or text space and such. A SuperAMS version would have been able to have close to a one-megabyte file! I contrast this to Bruce Harrison who re-wrote MIDI Master to use the SuperAMS for bigger MIDI master. I remember talking to Bruce during the early attempts, and he had to get very clever to get needed bytes to fit the needed routines in.

A true BASIC/Extended BASIC compiler is probably the most missing utility for the TI 99/4A. Let's face it TI BASIC is slow, as in molasses on a cold day! And, Extended Basic ranks a close second!!! There have been notable attempts, Bruce Harrison again with a compiler for Extended Basic, and some early attempts for TI BASIC that really restricted what you could do anyway. The limits of the TI itself prevented any really powerful compilers, for BASIC/Extended BASIC.

I think the answer to that has always existed. Did anyone ever question why TI did major work for the TI 99/4A, not on the computer itself-but on much more powerful minis? I am very surprised, that with hackers always coming up with neat programs for the TI 99/4A, that no one ever wrote a compiler on the PC, to compile BASIC/Extended BASIC programs.

You could write the thing in JAVA and not worry about speed! You could have a subset of TI BASIC that did allow sprites and such, then compile that into TMS 9900 assembly, and have it optimized as well!

It's one thing to run PC 99 on 1.4 GHz PC and have the Extended Basic run at incredible speeds on the emulator (which does have it's advantages-old games actually become playable!), and have a compiler that takes old code, and really speeds it up by converting it into 9900 code!

It would be a neat thing to have an 18 year-old program re-compiled to run as a 9900 assembly program!

Perhaps, one day!

Happy Holidays to everyone out there! I have been thinking of writing a series of articles for Retrogaming Times based on the arcade game Gyruss. I am looking for fellow veterans to add an air of "roughness" to them. Any USMC types out there willing to help out in this effort?

This was written while listening to Trans-Siberian Orchestra!

("Hi, my name is Jim W. Krych. I am a 32 year-old electronics technician. My products that I currently work on are the SMU models 236,237, and 238. I am also a 13+ year veteran of both the USCG, active, and the Ohio Army National Guard, reserve with B Co. 112th engineers. I can be reached at: jwkrych@adelphia.net or jwkrych@n2net.net I have a two-year-old son, Treyton, and he is the CEO of Treyonics! I have founded my own business and, of course, I named the company after my son Treyton! Our product is the Treyonics Home Controller System Model 9908. Better known as the… Devastator)

"Serious Gaming"

SED TANTUM DIC VERBO

by Jim Krych

Hey fellow retro-gamers! I know it may seem odd to have a Christian Ministry mentioned here, but hear me for a moment:

Back in the mid 90's, I used to run a computer ministry that gave out computers to the poor families in the inner-city of Cleveland. We were under a church then and were able to give tax write-offs to people donating equipment. I have been in the Kinsman/Woodhill section of Cleveland, to the near West Side as well, doing the Ministry work.

We took all type of equipment back then. I was even offered an Osborne! I got quite a few C128's, Apple II's, PC's of various vintages, and Atari ST equipment. It was a Chinese Christian, Dr. Clarence Chang of NASA, who first introduced me to the ST line.

We gave to mostly families, but we were also able to give to a small school as well. It was great to see how the machines helped people out, and the joy of seeing a lot of hard work pay off. And, some funny stories to boot! Like when one family's pet rabbit made short work of a TI parallel cable and floppy cable!

I have made mention of Centurion Ministries to my current Pastor, Leroy McCreary, HR Director at NASA, and Senior Pastor at Peoples Community Church in Berea, which is where our Atari group here meets every month. I will present a letter to him and the Elders Board, and we will again be a 501C3 organization once accepted by PCC.

This time, however, we'll deal mostly with PC's and Mac's. If anyone is looking to donate used PC and Mac equipment to help the inner city of Cleveland, please contact me at: jwkrych@adelphia.net and list the subject as Centurion Ministries.

Take care and God Bless!

p.s. The above Latin Phrase is right from the Vulgate. It's "Just say the word"!

Letters to the Editor

Time to dip into the email bag and see what the readers have to say.

I am an avid reader of your newsletter and look forward to it every month. I have two questions that I hope you can help me with. I have a TI 99/4A that I found in the original packaging and put away for a while. I recently found a bunch of games for it and decided to try it out. When I plug in a joystick to play games it does not take. It only works by using the keyboard which is about as annoying as an Atari 5200 controller. Is there some trick to this??? Also, does the system work with Atari 2600 controllers??? My other question is about cleaning prices marked on games found at thrift stores. I recently scored a bunch of NES games in mint boxes with instrucctions that I wouold like to take to my local collectibles store and trade for 2600 stuff. I tried soap and water and vigorous scrubbing on one box but it caaused some minor damage. Do you have any suggestions??? Thank you and have a great holiday.

You can use Atari 2600 controllers on the TI, but you need an adapter from Wico. They are occasionally on eBay and sell for about $20.00, but well worth every penny. The TI controllers, in a word, suck. They break easily and are not very responsive when they are new.

As far as taking off prices, are you speaking of magic marker or price stickers? If it is price stickers, you can either heat them up with a hair dryer and then peel them off (keep running the hair dryer on the sticker as you peel it) or you can use Goo Gone, a product that many classic gamers swear by. As far as magic marker, I am not too sure. I will post this in Retrogaming Times and see what my readers have to say. So does anyone have any good suggestions?

How do you choose the order of the articles? Why are some writers always at the top and others at the bottom?

OK, this is pretty scientific, so you better take notes. Ready? Here we go! The articles from the writers are put in order of when we received them. The sooner they arrive, the sooner they are put in. That is the biggest reason why Adam King has been first, he has a new article within days of the newest issue of Retrogaming Times coming out. Same reason why Jim Krych is usually the last one. His articles tend to get there a day before publication. Hope you got all that down.

How many different game systems did Atari make? My friend says four, but I say 5. Who is right?

We are only going to count actually released systems and not prototypes. We will also only count the US made ones. We will also only count Atari 2600 as one, even though there were more than one version released. Plus, we will just count the actual game machines and not the computers that played games. Lastly, we will not count the many different pong machines. With this in mind, Atari released a total of 6 game systems. Here they are:

Atari 2600
Atari 5200
Atari 7800
Atari XE (yes, it was a game system that doubled as a computer)
Atari Lynx
Atari Jaguar

MAME Reviews

By popular demand, the MAME reviews are back! Time to pull two more golden oldies out and dust them off and put them through their paces. Hope you enjoy them!

Eagle
This is one of those games that I used to play alot back at the Rib Factory. I don't know what the appeal was to this game, but I just enjoyed it. It is basically a Galaxian or Phoenix clone, with a little difference. The biggest difference is that you get three different ships, as opposed to just the same ship three times. Plus, you can build them up to make a super ship! We all like super ships, right?

(Talk about a step saver ship!)

Eagle starts off with a puny ship. I mean this poor thing is the runt of the star fleet. I bet it doesn't even have a bathroom in that puny little ship. But don't let look fool you, it can shoot with the best of them. Actually the small size does have its advantages as it is harder to get hit. Don't worry if you are feeling inadequate, you will get a bigger ship in a few rounds. All you need to do is clear a few rounds and you get to go to a docking sequence. Here you have to navigate your ship down to land on the other ship, ala Lunar Lander. You can move left and right and thrust to slow down your descent. Quick hint,

when you get to the fourth level, try to kill the last creature as close to the center of the screen as possible.

(Perfect landing! Too bad I already killed off the little ship.)

So besides clearing all the levels, you also want to build the monster ship! This ship would allow you to shoot five bullets at a time! Talk about overcompensating. Besides this neat little feature, the game is pretty much a Galaxian clone. You shoot different type ships, some of which look like butterflies. Maybe it is me, but it is hard to get excited about destroying adorable little space butterflies. Anyway, the game is fun and worth a few turns. It is not a gem, but it is no lump of coal either.

(Die butterflies, Die!)

Jailbreak

The prisoners are breaking out and you need to stop the jailbreak! Sounds like a fun game, right? Well, it is allright, but not as much fun as it could be. This is one prison that would be sued to the high heavens if they ever decided to handle a jailbreak like this.

(Give me a gun and I will mow down those prisoners)

You play the part of a lowly cop. It is your job to stop these hooligans who are out causing trouble. Like any self respecting law officer, you come equipped with a gun and a bazooka to fight the forces of evil! A bazooka? Are these guys nuts or what? Excessive force is an understatement here. You do not capture jailbirds, you shoot them dead. Talk about trying to curb the overpopulation problems in the prison system.

The game plays like any other side scrolling beatem up of the 1980's-1990s. Think Double Dragon, thing Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, take your pick and this game is similar in some fashion. You move from left to right, battling with the prisoners, while trying to save innocents. The innocents range from captured men to very annoying little kids. The kids cry so much that I wanted to kill them myself.

(Nothing says party is over like a Bazooka!)

Just like the aforementioned games, you move across the screen and keep fighting the same guys over and over, until you make it to the end of the level. For the genre, it is pretty weak. The gameplay is quite repetitive, the sound leaves something to be desired and the game gets old, very quickly. Thank goodness I did not blow any quarters on this one.

Conclusion

Time to put another issue to rest. With the holidays upon us, it is a good time for me to with you a Happy Holidays! Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah, Happy Kwanzaa, Happy New Years and Happy Festivus! Hope I covered all of them. See you next year for more classic game coverage! Be safe, be merry and give your classic games some attention!

Tom Zjaba

(This issue was done while listening to whatever came next on Jukebox. Right now it is Bob Dylan and before that it was Blondie. Gee, I must be playing these songs alphabetically.)