

Retrogaming Times

Issue #50 - October 20th, 2001

Table of Contents

01.	The Big 5-0
02.	Cinciclassic is Back!
03.	Commercial Vault by Andy King
04.	Halloween Video Games by David Mrozek
05.	Don't You Wish by Fred Wagaman
06.	The TI/99 "What Might Have Been" by Jim Krych
07.	Heartbreaks and Video Games
08.	Question to the Readers
09.	Intruder Alert
10.	Wild Commercial
11.	Conclusion

The Big 5-0

A question that I have been asked alot lately is if I ever thought that I would reach issue #50 of Retrogaming Times. To be honest with you, I did not. Especially in the early days, when the newsletter was read by a few dozen people and I was a one man project. I figured that it would peak with an audience of maybe a hundred people and after time, I would discontinued it.

Even Miss Cleo could not have predicted the success that the newsletter would have! With a large audience (while it varies, it probably averages about 5,000 readers a month) and a great group of contributors, the newsletter is stronger than ever! We have had both feedback and contributors from all over the globe! From Canada to Russia to Israel to New Zealand to Japan, I have received praise and thanks from gamers from all over the world. They have shared their stories, their finds and more with me and my contributors. We thank each and everyone of you who took the time to write an email to us. Each one is appreciated and we do our best to respond to them. It may take awhile, but we try to get back to you.

We have now reached a major milestone in the newsletter's history and one that I am very thankful about. So here is to another fifty issues, may we never run out of subjects to talk

about and may your classic systems continue to work!

Cinciclassic is back!

After a year off, the Cinciclassic is back on! Here is all the info on this very fun show in the Queen City.

We are pleased to announce Cinciclassic will be running this year on November 9th, 10th, and 11th. Cinciclassic is a Classic Videogame Collectors meeting/convention in Cincinnati Ohio. This years event will be held at the Forest Fair Mall, located on Forest Fair Drive right off Interstate 275 just 10 minutes north of downtown Cincinnati. It should be convenient and easy to find. We will be having tournaments, auctions, and plenty of classic games to play. For more information, please visit <http://www.cinciclassic.com>, and sign up for our Yahoo Groups mailing list for up-to-the-minute updates.

Commercial Vault

by [Adam King](#)

Greetings gamers. One thing I enjoy about the video game industry is the television commercials. The companies try to pitch their ideas to kids in different and imaginative (most of the time) ways. In this section, I aim to spotlight different commercials, providing the words to the commercial and some screen grabs, with some commentary.

In my first commercial, I have an TV ad for the Atari VCS, dating around 1981. A worried mother writes to "Atari Anonymous" that she notices her family playing Atari games and doing weird things while playing certain Atari games. We see a shot of some gameplay, followed by the family member acting strange.

MOTHER: "Dear Atari Anonymous, my son Boris has a Missile Command problem."

BORIS [in a monotone voice] : "My mission in life is to save all of mankind."

MOTHER: "Lately my daughter has developed a similar problem with Atari Warlords. Now with Video Pinball my husband is acting funny lately. With Atari games so ingenious, so involving, so intense, I ask you, Atari Anonymous, is this problem contagious?"



This boy is zonked out on Missile Command.



She's excited about Warlords



I don't like the look on his face, since he's playing Video Pinball.



Jeez! Even the dog is play Air/Sea Battle! This is serious!



This is who's responsible. Beware!

(Hi, I'm Adam King, a 22-year-old game player who's played for nearly 16 years. I like to collect Atari, Intellivision, NES, and Sega Master System games, accessories, and other items (though i dabble in other systems as well). I can be reached at Hal_3000@rocketmail.com.)

Halloween Video Games

By David Mrozek

Many classic video games feature occult subject matter, and this is the best time of the year to play them. Below I've compiled a collection of all my scary game reviews for the Atari 2600. For the rest of the list (from Intellivision to Dreamcast), check out my site at www.videogamecritic.net.



Absolutely unbearable. Sheer terror! Guaranteed to cause nightmares.



Terrifying and intense. Hard to play with the lights out.



Pretty scary. Forbidding atmosphere. But you'll live.



Marginally scary. Just a hint of terror.



Nothing to fear. This is kiddie stuff.



[Blair Witch Project, The \(Hozer 2000\) B+](#)

Your eyes do not deceive you! Yes, a Blair Witch game is available for the Atari 2600! I happen to be a huge fan of the movie, and it's great to own this game, even if it's just a hack of Atari's old Haunted House game. The gameplay is exactly the same, but the graphics have been "updated" Blair Witch style. You are now pursued by moving handprints, the ghost of Rustin Parr, and the Blair Witch herself! The scepter is now shaped like a totem, and instead of finding pieces of an urn, you must assemble a camera instead. The font used to display the numbers at the bottom of the screen has also been changed. Tim Snider did a great job matching up a classic game with this scary film.



[Frankenstein's Monster \(Data Age 1983\) A-](#)

This is the best cartridge that Data Age put out for the 2600. The game screen, representing Frankenstein's castle, has several levels. You can see Frankenstein getting charged up on the top level. Your job is to gather bricks from the bottom level dungeon and carry them to the top. If you transport enough bricks, you can trap the monster. This plays a lot like Pitfall. The graphics are excellent and the horror theme is a refreshing change.



[Ghost Manor \(Xonox 1983\) B](#)

In this impressive multi-screen game, you rescue a friend imprisoned in Dracula's castle. There are several stages which provide unique challenges, including ghost chasing, shooting castle guards, and facing Dracula himself. The graphics and sound are decent, but the "rainbow ghost" looks idiotic. This was one of the first games to let you select between a male or female character.



[Halloween \(Wizard 1983\) B-](#)

This is a neat little novelty game that captures the spirit of the movie quite well. You control a babysitter in a two-story house trying to save kids from a knife-carrying psycho. The house is plain, with only an occasional doorway or window, but the characters look good. The so-so gameplay involves grabbing children and taking them to a safe room. Michael Meyers is slow, so you can avoid him fairly easily if you see him coming. But like the movie, he tends to pop out when you least expect it. If he catches you or a kid, you are treated to some extremely gory/funny animation. Sometimes you can find a knife yourself and turn the tables on him. The lights on the top floor occasionally go out, adding to the

suspense. But the absolute best thing about this game is the excellent, spooky Halloween theme song that plays whenever Michael appears.



[Haunted House \(Atari 1981\) B+](#)

Trying to create any kind of a scary atmosphere on the 2600 is not easy, but Atari did a fine job with this game. The object is to move a pair of square eyes around a 4-story house, collect 3 pieces of an urn, and escape. Spiders, bats, and ghosts roam freely around the house and try to take your nine lives. You have an unlimited supply of matches to help you see the area immediately around you. There is also a protective scepter and a master key to unlock doors. You get all the standard scary effects like wind, thunder, footsteps, and slamming doors. The monsters and objects look good, but the house is pretty boring, with each room being empty and square. There are nine difficulty levels, but level nine is the most fun (and hardest), with dark rooms, locked doors, aggressive monsters, and random object placement. Scrambling towards the exit with your last life, not knowing what's behind the next door can be pretty intense. Haunted House is not as complex or addicting as Adventure, but it's still good fun.



[Texas Chainsaw Massacre \(Wizard 1983\) F](#)

Boy oh boy is this game bad! You control Leatherface, a maniac who must kill as many people as possible with his chainsaw before he runs out of gas. This is one of the few games that lets you be the bad guy! The screen scrolls sideways as you search for victims and avoid obstacles. The graphics are fair, but the sound and gameplay is nightmare. Victims disappear before you can touch them. You're constantly getting stuck in the scenery. Tell me when it's over!!



[Ghostbusters \(Activision 1985\) D](#)

I always hated this game, but surprisingly, the Atari 2600 version is better than most. It's a streamlined version, so there's less strategy, less setup, and more action. You can immediately start vacuuming ghosts off the roads and trapping them in front of buildings. Another bonus is that those boring driving sequences don't go on and on like they do in other versions of this game. The graphics are outstanding, with detailed buildings and multi-colored, well-animated characters. The green "slime ghosts" look cool, but the yellow "street ghosts" look like smiling bananas. The Ghostbusters theme plays in the background throughout the whole game. While it's a pretty good rendition, you'll get sick of it after a few verses. Trapping ghosts gets repetitive, and you'll soon find yourself looking for that marshmallow man. I couldn't figure out how to face him, but I know he's in there somewhere. The instructions are confusing. Ghostbusters is a good technical achievement, but the gameplay just isn't very compelling.

Don't You Wish

By [Fred Wagaman](#)

A quick check of Merriam-Webster's online dictionary tell me that one of the definitions of "fake" is:

Function: *noun*

Date: 1827

: one that is not what it purports to be: as a : a worthless imitation passed off as genuine b : IMPOSTOR <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=impostor>, CHARLATAN <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=charlatan> c : a simulated movement in a sports contest (as a pretended kick, pass, or jump or a quick movement in one direction before going in another) designed to deceive an opponent d : a device or apparatus used by a magician to achieve the illusion of magic in a trick

One of the best fakes ever perpetrated on the classic video game community occurred a few years ago in issue #102 of Electronic Gaming Monthly. It was reported that a classic game programmer had created and manufactured an Atari 2600 version of "Doom". This was at the time when homegrown games were becoming a reality. People were creating new Atari 2600, Vectrex and other classic system games. Along with the accompanying screenshots, this thing looked legit. Many people bought it, hook, line and sinker. Turned out to be fake. A hoax. A ruse. (Actually it was a project for school.) The story and the pictures can be found at

<http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Arcade/8691/2600DOOM.HTM>

Some time later, someone said they had a prototype Atari 2600 made specifically for John Deere on one of the newsgroups. It even had a game made just for John Deere called Johnny Tractor. It was going to be the start of a special campaign in the early eighties that never got past more than a few dealerships. Check out these 2 links for examples of the cart and machine.

http://home.earthlink.net/~resqsoft/john_deere.jpg

<http://www.cyberroach.com/cyromag/seven/vbig21.jpg>

It was another elaborate ruse meant to have a little fun at the expense of classic game fanatics everywhere. Sort of a "Coke Wins" joke.

We're a little more savvy now. If someone says they've found a heretofore never heard of game, we are suspicious. But games like "Save Mary" and "The Alligator People" for the 2600 have appeared over the last couple of years. So we need to greet each new announcement with a wary eye and a hopeful heart. To that end I offer this link:

<http://www.mameworld.net/massive/FX/MAME/Atarimame2.jpg>

I can't wait to get a copy of this one...

(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 5 year-old, button-loving son, Max and his 2 year-old, 4th player, Lynzie. Fred notes that he'd love to get a hold of a copy of the most rumored games for the ill-fated NEC Supergrafx. "Strider" was announced and never surfaced. The rumor is that there are 5 prototypes out there somewhere. If you know

where to find one, contact Fred at fcw3@postoffice.ptd.net)

The TI 99/4A
“What Might Have Been: Part II”
The MYARC 9640 - Geneve

by Jim Krych

Hey Tom, congrats on issue fifty!!!

Hindsight, they often say, is 20/20. But they also say that those who ignore the past often repeat it. With both of these phrases and gems of wisdom in mind, let's discuss the TI clone, the MYARC 9640, also known as the Geneve.

This computer-on-a-card, replaces the old TI console, and the infamous “fire hose” and itself has the following features:

TMS9995 with a 12MHz speed, actually everything runs at 3MHz inside but the code runs 3-4 X that of a standard TMS 9900. Memory mapper allowing 8K pages of up to 2 megabytes system memory, 512K comes as standard. The V9938 VDP with 128K of video RAM. A mouse port, and RGB/Composite out, and of course, the standard TI sound chip.

You would save your carts through a special program, and then run them on the Geneve. One of the modes is known as GPL mode, and think of it as a faster TI 99/4A. You could set the speed and such, so your old games wouldn't be unplayable and such.

All in all, a pretty powerful TI clone. You needed a separate card to run the speech synthesizer, and with that you could have all the benefits of that device.

I remember first seeing one of these in action at the Thalner's residence in North Ridgeville, Ohio. The 80-column Multiplan, and the gif viewer with the high-res pictures, I was pretty impressed. I had even had plans to get one after Coast Guard boot camp, but I never did.

The Geneve came out in 1987, however, one version or another was promised in previous years. They, MYARC, even should a dummy console, with several printed circuit boards, at a TI show several years before. So, the policy of promoting non-working prototypes, and half-completed projects, goes way back.

Alas, the same problems from the TI world also affected this computer. For starters, unless you were part of the “cliché” no inside information on the Geneve was available. So a policy of “tribal knowledge” persisted. Secondly, NO TRULY USABLE OS WAS AVAILABLE UNTIL 1992-1993!!! Until a group bought out the rights to the native OS, MDOS, and then actual work could begin on it.

For the longest time, you would have two OS's. One that was workable for floppies, and one that was workable for the HFDC, hard and floppy disk controller.

So, many programs for this computer ran in GPL mode. One Gentleman, Don Walden of Cecure Electronics, tired very hard to give technical and customer support for this computer. And is typical of the TI community, was shot down, butchered, and left for dead. Considering that a system schematic was only available until someone actually did point-to-point circuit tracing, says a lot for the nonsense behind the Geneve.

Some extras were made for it, allowing the use of Flash ROM, extra memory with 128K/512K SRAM, and the adding of an extra 64K of Video RAM. As well as some fixes for the poor design itself-namely the voltage regulators tended to be very bad and would go on you.

And, even the Geneve was used as an emulator! The Tomy Tutor was cloned on the Geneve, and you could play all the games for it on your Geneve!

Apparently, some 3000 Geneves were sold. And, the first users of the SCSI card were the Geneve people. But, the delays, the lack of support, the lack of available information, and the lack of a usable OS from almost day one, doomed this computer. One might just say, it was a sequel to "Plan Nine from Outer Space".

But that is not to say that the people away from MYARC, were shady, indeed they did a superhuman effort to support this machine, where the parent company did not. All the problems that TI gave to the TI 99/4A, only on a smaller, but just as devastating, scale, Tim Tesch, Don Walden, and others-such as the Germans, did the best that they could.

Too little, too late.

But, I would love one to play with. But if it's speed and the ability to run things faster, then the PC 99 program is my best hope, on my P3 600MHz PC. I had hoped to get some gear from people in Akron, but that seems to have fallen through. Oh well, maybe someday.

I think, with the benefit of hindsight, that had they designed from day one, a TI clone on a PC card, to use the PC bus and the peripherals of it, more might have come from it. The computer would have had access to tons of cards and such, cheaper than anything the third-party vendors for the TI could have ever put out. You would have avoided all the power problems, and a simple card edge connector would have allowed the speech synthesizer to work with the card. Such a card could have come out in 1985 or early 1986. Why not! A card that was an Apple II clone did actually exist for the PC world.

Do we wish to think that a market could yet exist? Well, considering the junk V-Tech puts out for their toy computers, a TI 99/4A on a chip, with a 256 x 192 LCD display, and a flash ROM with the whole library of the PLATO Courseware, might be a possibility. And, at a price TI users have always wanted, well, maybe just a little higher than they want, \$49.95. But, even then, there might just be a bunch that would complain it would be \$49.70 too much. One such market for a simple system, with the large educational software, and at a cheap price, would be the home-school movement.

What's next? We might try for the German TI clone, the cards that make up a TI 99/4A. Any experts out there willing to fill me in on this system? I know they exist, I have seen

them work with my own eyes, and so they are not vaporware!

“Hi, my name is Jim W. Krych. I am a 32- year old technician, with an Electronics Diploma and a soon-to-be finished Computer Programming and Operations Diploma. I am currently employed at the finest maker of electrometers/nanovoltmeters/etc., and my particular product line that I work on is the Source Measure Unit (SMU) model 236,237, and 238. I have a 2-year old son, his name is Treyton. I enjoy retrogaming and things that go with that. :) My email address: jwkrych@n2net.net or jwkrych@adelphia.net.

“I love you Treyton, my son!!!”

I have formed my own business! All other projects prior to this were carried by other companies, so this time it's all in my hands, with a lot of prayer and help from others! The company's name is Treyonics, in honor of my son!!! Our flagship product is the Treyonics Home Controller System, Model 9908, better known as the.....

Devastator

“Serious Gaming!”

Heartbreaks and Video Games

There is one constant in video games as is the case with all electronic devices, they are destined for extinction. No matter how popular they are, no matter how well they do, every game system will be replaced. It is inevitable and the sooner you can come to grips with this notion, the better off you will be.

This is something that I have become all too aware of with the slow death of the Dreamcast. This is probably the first system since the Colecovision that I really got into, during the height of its popularity. It is the first system, since the Colecovision that I really fell in love with and wanted to own the vast majority of the games. It is the first system, once again, that I felt the pain of loss as I watched it wither and die, while still being so young and so full of promise. Once again, a video game system has broken my heart, something that I did not think would ever happen again.

The Colecovision was a system of first for me. It was the first video game system that I purchased myself, making it the first game system of my choice. It was not a present like the pong unit or the Odyssey 2 that preceded it. It was a system that I chose to buy with my own money. It was the first system that prompted me to purchase stock in a company. It was the first system that I fell in love with. And it was the first system that I felt the pains of loss as the system was cut short of what could have been a long and promising future. It left me with a lingering taste of disappointment as I realized some games that I waited so patiently for, would never materialize. Games like Tunnels and Trolls, which along with numerous other vaporware games, were advertised on the system box, to only be nothing more than an artist's rendition. Dreams like the Super Data Packs that offered more levels, greater graphics and more. But none were to materialize as the system was soon

pushed aside for the Adam computer.

One would have thought that I would have learned from my mistake. For a decade and a half, it seemed like I did, until the Dreamcast became part of my life. While I had a Playstation and a Nintendo 64, neither system excited me. They both had good games, but there was no excitement that I felt with the Dreamcast. I do not know if it was the games or the sense of cheering for the underdog that made me get caught up in the euphoria, but I was caught. And as much as I was swept into the enjoyment of this wonderful system, I soon was utterly crushed as it was abandoned and game after game was cancelled. Soon it was more games that would never be more than mention in a press release. Games like Hundred Swords, Armada 2 and especially the most devastating one, Jambo Safari, a game that I wanted more than anything else. It was also devices that never materialized like the zip drive or DVD drive. It was the Colecovision all over again.

What is the morale of the story? No matter how great a system is, its demise is inevitable and it is something that we need to be prepared for. Sure the enjoyment of the system will always be there, as is proof by the sheer number of people who still enjoy their Ataris, Colecos and Intellivisions. But one of the joys of owning a game system, during its lifetime, is the excitement of new games. The hope of that great game on the horizon is a critical part of owning a system. The hope that the game that will finally meet your expectations, is in production and will soon debut on the very system that you invested your money into. When this is removed, a certain enjoyment is lost. But such is life as games are replaced and something bigger and better is always on the horizon. But watch out for a heartbreak, because no matter if it is your first love or the latest flame, the pain is still great and hurts just as much.

Question to the Readers

Instead of the usual letters to the editor, I decided to pose a question to the readers of Retrogaming Times. Now that the newsletter has reached a milestone, I thought about going back and redoing some of the old issues. Changing their layout to the more uniformed look we use now, add in table of contents, maybe rewriting some articles. My question to the readers is would you like to see the old issues get a facelift and be redone or would you like to see them remain as they are? Would you rather see the slow development of the newsletter, from its much more primitive beginnings to the more polished look of today? I am torn on which way would be best and thought that since the newsletter is as much yours as mine, I would get your feedback. So take some time to write and let me know how you feel. Thanks!

Intruder Alert

Chapter Three

Last thing I remembered was being shot and dying. I thought I was dead, but here I was, as good as new and still in the same maze, with the menacing red robots coming after me. Only this time, I was prepared for them. I knew their laser shots were coming and I

took steps to avoid them. Instead of sitting there like a target, I ran away. From there, I headed towards another door, hoping to shoot any robots in my way. I ran down one corridor, only to find more robots. I turned and ran back as I saw shots, zooming past my head. I ducked down a nearby corridor and paused to catch my breath.

As I rested, I wondered if there was any way out of this maze of terror? But my rest was brief as I heard that infernal sound of the bouncing ball as he made his way towards me. I knew it was time to run out of the room and I quickened my pace. I ran towards a door and once again, I felt the burning pain as a laser hit me in the back. I screamed in pain and then everything went black. For a moment or what felt like a moment, there was nothing. Then I was blinded by light and once again I was in the maze, at the beginning and the robots were there again. This time, I just stood there in shock. How could I keep dying, yet I always came back? It made no sense to me. I wanted to stand and wait for the robots to kill me to test my theory, but I felt a compelling force, sending me to the right. While I controlled my mind, it was like some greater being was controlling my destiny.

This time I did make it out of the maze, only to find another maze. As I entered this new maze, once again I was struck down. I swore that I wanted to go left, but my body decided to go right. As I died, yet again, that same blackness was there, only this time it seemed even longer. What felt like an eternity, I existed, yet did not exist at all. After some length of time, which had no meaning to me, I materialized back in the original maze. A great sense of déjà vu came over me as I knew that I had been here before, yet it seem like everything was new. It was if I had been born anew.

Little was I to know that this rebirth would take place again and again. I had to relive this death maze, over and over again. I died a thousand deaths and yet, I could not die. I had broken free of the prison of death, only to be stuck in a much greater prison. This one was a constant loop of death and a futile effort to find a way out of the maze. I was alive, yet I was very dead.

Then something even stranger happened. As I was ready to exit another room in this endless maze, everything went black. No shot from a laser, no painful death, just pure blackness. Everything stood still as I just existed. What grand power had caused this and what was my fate?

"Hey, why did you turn my game off? I still had two guys left." a young boy screamed out as the screen on the arcade game before him went blank. "I told you before, we close at 9:00 and all games are turned off, no matter what." a disgruntled man shouted at the boy as he was turning the signs in the front window of the arcade. The boy then looked at the machine and said "I will be back tomorrow and I will get that high score". He then walked off with a slightly perturbed look on his face as he left the establishment.

As the lights went out and the doors were closed, a strange noise floated through the arcade. It was the very faint sound of a hundred tortured souls, screaming out an end to their existence. But it was so faint that noone heard it. They tried to find peace in the night, but they knew too well that tomorrow, their private hells would begin anew.

The End

Wild Commercial

Saw this in the newsgroups and could not help but share it. It is a link to a commercial for Atari 5200 joust that is beyond description. It has to be the wildest, most ridiculous commercial ever (except maybe for the Atari Jaguar commercials that were never used). To see this, go this URL:

http://www.atari-history.com/movies/5200_joust.avi

Conclusion

While there was nothing really special about issue #50, we did reach it! Time to reflect on the accomplishment and look ahead to the future. I plan on going for 100 issues and then taking a hiatus. Figure after another 50 issues, I will need one!

I would like to take this time to ask everyone to say a small prayer for Alan Hewston. As one of the long time contributors of the newsletter, it was painful for him to not be able to contribute to this special issue. But he is in the hospital and our prayers are with him at this moment. We hope that he has a speedy recovery and will be back with his popular, "Many Faces" article.

Next month, we will bring back a few things that were missing, like "Spotlight of the Month" and "Letters to the Editor". Just took a one month break from them (besides I did not receive any really good letters this month, you guys are slipping). So enjoy Halloween and keep those classic games alive!

[-Tom Zjaba](#)

(Tried a smaller font this month. Let me know if you like it better or if I should go back to the larger font. By the way, the song of the month on my playlist is "I am a Man of Constant Sorrow" from the "Oh Brother, Where art Thou" movie. A very funny movie and a catchy little song).