Retrogaming Times Monthly

Issue #10 - March 2005

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Press Fire to Start

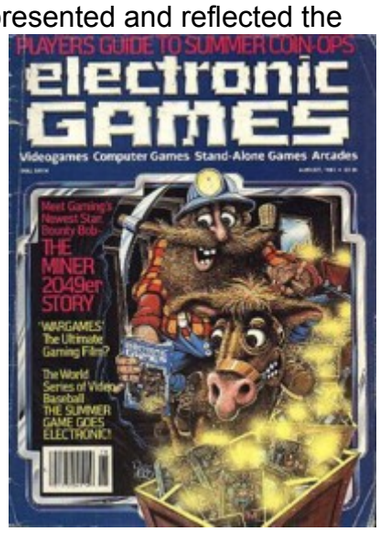
by Adam King

Greetings, gamers, and welcome to RTM number 10. I never though we'd make to to 10 issues, but here we are. Of course your ongoing support made this possible, so thanks a million. Now let's see if we can make it to Issue 20.

But there's time for that later. In this issue we have another heaping helping of classicgaming columns, from mountain kings to Missile Command. So without further adieu, let's get started.

Syntax Era: Electronic Games (Part 2)

by Scott Jacobi



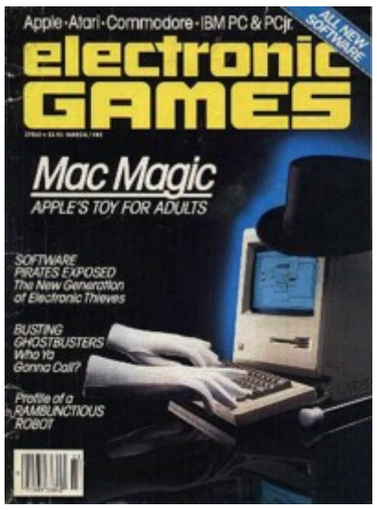
Of all the video game magazines published in the '80s, no magazine represented and reflected the state of video game industry before (and during) the crash more than Electronic Games. From it's humble beginnings, comparing Asteroids to Space Invaders, to tracking Donkey Kong's meteoric rise to the top of the arcade charts, toppling Pac-Man, to the announcement of brand new "third generation" technology like the Atari 5200 and the Colecovision, Electronic Games was a video game player's treasure trove of information.

Let's not forget that on top of covering gaming consoles, arcade hits, and the developing handheld market, they also tracked another up and coming star of the day, computer games. Nowadays, the home console market and the PC market are very much divided, and it is uncommon to find a gaming magazine that caters to both markets between its covers (Edge magazine comes to mind.) Back then however, the line between console games and computer games was a little blurrier, and the computer game reviews fit in very well with the rest of Electronic Games' content.

And so computer games lived along side the console games in the pages of the industry's very first dedicated magazine, usually playing second fiddle... for a while. Then one day in August of 1983, the latest issue arrived in my mailbox, sporting a blue border surrounding the picture of an interesting looking miner, and to the side is the caption "Meet Gaming's Newest Star, Bounty Bob - The Miner 2049er Story." The Miner 2049er story? I didn't recognize the title from the arcade, and I hadn't seen this new game on the rack for the Atari 2600 games at Toys R' Us (yet) so what was this wonderful new game?

In the months that were leading to the inevitable decline of the home console gaming market, Electronic Games had looked to a new source for the next symbol of video game fun and innovation. They looked to the computer market. And they found a new star in a game developed by Bill Hogue for many of the computers available at that time, including the Atari 400 and 800, Apple II, and Commodore 64: Miner 2049er. And it wasn't a temporary change either. The editors of Electronic Games truly saw the home computer market as video games' savior. To them the market wasn't

crashing, the market was evolving. They didn't have the buzzwords of modern marketing teams, but if they could borrow one word from today, it would have been convergence.



It was a logical assumption. If you could buy a machine that could play great games, or if you could buy a machine that could play great games (in some cases, even better) AND it could help you with your taxes and your children's homework, which would you rather buy? By late 1983, Electronic Games' money was on computers. Not that they dropped coverage of new console games completely. Computer games simply began to share in the spotlight more often.

As the months went by, you could see in some of the editorials (faithfully retyped in the web pages of http://cvmm.vg-network.com/egthumbs.htm) a watchful eye and the premonitions of a fateful downfall of the home gaming market. Several quotes made by editor Arnie Katz in the October 1983 issue allude to this fact. "That loud crashing assailing your ears is the sound of retail prices tumbling on electronic gaming hardware and software." "When consumers start shopping for the items on their 1983 gift lists, they'll find they can buy the system of their dreams for 50% or less of what the same equipment would have cost only a year earlier." "Computers are only just starting to tap the mammoth audience that futurists expect them to capture by the end of this decade." In January of 1984, Arnie made many predictions of the upcoming year, but none were as telling as this: "By the end of the year, there will be two videogame systems in active production as gamers flock to computers for their home arcading."

And then it happened. The decline of the market proved to be too much even for the mightiest gaming magazine on the racks, and after the January 1984 issue, Electronic Games skipped a month for the first time since March 1982, after only it's second issue. When it returned in March, the editorial spoke of "the Big Videogame Shake-Out," commenting that "Electronic gaming is in the midst of a delicate transition. The videogaming era is winding down, while home arcading with microcomputers is just entering its main growth spurt." And as a result, Electronic Games would need to adjust their publishing schedule and returned to bi-monthly printing.

And so Electronic Games continued their dedication to the computer gaming market, commenting on the state of arcade games, the dilemma of the first time home computer buyer (to buy now, or to wait for better... some things never change) and even a soap box piece on software piracy. The final nails in the coffin began in March 1985. In an issue whose cover sported the brand new Apple Macintosh, Arnie Katz's name no longer graced the editorial. Instead, it was Doug Garr introducing some new members to the staff. Even a staff change wasn't enough to aid the ailing magazine, and two issues later, in May 1985, the magazines title was changed to "Computer Entertainment." Not that it mattered. The magazine was a pale shadow of it's former self. After three monthly issues of "Computer Entertainment," the legacy of Electronic Games was no more after July 1985.

This doesn't completely end the story, however. After along period of silence from the press on the subject of video games, and Nintendo's near single handed successful revitalization of the industry in America, Arnie Katz, Bill Kunkle and Joyce Worley returned to the business of reviewing and writing about games and published their first issue of "Video Games and Computer Entertainment" in December 1988. Ironically, VG&CE experienced the complete opposite evolution that Electronic Games did. This time, it was computer games that slowly vanished from their pages, causing the title to shorten to "Video Games." The title "Electronic Games" would reappear on the stands in October 1992 for a decent sized second run. But in my mind, none of them ever held a candle to how excited the original Electronic Games made me as I read each one cover to cover.

The Many Faces of . . . Missile Command

by Alan Hewston

This month we have another 25th anniversary tribute - that of the arcade game "Missile Command". While this game could have been called Anti-Ballistic Missile Commander, the name "Missile Command" is sufficient. You command a limited supply of defense missiles to save "civilization as we know it". Instead of just losing another fictional video game and walking away (such as if Pac-Man lost all his lives), in Missile Command the challenge seems more realistic and personal. When you fail, and everyone does, it gives you one of the most humiliating send offs of all time - Armageddon has occurred with blinding flashes of light, and loud bombastic explosions letting everyone in the parlor know that you lost, you blew it, it's over, kaput. The screen says it all THE END.

You defend 3 missile bases and 6 cities all equally spaced at the bottom of the screen from your enemy who brings death-from-above. The middle most, extreme left and extreme right locations are your missile bases. In between the bases are 3 cities on each side. The Atari arcade programmers originally envisioned the game as defending 6 California (or US) cities, from a certain intercontinental threat - yes you know who. The arcade product was generic, but we all knew that these were not interplanetary aliens. Aliens would obliterate us from orbit and not bother to bring in low orbiting Satellites, much less use Bombers planes. The programmers even referred to the satellite as Sputnik. . . ah, the Cold War at it's finest. Anyhow, if a city gets hit by the enemy it is destroyed, but these cities can be replaced via bonus cities - earned every 10 K scored. At the start of each attack wave, you get 10 Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABMs) at each base. An enemy explosion over the bases will deplete it of all remaining missiles for that wave. Waves only last about a minute, but get harder and harder (through the max difficulty reached at wave #18) via combinations of faster, more numerous, more accurate or more evasive enemies. After a brief pause between waves, bonus points are added up for cities and ABMs remaining, and then any bonus cities stored or just earned are randomly placed where cities were destroyed. Fortunately you can only lose 3 cities in any attack wave, but if you have no bonus cities and none have survived the current wave, the game comes to an end.

Most of these enemies are ICBMs or Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles arriving from the top most portion of the screen and leave a trail behind them until they are destroyed or explode over their target. Their final destination is fixed and they are unable to alter their course. Some will split into multiple missiles or MIRVs, each having their own destination and likewise leaving a trail. Worse still, are the low flying Bombers & Satellites that emerge from the edges of the screen. They are slow moving and cannot harm you, but they eventually release their bomb load - essentially a MIRV, but starting at a much lower, more deadly altitude. Finally, you must face the most feared enemy in nearly all of video game history - the dreaded Smart Cruise Missiles. Smart Bombs again? Last month - in "Defender" one controls a limited supply of ultimate weapons which Williams Electronics named Smart Bombs. Yes they always did eliminate every enemy on the screen, but they were NOT actually smart in any way. In "Missile Command" the table is turned and now your enemy has "smart" Cruise Missiles. They are smart in two ways, 1) they sense the approach of your ABM and alter their descent speed or trajectory to avoid being hit, and 2), they always hit a target. Fortunately, they will not alter their course to seek a "live" target, so their target may be a missile base that has been depleted or a city already destroyed. Smart Cruise Missiles are distinct from ICBMs in that they do not leave a trail, but give off a unique high pitched sound.

How do you use your ABM's? Use the trackball to rapidly move your cursor to the location where you want the ABM to detonate, then press the fire button from the desired missile base and there it goes. A little delay as it rockets upward, then explodes at its destination. Meanwhile, ignore the ABM you just fired, and focus on the next target as the enemies keep on coming. Decide which enemies to attack, or rather, decide which bases and cities you will protect and then execute. Don't forget to shoot below the enemies to allow for the travel time for you ABMs. Any enemy inside an ABM explosion will be destroyed. Upon being destroyed, each enemy will yield a further explosion, which can then take out even more enemies in a chain reaction. Now then, of your 3 missile bases, the center base is the most effective being centrally located and also having the fastest missiles delivered to target. The missiles in the L and R bases do not travel quite as fast, but they are more useful in firing upon targets on their side of the screen. Each base has its own fire button and the missile you fire only come from that base selected. If you have no more missiles in that base, you'll hear a noise telling you that it's empty. A limit of only 8 ABMs can be exploding simultaneously, thus any shots fired beyond that will yield the empty sound.

"Don't Defend Dirt"

A saying by one of the Atari programmers reminds us - do not try to eliminate ALL missiles and especially ignore those headed for DIRT. If an enemy is heading towards an empty (or soon to be) missile base or a destroyed city - then ignore it. Of course, early on, go after every missile to earn the maximum points. Highly addictive games will temp you to be a little bit more greedy and earn just a little bit more points each round, wave or level. But you had better know when to stop being too greedy. Concentrate on what you must protect, your missiles . . . and of course at least one city - preferably near the middle of the screen. Missile Command will remind you over and over again what is important to defend. Especially the home version as you only have one missile base. If you forget to protect it, you will most surely be introduced to what gamers refer to as a "Double Death". Although the term is a bit off in literal meaning for Missile Command, the point is driven home here as you must defend your missile base at all costs. If they hit you once, they have no mercy upon you and subsequent strikes may explode just before you were to get your reserve supply activated. You see, you must wait for several seconds while the explosion occurs and before your reserve ABMs are made available. Too late they have hit you again, and you didn't even get a chance to fire another missile. This could happen multiple times, and all the while, let's not forget that while you are without missiles your cities are defenseless as well. Missile Command has NO mercy. Not like Pac-Man where you still have a sporting chance to clear the board. Nope - one nuclear warhead can ruin your entire day. Your game is quickly over from one mistake. Dare I say this is the King of all Double Deaths. So don't defend dirt!

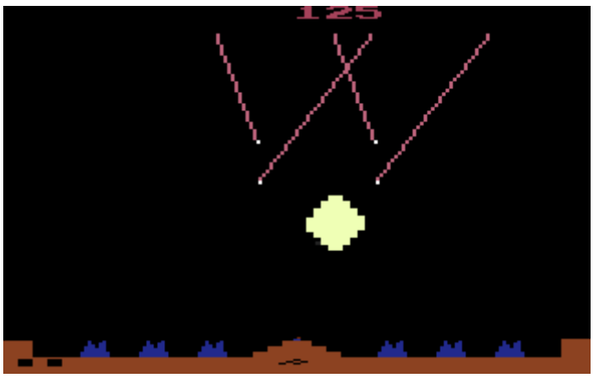
Arcade: 1980 Atari Dave Theurer
Home Versions all by Atari:

•Atari 2600 ('81 Rob Fulop)
•Atari 8 bit ('82 Robert Zdybel)
•Atari 5200 ('82 unknown - probably ?Robert Zdybel?)

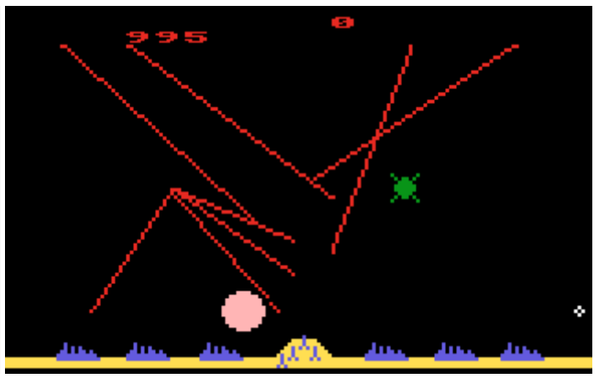
Arcade Sequel: Missile Command 2 - 1982 Atari, Two player simultaneous action - prototype.

The 5200 Trackball is the most important element of any classic home versions.

Home Version Similarities: Except those in <> all home versions have: arcade scoring & multipliers; MIRV's, Bombers and Satellites <2600>; a pause <2600>; choice of a starting levels 1 to 9; choice of turning off bonus cities <2600>; a practice mode with only cruise missiles <2600>; chain reaction explosions <2600>; a hit on your missile base eliminates all active ABMs, and then you must wait several seconds before the arsenal is re-stocked; every wave gets harder (through 16) due to combinations of faster, more plentiful and more smart Cruise Missiles; smart Cruise Missiles make a distinct sound. For the home versions, Atari officially changed the story to be located on a fictitious planet and your closest neighbors turn against you and attack - reigning down their Inter Planetary Ballistic Missiles (IPBMs) upon you. It is odd that Atari only released this on 3 home systems. No known versions were in development either. I guess Atari liked advertising "the ONLY version of Missile Command . . .". All versions are quite common.



Missile Command on Atari 2600



Missile Command on Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit & Atari XE

Disqualified: Atari 8 bit (original Brown cart version) (N/A)
My first reaction was that there was more than one version for the 8 bit machines. As usual, we can only allow one official score for each version, so the original brown cartridge version CLX4012 will not be scored. It is essentially the same as the XE & 5200 versions, but lacks the full range of starting levels. You can only play the default wave or select wave 8 vie <CONTRL><C>, but no waves in between. Likewise you cannot practice any other levels. Overall this is not much of a deduction (maybe -0.5 point), so the Addictiveness score would likely be the same. If you only have this version, you are not missing much, so do not fret. The text at the top of the screen is also slightly different as well.

Bronze Medal: Atari 2600 (38)
My first reaction was the colors are outlandish and make it hard to see. But, over the course of many games/years - the clashing colors seem to add to the challenge - it's not a graphical glitch. It is harder on the eyes, but you can still identify everything. No one said war was easy. Unfortunately the Gameplay has been watered down - but is still very good (7). Most significant is a reduction in number and variety of on-screen enemies - there are no multiple bomb threats - no MIRV's, Bombers or Satellites. The arcade game's diverse strategy is further simplified due to only 3 shots being fired at once (not 8), and obviously from having only ONE missile base. The challenge is reduced since you no longer need to excel at using 3 distinct fire buttons. Another simplification is that the ABM explosions are a bit larger, but this was probably necessary due to the limit of only 3 ABMs, and the lack of chain reaction explosions. It is likely that Atari management limited the cart's memory, thus despite the ability to keep track of and display more explosions, and thus or more and various enemies. The manual says that wave 13 is the hardest, but actually wave #16 is as verified by Craig Kubey, who's "The Winner's Book of Video Games" lists the number of enemies (# of IPBMs / # of Cruise Missiles) in each wave. From wave 1 to 16 these are: (12/0), (15/0), (18/0), (12/0), (16/0), (14/1), (17/1), (10/2), (13/3), (16/4), (19/4), (12/5), (14/5), (16/6), (18/6), (20/7). Subsequent waves all have 20 IPBMs and 7 cruise Missiles, but still only 30 missiles - so "Don't Defend the Dirt".

Despite the reduced gameplay and no pause feature, the Addictiveness is great (8). You will be quite challenged, and will come back for more. This version does get harder faster but is close enough to the arcade game to get into it. The Cruise Missiles are a bit too agile and too smart here and seem to unrealistically avoid your ABM's. So if you play long enough you'll surely feel cheated by those

dreaded Cruise Missiles. This is the best 2 player version as it uniquely adds individual A/B difficulty selection, allowing for a difference in skill level for players. One player can have fast moving ABMs (easier), while the other's are slow (harder) - quite nice, and should have been added to the computer/5200 versions. Likewise, the 2600 has the only child's version - easier, slower & fewer enemies. Graphics are very good (7), lacking the detail of the arcade, but having fast action and enough enemies {6} and explosions {3}. There's decent animation as the cities turn into mushroom clouds, and some variation in colors between waves. The colors changes really boil down to only 4 groups of objects all changing colors together from wave to wave, but that is good enough. Sound effects are respectable (6) and include a starting wave jingle, ABMs fired & exploding, cities or missile base destroyed, adding up of bonus points, awarding bonus cities, and the end of the game bombardment. Finally, the cruise missile alert is distinct and clear, but unfortunately it also negates the sound of an ABM being fired. Thus you do not always get an audio feedback verifying an ABM was fired, but fortunately you'll still hear the "clinking" sound if you are empty or cannot fire at that time. Controls (10) are perfect with a joystick but do not seem as easy to control with the trackball. Regardless, there's no way for the Trackball to work in true analog trackball mode. Most 2600 fans really love this game more than I do. It's enjoyable, but I couldn't find myself justifying scores any higher - I hope that you concur.

Gold Medal: Atari XE & Atari 5200 (42)

A tie. My first reaction is that the original 8 bit version, the XE version and the 5200 are identical. As mentioned earlier, the original 8 bit cart is slightly limited, but otherwise is the same. The three versions were probably coded by the same programmer, or copied and ported to the other two versions with the only obvious difference being the Controls interfaces. There may be some cosmetic audio or graphical differences, but I didn't try hard to spot them. Regardless, the scores and descriptions are all the same. Missile Command came as the built-in game on the XE Game system, so you always had it with you. I've not seen an XE cartridge version, but feel free to let us know if there was. Gameplay is more faithful and impressive (8) than the 2600. The MIRVs, Bombers and Satellites are all included. Only 3 cities can be eliminated in a wave, up to 8 ABMs can be fired at once, there are 24 missiles, 6 per allotment and chain reaction explosions do occur. The only significant gameplay difference form the arcade is having only one missile base and of course one fire button. There is an overlay included with the 5200 which shows all the commands, which for the [5200] & [XE] respectfully are: [8] & [S] allows a practice mode which toggles the game from normal mixture of enemies to only smart cruise missiles; [#] & [Option] toggles the Bonus cities off/on; [*] & [Select] toggles between 1 or 2 players. For the 5200, [0] followed by [1] through [9] skips to level 1 through 9, whereas on the XE, [0] to [9] skips to that level - 9 being the most difficult. On the XE [T] toggles between Joystick, Mouse and Trackball. The Addictiveness is fantastic (9), with a pause [pause] & [space bar], the selection of starting waves 0 to 9, bonus on/off, and practice modes to keep you coming back for different challenges. The difficulty increases more gradually (nice) than the 2600 but still peaks at a challenging level. The Cruise Missiles ultimately become too darn "smart" and deadly, making huge detours - dashing any hopes of a "10" for addictiveness. Although there is still room for improvement compared to other 8 bit games, the Graphics are very nice (8) and include chain reactions, more colors & enemies (10+) & explosions (8), better detail, higher screen resolution, better firing animation and yet no slow down in the action. The 2600 did have better city animation. Explosions are slow and not rushed here, matching the arcade's realism. Sound is very good (7) a wee bit better than the 2600. All the effects are similar, but better than the 2600 - such as the more impressive launching sequence of each ABM. The Satellite & Bomber effects are also included but unfortunately are the same effect. The ever-present Cruise Missiles once again cut out another effect - the sound of the Bomber/Satellite is cancelled. Controls (10) can be perfect, but only with the right controller. If you enjoy a standard 2600 stick, then the XE and 800 versions are perfect, but my 5200's did not work with the Masterplay Interface. As usual, the standard 5200 stick stinks as does the Wico controller - all being clumsy as they operate like in trackball, but are not quite the same. The XE and 800 versions using a 2600 style trackball will leave you a little frustrated getting the precision you desire. The fire buttons are also more tiresome on all trackballs. So trackball lovers will either love these versions or hate it. Finally, using the 5200 trackball controller seems to be the best and only option for the 5200. It is nearly as easy for me, a joystick lover, to use as playing the 2600 version - so Trackball fans should love it. Let me just say that the 5200 track ball is really the best thing since sliced bread for the 5200. Its keys and buttons are perfect and never seem fail. The track ball is easy to take apart and clean and is compatible (with a Y cable connector) and Wico controllers. There may be a couple games where the trackball will make the Masterplay Interface, or any other controllers useless, but I always start playing a 5200 game with the Trackball and Wico controller hocked up. This seems to be the best way to go, and for this reason I'm sure glad that I have two 5200 Track Ball controllers. So overall, your enjoyment of this game lies in the version you have and if you have the best, or compatible controller.

Missile Command 2

Sounds like we missed out on quite a treat here - a cooperative 2 player game, each protecting half of the cities, with half the missiles. Too bad it was not considered an option for any classic home version. The 7800 would have been up to the challenge of 2 players simultaneously. Lots of combinations too, like 2/3 or 6 fire buttons and share the missiles, or not, one gets slower or faster missiles, or the first 15, then final 15 have flip flopped speeds between players/waves. How about having your own Smart

Bombs. Either add specific base or fire buttons to select them, or maybe just the final 3 to 5 ABMs are Smart. Arms escalation! Why not? We have the technology. Who wants to program the 800, 2600, 5200, or 7800 for such a thrilling classic home version? And please let us know if you'd like to write a MAME review of this game for the RTM?

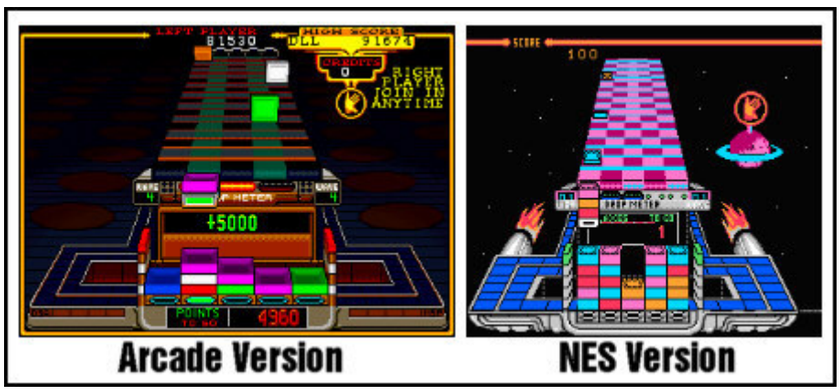
Come back next month where we learn "Do NOT attack dirt", in the Many Faces of "Battlezone" on the Apple][, Atari 2600, 5200, 8 bit (Atari & maybe Andromeda version), C64 & Vic 20. Contact Alan [old man - just turned 40] Hewston at: Hewston95@NOSPAMstratos.net or visit the Many Faces of site: http://my.stratos.net/~hewston95/RT/ManyFacesHome.htm.

The Titles of Tengen - Klax

by David Lundin, Jr.

"It is the nineties and there is time for..." Klax! Well, at least it wasn't an over hyped claim for this original addition to the puzzle game genre that was actually released in 1989 by Atari Games. The gameplay in Klax is deceptively simple: catch colored tiles as they flop down a plateau and off the edge, then drop them into patterns of three or more alike colors so they'll disappear making a "Klax" (three or more tiles of the same color horizontally, vertically, or diagonally) and points are awarded. The more complex the pattern or chain reaction the more points the player earns. Each wave has specific criteria of what must be accomplished in order to move onto the next one. If you miss too many tiles as they flip off the edge of the playfield or run out of room then it's game over. It's Tetris meets Tic-Tac-Toe in a game that is based around the marriage of puzzle solving and fast reaction. While things may start slow, soon enough the tiles come barreling down the playfield leaving nearly no time to plan out long, high scoring sequences.

The first difference between the NES version and the arcade original that most people will notice is the music on the NES version since the arcade original didn't have a soundtrack. The music itself can be best described as 8-bit NES electronica and there are five different audio tracks to choose from that all sound somewhat different. However the option to leave the music off and have just the sound effects play is there as well and the click sound the tiles make, as they flop down to the edge of the plateau, is about as close to the original as one could expect on the NES, not bad at all. The chime sound effects that play when a Klax is made are close to the arcade sounds as well. However the applause sound effect after completing a wave or a chain reaction and the female voice that announces each wave are both missing, it's not a big deal but they are both something the game is known for.



Visually the NES port is not as detailed but everything is there albeit at a lower resolution. The arcade original had the same graphic feel of other Atari arcade games such as Paperboy and 720 with simple yet detailed sprites. Although the graphics are expectedly dumbed down for the NES hardware it's still all there and it still all works. The controls are simple enough and are an exact transition from the arcade cabinet with left and right moving the paddle left and right and the A or B buttons drop the top tile on the paddle into the well. Pressing down on the control pad accelerates the speed in which the tiles approach the paddle and pressing up on the control pad throws the top tile on the paddle back up onto the plateau.

With the NES version you also get Blob Ball, a completely unrelated little mini game hidden in the menus. It's somewhat like Breakout with a blob of snot instead of a ball and no wall of bricks to smash. As the manual puts it - "Blob Ball is simply the stupidest game to come along in a decade! Lucky you. Just for fun, try out-thinking this blob and keep it from killing itself! It doesn't even know what a pattern is... oh, and in case you're wondering, Blob Ball has no relationship whatsoever to the rest of KLAX, it's just sort of there..."

At the end of the day Klax is what it was back in 1989, a middle ground between Tetris and Columns but it never became popular as either. Klax was ported to many consoles of the late 80's and early 90's including my favorite version on the Atari Lynx but it doesn't endure as well as Tetris since it's not a relaxing game to play, it's tense from about the seventh wave on. The arcade version featured 100 waves and I would guess that the NES version contains all 100 as well but I decided to keep my

sanity and not attempt to play beyond the first couple dozen. Klax was Atari Games' runner up to Tetris, which they also designed the arcade version of, as well as a Tengen NES port - but that can wait until another time.

"InsaneDavid" also runs a slowly growing gaming site at http://www.classicplastic.net/dvgi

Retrogaming Commercial Vault

by Adam King

In this month's edition of the Vault, we spotlight another ad for a CBS game. This one is for Mountain King, which was released for several systems. In this ad an ordinary Joe pops in a Mountain King cartridge in his system and start's playing. As goes through the game, diamonds and a crown appear in his living room, while we hear a song about this game done to the tune of the classical ditty "In The Hall Of The Mountain King."

> "When you play Mountain King,
> music is everything,
> 'cause if you hear this melody,
> it could mean victory!
> Grab a thousand diamonds
> as you go climbin',
> jump and be a winner
> or a spider's dinner!
> Now look for the spirit,
> music says you're near it,
> find it with your flashlight
> but don't you get uptight!
> Pass the skull, get the crown,
> now you hear this music sound,
> feel the baskle music ring
> speed of Mountain King!"
> "Mountain King for all Atari home systems, Colecovision, and Commodore 64 systems. From CBS Electronics, where the excitment never ends!"

PICTURES:

The man who will be (Mountain) King.

"Did I leave the freezer open?"

The face of royalty.

You can download this clip at Digital Press (http://www.digitpress.com/).

Don't forget you can find Nintendo commercials at my website, NES Times, which can found at come.to/nestimes.

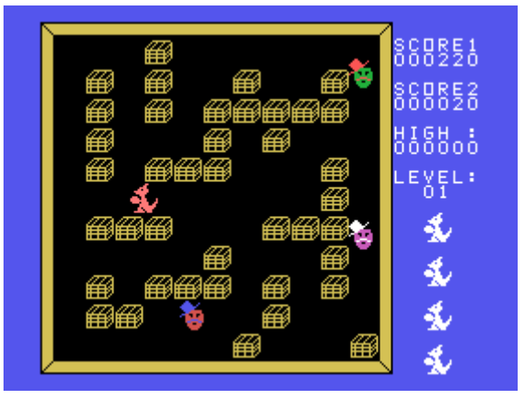
The TI-99/4A Arcade: Arcade Clones

by Bryan Roppolo

There is one category of video games that the TI-99/4A has a fair number of, and that is the Arcade Clone. Through the system's lifetime, a number of arcade clones were put out and a good number of those were faithful adaptations of their arcade counterparts. The sad thing is that because many of these clones go un-reviewed, people do not know what titles are clones of which arcade. Therefore, this month I will be focusing on the games Hopper, Car Wars, and TI Invaders which all fit this category. However, not all of the arcades these games take after were smash hits, and therefore there might be a title here that even the arcade enthusiast has never heard of. So if you're ready for some arcade cloning action, you've come to the right place!

Hopper (1983 TI)

This cartridge is a clone of the 1982 arcade game Pengo by Sega. The game itself plays pretty well and gets faster as the levels progress. In the game itself, you control a little Australian kangaroo by the name of Chadly who is being hunted by 3 circus trainers who want to put him into their circus act. The only way to outsmart these circus trainers is to use your mighty kick and try to smash them with their own crates. After squashing all 3 of the circus trainers, a new screen will appear with 3 more baddies ready to try and capture poor Chadly.



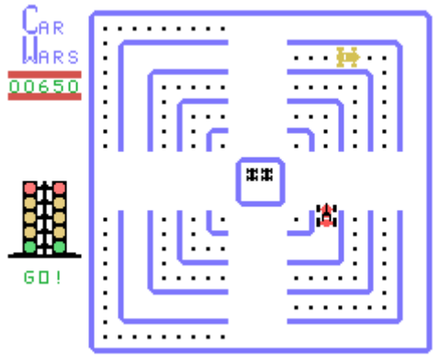
The idea, as kind of mentioned in the above story, is similar to Pengo in that you have to push blocks into your enemies. While the object of the game might sound easy enough, the quick movement of the circus trainers themselves make it hard to pin them into a place where they can be squashed. In addition, you have to make sure you don't run into one of the bad guys or else you'll be performing in the circus, which is every kangaroo's worst dream! One very important thing to note here is that you can only kick one crate at a time, therefore if you position your kangaroo behind two crates they will not both be kicked out. It's important therefore to make sure when positioning yourself for a good hit that there is only one crate in front of you, or else the kick will be unsuccessful. Now in addition to being able to kick crates into your enemies, Chadly is also able to break them if there is more than one in a row. This is very beneficial since it allows you to smash your way towards the crate that you want to kick.

After you get your kicking and crate breaking skills down, you'll find yourself advancing through the game further and further. In Hopper, the crate layout changes every 3 screens and on level 10 (if you manage to make it that far) the crates become invisible! One other element tossed into the game is ability to play with 2-players. In the 2-player game each person alternates in their turn, so when one player dies the other player starts his game. Sadly there is no option to play with two players on the screen at once, which would have added to the excitement of Hopper since everyone knows two kangaroos are better than one! It would have been cool to be able to to play with a friend in order to put those trainers in their place.

While the concept of the game is practically identical to Pengo, there are a few elements missing from the game that can be found in the arcade original. Elements such as the ability to shake the side of the walls in order to stun an enemy or the blocks of ice with stars on them which can be lined up in a row for bonus points are lacking for example. With these omissions aside, however, Hopper is a fairly faithful adaptation of its arcade counterpart and is worth a play or two. The biggest complaint that I have is the lack of being able to play with two players simultaneously, but other than that the game is pretty fun to play. So if you ever want to give Pengo the penguin a break from pushing around all those blocks of ice, fire up a game of Hopper and let Chadly the kangaroo lend a helping pair of hands (or should I say feet)!

Car Wars (1981 TI)

Here's a really popular TI-99/4A game cartridge that was programmed by Jim Dramis, who would later go on to do "Parsec". I never knew that Car Wars was actually a clone of an obscure arcade game called Head On by Sega/Gremlin until recently. In my opinion, this game is definitely worth trying out as it provides some really quick and enjoyable action.



The first thing one might notice by looking at the screen is that it resembles Pac-Man to an extent. Actually, the idea of the game is very similar to Pac-Man since the goal is to collect all the dots on the screen while avoiding any on-coming enemies. Interestingly though, Head On was a 1979 release in the arcades which means that it preceded Pac-Man by a year even though many have been tempted to say that Car Wars was a Pac-Man clone.

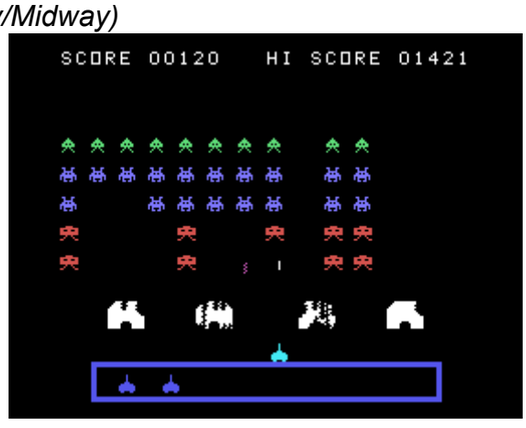
The nice thing about Car Wars are the options available to the player, such as selecting how fast you want the game to play (Creepin', Fast, or Flyin') and also when you want the computer car to speed up (Late, Early, or Look-out!). Now the speed of the game is pretty easy to figure out, it just allows the player to adjust how fast both the computer car and your own car travel on the screen. The faster both cars travel, the harder the game is since faster reflexes are then required to survive. The other option (computer car speed up) refers to when you want the computer car to start accelerating, because after a certain number of dots on the screen are collected the computer car will start to travel faster. Therefore, the earlier the computer car speeds up the longer you will have to play against a blazing opponent (and trust me, it's not that easy to avoid the computer when he's running at full speed!). Due to these options the game is that much better since it allows a novice player to get an easier game, while giving a more advanced player the challenge he's been looking for.

After selecting your game options, the next screen that comes up is the main race track. Here, both cars sit at the bottom of the screen with their bumpers towards each other waiting for the light at left side of the screen to turn green. Once the light turns green, both cars move in the directions they were facing. One important note to make at this point is the fact that you cannot stop your car once the light turns green, you can only choose its speed, slow or fast. Once the race is started your task is to collect all the dots on the screen without getting crashed into, but luckily there are a few things that your red car can do which the computer car cannot. One of these things is the ability to speed up or slow down at will (the computer's car travels at its slowest speed until near the end of the round when almost all the dots are collected). The other advantage you have is the ability to cross over either one or two lanes of the track (the computer's car can only switch over one lane at a time). Knowing when to switch over one or two lanes and also when to speed up can make the difference between losing a life or continuing on to the next round of play. One other thing I better mention before I forget is that there is one other little trick your car can do which the computer's cannot, and that's the ability to switch in and then right back out of a lane (this is where you move your car over one lane and then quickly move it back into the previous lane you were in before getting in between the blue walls). This quick maneuver can trick the computer into moving to another lane if timed right and is just a little bit of strategy added into Car Wars that helps make the game depend more on good strategy then pure luck.

After all the dots are collected, you advance on to the next round with a different car setup on the screen. Eventually once level 3 is reached there will be two cars on the screen ready to crash into you. The number of your opponents cars will keep increasing every other level as you progress onwards until all lives are lost! The interesting question that comes out of this is if it's possible for the whole screen to be filled with cars. The manual for Car Wars does indeed state that after every other round an additional enemy car will added to the screen, therefore leading me to believe that the game could keep going on until the whole screen is filled with cars! To be honest, I have only been able to get to the 5th or 6th level of the game (when there are 3 cars after you) and it would be interesting to know if anyone out there has gotten to the point where there were simply too many cars to handle on the screen.

Overall, this game is very addictive and sure to keep you entertained for a quick play. You might even find yourself out on a mission to see if it is possible to fill the screen up with cars. Due to the options provided and progressively harder levels, Car Wars is a game that I recommend if you are interested in playing a quality arcade clone. Heck, you don't even need to stop there! Try your hand at the original Head On by Sega/Gremlin and see how it compares.

TI Invaders (1981 TI) - *Clone of "Space Invaders" (1978 Bally/Midway)*



Here's a game that probably has been on every system since the late 70s (including even today's machines), and that's the famous Space Invaders by Bally/Midway. The TI-99/4A adaptation of this classic arcade hit truly is wonderful and gives justice to the arcade original, perhaps Tom Zjaba best summed up the game with the phrase "probably one of the best Space Invaders clones I have played". When Tom Zjaba gives that high of praise to a game, you know it's gotta be good! Now the idea behind TI Invaders is exactly the same as Space Invaders, in that that player takes control of a little ship at the bottom of the screen and tries to blast all the enemies that move back and forth above you. Of course, while you are blasting at all the aliens they keep inching closer and closer to your ship while showering deadly beams down. After blasting all the aliens on the screen, you then advance on to the next level. At first glance it might seem like a typical Space Invaders clone, but actually there are some really neat features in this game that separate it from many others.

One of the nice features is the fact that the first 3 rows of aliens are exact replicas of the 3 aliens present in the arcade version of Space Invaders. This shows that the programmer of TI Invaders, Garth Dollahite, really paid close attention to detail when creating this game and makes it feel even more like the arcade original. Now after blasting through a wave of invaders, there is a bonus round where a flying saucer goes back and forth on the screen and the more times you hit the saucer the more points you earn. However, the saucer gets smaller and smaller with each hit which in turn makes it harder for you to place an accurate shot. This bonus round only adds to the thrill of the game and makes it that much more addicting.

Three other interesting aspects of the game are the white bases, the ship you control, and the flying saucer that appears during game play (not the bonus round saucer). What's neat about the white bases is the fact that every time they get hit by either your fire or the alien's fire, they disintegrate realistically (as can be seen in the screen shot to the right). While in many home versions of Space Invaders the bases do indeed disintegrate, the TI version of the game really produced some realistic "melting" effects which helps add to the feel of the game. Actually, I don't believe I have ever seen a TI game where the disintegrating effects were as good as in TI Invaders! More interesting than the bases

though is the fact that every time your ship gets hit by an alien's blast, it will show damage on the side that the alien's hit. Meaning that if your ship was hit on the right hand side, there will be a gash on the right side of your ship, and if you were hit in the middle the gash will appear in the middle, etc. This little feature might be small but adds appeal to the game, because after you get hit the damaged ship is taken below (into the blue box on the ground) and stored away. Therefore, you can always look in the box and see where your previous ships have all been damaged. Sometimes I even find myself playing the game to see if I can damage the ships in the three different ways possible! This is either a sign that I am in need of medication or that the ship damage actually adds another tiny boost to the game play. The last unique part of TI Invaders is the flying saucer which flies across the top of the screen during the infinite waves of aliens you have to fend off. If you manage to hit this ship bonus points will be awarded to your score. Now this sounds easy enough, right? Well it's not hard to actually hit the saucer, but it's hard to place a well aimed shot in the center of the ship which in turn gives you the most points. The closer to the center of the saucer that you hit, the more points that will be awarded to you. Therefore, to achieve the highest score in TI Invaders, a well aimed shot is necessary when it comes to blasting that saucer at the top of the screen.

With all of these little perks that were tossed into TI Invaders, some directly from the arcade and others original additions, it really makes the game enjoyable to play. I've always found myself coming back for more action, and a lot of that is due to the little things that are tossed in. Therefore, if I had to recommend a good version of Space Invaders which offers everything the arcade original had plus more, then it would be this gem right here. Actually, you might find yourself coming back for more not just due to the extras through out the game, but also because of the victory dance that the aliens do after all your lives are lost. You might just be tempted to play another round of TI Invaders to show those dancing aliens who's really boss!

For more reviews, graphics, and information on TI-99/4A video game cartridges stop by the TI-99/4A Videogame House at <http://www.videogamehouse.net/>. This site is run by a staff of TI-99/4A enthusiasts, including Bryan Roppolo himself and has been responsible for finding unreleased TI-99/4A video game cartridges such as Lobster Bay.

POWER-20 REVIEW

by Tonks

Recently I "upgraded" to a MAC. I have only ever used a PC since the Amiga scene died in the early 90's. So it has been quite a fun challenge learning to use a new format. The MAC I bought came with no games, which is a bad thing for any die hard gamer. So I started doing a bit of searching on the internet to see what I could find in regards to MAC gaming.

After a bit of searching I started looking at the MAC emulation scene. What a pleasant surprise I got when I discovered a VIC 20 emulator called "Power 20". I have only ever known of VIC 20 emulators for the PC such as VICE and PCVIC as well as one pretty dodgy one for the Amiga. Not being a MAC user meant this was the first time I had ever heard of Power 20 let alone used the emulator. So I clicked on "download", waited a couple of minutes for the 1.2MEG file to download (I am a poor sucker who is still on dial up) and got ready to test out this VIC 20 emulator for the very first time.

Now I must just state here that while I love emulation, there is nothing that comes close to the real thing. I have always enjoyed using a VIC 20 emulator to have a look at some of the really hard to find games or prototypes, but it is just not the same as playing the game on the TV with a real joystick. So when it comes to playing my favourite games, it is always the real thing for me. So back to Power 20...

Power 20 is shareware. The unrestered version is fully functional but limited to 10 minutes use. It is very annoying to be in the middle of racking up a highscore on Omega Race when the emulator shuts down on you, but it still gives you a pretty good idea of how well Power 20 works. And let me say that it works beautifully. Right from the word go I was loading up and playing ROM images and TAP files with very few problems.

Once Power 20 is loaded, you are presented with full screen Vic 20 screen. The task bar disappears, giving a nice illusion of using a real Vic. The task bar reappears again when you use the mouse, making it nice and easy to access all the many options.

Loading a game is dead easy. You simply click on "Devices" and then select whether you are wanting to load a ROM image, a tape image or a disk image. ROM images are loaded very quickly, however at first nothing appears but the plain Vic screen. You must implement a soft rest (Apple Key "K") and then the game appears. Loading tape or disk images is simply a matter of mounting the image and

then loading it up as if using a real Vic by typing "LOAD". The game then loads on the virtual Dataset. It really couldn't be easier.

Many options are available, including video, sound, speed, memory allocation and input devices such as paddles, joystick and light pen. Everything is very straight forward to set up. In my opinion this is the easiest Vic 20 emulator I have used.

But the big question is, "How do the games play?" The answer is excellently. Games run at perfect speed, and being full screen they look great as well. Sound is very well supported, however the sound can sound a little thin compared to the real thing. This is quite noticable in games with lots of sound such as Gridrunner.

A few games simply refuse to work or have a number of glitches that effect gameplay. Games that I have had trouble getting to work properly include Bandits, Atlantis and Turmoil. However, other games I have regularly had trouble with on other emulators work very well on Power 20. This included Demon Attack and Pole Position.

One of the best aspects of playing games on an emulator is using the mouse to play Paddle games. The Vic 20 can often suffer from very flickery paddle controls. Using the mouse is easy and very accurate making games such as Clowns a real treat to play. USB Joysticks are also very easy to set up and use.

Finally I must make mention of the ease of registering Power 20. As mentioned earlier, Power 20 is shareware and the unregistered version is limited to 10 minutes play. Registering unlocks the program and gets rid of any time limits. Well, due to a bad experience trying register a game many years ago I was a bit hesitant in wanting to register. But I was so impressed with my ten minute version that I took the gamble and registered. Registration was done on the internet where I paid via credit card on a secure server. Literally within minutes I received two emails. Firstly I received a receipt for my purchase. This was quickly followed by an email from the author with my registration code which disables the time limit. It just could not have been easier.

In conclusion, I highly recommend Power 20 to any MAC user. The ease of use, acurate emulation and simple registration makes Power 20 a real winner. To download Power 20, log on to http://www.salto.at/ or most good emulation sites.

The Thrill of Defeat: The First Multi-Game Consoles

by Mark Sabbatini

Maybe it's from being a mountain hick unable to find "Combat" opponents. Or babysitting gigs at homes with different game consoles. Or a meager "buy-toys-from-garage-sales" allowance.

Or just that I was a whiny kid trying to be different and never happy with what was in the toy box. Considering I now own a Mac and listen almost exclusively to jazz, latter seems likely.

For years I seemed most drawn to everything but the Atari 2600 titles dominating store shelves, probably because I couldn't afford to add to our vast collection of "Combat," "Air-Sea Battle" and "Basketball" - although I still think the latter is pretty cool.

I spent holidays coveting systems in the J.C. Penny catalogue that vaporized into digital ether shortly afterward. A few years later they'd be at thrift stores and garage sales for a few bucks and I'd add them to my "collection," which in reality was a bunch of gadgets I tired of quickly and tossed out at some point during college (if only I'd known about the retro market - alas).

Which leads to this month's "Thrill Of Defeat" machines: Pre-Atari 2600 gaming consoles going beyond the Pong experience.

These machines generally made the Atari look like the PlayStation 2 of its day. But they make regular appearance at places like eBay and, for the right price, can still be entertaining for reasons beyond their utter simplicity.

The very first multigame console, the Odyssey I from 1972, is in an interesting "multimedia" study since many of its games combine a very simple on-screen element with elaborate real-world props like game boards, dice and playing cards. Since such games often tend to involve multiple players, they're also a decent social pastime for the right crowd.

Some consoles were considered commercial successes, but never at the level of the major machines beginning with the Atari 2600, or even the Intellivision or Odyssey 2. One reason might have been price: The Odyssey I cost $100, including two controllers and six game cards capable of playing a total 12 titles, about $500 by 2005 standards when adjusted for inflation.

This roundup is a mix of research and personal experience, since it's been years since I played some

consoles and others I'd never got my hands on (and, no, not every console from the era is listed, due to space limitations). Reviews are of games I have sufficient experience with, so the first two consoles (the Odyssey and Fairchild) are limited to overviews with some links to emulators for those interested in trying titles out. The ratings of other games, in tribute to the controversial "which character comes out of the closet?" episode of "The Simpsons" airing on the day this article is due, uses a three-tiered catch-phrase system from the show, with good ("Woo-hoo!"), average ("Okilie-dokile") and lousy ("Doh!").

For those looking to buy old machines, unless there's a specific console of interest look first at thrift stores where they may cost a few bucks before online auction sites where owners may seek hundreds of dollars.

Next month will be the final round-up of early machines, focusing on the earliest home computers (anyone still own a SOL-20 or the original Apple?). After that a look at individual machines and consoles will begin, including a more detailed look at their games - except, of course, where they were so short-lived only a handful of titles made it to market.

Odyssey I (1972)
Believe it or not, the first cartridge-based home console plays games with full-color, cartoon-quality graphics. They just come on plastic overlays placed on the TV screen.

Using traditional props such as cards and play money also makes fairly ingenious use of 1960s circuitry that has no processor, no memory, and is capable of displaying only two paddles, a ball and a vertical line. The cartridges don't contain actual games; instead hard-wired jumpers modify games already in the console.

An optional light gun attachment isn't all that sophisticated - it only measures light, so players can cheat by aiming it at a light bulb.

I had only one brief chance to try this machine, which seemed to be making the most of its cheesy abilities thanks to the overlays and extras, so I'm reluctantly bypassing any personal reviews. An emulator exists (http://darkwatcher.psxfanatics.com/console/odyssey.htm), but without all the "extras" the likelihood of recapturing the real experience is even dicier than emulation already makes such efforts.

Fairchild Video Entertainment System (a.k.a. Fairchild Channel F) (1976)
This system, which made its debut in 1976, was the first with a microprocessor and ROM carts, is another I can only describe, since my experience is limited to some catalogue coveting and an attempt to get a broken thrift store unit working.

A few technical specs (courtesy of The Home Arcade Museum): It used a proprietary multi-chip Fairchild F8 processor running at 2mhz. There were only 64 bytes of built-in RAM, half that of an Atari 2600, which by my calculation is barely enough to store scores and men remaining for two players. The sound came from a speaker within the unit, instead of the television.

The console costs $169.99, with games selling for about $20. It came with two built-in Pong games, with players able to move horizontally as well as vertically. The cartridges were much more diverse than the Odyssey, including space shooters, sports and driving titles (along with the requisite puzzle and so-called educational math drills). Cumulative reviews from magazines and owners place the games roughly at an Odyssey 2 level of quality, with nearly everyone agreeing the Atari was superior.

The controllers were a bit odd, but effective. They looked like joystick handles, with triangle-shaped joysticks at the top that you could also rotate paddle-style and push down to "fire." Programmers generally did a good job of making use of this flexibility, such as allowing a tank to move in one direction while pointing the turret in another. Unfortunately, they were also apparently rather flimsy and there was no easy fix because they were hard-wired to the main unit. A System II version with controllers that plug in came out later.

Playing games involved turning the machine on and then inserting a cartridge (a reversal of the norm), then hitting the reset button and making selections using a row of four buttons on the front of the console. The cartridges, which looked a lot like 8-track tapes, were labeled with numbers that were more prominent than the game titles.

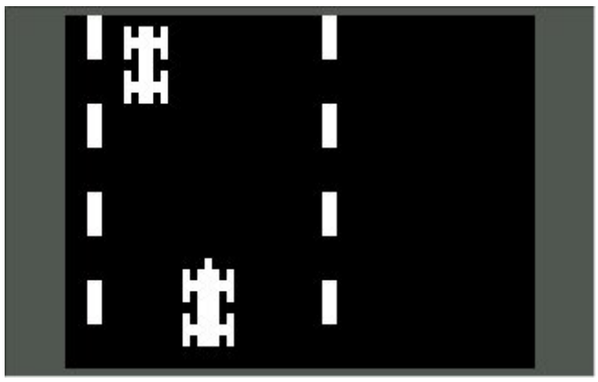
Emulation information about the Channel F is at
www.classicgaming.com/museum/channelf/index.shtml.

RCA Studio II (1977)
Some machines lost the war because they were unfairly squeezed out and some lost it because they deserved annihilation. Even by 1977 standards, this belongs to the latter category.

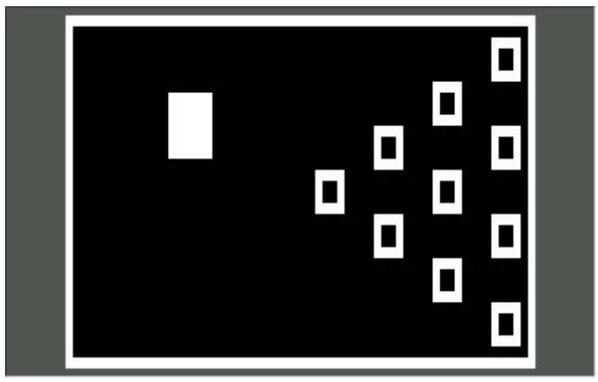
RCA launched the console in January, missing the Christmas crowd and then getting surpassed by

the superior Atari 2600 later that year. From what I can tell, it also trails consoles like the Fairchild in overall quality. The console, which cost $150 at its release, has five built-in programs, 2K of memory and black-and-white graphics with a maximum resolution of 128X64, although apparently many games used a 64X32 resolution. To the best of my knowledge only about a dozen games were released, generally selling for $15 to $20.

A look the built-in titles, the only ones I'm familiar with (screenshots courtesy of Paul Robson's RCA Studio 2 Emulation Page at www.classicgaming.com/studio2):



Freeway

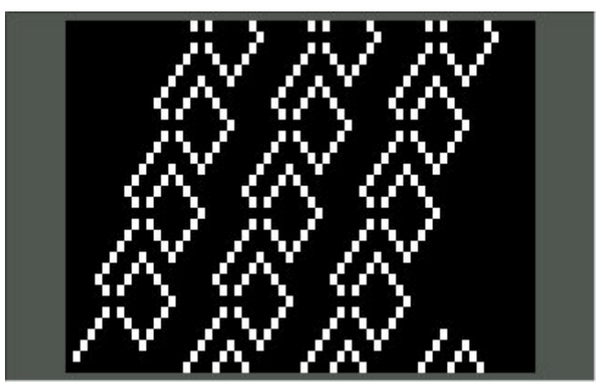


Bowling

Freeway (Woo-Hoo!)
Gets this rating mostly because it's the best of the built-in games. It's a one-player, overhead-view auto racer stripped to a bare-bones level of simplicity that works well within the limits of the system. Players get two minutes to drive as far and fast as possible while avoiding cars from the top of the screen, with two levels of difficulty built into the game. Since it's not too hard to make block graphics resemble cars and road stripes, they aren't a hindrance. The road is about the width of three cars, so this isn't much more sophisticated than those cheap LED handhelds that can be had for a few bucks these days (or free at Burger King with a kid's meal, as I note elsewhere in this issue), but the charitable view is all these racers wouldn't have been written if people didn't enjoy them.

Bowling (Okilie-Dokilie)
Enjoyable in a mindless simplistic way, this two-player built-in game involves controlling a bowling ball moving up and down the screen by pressing one of three buttons to make the ball go straight, curve up or curve down. I seemed to have better luck with the curves (more risky than straight, I assume), but whatever random factor controlled ball movement was a bit quirky. Randomness so every throw isn't the same is good, but not if it takes out/leaves pins that shouldn't be part of the equation. The scoring also didn't follow real bowling - a strike was 20 points, a spare 15 and a perfect game 200 - but not being a big bowling fan this never bothered me.

Doodle



Pattern

Doodle (Okilie-Dokilie)
Dull, dull, dull, but squeaks out a mediocre rating because I suspect plenty of users - particularly younger kids - enjoyed this video sketchpad more than me. Drawing is nothing more than a pen up/pen down kind of thing, but at least it was your message (i.e. "Hi Mom!") on the TV screen.

Pattern (Doh!)
This is the flip side of the same judgment call as Doodle, but falls into clunker territory because a lower level of user interactivity in the final result makes it less interesting. Users draw a picture in Doodle style, after which the computer turns it into patterns in a kaleidoscope/screensaver fashion.

Adding (Doh!)
Give RCA credit, if so inclined, for offering something parents could use to convince themselves the console wasn't merely a toy. But how much time do you think any kid spent with unpretentious math drills like this when parents weren't hovering overhead? A three-digit number appears on the screen and the user adds each digit for the answer, with points awarded based on time elapsed for a correct response. Later programmers learned to incorporate math programs into sports or adventure games,

the same way typing games became shoot-em-up clones, but that was almost certainly beyond the technology and minds involved here.

Atari Video Pinball (Woo-hoo!)
This dedicated unit introduced in 1977 shortly before the 2600 didn't play as many games as cartridge systems preceding it, but for the most part did them better. There were essentially three games - pinball, basketball and breakout - roughly equal in quality to early VCS titles.

There were two varieties of pinball (and four total variations), one with flippers and another "pinpaddle" option using a pong-like paddle to control the ball. The playfield is crude, consisting of boxes of various colors representing bumpers and other table elements, and there's very little "storyline," so to speak. In its favor, ball control is handled well and flipper buttons on the side of the unit add realism. Also, it can run on batteries, so if the adapter is lost it's still playable. Overall it's more fun than the Video Pinball cartridge for the 2600, if not subsequent titles like Midnight Magic. The inclusion of Breakout was a big deal back then and the basketball game, while not even to the level of the 2600 cart, is an OK aim-the-ball-with-the-paddle diversion.

Coleco Telstar Marksman (Okilie-Dokilie)
A typical Pong console with one very cool twist - a pistol/rifle controller that allowed users to play two "shooting" games in addition to the usual ball-and-paddle titles (it was the rifle that attracted me to this console instead of similar "shooters" offered by a number of different companies). Unfortunately, it came out in 1978 so those able to buy the latest and greatest could already bypass it for the Atari 2600.

I purchased one at a garage sale a few years later when used pong games were everywhere for maybe $5 and, unlike some other short-lived pong consoles, this actually had a relatively long life (a couple of weeks) due entirely to the shooting games. But, like the Odyssey mentioned earlier, the targeting mechanism was crude. I could sit a foot from the TV and hit everything, or move several feet back and miss everything, but finding a sweet spot where I felt like I was aiming at took some effort.

Odyssey 2 Multicart review

by Alan Hewston

Want to breath new life into your Odyssey 2?

Consider the new 128-in-one multicart by John Dondzila. John has produced Odyssey 2 multi-carts for quite a while, and the latest version includes all of the commercially available games released in North America, Brazil and Europe. Also included are all commercial prototype or otherwise unreleased games that have been found to date. It has all games made in PAL or NTSC, all those for the Videopac G7400, all the PLUS enhanced games and VOICE games. Finally, because fans have asked for it, all of the minor variations from official releases have been added to round out the total to 128 games. He's even added his own home brew game Amok! - a fast paced version of Berzerk with 12 levels, lots of action and multiple lives. Other updates include a working version of NTSC Frogger, and a new game from Netherlands "O2 Pong".

Because there do not appear to be any more commercial games or variations to be found, this may be the final version of the Odyssey 2 multi-cart ever made. So, if you like me were waiting a while to get all of the games at once, then now is the time. I know that I can now finish off all of my Many Faces of reviews thanks to owning this cart. The Odyssey 2 is funny in that it is one of the few systems where the rarest games represent more than half of the best and most playable games out there. All of them can now be yours, like Power Lords, Frogger, Super Cobra, Atlantis, Conquest of the World, Demon Attack, Great Wall Street Fortune, Quest for the Rings, Killer Bees, Turtles, Popeye & Q*bert.

The cartridge is VOICE compatible and comes shipped in a protective plastic case, in the usual Odyssey 2 handle cart. The only bad thing is that like many multicarts, access to all the games requires flipping 8 dip switches either On or Off. This must be done with the power off, and with gentle care as they are not that durable. Fortunately, John has designed the cart so that the dip switches are somewhat protected by being located under the handle. Also included is a very colorful label collage of the rarest games and several screenshots. A full alphabetical index of all games and variations with their dip switch designations. Other notes such as games that are PAL, NTSC, VOICE, PLUS, Videopac, or if they will only work, or may not work on certain Odyssey systems are noted.

John has also made and sells home brew cartridges for the Vectrex & Colecovision. They are worth checking out with lots of information and how to order on his site. He's easy to contact, friendly and is very prompt with his orders. His web site is at: http://www.classicgamecreations.com/

A complete list of Odyssey 2 games on his 128-in-one multicart are found at:

http://www.classicgamecreations.com/multi-main.html

Foxtrot "Snowcade"

by Mark Sabbatini

Fans of "Foxtrot" and cartoon strips in general who haven't seen the "How will Jason live without video games for a day" strips should check out the "snowcade" series at http://story.news.yahoo.com/news?tmpl=index2&cid=1065&. This page has the first strip, with the others on the "next" page. Beforehand, imagine how you'd try to play games like "Asteroids," "Space Invaders" and "Mario Bros." in your backyard. I'd rate "Tron" as the most potentially enjoyable and feasible of a rather unfeasible set of concepts. Probably the funniest strip - albeit not one for the kids - is the struggles experienced with "Tomb Raider."

Game Over

Well the last man has bitten the dust, so it's time to tune out for another 30 days. Again thanks for your continued support as we continue to carry on the mission of RTM, to keep the games of yesteryear alive. See you next month!

- ***Adam King***, Chief Editor

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