

RETROGAMING TIMES *monthly*

Issue #58 - March 2009

'70s



'80s



'90s



COVERING 3 DECADES OF GAMING

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Press Fire To Begin

by [Bryan Roppolo](#)

As I am sure all of you have now noticed, *Retrogaming Times Monthly* has a new home at its own domain. I felt that after serving the classic gaming community for 12 years that the free on-line magazine deserved its own place on the web, and here it is! Hope you all like the look and feel to the new site. Over time I will be transferring all the old RTM and original *Retrogaming Times* issues here, making everything contained in one location. Also, an index of EVERY article ever written will be available in the Article Index portion of the site to make it easier to find the reviews, stories, etc. that you are looking for. This is all going to take some time to finally finish, but I hope to have everything done sometime before the end of the summer. I'll be keeping everyone posted on the status of this project through the course of time.

Another difference you might have noticed is the name change of this introduction column from "Attract Mode" to "Press Fire To Begin". After publishing the last issue I thought I remembered some talk about different editors of this magazine creating their own unique name for this column. Sure enough I went back through the years and found that Adam King used "Press Fire To Start" and Scott Jacobi came up with "Attract Mode". Now before you guys get on me for choosing something so similar to Adam King's title, there actually is logic to my madness! The first thought that came to mind when I was contemplating a new name was "Press Fire To Begin", which is the phrase spoken by the speech synthesizer in *Parsec*, a popular game for the TI-99/4A (which as you might or might not know is my favorite system and the reason I got into classic gaming in the first place). I actually had forgotten that Adam King used such a close title for his column, until I went back to see what the other editors had chosen. I know many of you out there probably are acting like the Queen of Hearts from *Alice In Wonderland* and saying "Off with his head," but if you are a TI enthusiast you know how well known the phrase "[Press Fire To Begin](#)" is, so I just had to use it. Oh yeah, in addition I drew up a nice pixelated TI joystick to go with the column which I thought was very fitting and might help people piece together the origin of the column name. I also plan on "retiring" Scott Jacobi's Atari 2600 joystick image along with his column title, however, Scott is free to reuse his graphic and title if he ever becomes the editor again in the future. I thought this would be a neat thing to do, allowing each editor to leave their mark on the magazine.

I want to leave off this edition of "Press Fire To Begin" by saying that after reading the articles for this issue, I am very pleased with what I have read. They are very well written and prove to be quite entertaining. The only issue I have seen so far is that some people on various message boards feel this on-line magazine sometimes bashes certain classic systems. It has to be kept in mind that each article written is the view of the author and not the view of the magazine as a whole. If you feel that a certain system's weaknesses are only being talked about in this magazine, then hopefully you can submit an article yourself that shows the systems strengths. In the past I have gotten involved with the "my system is better" argument, but have found out that each have their own strengths and weaknesses. I would love nothing more than to have people submit articles for their favorite system showing all that it could do, since I know each computer/console could do something that another one could not. I just wanted to make mention of this to let readers know they are free to help prop up their system here anytime, as myself and others would love the opposing viewpoints since it makes good reading!



Falling Arcade Prices

by [David Lundin, Jr](#)

For this grand relaunching of *Retrogaming Times Monthly* I wanted to step away from my usual NES'cade column and share my thoughts on something I've been noticing recently. A popular subject I've seen in many places is how the current economic downturn is influencing the prices and values of video games. Now for new stuff the answer is not much at all. Granted, throughout the holiday season there were some great deals to be had with more and more retailers pushing value priced games as weekly specials. However, that's modern gaming, what about retrogaming? While some have said they've seen big deals pop up on Craigslist and eBay, I honestly don't see very much difference in the median price of select games that hold value. That means the Chrono Trigger's, EarthBound's, rare late NES releases, hard to find VCS cartridges - all seem to really be sitting firm with the over all trend for their platform and era of collector. Yet the place I've seen a phenomenal change is in arcade cabinets.

Up until this year popular classic arcade games were still riding high values. I'm talking about up to four figures for classics like Galaga, Pac-Man and the like - although lower priced cabinets could still be found. The choice cabinets however, in the right markets, could net a bundle. In the past few months though there has been a total shift in asking prices for arcade games, and the scales are now firmly tipped toward the buyer. Here in Silicon Valley, searching Craigslist for arcade cabinets has always yielded a fairly good selection. Prices were on par with what one would expect to pay, \$600.00 and up for good condition classics. These days the same search will return twice as many cabinets for sale, most for one third the price they would have been listed for last year. The kicker is that many of them aren't selling for those full listed prices. Buyers for the most part seem to be open to being haggled down, it really is unprecedented.

From what I've gathered the consensus as to why prices are down seems to point to a few things. First of course is people losing their homes and dumping their cabinets for quick cash due to an inability to relocate them. This is where a lot of the really cherry machines are coming from. Some who are not in as bad of shape may sell their cabinets for additional cash to ease the burden of the ever tightening economy. In both of these instances the sellers usually simply want the cabinets gone for whatever they can get. On the other side of the coin, the limited amount of people that can drop extra money on something like an arcade cabinet is smaller than ever. So the few that can, now have a lot less competition. Something else that was brought to my attention is that a lot of former arcade operators are dumping their warehouse inventory for the same reason, to get out of the business. Really can we blame them? Arcades are beyond being on life support these days and most arcades that are still up and running own all their own machines. With the pressure on just to be able to carve out a living it seems pretty obvious that if you had a warehouse full of games, and no one leasing them on route, you'd want to dump them and keep your head above water as well. This is why some recent arcade auctions have had bargain basement prices. That first point is the big one though - people looking around for things they can sell for some fast money. Food on the table or a giant hulking arcade cabinet against the wall? Sadly, from the people I've talked to this is the current choice they are faced with.

As buyers go, the exact opposite is true. Many who never thought they'd have the chance to be able to afford an arcade game, are finding themselves hauling one into their home. Go to any online community that has a discussion forum on arcade games and you'll see that there are new arcade game owners every day right now. I can speak first hand about what it's like to see an arcade cabinet you've always wanted, for a price you just might be able to work out. That's the way it was with my Galaxian cocktail. While I'll be the first to admit I don't have a lot of money, I was able to work things

out so that I could afford the cabinet. A lot of that has to do with seizing an opportunity you're not going to get every day. Since I really thought about it and took the time to work it into my budget, I have not a single regret concerning the machine.

Seeing how prices were dropping I once again started to work out a way to save a couple bucks here and there and build up a small savings to go after another cabinet. Not just any cabinet, one I had been after for years, a dedicated Klax cabaret. Cabaret cabinets are the mini uprights that were designed to take up less space than a full sized arcade upright would. This is key since the next machine would be going in the kitchen since that's the only place there was space for it. Klax is a game I've always loved, as is evident in my "Titles of Tengen" article about the NES port. On top of that, the cabinet is a perfect match for Tetris since it has a horizontal monitor, two four-direction joysticks, one button per player, and most importantly uses a JAMMA harness. That means with the purchase of a Tetris PCB I could have two of my all time favorite puzzle games in one space saving cabinet. Not to mention some possible Mr. Driller action down the road.



A Klax cabaret was for sale locally over seven months ago for a considerable sum, more than I paid for my Galaxian cocktail in fact. I didn't want to spend that much so I decided to wait it out as cabinet prices continued to fall. Now I know what some are saying to themselves, "David, it's Klax, Klax machines aren't worth anything, anyone that's owned one can tell you that," and that's true. Klax is notoriously worth very little, especially considering that most Klax setups were sold as conversion kits to be installed in generic cabinets. Most people that have built recent Klax conversions end up spending more on the parts than they're able to eventually sell the entire machine for. Yet it's still a game I love and the dedicated cabaret version has a very unique cabinet that has always been on my list of arcade machines to own. Not to mention it has unique thicker than usual joysticks. After months of watching the same listing get posted to Craigslist with a lower price every other time, the goal price was reached. The Klax cabaret would be mine for \$225.00 delivered. Again, "David, it's Klax, Klax machines aren't worth anything..." well to me this one is worth two hundred bucks, maybe a bit more due to how much I love the game.

Overall the machine is in great shape with the exception of the expected cigarette burns on the control panel and a few nicks in the side art. The game works great but the monitor board could use a couple solder points reflowed to fix an intermittent problem. It's something I'll get to fixing eventually. Aside from that the picture is bright and sharp. I've actually already purchased a Tetris board and it's on the way to me as this goes out for publication. However, when I do play Tetris it will just be a board swap, this cabinet will always be a dedicated Klax cabaret. Interestingly enough I have seen a Klax cabaret fully converted, new side art and all, to a Tetris cabaret. It was years ago at the Galaktican Arcade in San Jose, the all time favorite hole in the wall arcade of my youth.

Since purchasing my Klax cabaret the prices have continued to fall across the board. When I start seeing perfect condition Crystal Castles cabinets going for south of \$200.00 it makes me wish I had more space. Then again I'm very thankful for the space I do have. I'm reminded of that every time I talk with someone that just sold or just purchased an arcade cabinet. There always seems to be a story to tell concerning a fast sell off, a move of desperation, or a triumph of finally obtaining something once thought beyond one's grasp. If one can justify the purchase, it truly is a grand buyer's market for arcade games right now. It would seem the days of only broken machines going for rock bottom prices are temporarily on hold, while the real jewels of the past can be found for less than the price of a Wii. It's an interesting time indeed. NES'cade returns next issue.

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



Computer Idiocy Part 3: Simply Destructive

by [Mark Sabbatini](#)

You finally type the last paragraph of a term paper that's kept you up most of the night, save it and stagger to bed for a couple hours' sleep. The next morning when you try to print it out...nothing. The file contains nothing except a blank page.

(Company's response: Hey, there's (sometimes) a message telling you the file was partially saved, since the program only saves whatever text is after the cursor position. That's not a bug, it's a feature.)

As this column continues looking at lesser known moments of colossal retrocomputing idiocy, surely this is an abnormal example? OK, cue time warp and try again.

You finally type the last paragraph...and accidentally hit the ENTER key without typing in a filename at the "save" prompt. Maybe it's fatigue or just the computer's infamous keybounce doing double duty after you ENTERed the save command in the first place. In any event, the computer crashes and the only fix is turning the power off, losing your work.

(Company's response: Why would somebody press ENTER without entering a filename when prompted to do so? It's your fault, stupid.)

OK, third time has to be the charm. This time we'll assume the file actually got saved.

You try printing, but – yikes – there's a power failure. It only lasts a few minutes, so no problem. Except when you try to reload the file you discover the disk has been destroyed by the program.

(Company's response...actually, maybe now you understand why so many eventually decided to trap customers in automated phone hell.)

Each of these are real and fatal flaws in early home computer programs easily fixable with literally a line or two of code. They're hardly the worst examples or most crass responses, just what I came up with off the top of my head.

Asking "what were they thinking" just invites more agony for those victimized. A magazine review of Cosmic Paint for Radio Shack's TRS-80 Color Computer, for instance, criticized a lack of error trapping, but author John Hattan wrote a rebuttal arguing crashes are a good thing.

"I find it much more convenient for a program to abort with an error message than for it to return to editing without an indication you made a mistake," he wrote. Incorporating ON ERROR statements are "often a simple way to dodge hardware errors by having the program ignore them...some apparent fundamental problems can allow for more user convenience than the first glance shows."

The first example at the beginning of this column was perhaps the most maddening "feature" of VIP Writer, a CoCo word processor I used throughout high school and college. It saved files only from the current cursor position to the end of the text, which seems like something most users would rarely want – and I can't imagine the conversation that resulted in it being the default option. I tend to save every few minutes, so I was constantly scrolling to the top of a document and back to wherever I was at, a maddeningly time-consuming process. But I had a few brain lapses, especially early on, where I wiped everything out by saving while at the end of the file. The program flashes a "file partially saved" message in the upper left corner, but it disappears as soon as you hit a key and in most cases I had already resumed writing.

Complaints from reviewers and others fell on deaf ears, as updated versions of the product never altered the feature.

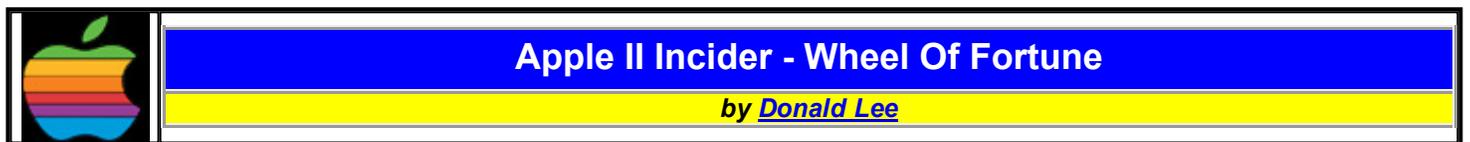
The second above example belongs to TextPro, a word processor whose long existence I never understood. Above all else, it was a line-oriented program. For those not familiar with this particular form of writing hell, it's something novice BASIC programmers wrote in the early days of personal computers that offered barely more usefulness than a typewriter. You type in a line or sentence at a time and press ENTER. Each line is assigned a number. If you want to edit anything, you have to go to a special mode where you provide the line number and retype the text. Inserting, deleting and moving text is pure hell, if it can be done at all. This is just the beginning of the misery, but for the sake of space I'll simply reiterate the commercial value of such programs was low or nonexistent. But TextPro lasted for years despite a premium price tag matching full-featured word processors. One reason was it offered a printer buffer so you could keep writing, but it suffered from a terrible, terrible

bug. If anything interrupted the printing process, the file was destroyed because how the buffer was programmed.

The third example and variations of it afflicted many programs. Saving without filenames, printing without a printer attached, mistyping the name of a file to be loaded from disk or cassette, and other such mishaps all could have been easily corrected.

A MacPaint clone called CoCo Max allowed files to be saved with names like "1:JUNK," which made them impossible to delete with the CoCo's disk operating system. Despite attention being called to it, the flaw remained when the company released an enhanced second version of the program a year later.

The tactic of blaming users or denying a problem existed might have been maddening for customers, but made for amusing reading in the letters section of various magazines. I learned more about which companies were worth dealing with there than I ever did from ads or even product reviews. Next month I'll start looking at some of my favorite rebuttals, along with perhaps some amateur psychology of what motivated such responses then and now.



Ever since I was a kid I've been a fan of television game shows. With classics such as Match Game, Family Feud, and Card Sharks (among many others), I spent a great amount of time watching television as a young kid and teenager. When game shows started to disappear in the mid 1990's, I was one of the most disappointed.

Fortunately, while game shows aren't on TV in the mornings like they used to be, there still are mainstays such as The Price is Right. Network TV brought us Who Wants To Be a Millionaire among other prime tv game shows. Even today's "reality shows" such as Survivor could be considered as an extension of the classic game shows from yesterday.

But one of my early favorites and one that still remains on prime time TV is Wheel of Fortune. Watching the show from the early 80's until today, I've seen the show go through multiple incarnations. I remember the early days of contestants winning money in a round of Wheel of Fortune and then immediately spending them on various prizes. These days, the cash is awarded directly to the contestant. One thing that hasn't changed much is the presence of Pat Sajak and Vanessa White. They've gotten older, but still remain entertaining on the show.



As a kid, I had a lot of fun playing along trying to solve the various puzzles on Wheel of Fortune. However, at the height of the game show's popularity, a company called Sharedata started releasing home versions of various TV programs. Among them was a version of Wheel of Fortune for the Apple II (I will take a look at the other games in the months ahead).

I immediately picked up a copy and dove right in. The simplicity of the Wheel of Fortune game show meant translating the game to home computers was relatively straightforward. The game screen was divided into three parts. The top part of the screen had the puzzle that players were trying to solve. The bottom left of the screen was a facsimile of the wheel that players spun. Finally, on the bottom right hand side of the screen was where the player interacted with the game and his/her information was shown. All input has to be done through the keyboard.

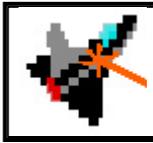
The game is divided into three rounds and a bonus round (if a human player wins). It can accommodate up to three human players at a time, but if you have less than three the computer will fill in. Due to the fact that each player takes their turn one at a time, Wheel of Fortune is a perfect party game for multiple players.

The designers of the game kept the graphics simple but colorful. In fact, Wheel of Fortune used 128K of RAM and the Apple II's double high resolution graphics mode, which meant the older Apple II machines could not play the game. The sound for the game is sparse but used when needed. I'm not sure how many different



puzzles were on the game disk, but in the time I played back in the 1980's, I didn't recall too many repeats.

All in all, Wheel of Fortune is a good effort and worth playing. While I've enjoyed watching game shows over the years, I've never had an inkling to try out to be on a game show. However, Sharedata's Wheel of Fortune game is a good substitute that I can enjoy in the comfort of my own home!



The Thrill Of Defeat: Games For The 2K Timex Sinclair 1000

by [Mark Sabbatini](#)

"This type of product can have the same impact as the car did 100 years ago."

Seemingly big words for a toy computer with 2K of memory, but that 1982 boast by a Timex executive is perhaps accurate since automobiles in 1882 were clumsy and unreliable experiments such as the Hippomobile. It would be another six years before Karl Benz began selling the first modern automobile. Forward a century from that and the computer was indeed credited with vast accomplishments such as triggering an unprecedented stock market crash and the first mass-scale digital virus.

The Timex Sinclair 1000 could do nothing of the sort, nor was it much good for word processing or playing games nearly as entertaining as 1982 hits like Pitfall and Choplifter. But even an unexpanded 2K machine could surpass the likes of that year's biggest bomb (ET for the Atari 2600) despite an absence of color, sound, speed, useable keyboard and graphics beyond 64X48 pixels.

Skimpy as 2,048 bytes of RAM sounds (1/1,000,000 of today's low-end configurations), it probably seemed vast to programmers accustomed to cramming code into the 1K memory of the TS1000's identical British twin, the Sinclair ZX81. After two months of reviewing games for that machine in this column about gaming on the world's most pathetic and/or obscure computers, we take a (cough) huge leap forward and examine how programmers took advantage of all that memory Timex provided to U.S. customers.

The TS1000, introduced a year after the ZX81's 1981 debut, was the first complete and assembled computer to sell for less than \$100 (\$99.95). It shared the ZX81's minuscule membrane keyboard with 40 keys and incredibly slow cassette storage format that was notoriously unreliable. Minor visual changes were made for the TS1000 such as changing the "rubout" key to "delete" and, as noted in the January 1983 issue of Byte, "the humor was carefully excised from the American manuals."

Part of the RAM was snagged by the display, which had no dedicated memory of its own, so programmers generally had 1,200-1,500 bytes to work with depending on how much of the screen was used. While a big step up from the 400-700 bytes a ZX81 programmer might have, it fell far short of the 3,583 bytes of Commodore's VIC-20, the TS1000's closest competitor (at three times the price).

A \$50 RAM pack expanded memory to its claimed maximum of 16K, but 64K RAM packs were available from third-party manufacturers. Customers could also eventually beef up their \$100 computers (a price that dropped to \$49, then \$29, then whatever stores could get as the price wars hit during the next year or two) with full-size keyboards, disk drives, modems, printers and various gizmos to do things like control home appliances. Programmers also figured out ways to overcome some of the TS1000's limits, introducing high-resolution (256X192) graphics and sound playable through an external speaker.

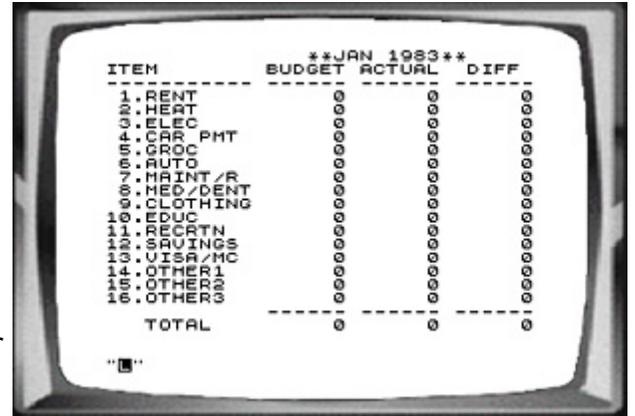
But the 2K games featured only the basics, with letters and punctuation often playing the role of "graphics," and the action crammed in a corner of the screen to save memory. Most commercial software consisted of multi-title game packs, although a few "premium" efforts were released singly or as a double set. A partial list of known titles is reviewed below with the remainder, minus most of the above preamble, hopefully squeezing into a reasonable amount of space next month.

Reviews, as always, are grade by how fun the games are strictly within their category, since most 16K TS1000 titles far outclass those listed below. Many are playable in a Web browser using the online emulator at www.zx81stuff.org.uk/zx81/indexframes.html. Otherwise, numerous free emulators and software collections are easily located with Google.

2K Games Pack (D-) (BROWSER PLAYABLE) Reading the cassette cover would be enough to prevent me from buying this International Publishing six-pack, as the instructions for the first two games indicate they are completely random. The first has the player and computer drawing cards alternately in an effort to get the closest to 31 without going over. The second has the player and computer rolling dice ten times, with the highest total winning. I'm sorry, but that would be lame in a 1K collection, or half-K for that matter. The randomness continues with Snail Race (even money bets on four snails moving one-at-a-time at random) and fails to do so with Advice, which is supposed to print out nonsense sayings from a short list of phrases but crashes instead. There's the ubiquitous sketch pad with nothing of distinction. The only thing worth any time is Reverse, which generates 10 random digits the player must then put in numerical order by reversing their order two at a time.



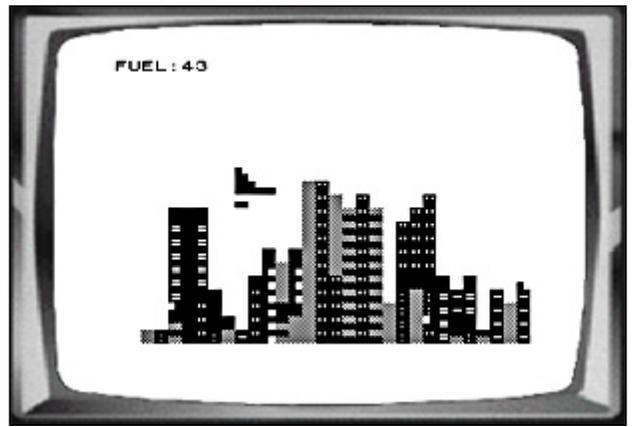
5-2K Family Pak (D-) (BROWSER PLAYABLE) No games, but at least as amusing than the IP package above, if only to see Timex trying to work things like spreadsheet and database functions into 2K. Memoboard allows text entry on a virtual bulletin board, but is severely penalized here for crashing if the <SPACE> key is pressed (users are supposed to navigate with the cursor keys instead). Checkbook balancer does a simple calculation of your bank statement and outstanding transactions. Recipe recorder is similar to Memoboard, with the ability to save the screen display. Money manager is a one-screen household budget program that looks like a spreadsheet, but using it is all but impossible since there's no instructions. Homework Helper is supposed to calculate equations and formulas but, again, without instructions it's hard figure out how it works.



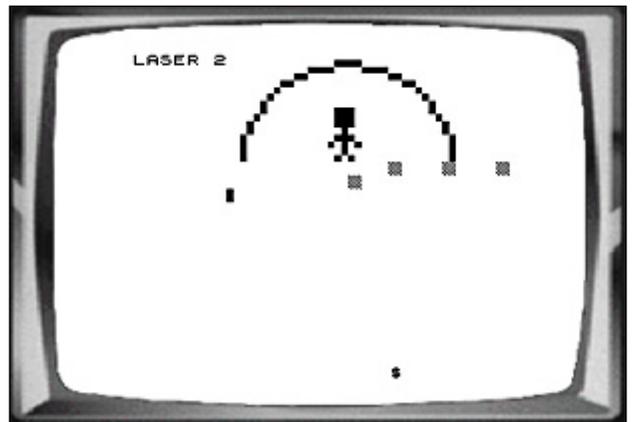
Bat Cage (B) (BROWSER PLAYABLE) Wow. This unique paddle game is easily one of the best 2K offerings out there and certainly worthy of being sold on its own instead of as part of a collection – except for a few niggling details. The player has four-direction control of a paddle that is used to capture one of the eight "eggs" bouncing rapidly around the screen. They're brought back to a small cage at the bottom of the screen, where the player presses a key to hatch them. At that point a bat that has been flying back and forth across the top of the screen starts attacking relentlessly to free the hatchling and the player must try to keep it out of the cage by deflecting it breakout-style, with each hit earning points. It's hard, but eventually the bird will give up and return to the top of the screen. At that point the player can try to capture another egg, taking care not to release any already in the cage when he enters and leaves it. Eventually more bats will attack and the points for keeping hatchlings captive increases. It's easy to learn and has potential to be a long-range challenge. So what are the problems? First, collision detection is spotty – anything other than a direct hit on the bat with the middle of the paddle is dicey, so it can feel like it's managing to free birds unfairly. Second, the instructions say the game ends "when the bats stay at the top of the screen and won't attack after you've hatched a new egg in the cage." Huh? What the heck determines that? It says you can try to free a captive bird and recapture it in an effort to keep the game going, but it all seems very arbitrary. Third, it uses the cursed 5-8 row of keys for movement, which are too closely spaced for accuracy and never manage to be intuitive no matter how much you try. And that leads to the real killer – and they're lucky the grade isn't lower because of it : the zero key is used to reset the game. The instructions warn you not to accidentally press it since it's so close to the directional keys, especially since the membrane keyboard makes it impossible to tell where your fingers are without looking at them. But instead of acknowledging the risk, why didn't they change it to one of about, oh, 30 better keys? I'd have bought this and been mostly happy with it as a youth, but I also suspect I'd have plenty of occasions where I'd want to throw the computer across the room for screw ups that weren't my fault.



Mixed Game Bag III (C+) (BROWSER PLAYABLE) This five-game package from Timex is better than most multipacks, even if they're basically dressed-up 1K BASIC retreads with the advantage of some machine language for playable speeds. The increased memory also allows more elaborate graphics on a larger portion of the screen, if large clumps of letters and symbols count as such. Blitz, for instance, is just a fancier-looking and slightly trickier version of the ubiquitous "bomber" game where an aircraft has to destroy the obstacles it keeps passing over using bombs before the plane descends too low and collides with something. It's well done and claims to have 255 speeds, although the usable variety is considerably less. Rat's Nest is a Tron lightcycle knockoff, again claiming 250 speeds and again many are unplayably fast. The computer AI is mediocre and the 5-8 keyboard controls absolutely suck. Snake seems like a decent Kaboom variation, with custom playfield setups, but the controls are difficult to figure out and they don't always seem to work. Sketch Pad is an improved version of 1K doodlers many packages include, with the ability to draw on the entire screen without crashing and save pictures on cassette. The problem is text entry is highly erratic – pressing the <SPACE> key (that's right, "key," since Sinclair decided a full-size spacebar was too extravagant) crashes the program. Users are expected to enter a special editing mode to insert spaces, which are also one of the very few graphics-like characters allowed (get used to drawing pictures with lots of numbers and letters, in other words). Cross The Road is a decent mutation of the highway portion of Frogger, with the player crossing from right to left while trying to avoid the large cars speeding by.



TS Destroyer/Space Raid (B+) (BROWSER PLAYABLE) This was one of the more prominent 2K packages and got generally positive reviews from magazines, including one hyperbolic article claiming it featured action and graphics "matched by only a few of the best 16K games." Not really, but it'll pass the time while saving for that 16K RAM pack. The horizontal-scrolling shooting TS Destroyer is the better of the two, with the player controlling the vertical movements of a ship in the middle of the screen that must avoid oncoming asteroids while destroying aliens rising to the top of the screen along the left edge. If an alien reaches the top it turns into a guided missile that will quickly destroy the player unless shot first (luring it into an asteroid also works). Making matters more complex is an enemy ship at the right edge of the screen that tracks the player's movements (at a somewhat slower speed) and fires shots whenever they are aligned. The game ends if 10 aliens reach the top, all your ships are destroyed, or you destroy a predetermined number of aliens. One nice thing is the instructions include modifications for those variables, along with the ability to print a final score if you have 16K (the instructions aren't in the online browser, unfortunately). Another nice touch is a simplistic two-line left-to-right scrolling "landscape" at the bottom of the screen that gives the game more ambiance. Space Raid is a simplistic relative of the last stage of Phoenix, with the player at the bottom of the screen trying to shoot through two rotating shields protecting a spaceship at the top with an alien inside. Enemy fire comes from a laser at the ship's bottom that tracks the player similarly to TS Destroyer. The game ends when the player's five bases are destroyed or after the alien is hit, which greatly diminishes the play value. Helping extend the longevity of each game is selectable speed levels ranging from too easy to unplayable. What would have helped more was squeezing in one more line of code so the game would progress to the next level of difficulty after each "wave" was completed.





Old Wine in New Bottles: Retrogaming on Modern Hardware

by [Jonathan H. Davidson](#)



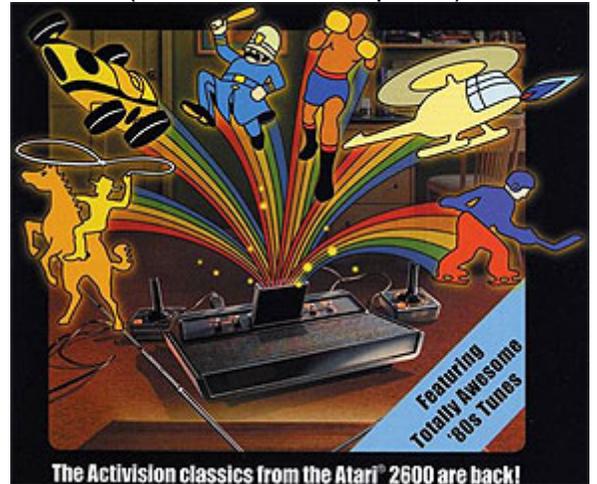
Atari 2600 games are very well-represented in PlayStation 2 compilations. The Atari Anthology, reviewed last month, includes 67 games originally developed by Atari. The retrogaming collection for this month is the Activision Anthology, another collection of Atari 2600 games. This collection was published by Activision Publishing in 2002.

Game Selection

The Activision Anthology includes 48 Atari 2600 games. This is virtually all of the games that Activision ever released for the Atari 2600, obviously excepting the licensed titles (e.g. Ghostbusters, Rampage, Double Dragon, and Kung Fu Master). Oddly, Commando (licensed from Capcom) is included.

Happily this compilation includes some of the more complex games like Private Eye, Pitfall 2, Robot Tank, and Space Shuttle. According to the manual, of these, only Private Eye had previously been released as part of a compilation. (This title was not included in either the ca. 1996 PC collection or as part of the original PlayStation compilation.)

A few titles from Imagic (Atlantis, Demon Attack, and Moonsweeper) are included, as well as some Absolute titles (Pete Rose Baseball as Baseball; Title Match Pro Wrestling as Title Match; and Tomcat F-14 Flight Simulator).



Most interesting is the inclusion of two previously unreleased/prototype games - Kabobber and Thwocker. This is one of only two compilations I have seen that include previous unreleased games - the Intellivision Lives collection for the PS 2 also includes three such games.

As with virtually all of these retro game collections, some games are less fun than others. It is great having virtually the entire Activision library conveniently available, but I doubt that Bridge and Checkers will receive a lot of play time. Fortunately, the collection is overall very solid, and it includes many games rightly deserving to be considered classics.

Bonus Content

This collection remedies one of the most significant deficiencies in all the previous Activision collections - it includes all of the original high-score patches.

The original manuals (and boxes) are also included. The manuals have been rewritten slightly rewritten to reflect the use of the PlayStation 2 controllers, but otherwise the text is substantially the same, including the tips from the original programmers.

A thoughtful touch is the inclusion of some period music from the early 1980s. This includes popular songs from such diverse artists as Blondie, Twisted Sister, and A-Ha. Fortunately, this feature can be easily turned off when it starts to become annoying.

General Comments

Most of the games are readily playable with the standard Dual Shock controller. There are a few exceptions, mainly Kaboom!, which was designed for the Atari 2600 paddle controllers, and Space Shuttle, which used virtually every button on the original console.

The main interface is modeled after a 1980's game room, complete with rack of cartridges (the label of which closely matches the original), corkboard to display the patches, and a portable stereo to provide the background music. It is very well designed and intuitive to use.

Next time out, we will review yet another collection of classic games for the PlayStation 2. Feedback on this column is always welcome; please send any comments and/or questions to jhd@interbaun.com.



National Center For The History Of Electronic Games

by [Alan Hewston](#)

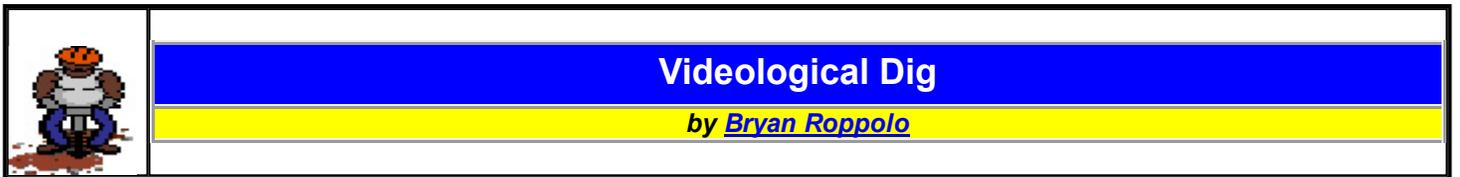
I've not been there, but hope to do so the next time my family heads near Rochester, New York. The National Center for the History of Electronic Games is located inside the Strong National Museum of

Play. The museum staff consists of Eric Wheeler, Jon-Paul C. Dyson, and Marc Check, and they boast a collection of 15,000 artifacts.

<http://www.ncheg.org/index.html>

The Strong Museum <http://www.museumofplay.org/> is considered one of the nation's top museums for children and families. They are home for the National Toy Hall of Fame and the world's largest collection of toys, dolls, games and other items that celebrate play. It's unlike anything you've experienced anywhere!

Maybe we'll have to seek an interview with these guys to see how they are doing. Let me know if anyone goes there or knows these guys, or if you'd like me to interview them. Thanks go to my friend Fred Horvat for alerting me about this place.



For this month's Videological Dig I decided to step back in time to the '70s, since this is the decade that made video gaming popular and is the reason why there even is such a thing as classic gaming today. Now what better way to get a glimpse of the '70s home video game market than to read up on all the craziness surrounding one of the hottest items of Christmas '75...that of course being Pong by Atari. Back in 1975 this was THE item to have, I mean it was a way to actually interact with your TV set instead of being merely a viewer. Even though the Odyssey by Magnavox was launched in 1972, it wasn't until Atari came out with a home version of its Pong arcade game that video games became popular in the home. Considering how much of a milestone this was, I thought everyone reading this magazine would find it fun to step back in time and hear first hand what it was like that Christmas, I know I sure did! I can only imagine what Sears was like back then with all the parents flocking to the stores to make sure their kids had the best "toy" on the market at the time.

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December 29, 1975

TV's Hot New Star: The Electronic Game

It's a sell-out item," crows a spokesman for Sears, Roebuck & Co. stores in the San Francisco area. "We can't get enough of them," says a representative of Bloomingdale Bros. in New York. "I don't know how many we could have sold if we had had them in stock," wails a buyer for a major West Coast department store chain. The object of these retailers' holiday cheer is yet another consumer product from the high-technology workshops of the electronics industry -- the video game. Still in short supply, electronic games may appear under only a few trees this Christmas. But consumers' eagerness to pay \$100 and up to convert their television sets into miniature athletic fields virtually guarantees a rush of competition next year. "The toy and game market is limited only by our imagination," says Scott Brown, consumer marketing director at National Semiconductor Corp. "It can be as big as the calculator market is today."

At the moment only two companies are serious factors in consumer electronic games. One is Magnavox Co., which pioneered the home video game business with its Odyssey system in 1972. The other is Atari Inc., a fledgling company based in Los Gatos, Calif., which up to now has concentrated on the coin-operated amusement business. Atari claims to be turning out more than 3,000 units per day of a consumer version of Pong, its hugely successful coin-operated game. Sears, which so far is the only retailer handling Pong, reports that it is selling "everything we can get." Magnavox introduced an improved version of Odyssey this fall and says it is approaching production of 3,000 units daily.

Follow the leader.

By next year, though, a flood of competitors is expected to pour in as the integrated circuits that run the games get cheaper and more powerful. General Instrument Corp. plans to begin producing early next year an integrated circuit that will control as many as seven different games at a price comparable to present one-game circuits. Atari, for one, is designing a product around the new part. And National Semiconductor, already a power in calculators and watches, is planning its own video

game. "Next year," Brown says, "people like us will really go to work on this market."

A big question is whether the entry of National and other semiconductor makers will create the same cut-throat price competition that has bloodied the calculator industry. John Helms, electronic games product manager at Magnavox, is hopeful that the direction will be toward more sophisticated -- and profitable -- games. "With a microprocessor," he says, "it could be a very complex product."

Nolan K. Bushnell, founder and chairman of Atari, claims: "The video game is not a watch or calculator thing. Each year the games will be very different and demand new and more powerful components." With shorter production runs, Bushnell believes, the semiconductor producers will lose their cost advantage over assemblers. "The semiconductor components are only 20% of the cost of a game vs. 60% or more in calculators," he adds.

But this view discounts the potential of the microprocessor, the computer-on-a-chip that is rapidly growing in power and falling in price. Although microprocessors are used in several coin-operated games, they are still too expensive for use in home units. "But prices will fall and capabilities will increase until we are in consumer games too," says A. J. Nichols, manager of microprocessor applications for Intel Corp. The big semiconductor maker has already been sounded out by at least one TV maker that is thinking of incorporating a game device in its set.

Ideas seem to be proliferating for games in which computer circuits generate TV images that players can manipulate with a turn of a knob. Atari is thinking about a home version of Tank, its biggest selling coin-operated game, in which competitors maneuver through minefields while they try to blast each other off the screen.

Game Over

I now feel I have had time to get my feet wet after this month's publication and am excited for the future. Since publishing the last issue I've had the chance to get better acquainted with the writers of RTM and hope to serve them well as editor. If anyone out there reading wants to get involved with us and write some articles, all you have to do is send anything you write to me, and as long as it's thought out and well written it will get published. I just wanted to spread the word that everyone has the chance to contribute if they want to, and possibly become part of the staff if they end up doing more than 3 articles. Thanks for a good issue of *Retrogaming Times Monthly* and hopefully even better/bigger things are soon to follow.

- [Bryan Roppolo](#), Retrogaming Times Monthly Editor

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