RETROGAMING TIMES *monthly*

'70s   '80s   '90s

COVERING 3 DECADES OF GAMING

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Press Fire To Begin

by Bryan Roppolo

In this issue of *Retrogaming Times Monthly* there are some new faces that have come onboard to do some one-off articles for us. I hope this trend continues as it's nice to have fresh faces in every issue and helps bring different stories/views to the magazine. I was quite amazed at how I would get an e-mail about once a week where someone would either ask to write a column or want to help out with the publication. I always knew the classic gaming community was a relatively close-knit and social group, but until I took over as editor I had no idea just how generous everyone in the community really was. I do appreciate all those who e-mailed and hope to keep hearing from you, since RTM is a classic gaming magazine and without regular classic gamers helping to contribute to its success it would be pretty boring to read!

In other news, this issue marks the beginning of the regular *Retrogaming Times Monthly* release schedule. Now that we are all caught up after falling behind due to the changing of editors earlier this year, every issue will be posted on the first and be a month apart. No more of this bi-monthly irregular release business which has been happening lately. Therefore, I encourage everyone to mark their calendars for the first of every month for the rest of the year since that will be the publication date for this magazine from here on out. It's about time too, since after I would get that good feeling of finishing an issue it was time to start thinking about the next one. Now I'll finally be able to take a break between new releases, as will the columnists.

One thing to look out for in the next issue is what might possibly be the first *Retrogaming Times TV* submission. RTTV is our new YouTube video outlet that will have all original video's posted to both it as well as right here in the magazine. These will be done by both the staff and people that want to contribute from the outside. It should be fun getting this new avenue going, since now we will have both an outlet for video and in-print submissions. On that note I'll sign off and let everyone read what's inside this latest issue, as I believe it's just a sample of all the good things to come in the future.
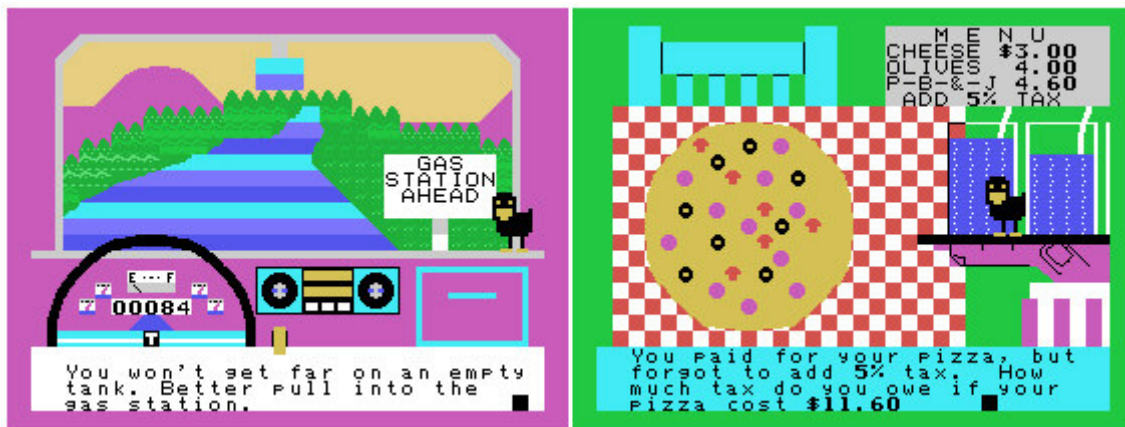
Gaming Studies With The Tomy Tutor: Car-Azy Racer
by David Lundin, Jr.

After many years of searching I have finally acquired the entire Tomy Tutor USA cartridge library - a whopping ten titles. Upon receiving the seven games I had been missing over the past twenty years, I sat down and played through them alphabetically. Car-Azy Racer was at the top of that list, a game unique among a unique hardware platform. It is the lone educational entertainment title, commonly shortened into the term edutainment. This is quite odd considering that in the USA the Tomy Tutor was marketed as a computer for kids, one that required no parental guidance and was designed to foster a child's introduction into the world of computing. Car-Azy Racer was also the lone cartridge to be released that does not use the Tomy Joystick or Tomy Joy Controllers, opting instead for keyboard input. Additionally, it was the only released Tomy Tutor cartridge that did not have a Japanese counterpart as it was programmed by Wordwright, making it a USA production through and through.

Car-Azy Racer's main goal is to reach the end of your journey before nightfall. Although there are various screens, the basic layout remains the same. A window of text at the bottom of each screen explains the situation as well as the current question. The questions are comprised of fourth and fifth grade level math and grammar, related to three main stops on your journey: the Gas Station, the Stadium, and finally the Pizza Parlor. Between each destination you are behind the wheel, with your score displayed on the odometer. The first question you are asked is which level you would like to play, represented as either first, second, or third gear. Honestly I don't understand how the gears relate to the difficulty since third gear seems to give the easiest questions and second gear seems to provide the most complex. Regardless of the level decided upon, the journey begins, guided by the ever present little black bird. Why a little crow hangs out with you the entire time is beyond my understanding, possibly because the developer didn't have a spare blue color in the palette. Either way, on the box for this game the bird is clearly shown as a crow. During the behind the wheel portions of the game the player may be asked to press a randomly chosen key on the keyboard to abruptly stop the car. The faster the player reacts, the more points they will earn.

Right from the start of the journey you are told to get your pencil and paper ready. In other words this game is designed to be used in conjunction with a writing utensil and a sheet of scratch paper. The first destination is the Gas Station, since there's no better way to begin a long journey than on a full tank. The Gas Station problems have to do with reading sales totals, answering which number is in what position, and other simple math questions. It is here that a problem with how the game reads input first becomes apparent. For instance, if you are asked to input what number is in the tens place on the gas pump, you can enter pretty much anything, including letters. The game is only looking for the one specific correct answer. Additionally, until a correct answer is inputted the game will not proceed. I can see how this would be disheartening for a child unable to figure out the correct response. I suppose that this is better than the program getting an unexpected response and crashing with an "ERR IN LINE 3460" message or something similar. However, this really makes me feel that the entire program was written in Tomy's version of BASIC. The faster your correct response, the more points you earn.

After filling up your tank it's time to head back out onto the road and to the Stadium. The games in the Stadium have to do with grammar and spelling but are handled in the same manner as the games at the Gas Station. Multiple choice questions appear here as well, but as before the program will take any input until the correct answer is entered. At the very least with the multiple choice questions you can eventually move on due to the process of elimination. After another brief moment on the road you pull into the Pizza Parlor where the difficulty setting seems to go out the window. For the most part these are word problems that have to deal with percentages and fractions. What I found most strange is that under the medium and hardest difficulty settings you'll get questions like, "If you have two friends with you and you all want equal amounts of pizza, how many slices would each of you get?" Super easy stuff most four year olds could figure out. However, on the easier difficulty setting you get crazy questions about figuring sales tax on mixed amounts. As with the other areas the game will not proceed until you input the correct answer. For every question that is correctly answered you take a sip of your drink. After answering all the questions you head back out on the road for your final debriefing, earning an additional 1,000 points for completing the "race" before nightfall. After that the game goes right back to the introductory screen - no high score table, no fanfare, no anything.

Although the questions change between each play and there are three levels of difficulty, there really isn't much replay value here. It almost makes me think that the "press this key to stop the car!" parts were thrown in at the last moment to attempt to add a little bit of randomization to spice it up. Oddly enough this game is exceptionally rare as Tomy Tutor cartridges go. One would think it would be more common considering that it is the only educational game on an educational computer, but this is far from the case. There really just isn't enough here for a standalone game, especially to warrant a $40 purchase in 1983. Perhaps if this was one of a series of games on the same cartridge, similar to how many games such as this were on the Apple II, I could see it being a worthwhile purchase. However, as it stands now, unless you're going for a complete set of cartridges there is little reason to own Car-Azy Racer.

Phoenix Is My Game! What Is Your Game?
by Paul "Zimmzamm" Zimmerman

Hello *Retrogaming Times Monthly* readers!

You might not know me, but do I have a story to tell you!

First, a bit of my background: Christmas 1980. What a wonderful Christmas! After opening all of our presents Christmas morning, my parents told me and my siblings that there was one more present which was sitting in the basement! All excited we ran down there and right next to the TV was an Atari VCS already hooked up and turned on! The game that was playing…..Space Invaders! History was made, at least in my gaming history. I have always been a fan of "shooters" (that is what I like to call them) aka shmups by the hardcore shooter players. I for sure don't consider myself a hardcore shmup player, however, I do enjoy playing some of them, and the Atari VCS has many. It is an excellent console to not only be introduced to classic gaming with, but also to play some early shmups. I still have my Atari VCS and 7800, plus now I also have a Nintendo Wii (probably my 3rd favorite console of all time) along with a few other consoles. I still play each one daily. I am for sure a retro game player, collector, and fan!

I live in the Midwest and every year go to the Midwest Gaming Classic. I was even on the staff in 2007 as a shmup tournament referee. A week before this year's event, I found out on the Midwest Gaming Classic's website that Phoenix would be used for the Atari 2600 Game Challenge Tournament. I've always had Phoenix (not sure when I first got it), but never played it before. Therefore, I decided to pop it in and try it out. Right off the bat I could tell this was a hard shooter for the Atari VCS, unlike Space Invaders. Due to the difficulty, I totally understood why they picked this game.

During the week I played the game about 3 times, with my high being 150,000. I looked on Twin Galaxies' Official Electronic Scoreboard just to see what kind of scores were posted. Not only was 150,000 a good number, but it was 2nd in the world. Too bad I did not record that game! At that very moment I decided I would compete in my first tournament at the Midwest Gaming Classic, which draws around 5,000 attendees each year.

During my first day at the Midwest Gaming Classic I got 130,000 points on Phoenix, which was good, but disappointing since it was lower than what I did at home. Playing a game live with a bunch of people watching you is completely different than playing it on your living room couch. Eventually though, word got around the show about this score (130,000) and that it was 3rd in the world.

At that time I was obviously in first place. Soon right after me, though, a couple of my Midwest Gaming Classic friends who compete each year in the tournaments (especially the shmup tournament; this year the Atari 2600 was the "shmup tournament") not only beat me, but they doubled my score! Incredible! These two players are for sure a couple of the greatest shmup players in the world!

During day two, at about one hour before closing, I noticed neither of my friends took on Phoenix again to try and break the world record of 521,960 points. That's when I decided to try one more time, even though it was a pay-to-play tournament and I did not have much money to gamble. At the same time the pinball and Tetris tournaments were going on, so it was pretty chaotic, especially with it being the final day. Even with all of the distractions (every time a pinball bell would ring it would make bright

white horizontal static interference with my TV) I was able to reach their scores without even losing a life once!

In Phoenix you start with five lives and get one extra life only at 5,000. I was nearing the 500,000 mark and wanted to get to the world record without losing a life. Sadly, I died right before I got there. The ref was going nuts at this time and went to tell the organizer about my score so far. The organizer wanted me to try and attain 600,000 "just to be safe," which meant if my score became official with Twin Galaxies it would be a little harder for someone else to beat it. I wanted to do that, but I also decided to try and double the world record! At this time I could tell there was a big crowd behind me with people chatting and taking pictures. I even heard someone talking about "kill screens." I am not sure which Atari VCS games have kill screens, if any, but I do know many scores flip back to 0 at a certain number (depends on the game). I was hoping this game would do that when I was nearing 999,999. I hit 1,000,000 and it did!! The crowd went nuts!!! I pumped my arm in the air just like Steve Wiebe in King of Kong. It was a great moment, but I kept on playing. I still wanted to double the world record.

For most of my game I was "in the zone." I was able to play through all of the distractions and even hold a discussion with the referee for most of the game. It was pretty amazing. Plus, from around 800,000 to my final score I did not have any lives left! Not only was I very nervous about maybe not being able to flip the score, but I could tell the crowd was nervous as well, with it being pretty silent around me. Amazingly, I did it and was able to keep going for a bit more. After 1 hour and 45 minutes (45 minutes after closing), my final score was 1,124,779! I won the Atari 2600 that the tournament was being played on, the controller, and the Phoenix game! I also won 25 other Atari 2600 games and a trophy, along with the possibility that this score could end up being the official world record with Twin Galaxies.

Many pictures were taken of me and some even asked for my autograph! One attendee said he was making a Midwest Gaming Classic DVD and that my game would be on the compilation. He even asked for me to sign it when it's done! For the second half of my game VGEvo was even streaming it live on their website. Needless to say, the 2009 Midwest Gaming Classic was my greatest video gaming experience ever, especially since it was my first live world record!

Fast forward a couple weeks: Twin Galaxies decided that my score would not be official! They said either a Twin Galaxies referee had to be at the event to witness my score or that the game had to be filmed from the very beginning to the very end. Most of the camcorders started recording around the 500,000 mark. I posted on the Twin Galaxies forums (http://forums.twingalaxies.com/viewtopic.php?f=49&t=14479) about my game, my score, and even uploaded some of the videos and pictures to try and get some of the referee's interested so that maybe they would make my score official. Some show goers even wanted to call them to tell them about my game, however, I had no luck in convincing them. Even though I came up short in convincing the staff of Twin Galaxies of my achievement, everyone on the forums was giving me their congratulations. However, one member told me the unofficial world record for Phoenix was 1,516,900 set by Todd Rogers!

I decided that since my Midwest Gaming Classic score was not official with Twin Galaxies, maybe I should try to not only do better, but also beat Todd's and in turn double it! (I like to double scores!) My final home score was 2,344,018! Sadly, I was unable to double Todd's score, but I was still very happy since it was higher than my Midwest Gaming Classic attempt. Also, during this game I found a glitch around the 1,700,000 mark where the mothership actually stopped firing! I was in shock and this for sure threw my game off. Eventually, i'm not sure at what point, it started firing again and I died soon thereafter. In the end I was not only very happy with the score, but I recorded it as well!

During Tim McVey's live Nibbler world record attempt on Ustream (Nibbler is Tim's game), I decided my next world record attempt would be Custer's Revenge (yes, that infamous "adult" game). I never played the game before, except for a couple practice rounds. What an awful game! During Tim's

Nibbler attempt I was talking to Todd about Custer's Revenge, and he told me his score for it which was another unofficial world record. He also showed me magazine articles that interviewed him about the game. In the end, I more than doubled Todd's score. However, I highly recommend to not play this game for more than 5 minutes, let alone an hour and a half like I did!

Both my Custer's Revenge and Phoenix word record's were recorded on a single VHS tape and mailed to Twin Galaxies. Everything on the tape was fine, except for a little bit of static, but you could still see everything. However, one of Twin Galaxies' referee's informed me after they received the tape that it was defective and unfixable. Since I recorded directly into the VCR, I did not have another copy of the tape so I was very disappointed. The referee even consoled me on the bad luck I was having with recording this score. I can only hope the 3rd time is the charm!

The future: I am a guest/tournament organizer for the [Video Game Summit 09](#) in Lombard, IL this July. I am going to attempt a live 3,000,000 game (or at least a world record) at the event. I am going to record it once again, but this time with a brand new tape. It will be shown live on Ustream as well as Twin Galaxies' website. Doors open at 11:00, but I am going to start my game at 9:00 so that I can do some other things afterwards. The organizer for the event decided if an attendee buys a ticket online (for only $3) that they will be able to get into the show at 9:00 (2 hours before the doors open) to witness my attempt from the very beginning.

I plan on recording one more game at home before the event, just in case I can't get a good score. If I can't get a good score at VGS, I will then play my tape in place of it. Kind of like what Billy Mitchell did in King of Kong. Since VGS is a family event, I will record my Custer's Revenge game at home afterwards.

So what is your "game"? How do you know when a game is your "game"? Well, it's like this: when you play a game for the very first time and you do very well, enjoy it very much, and maybe even break a world record, then it is your "game".

Hope to see everyone at Video Game Summit 09!

Game On!

	Game Reviews Go On The Air
	by *[Derek Slaton](#)*

Throughout my life, classic video games have helped me get through some of the most difficult times. When I moved to a new school in the 6th grade, it was only because of Revenge of Shinobi and Phantasy Star II that I had any common ground with my new classmates. As a result, I ended up with a group of friends that I still have to this day.

When I was in my second or third Freshman year of college my girlfriend dumped me. Rather than spend the weekend moping around, I went to a nearby classic video game store and bought an Atari 2600 and ten games. As a result I ended up with the first few pieces of what would one day become the massive classic game collection I now have.

It was only four short months ago when classic video games once again came through to help me during another difficult time in my life. Like so many other people around the country I was let go from my job, and it didn't take long to figure out just how bleak the job market was out there. After roughly six weeks of sending out resume after resume and getting the same response I would have gotten if I had printed off a copy and set it on fire, I decided it was time for me to try something different. That's when my video game project was born.

Ever since buying that Atari 2600 some ten years ago I have stopped at every flea market, thrift store, and out of the way vintage shop I could find in order to add to my collection. Therefore, it didn't take me long to decide what the subject matter of my project would be. It was just a matter of piecing together all the equipment and software I have acquired over the years during my failed quest to make a movie, and before I knew it I had the foundation of a classic video game show.

Over the next several weeks I researched all the classic games I could and wrote segment after segment until I had ten shows ready to go. Since this was being designed for the internet I aimed for a running time of 5-8 minutes for each episode, which in my mind was about right for internet viewing. Now the only thing left to do was to insert a host to tie it all together and I was ready to go. Unfortunately, being unemployed makes it kind of difficult to hire one due to the lack of funds and all. So after much consideration I decided to host the show myself for one reason and one reason only, I came at the right price.

And thus The V.G.A. TV was born. I decided on the name because I am a collecting purist and don't buy any games online (other than the occasional import since you can't find them in the wild), I thought of myself as The Video Game Archeologist (The V.G.A.). Going to all of these out of the way flea markets and vintage shops makes me feel like I am a modern day archeologist, since i often have to sift through dirt encrusted junk in order to find the rare treasure below. Plus, if it catches on it gives me an excuse to buy a fedora and a bull whip at some point.

On April 17, 2009 the first episode of The V.G.A. TV went live. I have worked on a multitude of projects over the years, some big and some small, but I believe that the eight minutes and seven seconds that the first episode runs is by far the proudest I have ever been about something. Because not only was it done virtually entirely by me (I write, produce, shoot, capture game footage, edit, do voice over, and host the show), it finally allowed me to share my love of classic games with the world.

A new episode of the V.G.A. TV goes live every Friday and can be seen at www.thevgatv.com. Feel free to send any comments about the show my way.

	RTM Idiocy: The Misadventures Of PIGBEAR
	by Mark Sabbatini

Some tales of retrocomputing idiocy are so funny it's a crime to do anything other than let the moron of the moment hang himself with his own words. So I'm taking a break from my usual collection of tidbits to tell the following story about my nominee for dunce of the decade on one of the earliest online users' groups.

A brief setup: These are excerpts from posts between a new member named PIGBEAR and several other chatters on the Delphi BBS back in 1989. I've included a comment or two in italics for clarity, and some summary thoughts at the end, but otherwise this is the discussion as it unraveled. See how long it takes to guess the punchline.

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From: PIGBEAR To: MARTYGOODMAN
- DO YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WITH A COPY OF MIKEYTERM A LITTLE CHEEPER THEN
$10.00 WE NEED IT FOR THE BOY SCOUTS AND WE DO NOT HAVE A LOT OF MONEY.

From: MARTYGOODMAN To: PIGBEAR
- Are you kidding??!!  A piece of software of quality, that took mike
YEARS to write, and you are complaining because he charges all of $10
for it?  Get serious!   Most of the software I use on the IBM PC costs
me beteen $80 and $500 per program. Believe me... if you can't afford
to drop $10 for a critical program, you have no business using
computers.  Period. I take it you are, implicitly, admitting that you
steal all the software you own???

From: PIGBEAR To: MARTYGOODMAN
- NO I DO NOT STEAL I ONLY THOUGHT MABBY I COULD GET IT A LITTLE
CHEEPER AFTER SPENDING A LOT OF MONEY THIS MOUNTH FOR PARTS AND OTHER
SOFTWEAR FOR THIS COMPUTER. I ONLY HAVE A LITTLE MONEY LEFT FOR BILLS.
AND IF YOU CANT BE NICER IN YOUR COMMENTS TO OTHERS YOU SHOULD NOT BE
ON THE PHONE LINES WITH OTHERS. YOU GIVE THE PHONE CO A BAD
NAME............

From: COCONAUT To: PIGBEAR
- Does the word FREE mean anything to you?   Several of us, myself
included, have suggested down-loading Mikeyterm from the Database
here.  Then it is up to your conscience whether or not you wish to pay
Mike for his trouble in writing it, and his kindness for entering it
into the Database. Frankly, Marty Goodman is the SIG operator here, and
for good reason. Those of us who know Marty, may not always agree with
his politics, but he is never anything but truthfull and fair.  If the
truth hurts, so be it.  Purchasing copyrighted software (or anything
else, for that matter) on the "black market" and not from its author is
dishonest illegal, and is simply stealing. Don't pick on Marty because
you got your feelings hurt.

From: RICKADAMS To: PIGBEAR
- Sigh... look, gang, lighten up.  PIGBEAR isn't copping to being a
software pirate, he just wants to get his software as cheaply as he
can.  Doesn't everybody? Okay, he needs some education... I don't think
that he really thought through that asking someone besides Mike for a
free copy of Mikeyterm was a major faux pas... not because he's dumb,
but just because he didn't really understand the issues involved.

From: PIGBEAR To: RICKADAMS
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- THE ONLY REASION I ASKED FOR MIKEY TERN FOR A LITTLE LESS WAS THIS MOUNTH I SPENT OVER $130 FOR OTHER SOFT WEAR INCLUDING VEDIOTEX THAT I FOUND WAS A PEACE OF TRASH AND ALSO ((AUTOTERM)) THAT I CANT SEEM TO UNDERSTAND. I DID NOT MEAN TO STEAL A PROGRAM AND TO ALL THAT THOUGHT THAT I AM SORRY . BY THE WAY I AM ON A FIED INCOME AND DONT HAVE A LOT OF MONEY AND WHO DOES NOW THESE DAYS. IF I WERE IN THE MONEY I WOULD HAVE A TANDY 1000 NOT A COCO II AGIN I SAY A AM SORRY TO GIVE YOU GUYS A PROBLIM AND A HEAD ACH I AM NEW TO A COMPUTER AND TO THIS SERVICE.

From: PIGBEAR To: RICKADAMS
- I ALSO AM SORRY THAT I GAT OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT BUT I AM NEW TO ALL OF THIS IT IS ALL GREEK TO ME AND I NEED ALL THE HELP THAT I CAN GET AND LEAD IN THE RIGHT WAY.

From: MARTYGOODMAN To: COCONAUT
- I just got a bit exasperated when, after being politely told by me and you and several OTHER members that the proper way to obtain the program was to write to Mike and take him up on his very generous offer, he perisisted in whining for a "further discount". That behavior prompted my disgust, and a (by my standards relatively mild) display of that disgust in public. Note that it was PIGBEAR who acted obstinate at least, if not insulting, by persisting to solicit help in cheating Mike out of the pittance he asks right here in public.

From: RADICAL To: PIGBEAR
- I have been following the thread of your requests since you first popped on line. As a relatively new user myself, I think your biggest problem is you are using overkill trying to get help. Why don't you sit down and organize your questions into one message, and either upload it, or input it directed to ALL. Everyone scanning the message base will read your requests, and anyone with useful knowledge will be happy to jump in with a respone...No question is dumb, but you should try to think out the problem first, and document the things you have attempted before asking, so the other members of the forum will have some basis to answer.

From: PIGBEAR To: NYMAN
- I am a cubmaster with 10 years of exp in Leadership and 7 Years ofBoy Scouting as a boy in Gettysburg Pa that is my home Town i live in york,Penna now. If i can ever out how to use the manual for autoterm for the word prossing unit mable i can sve some money. I need all the help I can get to use this better.

From: MARTYGOODMAN To: PIGBEAR
- Please let me remind you that it is improper to solicit copies of copywritten software here on the SIG... even as "backup" copies. If you have a problem with a particular piece of commercial software, the proper thing is to send back to the seller the original disk (the one with the serial number on it) and request a replacement. And then, be careful to make BACKUPS of the new disk you get.

From: PIGBEAR To: HARDWAREHACK
- 2 WKS AGO I CLEANED OUT MY DESK AND I BELIVE I THREW SOME OUT SUCH AS MY WORLD OF FLIGHT GAME MANUAL AND MY MUSICA AND MY MONOPLOY MANUALS

AND MY QUICKREF CARD TO DELPHI. ALSO MY KIDS SOMETIME GET INTO MY DESK AND SCREW UP THINGS... I AM ABOUT TO DO THE SAME BRUCE WAYNE ON BATMAN DOES MAKE MY STUDY OFF LIMNETS TO ALL BUT ME. THANKS FOR THE REDICAL AND MESSAGE

From: RICKADAMS To: HARDWAREHACK
- While he had a definate attitude problem...we ought to consider the possiblity that PIGBEAR did not KNOW that what he was asking for was blatantly unethical, even illegal... out of a combination of ignorance and life circumstances that would make ten bucks seem like a lot of money to him...Here's this guy who blunders into one of the last bastions of anti-piracy sentiment in the known universe, and leaves this typo-ridden, uppercase message soliciting a pirated copy of Mikeyterm because $10 seemed like a lot of money... it occured to me that this guy might be CLUELESS about what a major paux pas he was occurring...(I'm finding the whole situation rather amusing myself...)

From: PIGBEAR To: DELTATANGO
- I AN NOT GOOD AT READING INSTRUCTIONS BUT GOOD IF SOME ONE TELLS ME HOW AND SHOWES ME HOW TO DO IT. I HOPE TO GET TO USE THIS BETTER I NEED TO SAVE MONEY AFTER SOME ONE ELSE RAN UP MY DELPHI BILL $200.88 THIS MOUNTH ALONE OUCH!!!

(PIGBEAR was never heard from again. If anyone hasn't figured out the punchline, a member helpfully provides it - even if it probably wasn't seen by the person who needed to most.)

From: DELTATANGO To: PIGBEAR (NR)
- It's pretty hard (impossible??) for anyone to use your account unless they have somehow obtained your password. If you think that is the case, better change it right NOW! You also need to understand that this on-line business can get a little expensive! Its awfull easy to ramble around Delphi at 300 baud, forgetting about the time, and run up a humongous bill. That's probably the reason some of the people were a little incredulous when you were concerned about paying $10 for a term program.

It's hard to imagine anybody needs snark to appreciate the lunacy of this thread, which is missing plenty of gems such as his spelling "disk" with a "c" instead of a "s" (it's not like that's a case of accidentally hitting an adjacent key). But a few thoughts anyhow:

– How did PIGBEAR manage to get online in the first place? Getting an internet connection these days can be annoying, but back then it usually involved 1) modestly complex configuring of modems that were slower by factor of dozens or hundreds than today's broadband, 2) terminal programs that generally required complex commands and dialing codes to connect to a service and 3) more challenge setting up a user account and then navigating to various areas if you somehow could get connected. Plenty of experienced users found it more nuisance than it was worth.

– How disturbing is it this guy was a Scout leader? Nice intentions, certainly, but it doesn't exactly seem like putting his gifts in the best place.

– More disturbing is PIGBEAR's day job as a police officer. It doesn't bode well for the department when the department is willing to hire someone with his (lack of) literacy skills and he's that poverty

stricken (it's not impossible the two are related).

– Finally, giving the guy his due, he didn't lurk off to another board and simply pirate the program in question (snark: maybe he didn't know how). Also, he's far from being the only nitwit to lose many pounds trying to save a few pennies in this manner. Indeed, one of my other dunce of the decade finalists is a collective effort by some of the board's most experienced users, costing far more money and time than PIGBEAR's blunders. We'll get into that one next month (after which we'll hopefully return to our normal broadcasting schedule).

Apple II Incider - GBA Championship Basketball (Apple IIGS Version)
by Donald Lee

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Happy April to everyone! With the short turn around for this article, I decided to go with a game that was easier to get the hang of so I didn't have to spend a ton of time playing it. Also, I wanted it to be a basketball game as the NBA Playoffs have just started in the past couple of weeks.

I decided that it was about time to look at an Apple IIGS specific game as that has been something that I haven't done much of in this column. Originally, I decided to try Magic Johnson Basketball as I had not played that game before. However, it wouldn't recognize my joystick, so that was obviously a bit of an issue. So my next option? An oldie but goodie that I had played on my Apple IIe: GBA Championship Basketball: Two-On-Two by Gamestar.

GBA is a pretty interesting game. Unlike the classic Dr. J vs Larry Bird Go One-on-One which featured a one-on-one half court battle between Julius Erving and Larry Bird, GBA simulated a full court two on two game. You had the option to play one player with a computer player versus two computer players, or have two humans playing together against two computer players.

I stuck to playing a one player game with a computer player. I was able to create my own character and tweak my attributes which, by default, is "average" in all categories. I decided to up my outside shooting a little bit and in doing so, sacrificed some of my inside scoring. You could also choose if your player was black or white. Given it was the 80's, I guess the notion of Asian or other foreign players playing basketball wasn't quite in vogue yet.

As far as playing went, you could choose to practice or play a game. If you chose to play a game, you could pick an exhibition or participate in a league. The league play option may have been ahead of it's time. By playing in a league, you could create your own player, a team name, participate in a short regular season and, if you qualified, the playoffs/championships. As a nice touch, after every game you get a newspaper headline highlighting (or lowlighting if you lost) your performance.

Alas, while there were some nice touches, the actual game play is a little limited. While GBA is full court, the computer switches between two screens to simulate the action. I seem to recall on the Apple II version that I could get a good fast break running, but while trying the IIGS version I couldn't do so. So, if you happened to get a steal or a rebound, you could only get the ball upcourt and run a half court set.

The graphics for the IIGS version is fairly good. The court is well detailed and you can make out the players as they dribble, pass or shoot. Obviously, even with the IIGS's improved graphics over the 8-bit Apple II's, the game play is nowhere near like the NBA Live or NBA 2K games of today.

The sound and music in the game was a little disappointing. The Apple IIGS has exceptional capabilities, but they were not used much here. There were the usual sounds for dribbling and referees blowing the whistle, but no crowd noise. Music is also surprisingly missing, just like how there is no dunking, except during the boot up screen for the game.

However, despite the lack of sound and music, GBA is an interesting look back in the past. I had a good time playing the Apple II version, and the IIGS version was much improved (especially the graphics and the speed). Alas, the emulator I was using seemed to freeze quite often so I could never complete a game, but from what I was able to see, GBA Championship Basketball was a good pre-cursor to the NBA games that exist today and is well worth a look!

The Thrill Of Defeat: P&P On The Unexpanded Timex Sinclair 1000 (Part II)
by Mark Sabbatini

Owning the world's most disposable computer has advantages, not the least of which is ripping apart its innards without excess worry.

Most of 1970s were a hardware hackers paradise, since building a computer from scratch was about the only affordable home option. When cheap all-in-one units like the PET, TRS-80, and Atari came along at the end of the decade, the solder set quickly because a small minority of users.

Of all the computers I owned it seems Sinclair ZX81 users – especially the Brits – were the most willing to violate their warranties and explore the possibilities of hardware instead of software. I used to shake my head when they'd describe spending hundreds of dollars on stuff they wanted to wire to a $100 computer (soon to be $29 and lower), but now as I pine for the days of those Radio Shack 150-in-1 electronic kits it makes sense.

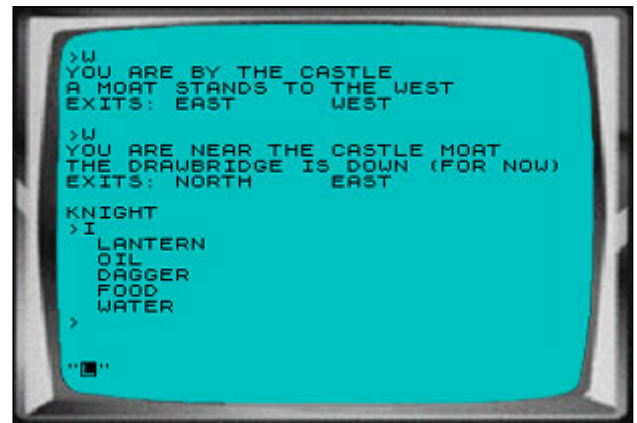So while nearly every ZX81 user unhappy with the built-in 1K of RAM simply bought the cheap ($49, soon to be less) 16K RAM packs that plugged into the back of the computer, a small group of

hardware warriors scoured the more obscure magazine ads for add-ons of 2K, 4K and 8K that were (usually) a few bucks cheaper, although it also usually meant opening up the computer and soldering the chips to, uh, whatever was the proper place. I remember wondering why bother, since nearly every commercial program not running on the base machine seemed to require 16K. But, it seems, I was a bit misguided about that as well.
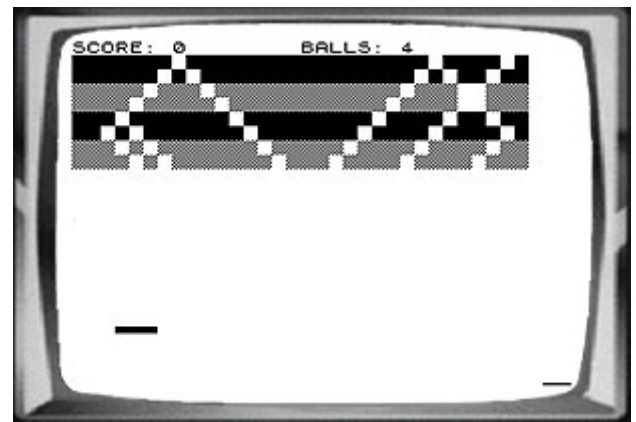
So this month's look at gaming on the world's worst and most obscure computers will be the first of two looking at programs that ran on those few machines. Nearly all are a major leap in quality above the 1K games reviewed the past few months, but still considerably short of the mass quantities of 16K titles soon to be reviewed. Grades, as always, are strictly limited within their own category.

Unlike previous months, none of the games here run on any online emulators I'm aware of. Googling will turn up any number of free emulators on platforms from PCs to Palm pilots, as well as the files for each of the below titles.
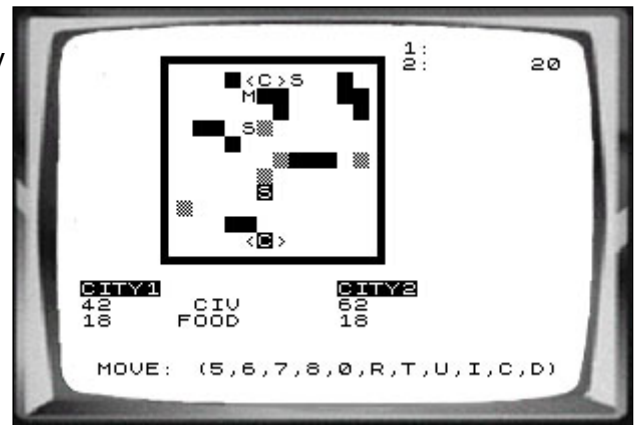
8K Adventure (C+) Thank (deity of preference) for emulators that allow you to tweak speed, because this fantasy text adventure crawls along like those news teletypes that scroll text across the screen in movies. It's an adaptation of what a Commodore 64 programmer wrote in an effort to show a full-fledged text adventure could fit in 8K. Descriptions are less than spartan, the vocabulary is about a dozen words and there's only about 25 rooms. It's not all that tough and doesn't take too long to solve (maybe that's one reason to run it at native ZX81 speed). But I stuck with it anyhow, mostly because I knew it'd be a much less intense time-consumer than Zork.
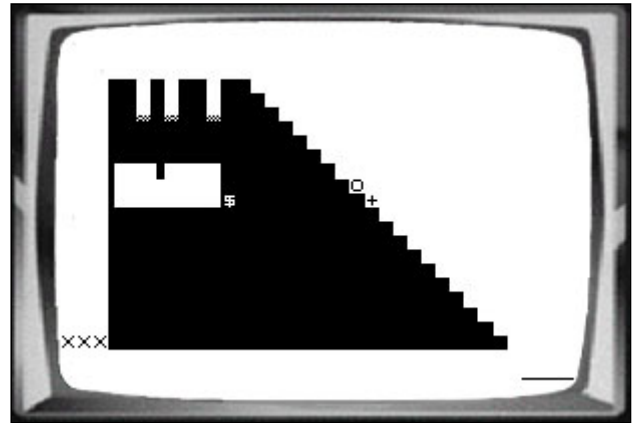

Breakout 4K (F) This has to be one of the worst renditions of a tired game I've ever seen and it's mind-blogging extra memory is required, especially there's a 1K version that ranks among the best ZX81 games ever. The graphics are blocky even by the worst-ever standards of this computer, the ball flickers so bad it's almost invisible, it knocks out all bricks in its path (rebounding only off the edges), it's slow and the collision detection seemingly has nothing to do with where your paddle is. This would get a D- on a 1K machine simply because it doesn't crash, but there have to be some standards for people who've taken the time to weld extra chips to their computer.
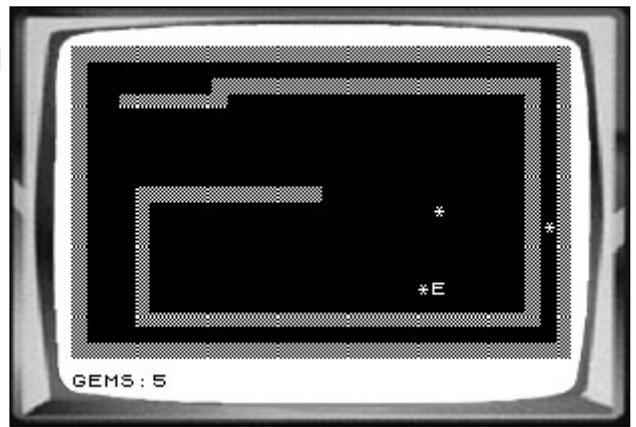
Civilization 4K and 8K (D) I guess reading the instructions was amusing for a few minutes. It's a heavily hyped interpretation of Sid Meier's classic, available in 4K and 8K BASIC versions. It looks like a potentially interesting, if simple, strategic war game. You create units to collect resources and build up military units that you move around, all apparently to kill the computer's home base before it gets yours. Problem is, the program crashes frequently. It seems I'd get a few moves further each time by not repeating whatever option caused the previous crash, but this isn't the kind of learning curve I feel like spending a lot of time on. Smarter people than me may adjust, which is why it doesn't get a failing grade. Files at www.lrz-muenchen.de/~t4221aa/WWW/zx81/civ.htm. Instructions for 4K www.lrz-muenchen.de/~t4221aa/WWW/zx81/CIV4K.HTM.
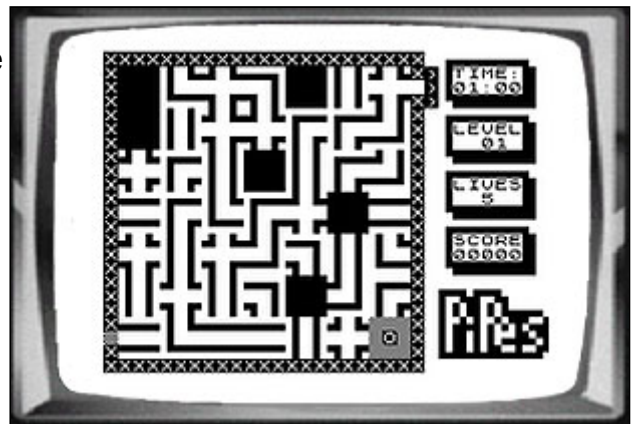

Curse Of The Aztec Tomb (C+) Here's another example where the reading is better than the game, but in this case it's not entirely a slight to the program itself. It's offered at tribute site for Amiga Power magazine, a strange location to be sure, but one worth spending lots of time at before or after trying this platform game. The premise itself is old school and apparently adapted from an incomplete listing in a magazine. But it's impressive for a 4K ZX81 game at the time. The player is a one-legged man moving through various rooms gathering keys (which look suspiciously like "$" signs, according to the instructions) while dealing with boulders, drawbridges, deadly creatures, collapsing ceilings and other hazards. Controls are absurdly simple, with "1" key moving the player forward and the "0" key serving as a jump button. But there's a number of problems, beginning with the fact the controls aren't the most responsive in the world. You'll have to press the jump key well in advance of an approaching boulder, for instance, and positioning yourself to jump over things can be tough. A bigger problem is the instructions are extremely vague and the player often has no idea of how to use the limited moves in various situations. Since the player only gets one life, the game becomes a matter of repeating learned patterns and then dying repeatedly until a solution is found by chance. Even the programmer admits "half of the game's hazards are completely random and unfair." In the words of Orwell, double-plus ungood. That's when it's time to quit and read some of the best retrocomputing rants ever at the AP site. The program is at http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/ap2/good/Games_AP_People_Did.html.

Gem Digger (D+) A variation of the all-too-common snake game written in BASIC, which means it's slow and the keyboard response lagging. The player leaves a TRON-like path while navigating around the screen collecting as many gems (asterisks) as possible before colliding with the "E" on the screen to exit the level. The "boss" then demands a certain number of gems, so your score is whatever is left over. As the game progresses there are more gems and the boss wants more of them. The game doesn't move fast enough that colliding ought to be a problem but the key response lags a step or two, so you're essentially pressing keys about one move before your intended detour and hoping for the best. At least the keys are logical (Q/A for up/down and O/P for left/right). Not the sort of game that ought to require an extra 4K RAM to run.

Pipes 4K (B+) We'll end this month on a positive note with this modern-era race-against-the-clock puzzle game that was an entry in the 2003 Minigame Competition. Written by Fernando Miguel Barletta, who's gotten generally positive reviews from me for a number of 1K games in previous columns, he uses the extra memory to create a game with considerably more longevity. Think of it as a hyper version of the square sliding-puzzle games where you put the tiles 1-15 in order (I've also seen similar "pipe" games since my early computing days on many platforms and, no, I don't know where they originated from). Here the player controls a cursor that moves around a screen of pipes, with black blocks scattered about that cut off their flow. The player must move the "blanks" so the pipes can carry fuel out of the maze. This is done by passing over the blocks, which then move to where the cursor was, so approaching from the right direction is vital. It'd be nice if something other than the 5-8 cursor keys were used for movement, but it's not as big a detriment as it is with split-second arcade games. The player must get a set of linked pipes to the exit within a time limit, then press the "0" key to start the gas flowing. If successful, the player gets bonus for extra time. It starts to get repetitive and easy once the player gets proficient rearranging the blocks, but it'll take long enough to do that which makes this a worthwhile title.

Creating Atari 2600 Games With Batari BASIC
by *Todd Holcomb*

I've always wanted to program my own video game, and guys like Warren Robinett and David Crane have always been my heroes. However, like most people, school, work, and family made finding time to learn complex programming languages difficult. Recently though, I discovered a simple way to make Atari 2600 games using a basic language called batari Basic created by Fred "batari" Quimby. Now, the last time I did any basic programming was back in the 80's on my old Apple IIe, but making the jump to batari Basic is relatively easy. There are tons of code samples to get you up and running, a dedicated forum with lots of helpful people, and an online manual.

"So why would you want to make a game for that ancient system?" is what most of my friends and family ask. That and "could you be a bigger nerd?!" The answer to the second question is "no", and the answer to the first is more complex. Most games for the Atari are the essence of fun gameplay - easy to learn but difficult to master. I enjoy being able to sit down and play a game for 15-30 minutes and not have to sit for two hours just to figure out the controls or to try and reach a save point. There's also something historical about programming for an old system and facing some of the same limitations that the original programmers faced.

My first attempt at programming was more of an experiment. Could I make a version of one of my favorite Atari games - [Adventure](#)? I made a very simple game with nine rooms, a wizard, and a monster. I was soon spending all my free time figuring out the playfield graphics, the ball sprite, player sprites, and collisions. Unfortunately, I couldn't figure out how to get the enemies to chase the player from room to room and I soon lost interest and started paying attention to my family again... But my kids kept asking, "Hey Dad, can I play your Adventure game again?" It was fascinating to watch them play and figure out strategies to beat the game on their own. This reinvigorated my interest and I set out to make a bigger and better version that would be more challenging. The end result is my own sequel to Adventure, called [Evil Magician Returns](#). My oldest son made it all worthwhile when he said my game was his favorite Atari game. But then he likes ET too...

To get up and programming your own game, you'll need a text editor (I used TextEdit on my Mac), the [batari Basic compiler](#), and an Atari 2600 emulator like [Stella](#). And yes, there are even people out there that can burn your finished game onto a [cartridge](#) to play on the original hardware! Now get over there and make us some games!

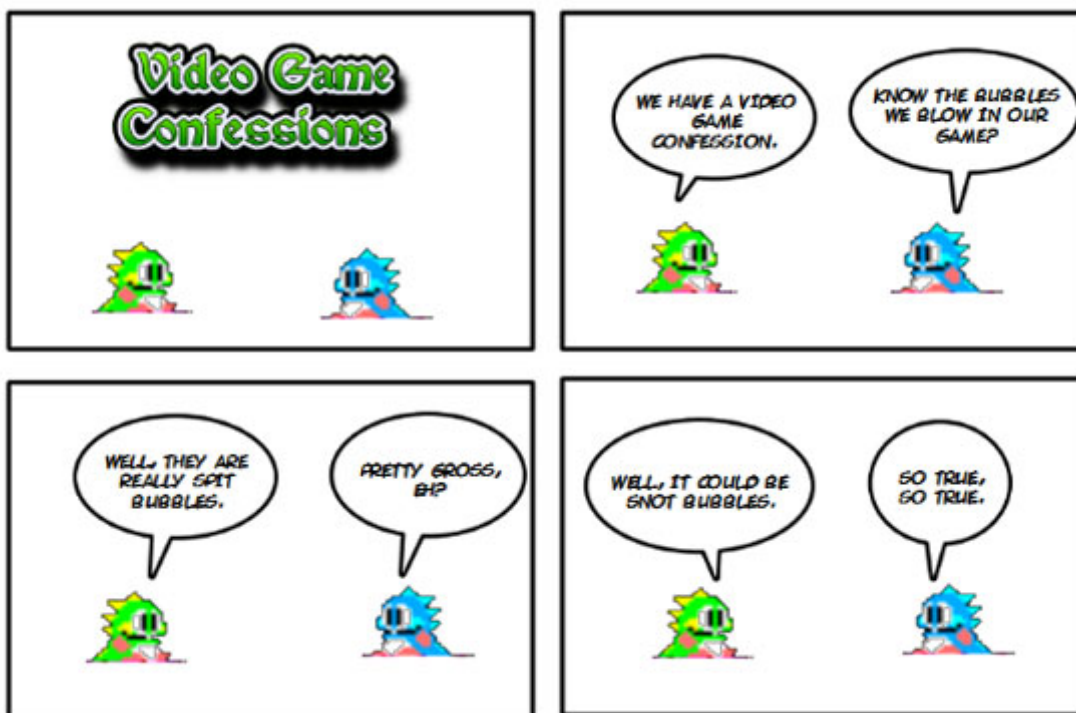|	
	Videological Dig
	by [Bryan Roppolo](#)

I started this column out with some newsbytes from the past and then decided to do a TV commercial in the last issue. Now you might wonder what could he possibly think of next? Well, when I sat down and thought about the different advertising mediums used through the years I thought...Newspapers, TV....and then it hit me, radio! That's when I remembered I had an original 1983 Atarisoft radio commercial right here on my computer that I found on Detroit Radio Flashbacks. You have to admit that this is one really catchy jingle. I even found myself singing it this morning! (okay, maybe it's not THAT good, but it does stay in your head for a while).

This particular commercial must be from around October/Novemeber 1983 since that's when Atarisoft came out with their first line of video games for various home systems. You might also recognize the song that starts to play after the commercial is over. I'm not going to give it away, but if you are into '80s video games then I assume you would know the song and artist. Let me just say the person that wrote it goes by a royal name. If you want to feel like you're back in the '80s listening to the radio in your car, be sure to give this clip a listen as it is a pretty fun blast from the past.

Laughing Pixels
by Tom Zjaba

Tom Zjaba is the founder of Retrogaming Times and is both a video game and comic book enthusiast. Be sure to stop by his *Arcade After Dark* site to see a plethora of video game related comics which are not published in Retrogaming Times Monthly.

Game Over

Whew! This was a hard one to put together since it was a mere 16 days between this May 1 issue and the last one on April 15. I'm now looking forward to lounging by the pool and working on my suntan...well maybe I won't have THAT much free time, but I will be able to relax a little more now that we are back on track. The thing that I was most proud of was the large turnout of articles relative to the short turn-around. We were finally able to break 10 columns this month and hopefully that will continue to be the case. I personally thought that this would be the shortest issue since my time as stepping in as editor, but it turned out to be the biggest. I was very impressed. Hopefully future issues will continue to be impressive and be as fun to read for the retrogaming community.

- Bryan Roppolo, Retrogaming Times Monthly Editor

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