

SPACE

NEWSLETTER for October, 2003



President's Corner by Michael Current October, 2003

Yes, fall has arrived, Halloween is just around the corner and before you know it we'll be knee-deep in snow drifts. Time has its way of just marching steadily ahead.

Nominations for club elected officials will be solicited at this month's meeting. Please consider stepping forward. As you know the club is in need of new leadership, why not you?

The "Atari News" items this month include several specific to our 8-bit computers. How about the new 1Mbit and 8Mbit Flash MultiCarts from Steve Tucker, or Sunmark's new Commando cartridge? Then there's Sunmark's \$500 programming contest. Any SPACE members up to the challenge of this contest?

I guess this month I'll have to write about my buddy the Swen worm for PC's running MS-Windows. It was recognized and named on about Thursday Sept 18, but by the next day its seriousness was upgraded as it swept around the Net infecting hundreds of thousands of PCs. Sadly, it primarily relied on security issues in Windows that Microsoft fixed and released patches for over a year ago, but this worm demonstrates that many, many people still don't do their Windows critical updates. As it happens, the antivirus software makers were quick to update their virus lists to recognize and prevent this particular infection, as they usually are. However, with Swen, direct infection isn't how most of us were affected. Because you see, once this thing infects a PC it is extremely effective at emailing copies of itself as (large) attachments to email messages to every legitimate email address it can find on that PC. These email messages are very cleverly designed to look like security updates from Microsoft, encouraging the nondiscriminating PC user to open the attachment to fix all known security issues. When in fact, running the attachment would install this worm/virus, which would then begin emailing itself to dozens or hundreds or more new recipients.

But as I was saying, Swen's notoriety is earned primarily by its proficiency at emailing copies of itself. With my email address widely available all over the world thanks to my routine FAQ postings on Usenet, Someone like me is particularly likely to receive emails like these. One reason I chose a big, national ISP in EarthLink was for its reputation for strong spam protection. Well, let me tell you, EarthLink's spam protection was no match for Swen. Starting last Friday, I was receiving these emails, complete with large attachment, at the rate of one every 1-2 minutes. Each comes from its own unique From

address, so no way to block with simple Blocked Addresses. My 10MB quota was being reached in about 45 minutes, so that I could not receive my legitimate email. If accessed at home over dialup, they were coming in faster that I could download them.

By Monday I engaged in a new strategy. I installed a copy of Eudora at work (fast ethernet network), and configured it to download mail out of my EarthLink account all day and night, 24/7. This way I could avoid hitting my quota and losing messages. It also gave me a way to see how many Swen emails I was really receiving. The answer is, between Mon 9/22 and Fri 9/26 I received over 1500 of 'em, or around 200-300 per day.

Today (Sat 9/27) they finally seem to have started to taper off. Where have EarthLink's administrators been to update their spam filters? Why was it so easy for other major ISPs to update their spam filters for Swen, while EarthLink still hasn't responded a week after the outbreak started? I wish I had an answer for that one. (I also learned this week that EarthLink's tech support people are located in India, probably having something to do with their inability to understand and coherently answer the simplest of questions.) I suspect other SPACE members, with different ISPs, fared better than I have with Swen email.

Meanwhile my 14-year-old 130XE has yet to be infected by a virus of any kind.

SPACE home page counter update: as of 9/27/03, 3:00pm:
649 hits since June 7, 2003.

Thanks, keep using that Atari, and come to your next SPACE meeting, Friday October 10, 2003.



Treasurer's Report by Greg Leitner For September, 2003

I could not locate the email from Greg containing the Treasurer's Report. Asked him to resend it.

Newsletter Editor



**Secretary's Report
By Brian-Angel C Little
For September, 2003**

No Minutes Submitted.

--Date: Wed, 10 Sep 2003 13:04:45 -0700

Atari800 1.3.1 has been released. Binaries for PC and Atari Falcon/TT available.

<http://atari800.atari.org/>

[This news item courtesy of Atari.org - <http://www.atari.org>]

A-T-A-R-I

Answers-Tips-and-Relevant Information

by Paul Alhart

paulalhart@hotmail.com

1987.9

For some time I have been thinking about writing a program that would make labels for audio cassette tapes. Somehow other things always seemed to be more urgent, so I was happy to find that someone else had found the time and done it for me. The someone is David Adkison, and the following is a reprint of his article from the M.A.C.E. Journal (August 1986).

If you use a cassette recorder with your computer or have a tape deck for your Hi-Fi system, you have probably at one time or another made a label for tapes you recorded. Most commercial tapes come with a label, but even some of these (particularly the new popular "books on tape") do not.

In the past I dreaded making these labels for my recordings or computer programs because of the time involved in sizing the label and neatly printing the titles on it. The result was often no label at all or one with only the artist's name on it, which I usually regretted later when I wanted to know specifically what was there.

CASSETTE LABELER takes the drudgery out of making these labels because it makes them for you. All you have to do is type in the information you want printed on the label. While executing, the program prompts you for various information and prints a template that merely has to be clipped, folded, and placed in the plastic cassette box.

The program was written for the Star SG-10 printer, but can be easily modified for any other printer by changing the control codes in lines 40 (for condensed print) and 450-460 (for turning underlining on and off). I tried to keep the typist in mind when writing the program so there are no inverse keys or special characters (see note below for help on typing in the program).

It would be best to use heavier bond paper for your labels, but any will do. Each side has room for six titles (up to 64 characters in length). If you have more than six titles per side, the program will tell you how many to put on each line (use a slash, space, or whatever you want to separate titles on the same line).

I hope with CASSETTE LABELER you will have fewer "mystery tapes" and spend less time fast forwarding through a tape to find out

what is on it.

Hints for typing in CASSETTE LABELER: Here are some hints for typing in some of the more difficult lines.

LINE 90 The long string of characters enclosed in quotations in this line consists of a vertical bar (created by holding down the "shift key" and then pressing the "equals key", followed by 68 hyphens, and then another vertical bar.

LINE 100 There are 37 "space bar" entries between the first quotation mark and the vertical bar.

LINE 220 There are 68 "space bar" entries between the vertical bars.

LINE 240 Follow instructions for Line 100.

LINE 340 Follow instructions for Line 220.

LINE 350 There are 68 "underlines" (shift/hyphen) between the vertical bars.

LINEs 410, 460, & 470 Follow instructions for Line 220.

LINE 480 Follow instructions for Line 90.

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1 REM CASSETTE LABELER
2 REM byDANNY M. ADKISON
3 REM POLSC DEPT./OKLA. STATE UNIV.
4 REM STILLWATER, OK. 74078
10 DIM
TITLES$(64),DOLBY1$(9),DOLBY2$(9),BIAS$(11),LEFT$(65),
EDGE$(58)
20 LEFT$=" ":LEFT$(65)=" ":LEFT$(2)=LEFT$
30
VERT1=0:VERT2=0:SIDE1=0:SIDE2=0:MIN=0:MAX=0:Z=0:Q=0
:TRAP 930
40 LPRINT CHR$(27);CHR$(15):REM CONTROL CODES FOR
CONDENSED PRINT ON STAR SG-10
50 GOSUB 800:REM INSTRUCTIONS
60 GOSUB 660:REM DOLBY AND BIAS
70 GOSUB 500:REM NUMBER OF TITLES
80 REM BEGIN PRINTING
90 LPRINT "|-----|
-----|"
100 LPRINT "| SIDE 1: ";DOLBY1$;" -
";BIAS$;"|"
110 ? CHR$(125):? "NOTE: TITLE ENTRIES MAY BE UP TO 64
CHARACTERS LONG"
120 ? "(That comes to about 1 and 1/2 lines of text on the screen.):"?
130 IF SIDE1=0 THEN 210
140 IF SIDE1>6 THEN GOSUB 550
150 FOR X=1 TO SIDE1:?"What is title ";X;" on SIDE 1"
160 INPUT TITLES
170 LEFT=LEN(TITLES)
180 LPRINT "| ";TITLES$;LEFT$(LEFT);"|"
190 NEXT X
200 IF SIDE1=6 THEN 240
210 IF SIDE1<6 THEN VERT1=6-SIDE1
220 FOR X=1 TO VERT1:LPRINT
"||":NEXT X
230 ? :?
240 LPRINT "| SIDE 2: ";DOLBY2$;" -
";BIAS$;"|"
250 IF SIDE2=0 THEN 330
260 IF SIDE2>6 THEN GOSUB 590
270 FOR X=1 TO SIDE2:?"What is title ";X;" on SIDE 2"
280 INPUT TITLES$

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290 LEFT=LEN(TITLE$)
300 LPRINT " |";TITLE$;LEFT$(LEFT);"|"
310 NEXT X
320 IF SIDE2=6 THEN 350
340 FOR X=1 TO VERT2:LPRINT
"|"":NEXT X
350 LPRINT
"|"
360 ? :?
370 ? "What is the title for SIDE 1"
380 INPUT EDGE$
390 LEFT=LEN(EDGE$)+8
400 LPRINT " | SIDE 1: ";EDGE$;LEFT$(LEFT);"|"
410 LPRINT " |"
|"
420 ? "What is the title for SIDE 2"
430 INPUT EDGE$
440 LEFT=LEN(EDGE$)+8
450 LPRINT CHR$(27);CHR$(45);CHR$(1);" | SIDE 2:
";EDGE$;LEFT$(LEFT);"|"
460 LPRINT
CHR$(27);CHR$(45);CHR$(0);"|"
|"
470 FOR X=1 TO 4:LPRINT
"|"":NEXT X
480 LPRINT " |-----|
-----|"
490 GOTO 630
500 ? CHR$(125):? "Hom many titles on SIDE 1";
510 INPUT SIDE1
520 ? "How many titles on SIDE 2";
530 INPUT SIDE2
540 RETURN
550 MIN=INT(SIDE1/6):MAX=MIN*6:Q=SIDE1-MAX:Z=MIN+1
560 IF Q=0 THEN ? "PUT ";MIN;" ON EACH LINE.":GOTO 580
570 ? "PUT ";Z;" ON ";Q;" LINES AND ";MIN;" ON THE REST."
580 SIDE1=6:RETURN
590 MIN=INT(SIDE2/6):MAX=MIN*6:Q=SIDE2-MAX:Z=MIN+1
600 IF Q=0 THEN ? "PUT ";MIN;" ON EACH LINE.":GOTO 620
610 ? "PUT ";Z;" ON ";Q;" LINES AND ";M;" ON THE REST."
620 SIDE2=6:RETURN
630 ? CHR$(125):? "ANOTHER LABLE? 1=YES/2=NO"
640 INPUT OTHER:IF OTHER=1 THEN 20
650 END
660 ? CHR$(125):? "WAS DOLBY ON FOR SIDE 1?
1=YES/2=NO":INPUT DOLBY
670 IF DOLBY=1 THEN DOLBY1$="DOLBY ON "
680 IF DOLBY=2 THEN DOLBY1$="DOLBY OFF"
690 IF DOLBY>2 THEN 660
700 ? "WAS DOLBY ON FOR SIDE 1? 1=YES/2=NO":INPUT
DOLBY
710 IF DOLBY=1 THEN DOLBY2$="DOLBY ON "
720 IF DOLBY=2 THEN DOLBY2$="DOLBY OFF"
730 IF DOLBY>2 THEN 700
740 ? CHR$(125):? "WHAT IS TAPE BIAS?":?
"1=LOW/2=HIGH/3=CHROME":INPUT BIAS
750 IF BIAS=1 THEN BIAS$="LOW BIAS "
760 IF BIAS=2 THEN BIAS$="HIGH BIAS"
770 IF BIAS=3 THEN BIAS$="CHROME "
780 IF BIAS>3 THEN 740
790 RETURN
800 ? CHR$(125):POSITION 10,0:?"CASSETTE LABELER"
810 ? :?
820 ? :? "This program will print out a label for your music, spoken
word, or"
830 ? "computer cassette tape."
840 ? :? "The instructions should provide you with all you need to

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use this program."
850 ? "Here are a few hints before starting"
860 ? :? " 1) If you want to use a heavier paper (which is
advised) put it"
870 ? " in the printer now."
880 ? " 2) You can make 12 entries (each 64 characters in length).";
890 ? " If you have more than 12 entries, try putting
several on one line."
900 ? :? "IF YOU ARE READY ENTER '1'"
910 INPUT GO:IF GO=1 THEN RETURN
920 GOTO 900
930 P=PEEK(195):IF P=138 THEN ? CHR$(125):? "TURN
PRINTER ON AND
STANDBY!":FOR E=1 TO 1200:NEXT E:GOTO 30
940 GOTO 40

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LOS ANGELES--Sept. 2, 2003--Atari is bringing all the action and intrigue of the "Mission: Impossible®" movie franchise to video games with "Mission: Impossible -- Operation Surma" for the Xbox(TM) video game system from Microsoft, the PlayStation® 2 computer entertainment system and the Nintendo GameCube(TM) and Game Boy® Advance. Developed by Atari's Paradigm Entertainment and scheduled for release in November, "Mission: Impossible -- Operation Surma" provides players with a chance to become IMF super agent Ethan Hunt in the stealth action game of the year.

"With 'Mission: Impossible -- Operation Surma,' players will be thrust into an authentic 'Mission: Impossible' experience, complete with the latest spy gadgets, stealth action, incredible combat and plot-twisting suspense fans have come to expect from the franchise," said Steve Allison, vice president of marketing, Atari Los Angeles. "The stealth action category continues to surprise gamers with new and innovative game play experiences, and 'Operation Surma' is no exception. Our unique connection to one of today's strongest Hollywood movie franchises, which virtually defines the stealth action category, will complement our focus on delivering incredible game play with all of the powerful lead characters, fascinating villains, elaborate double-crosses and cunning treachery of a real 'Mission: Impossible.'"

In "Mission: Impossible -- Operation Surma," players step into the role of Ethan Hunt as he traverses the globe uncovering the insidious mysteries behind the malevolent Surma Corporation and its newly developed virus, ICEWorm, which allows Surma to break into any computer system in the world. Armed with the hyper-cool, super spy technology and weaponry from the "Mission: Impossible" movies, such as miniature remote-controlled devices, micro cameras, tranquilizing darts and character disguises, Hunt must lead his elite team in preventing Surma Corp. from achieving its ultimate goal: global domination.

"Mission Impossible -- Operation Surma" features groundbreaking gameplay that empowers players to choose the tactics and game play style they wish to use in tackling mission objectives. For example, as Hunt, a player can forge an uneasy alliance with questionable allies in order to gain the upper hand against an overwhelming enemy force; or, the player can charge in, with the latest top secret IMF weapon; or, the player can slide silently in and out of the shadows, penetrating enemy lairs unnoticed. Ultimately, the nature of the adventure lies in the player's hands.

"Mission: Impossible -- Operation Surma" Features:

Open-Ended Gameplay: Players will be empowered to play the game the way they like. Take out a guard and dispose of his body, sneak behind the guard and slip by unnoticed, distract the guard to another

area, tranquilize the guard remotely or even take him prisoner are just a few options at the player's disposal for nearly every situation.

Super Spy Gadgets: As with any "Mission: Impossible," the gadgets are where it's at. "Operation Surma" will put dozens of super-cool gadgets at players' fingertips, including: The Wasp, a miniature remote-controlled "bug" with a devastating "sting"; a directional microphone used to create distractions; binoculars featuring a digital camera for evidence gathering; EMP darts for disabling critical electronic devices; and much more. **Agent Moves and Abilities:** As Ethan Hunt, players will have at their disposal all the moves that any respectable super agent has spent years perfecting, including: vaulting and mantling of objects; hand walking on ledges; wall hugging through tight spaces; crouching and creeping to keep a low profile; hand-over-hand maneuvering on pipes and girders. In addition, players will be able to execute numerous stealth disabling, restraining and finishing maneuvers on enemy characters.

Gameplay Locations: Led by Mission Commander Swanbeck, players will follow clues and undertake missions in exotic locations around the world, including: the Los Muertos research facility in the southwestern United States; Sansara Prison in Northern Africa; and Yugaria, a fictional Eastern European country.

New York, New York, September 15, 2003 – Atari, Inc. (Nasdaq: ATAR) has entered into a licensing agreement with Microsoft Game Studios under which Atari will be the exclusive U.S. jewel case distributor for select Windows titles developed by Microsoft Game Studios.

Under the terms of the agreement, which extends through June 2006, Atari will republish and distribute jewel case versions of several best-selling Microsoft Game Studios titles, including: Age of Empires – Gold Edition, Microsoft Flight Simulator '98, Links LS 2000, Combat Flight Simulator – WWII Europe Series, Pandora's Box, Bicycle Casino, Bicycle Card Games, Bicycle Board Games, Crimson Skies, Starlancer and Pinball Arcade.

"We're delighted to expand our relationship with Microsoft Game Studios in this manner and to add this group of products to our distribution line-up," said Ezra Chen, Vice President, Product Acquisition for Atari, Inc. "The combination of Microsoft's strong titles with Atari's distribution network should yield great results for both companies."

"Atari's widespread distribution allows us to extend the lifecycle of great products, giving consumers additional opportunities to experience some of the industry's strongest franchises," said Ed Ventura, Director, Microsoft Game Studios. "We recognize the importance and the potential of the value-priced games category, and Atari is the ideal partner to offer our games in the U.S. market."

BEVERLY, MA, Sept. 25, 2003 – Atari Inc. today announced that Beyblade™: Super Tournament Battle for the Nintendo GameCube™ video game system has shipped to retail outlets nationwide. Based on the Japanese sensation that has become a hit TV series and a blockbuster line of Hasbro toys, Super Tournament Battle invites legions of fans to become active competitors and live the complete Beyblade™ experience on console.

Super Tournament Battle is the ultimate Beyblade experience, from the "gotta-have-it" blader to the casual fan, the game features over 150 ways to customize Beyblade tops and parts. Players launch Beyblade tops into tricked-out stadiums, and call upon their Bit Beasts to enhance the strength and speed of their tops as they crash and strike against other Beyblades. The player with the last top

spinning (and still in one piece) at the end of the battle wins. An extreme sports experience where every fan can become an active competitor, Beyblade requires strategy to build and customize battle equipment in pursuit of becoming a World Beyblade Champion.

"Super Tournament Battle offers fans the first opportunity to compete among and against their favorite Beyblade™ characters, test their best strategies, and experience highlights of the TV show with all the interactive elements of the toy," said Nancy MacIntyre, vice president of marketing for Atari. "Kids all over the world are very passionate about Beyblade, and Atari is pleased to offer a game with tons of options and customization that allows every fan to participate in their favorite pastime like never before."

Licensed by Nelvana from d-rights, Beyblade is an enormously popular animated television show. It is the 2nd highest-ranking kids program on ABC Family, Mondays-Fridays 7:30-8 am, with Males 6-11 and Males 9-14. It is also a hugely successful toy based on customizable, high performance tops that compete. To date, over five million tops have been sold in the US alone.

Developed by Takara, Beyblade™: Super Tournament Battle has a rating of 'E' for Everyone and is available for a suggested retail price of \$29.95. For more information on this title, please visit <http://www.atari.com>.

BEVERLY, MA – September 4, 2003 – Atari, Inc. (Nasdaq: ATAR) announced today that it will ship Yu Yu Hakusho®: Spirit Detective™ for Nintendo's Game Boy® Advance this December. Based on the popular TV series, Yu Yu Hakusho® airs weekdays on the Cartoon Network's top-rated Toonami Block, and is one of the top-rated animated series for males 9-14. Yu Yu Hakusho® is licensed in the United States by FUNimation Productions, the force behind such hits as Dragon Ball® and Dragon Ball Z®.

"We believe Yu Yu Hakusho® – with its deep story, memorable characters, and dedicated TV fan base – is a rich franchise with which to make great video games," said Nancy MacIntyre, vice president of marketing for Atari's Beverly studio. "We are excited to once again partner with FUNimation on Yu Yu Hakusho® and hope to duplicate the success that we have achieved with Dragon Ball Z®."

"One of the reasons we love working with the team at Atari is the company's pursuit of the highest standards of quality and authenticity. This effort shines in its release of Yu Yu Hakusho®: Spirit Detective™, and Atari is well on its way to successfully establishing Yu Yu Hakusho® as a premier interactive entertainment franchise on par with its work with Dragon Ball Z®," said Gen Fukunaga, president of FUNimation. "This video game will give fans and gamers in the United States their first chance to interact with this engaging series. We're very excited to see Spirit Detective added to an already impressive list of licensed products."

Yu Yu Hakusho® follows the story of 14-year-old Yusuke Urameshi, a young rebel frustrated by a lack of direction in life. When he unexpectedly sacrifices his own life to save a child from a deadly traffic accident, he is given a second chance and is allowed to return to Earth – but not to the life he left behind. Yusuke has been granted some amazing new powers, and if he wants to live again, he must use them for the cause of good.

Developed by Sensory Sweep Studios, Yu-Yu Hakusho®: Spirit Detective™ allows players to assume the role of six major characters, including Yusuke, Kuwabara, Kurama, Hiei, Botan and Kayko, and explore 22 challenging levels, each recreating the major milestones from the show's Spirit Detective Saga. Each character is armed with several different weapons and abilities from the animated series.

Featuring the well-known story lines from the animated series, Spirit Detective™ also includes some surprises designed to keep the story fresh and exciting for fans.

Yu-Yu Hakusho®: Spirit Detective™ is scheduled to ship this December for Nintendo's Game Boy® Advance at a suggested retail price of \$29.99. This product has not yet been rated by the ESRB.

--Date: Mon, 22 Sep 2003 09:39:52 -0700

Mark DiLuciano of Sunmark Products has announced Sunmark is now accepting pre-orders for the Atari 8-bit computer version of Commando. This unreleased prototype appears to be complete and features great graphics and gameplay. Commando is being released on Sunmark's bankswitching Mega-Cart and can be pre-ordered from <http://www.sunmark.com>

You can discuss Commando and view some screenshots of the game in AtariAge.com's Atari 8-bit Forum.

<http://www.atariage.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=34025>

[This news item courtesy of Atariage.com: <http://www.atariage.com>]

--Date: Tue, 23 Sep 2003 08:29:50 -0700

A new beta version (4.0) of the Atari 8-bit emulator Atari800Win Plus has been released. This is the first new version of Atari800Win Plus in nearly a year, and it has a large number of improvements and bug fixes. Two of the big improvements are cycle-exact emulation and new high-quality sound emulation.

http://www.atariarea.histeria.pl/PLus/index_us.htm

[This news item courtesy of Atariage.com: <http://www.atariage.com>]

--Date: Fri, 26 Sep 2003 18:19:18 -0700

Mark DiLuciano of Sunmark Products has announced a \$500 Graphic Programming Contest for Atari 8-bit computers. All you need to do is deliver an executable that can be loaded on an 8-bit machine, with a maximum file size of 16K. First prize is \$300 cash, second prize \$150, and third prize \$50. The art can be on any subject matter, and can even be animated. The contest will run until October 20th, 2003, with winners announced on November 1st. For complete details, visit <http://www.atariage.com/forums/viewtopic.php?t=34470>

[This news item courtesy of Atariage.com: <http://www.atariage.com>]

--From: Steven J Tucker

--Date: Sun, 14 Sep 2003 21:43:09 GMT

Pre-ordering starts today for my 8Mbit Flash Multi-Cart/Disk-Cart/Homebrewing Cartridge, with shipment of all orders by 09/22.

The cartridge is professionally produced, with open-source software and extensive documentation.

Limited edition pricing is \$39.99 per cartridge, with a shipping discount for buying five. After 9/22 the price will increase to \$44.99.

For complete product information and the order form go to:

<http://www.atarimax.com/>

or directly to the MaxFlash cartridge page at:

<http://www.atarimax.com/flashcart/documentation/>

Highlights:

-> TRUE 8Mbit (1M Byte X 8) Flash design.

-> Entire 8Mbit flash space reprogrammable in-system.

-> Hobbyist oriented design, no surface mounted parts, reasonable price.

-> Highest quality color labels.

-> Easily create and share your cartridge projects with anyone.

-> Supported by the same open-source perl/6502 development kit as the 1Mbit cartridge.

--From: Ernest R. Schreurs

--Date: Wed, 01 Oct 2003 00:45:32 +0200

Hi All. It has been a while since I posted something here. Today I updated my homepage a bit. My page contains several programs for the die-hard Atari cassette users. There are still lots of those around. The wav2cas program that I wrote in may of 1997 has been updated slightly. Some users had problems with the .wav files that some sampling programs produced. I have modified the program such that it will now skip the parameters that used to confuse it. Also, since I happened to be using a program that could only sample 16 bit values, I added support for 16 bit samples too. That is not more reliable, it just takes up more space, but that particular program could just not be forced to use 8 bit samples. Sounds familiar, forcing people to use 16 bits. I have not tested it a lot, so if you download it and discover a problem, let me know. For those of you that were not able to process .wav files before, this new version might work with your setup now. If not, let me know.

Also, I have added a program that another Atari user sent me. It will let you take a DOS file, i.e. a .com or a .xex file, and then create a .cas file out of it, optionally adding a boot loader. After writing it to a real cassette with the cas2wav program and a .wav player, the tape can then be used on a real Atari. This allows users to download stuff from the internet and write it to real tapes. I suppose this would also work for .bas files. Give the program a try, and send the author your comments! Also, I have added a link to the ATART program webpage, which allows editing of .cas files.

My webpage is still at

<http://home.planet.nl/~ernest>

Keep those XL's/XE's buzzing!

Opinion
Why We All Need Our S.P.A.C.E.
By David Sherwin

I've been seeing some troubling news appear in the pages of the S.P.A.C.E. newsletter over the past few months. There's been a Presidential move, talk of declining club participation, and even whispers that S.P.A.C.E. might be forced to disband in the near future.

As the new kid on the block, my thoughts are probably the least valid of any member's -- what have I contributed to this club? -- but, as they reflect the views of an outsider, I think that they are certainly pertinent to this discussion.

As some of you may know, I live in Calgary, Canada, which is a city that is roughly the size of Minneapolis. Calgary, like most North American cities of a good size, did have an active Atari users' group in the '80s and '90s, but it quietly disappeared before I moved to this city in 1997. I haven't found a trace of it anywhere.

The last Atari users' group in my province, the Edmonton Atari Computer Enthusiasts (E.A.C.H.) dissolved in a flurry of finger-

pointing, bitter recriminations, and actual litigation in 1997. The last days of E.A.C.H. provide interesting reading in the Law Society Library, but I've always felt this to be an unfitting (if bizarrely interesting) end to a group that helped develop the only Atari ST line of clones in North America.

Most of the other Atari users' groups in Canada have followed this sad fate. I was a member of the Toronto Atari Federation for many years, and recall that it used to be the largest Atari users' group in North America. TAF faded away last year.

I now maintain my ties to the Atari community in North America through long-distance communication lines. I became a member of S.P.A.C.E. last year after nominating myself to be the newsletter editor of S.P.A.C.E.'s sister group, S.C.A.T. (the Suburban Chicago Atarians). I'd always known about S.P.A.C.E., of course, just as anyone who'd read any Atari-related magazine article or engaged in an on-line discussion would have heard about WAACE (gone) or ABACUS (still alive). S.P.A.C.E. is a survivor, and I'd always assumed it to be invulnerable to dissolution through disinterest. It's frightening to see that I'm wrong.

Some of you may recall Ian Chadwick, who wrote, among other things, a book called "Mapping the Atari" for the 8-bits back in '84 and most of the instruction manuals for a Canadian software company called Batteries Included. I conducted an interview with Ian Chadwick some months ago regarding the history of his involvement with the Atari community, and asked him what he thought about the future of Atari users' groups. He suggested that users' groups would survive as long as there was interest, and he compared them with groups that kept 19th-century locomotive engines running. "It's mainly about nostalgia", he suggested.

There's undoubtedly some merit to this analogy, but it doesn't run very deep. I could probably run a 19th-century locomotive (or have a very good idea how it might work) with access to a good library and stack of historical documents. Computers are too complex for trial-and-error methods of operation, though, and their proper use is contingent on a large group of knowledgeable owners who can tell you that "Galaxian" shouldn't go into the right-hand cartridge of an 800, or that it is, in fact, possible to create graphics with the XEP80 unit. Some of this information used to be available in public libraries, but that's mostly gone now. Almost all printed material regarding Atari machines is now in the hands of private collectors, and it is becoming increasingly scarce as stocks are destroyed through neglect or deliberate action.

I don't, however, mean to suggest that the role of the Atari owner is one of computer historian, although that will be an increasingly important role for us. The Atari computers were remarkably complex machines, and most commercial software written for them really didn't exploit their capabilities. I've seen the release of some truly remarkable games in the last 12 months, and projects are being developed right now to enable true stereo sound on the 8-bits (a dual POKEY upgrade, with 8 voices!) and enhanced graphics capabilities. I'm also upgrading my 8-bit with an external hard drive, and may "rack it" at a later date. I'm not going to be able to do this on my own.

I think, ultimately, that too many clubs assume that their membership is static and comes from a small, and shrinking, pool of computer users. I think I'm a good point disproving this theory. I was 10 when I received my '800 in '83 and 19 when Atari dropped all support for the 8-bits in 1992, though I did continue to use my computer. I remember that I did type an article or two for the TAF newsletter, but couldn't really participate in the group. How could a 12 year-old compete with an Ian Chadwick, after all? I returned to my Ataris a

few years ago after realizing that most of the "old guard" had retired, and that no one was stepping in to replace them. I bet you that there's lots of 20- and 30- somethings out there right now who have fond memories of their XEGS or Mega ST, though, who'd love to become involved in a users' group...if they knew it existed. S.P.A.C.E. should continue, if for no one else, than them. And why not? There will always be new users and owners, and they do have no where else to turn.

I could suggest that S.P.A.C.E. place fliers in the local universities (an excellent place to start) or try advertising on the local community channel (cheaper than you think), but will leave that to the club executive.

I've also got something up my sleeve that may just help to revive club membership. I'll keep that secret for now, though.

S.P.A.C.E. has been around for over 21 years, now, and it's evolved into something that's part social group, part "retro-gaming-computer club", and part computer library. I think that this a very good thing, and in that it serves a useful purpose to a great many people. There is, clearly, still a need for S.P.A.C.E. in our world.

These Towers Are Worth Climbing

"Tower Toppler" (TT) has been the object of considerable interest -- and derision -- since it was first "discovered" in a palette of items reportedly acquired by B&C Computervisions in 1995. It's been rumoured that "Tower Toppler" (curiously renamed from the more well-known "Nebulus") was being ported over to the 8-bit line by software house Hewson to bolster the XEGS library, but was mysteriously canned in the later stages of its development as interest in the 8-bit line declined. The ultimate cartridge release of TT in the late '90s was subsequently greeted with great excitement by hardcore 8-bit enthusiasts -- until they discovered that it appeared to be black-and-white on their fancy display systems. TT went back into the doghouse.

I'm happy to report, however, that TT does indeed boast a modest graphical palette -- the result of some pretty funky, if not entirely effective, graphic mode 8 artifacting -- although you'll need to hook up your computer to a good old composite monitor (or a TV) to enjoy the effect.

Gamers who take some effort to accommodate TT's quirky display modes should find this game to be an extremely pleasant surprise. TT features smooth-scrolling arcade action, acceptable sound effects, and enough puzzles to challenge even the most jaded gaming fan. TT is, in reality, a revolving, graphically advanced version of "Miner 2049er" -- and is possibly the best platformer for the 8-bit computers.

Gameplay

TT/Nebulus enthusiasts should be thrilled to discover that all of the game's most unique elements have been successfully ported to the XL/XE version. Like all platformers, the goal of TT is to climb your frog-like control creature to the top of each level while avoiding a number of gaming hazards. The unique twist here, though, is that gaming platforms (placed around "towers") revolve once players reach the edge of the screen. The intended (and highly-touted) "vertigo" effect that results isn't half-bad, and it does help to create something of a pseudo-3D gaming effect. This was pretty advanced stuff in 1988, and it's still fairly impressive today.

The XE version of the game features a simple level select which can be chosen by pressing the "option" button. The "easy" stream sends players up "The Tower of Eyes", (fairly challenging in itself), which is touted as the game's easiest tower. The "hard" stream transports

gamers to "The Blink of an Eye", which is a tower not found in the 7800 version of the game and extremely difficult to complete; gamers who complete either tower will then be transported to other towers. I haven't been able to progress past the third tower on either level, but it's a fair bet that the XE version of TT contains at least as many -- if not more -- levels than on the 7800.

Most of the towers can be toppled only through techniques that involve some combination of memorization and inspired guesswork. There are gaps in the staircases which wind their way up the towers, and gamers will have to use available "lifts" or jump their way over any chasms they encounter. Doorways are also scattered throughout the tower, and you'll need to enter these in order to make your way past certain hazards. Finally, many of the staircases have strange effects on your control creature and may move it either backwards or forward into a hazard regardless of joystick movement.

Monsters are present on all towers, and all but the bouncing boulders, which can be shot, are indestructible. Unlike most platformers, monsters here won't kill you, but they will knock you down to a lower level of the tower that you're trying to "topple". Gamers who fall into the water or who fail to complete a tower in the allotted 100 seconds will, however, lose a life.

Players who are successful in toppling a tower will be treated to a bonus arcade "fish-catching" segment where, with the aid of a submarine, fish can be caught for bonus points.

While somewhat cheesy, these intermissions to provide players with an opportunity to relax before they attempt to conquer the next tower.

Controls are a bit tricky in this game, as movements are controlled by pressing various combinations of the fire button and use of directional joystick movements. Most game levels include "tricky" segments which may be negotiated only with precision timing and / or jumping; the purchase and use of a good joystick (think Wico) is a necessity.

Graphics

TT utilizes, as one player has described, "nasty artifacted mode 8" in a compromise to achieve both high graphical resolution and a somewhat varied in-game colour palette. You'll only see the "false" artifacting palette on a good composite monitor, though, so you'll definitely have to dig out that old 1702 monitor to play this one.

The results of TT's artifacted display are decidedly mixed and will, unfortunately, vary according to the hardware you've got installed in your computer. On my 800XL, for instance, the towers are green and water is a mixture of browns, greens, and blues; creatures and hazards are white. Intermediate "fish-catching" stages feature blue-toned oceans and brown-and-beige toned ocean floors that is a visual duplicate of the 7800 version of the game. This is, overall, an acceptable display mix with which most gamers should be satisfied.

On my XEGS, however, the gaming palette is green, neon-pink, and a number of intermediary shades which simply look terrible. I've been told that, for this reason, TT is best played on 64K XL machines which have older versions of the 8-bit's graphic OS.

TT otherwise boasts graphics resolution which is very high for an 8-bit arcade game. Your creature (which looks more like a mini hippo than a frog) waddles comically up those endless sets of stairs, and the bouncing boulders and eyes look like...bouncing boulders and eyes.

The revolving jacks-like creatures haven't been completed in the XE conversion, however, and they float along merely as pixelly blobs.

Tower revolutions are impressively smooth and staircases are monochromatically pleasant.

While perhaps not a showcase for the 8-bit computers, it's clear that TT's graphic notoriety is clearly undeserved.

Sound Effects and Music

Sound effects in this version of TT seem to have been copied directly from the 7800 version of the game. While TT does feature some of the best music and sound effects to be found on the 7800, the results are simply "OK" on the XL/XE which, as we all know, can do so much better with efforts properly coded to take full advantage of POKEY. TT's blips and bleeps are, nevertheless, otherwise suitable to the game's surreal science-fiction theme.

Summary

TT has suffered an inordinate amount of inaccurate bad press that has undoubtedly discouraged many Atari enthusiasts from acquiring this underrated gem.

Many classic gamers have questioned the Tramiels' decision to repackage their 8-bit computers as game machines in the late '80s, but it cannot be doubted that the XEGS helped to bolster the 8-bit library with some true gaming masterpieces. Players who previously thought "Airball" and "Deflektor" to be the epitome of development at the old Atari Corp are well advised to give this surprisingly excellent platformer a try.