



SHIFT838 Newsletter

APRIL 12, 2016

VOLUME 2, NO 2

This newsletter is dedicated to the ongoing support for the Texas Instruments TI-99/4A and Myarc Geneve 9640 user community and is published by SHIFT838.

Welcome to Volume 2 Issue #2 of the SHIFT838 Newsletters!

Most of you are aware that I have been working on moving my SHIFT838 web site from wix.com to 99er.net. It is about 98% moved and I just need to move a couple of more pages. I will post on AtariAge and probably send out a small subscriber letter when that move is completed. Hopefully I can put in a re-direct address on the current site to take care of the rest. You can still utilize the new page that is hosted on 99er.net for the Chat application, which is very cool.

<http://shift838.99er.net>

I have been extremely busy with putting the final code my FuSiON BBS system and traveling to sites for work for a new project my company is deploying. The newsletters will most likely continue to be published every few months.

I also wanted to give a shout out and recognize that **Ciro Barile** that host the '**TI-99 Italian User Group**' at <http://www.ti99iuc.it>. He also helped to create some graphics for use in my PDF newsletters as well as started converting them over to Italian language for our Italian friends.

In this issue I wanted to post the interview that **Ciro** and I had with **Scott Adams** as well as review the new open source USB keyboard project for the TI-99/4A developed by **Matthew Splett** otherwise known on AtariAge as '**JediMatt42**'

Thanks to all that have subscribed!

Scott Adams Interview

I am sure that many of us including myself spent countless hours playing an adventure or other games by Scott Adams. I was able to secure some time with Scott and thought that many of us would enjoy some of the questions I had.

Chris: What started you on the path of computing and what was your first experience with a computer?

Scott:

When I was around 10 years old in early 1960s my elementary school class went for a visit to the computer center at University of Miami. I saw all the people behind a glass wall working on a large main frame and I said I wanted to go in. they said I couldn't but maybe in the future.

In high school around 1968 or so they got a remote terminal to the University of Miami that they would allow students to use. It was running APL/360 and I was hooked. It virtually became my terminal. I would stay late at night and get locked in after hours and would come early in the morning and was allowed to be let in with the janitorial staff. My first major program was tic-tac-toe against the computer.

Chris: Did you take any computer courses to start you in the field, and if so what were they and how much time did you invest?

Scott: I was self-taught. I bought the manual for APL and read it and experimented. I was supposed to go to college to become a doctor. I changed my mind and went for a computer science degree. I managed to land a job in the college computer center. When I left I was a prime programmer at the college and in charge of all the financial software. I was also receiving free tuition remission as well.

Chris: What was your favorite vintage computer system and why?

Scott: They were all great. My first personal machine was a Sphere. I was their first order. It was a kit computer. The first year they have a contest of what do you use your computer for. I entered a tank war game I had written, I also designed a video card for the computer (it was a text only machine) and tank style controllers for 2 players to play the game with. I won the contest!

Later I had many of the myriad classic machines. My first "appliance" computer(not self-built) was a TRS-80 model 1 with 16k memory and Level 2 Basic from Microsoft. I did a lot of work with that and that was the machine I developed Adventureland on.

Chris: What inspired you to develop '*Adventureland*'?

Scott: I played Crowther and Wood Adventure on a mainframe. I had been wanting to do some sort of game using the Microsoft basic and strings. This sort of game seemed perfect to me to learn and experiment with.

Chris: How involved were you with Texas Instruments to develop the Adventure Cartridge?

Scott: I did all the programming etc. It was an amazing machine on the inside and I was very impressed with it. I developed a way to get the adventure game with graphics on the cartridge and hired an artist to do all the graphics with my system.

Chris: Did you develop or help develop the Adventure Programming Language used with the Adventure Cartridge and if so what were your primary goals for this language?

Scott: There were 2 cartridges. Return to pirate island (the graphic one) and the master cartridge for the text games. That was my adventure programming language I created for Adventureland. I found I could easily translate and move it to many different machines.

Chris: Which adventure for the TI-99/4A was your favorite and why?

Scott: The last one, '**Return To Pirates Island**' that was the graphically adventure. It was a lot of fun creating that.

Chris: When you programmed your adventures for use on the TI, did you use a specific editor that you created? If so can you explain what the editor was or how you would go about programming the adventure?

Scott: Yes I did, I wrote all the games at time on a trs-80 model I and then transferred the databases to other machines. I then created the data base interpreter on each machine in assembler depending on its CPU.

Chris: What was some of the key differences for porting your adventures to other computer systems?

Scott: Each machine would have different challenges and different hardware. One of the Commodore Vic-20 had so little main memory that the interpreter and database had to go in the cartridge. I found I need a couple hundred more bytes to get it to fit and was stumped. Commodore engineer said I could remove the automatic loader in the cartridge to get some space. So that is why on the vic-20 you have to type in a magic SYS number to start the games.

Chris: Was there any main hurdle that you can remember that you had to overcome to get your adventures to work on the TI-99/4A?

Scott: Only thing I remember was the keyboard was horrible. I think that was what killed the machine in the long run. What a shame.

Chris: What are your thoughts about the various emulators today that can be used on the PC, MAC and Unix computers for the TI-99/4A?

Scott: Wonderful! I am glad to see that it is still alive today.

Chris: Do you peruse any of the vintage computer forums like AtariAge?

Scott: Sorry I don't I am on Facebook and a member of a few 8 bit pages there.

Chris: Do you still own a TI-99/4A or any other vintage computer system?

Scott: The only vintage computer I own is a TI-99/4a with a game cartridge. I was real proud of Return TO Pirate's Island.

Chris: How involved were you with the "Adventure International" company who published so many Adventure games for the TI? (Did you write all the stories and gameplay mechanics, or were there other creators who developed plots alongside you?)

Scott: Yes that was my company. All the adventure games for the TI were mine. There were a few co-authors in my game line. 2 of them to be exact. Pyramid of doom and Golden Voyage.

Chris: What was your level of involvement (if any) with the Adventure editor which allowed TI users to create unique adventures which would work on the Adventure cartridge?

Scott: That most have been after the fact. I suspect it is built on the Scott Free version of my gaming system.

Chris: If there was one thing you could change or accomplish for the TI-99/4A and you could use the Back To The Future Time Machine, what would that be?

Scott: Not have them go out of business 3 months after releasing Return to Pirate Island. I really think the game could have sold a lot more.

Chris: Programmers like myself are still making Adventures for the adventure cartridge, what would you say to us about this?

Scott: I am so glad my system is still being used. I went to modify it an today it is the basis for the newer games I released such as Return to Pirates Island 2 (similar to the original game but full sentences and some extra puzzles and The Inheritance) see my web page at www.msadams.com

Chris: Did you ever imagine that your adventures would be so widely known and enjoyed by users from all walks of life and different computer systems?

Scott: No I was doing it because I was having fun and wanted others to have fun too.

Chris: Would you consider making a comeback and develop some new Adventures that has the Scott Adams flair for the TI-99/4A? If so, have you put any thought into the adventure scenario that you would like to work on and could you give us any clues?

Scott: Yes.

An TI user in Italy named BDB would like to know:

BDB: Do you think the new ePub and Kindle standards would be a new opportunity for popular interactive fiction games and if so have you already thought about experimenting with this platform?

Scott: I don't think they have the flexibility of my system but who can tell what the future will bring.

Monthly Highlights

- **TI-99/4A Fest West** COMING! – On April 30, 2016! An event where many TI'ers get together to do what else you ask? Talk about the TI! To read more check out the thread on AtariAge:

<http://atariage.com/forums/topic/248617-pnw-ti-994a-fest-west-2016-april-30th/#entry3430447>

- JediMatt42's USB TI Keyboard and keep watch for is Geneve 9640 USB Keyboard Adapters!

<http://atariage.com/forums/topic/242816-usb-keyboard-adapter-warduino-style-components/>

<http://ti994a.cwfk.net/index.html>

- Super Mario for TI-99/4A – requires F18A – but it's going to be great!

<http://atariage.com/forums/topic/248059-super-ti-99-mario-bros-f18a-required/>

- New Version of TIMXT! – 80 column, ANSI terminal viewer with 38400 support on native TI with F18A!

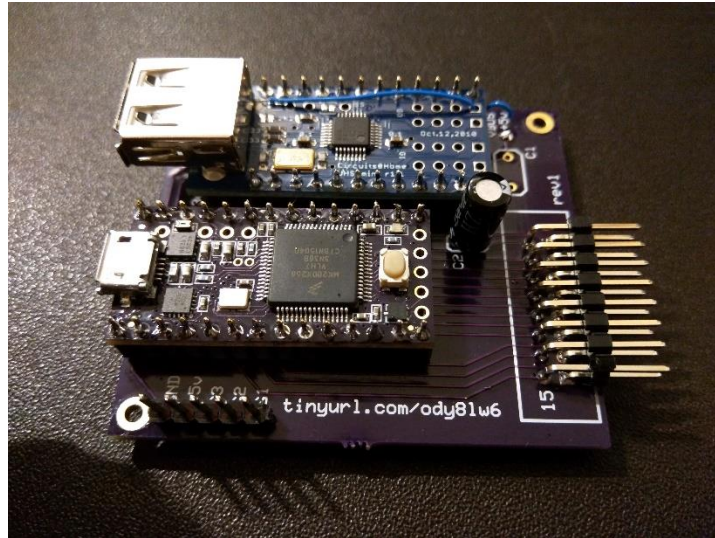
<http://atariage.com/forums/topic/249947-some-interesting-things-are-afoot-with-timxt-and-the-bbss/?p=3460287>

- **Serial Bridge with Mame/MESS** – Tutorial for all the emulation users that enjoy MAME/MESS to get an old school type feel for calling BBS.

<http://atariage.com/forums/topic/248897-serial-bridge-with-mame/?p=3435266>

Hardware

In this edition I want to highlight the **USB Keyboard** by Matthew Splett, otherwise known as 'JediMatt42' on Atariage.



This keyboard modification allows open source Arduino parts to be used together in order to hook up a USB keyboard up to the TI-99/4A while the old keyboard is still attached and functional!

Matt has come up with a circuit board design to mount all the necessary components within the TI-99/4A. It takes an hour or so depending on your soldering skills to get this done. This project also has updateable firmware for when Matt finds bugs or wants to improve his code.

I was lucky enough to have one provided to me so I could review it (Thanks Matt!). I have even purchased the required components and built a second USB keyboard interface for my backup TI-99/4A.

The step by step instructions on Matt's website are easy to follow. The system is easy to install and upgrade when needed. And all the files including the PCB layout files are included on Matt's website.

If you use your TI-99/4A often as I do and do not want to use the stock keyboard and with the RAVE99 keyboards very scarce and these components to build this project are widely available then this is the project for you.

I have been using it extensively for the last couple of months. Although I have found certain issues that I have reported, which were quickly resolved. All and all this keyboard project is worth it. Since I have been editing a lot of code recently my code updates have gone much faster with the standard PC keyboard.

Don't get me wrong, I still love my TI stock keyboard but when it comes to coding I prefer the standard keyboard.

Matt is also working on a version that is coming along nicely for the Geneve 9640. You can read about his entire projects at:

<http://ti994a.cwfk.net/index.html>

Software

TIMXT

Insane Multitasker has been working hard to get the routines down to better improve his version of Super Mass Transfer which supports File Transfers, full ANSI and 80 column on a TI-99/4A with an F18A video upgrade. With the latest code update all of us F18A users can now obtain a blazing speed for 38400 bps to connected boards (if the board supports that speed).

If you were around when 300 baud was considered fast and we all heard the hype that we could never go faster than that as the phone lines would handle it. The TI baud rate is now 128 times faster!

The leaps and bounds that key developers in our community has been able to create in order to make our TI experience better just astounds me.

FuSiON BBS – Most know I have been coding this BBS off and on for around 3 years. Thanks to **Insane Multitasker** to allow me to utilize his assembly routines. I have launched the BBS in a **test** state to identify issues, which a few have crept up. I have addressed the code issues and I am currently finalizing the documentation for release. If you have not connected in via Telnet please give it a shot.

Please note this will run on real iron TI/Geneve hardware or via **MESS/MAME** emulation. The BBS I have thrown up is currently running on MESS emulation.

The reason I wanted to create a BBS was to see if I could do it as I never coded a XB portion of a BBS completely before and to see if I could get it to work on MESS/MAME emulator as well as give our user community an option to run a BBS even if they did not have a real TI or Geneve system.

I want to thank Insane Multitasker for allowing me to use his assembly routines and for sticking with me and all my questions, code review and help as well as implementing the carrier detect routines I needed in order to run the BBS on emulation. There are different machine language based on whether real hardware or emulated hardware is being used for the '**carrier detect**'.

The BBS will be released for **FREE** to the TI/Geneve community.

If you like what you see and want to run a BBS with my **FuSiON BBS** software then send me a direct email.

Highlighted User System



For 2016 I want to highlight a system for every newsletter. Once a system has been submitted the TI'er does not have to submit again. To submit your system for consideration please send me a PM on AtariAge or direct email with a subject of **'Submission for TI Highlighted System'**.

The system does not have to be a completely decked out or an expanded system. It's really about the story of how the fellow TI'er came into the TI fold and why they like the machine so much. I want to include a personal story from each TI'er chosen to help the rest of us learn a bit about them.

If your system was not chosen this time, don't fret there are plenty more newsletters.

The SHIFT838 Highlighted system for this edition is **Gregory McGills** system(s) from Portland, Oregon. See the picture(s) below. A very nice TI and Geneve 9640 setup.

Greg has 3 systems and the pictures are from left to right.





System #1:

TI-99/4A Console with F18A video upgrade, NanoPEB and LCD display

System #2:

Myarc Geneve 9640
Peripheral Expansion Box
HFDC controller
DS/DD 5.25 and DSHD 3.5 floppy drives
Seagate ST-251 40mb MFM hard drive
Samsung 910MP analog RGB display hooked up via SCART
Logitech bus mouse hacked for Geneve
104 Key Keyboard
TI RS232 card with HDX modification
External Power supply for Hard drive

System #3:

TI-99/4A console
Gram Kracker
Speech Synthesizer
Peripheral Expansion Box
Foundation 128k RAM card with XBII EPROM
CorComp DS/DD Floppy Disk Controller
2 x 5.25 DSDD ½ height drives
1 x 3.5 720k
1 x HXC disk emulator
TI RS232 card with HDX modification
SID Card
Mechatronic Mouse
TI 10" Color monitor
Myarc Personality Card
Myarc WDS/100 Hard Disk System with Rodime 15mb MFM hard drive
Wico bat-handle joystick with TI adapter box

Greg's favorite piece of hardware for each system is as quoted:

- TI - Gram Kracker because I can replace my OS GROMS and also have 80k of ROM/GROM reloadable from disk any time
- Geneve - The Geneve itself, a great computer with more everything
- OtherTI - The F18a which allows for VGA and cool new features

The below is a direct quote of how Greg came into the TI and is his personal story.

WARNING!!! Long story but a good one! Read On!

"I got into computers young, I had to play any video game or electronic learning tool when I was a kid. I spent hours and hours at the local arcade and had to play any arcade game we came across at pizza joints and shopping malls.

Once I found out you could break programs on the Apple II's at my Jr high and list them I quickly learned some basic language. I immediately started pressuring the parents for a computer at home. I used the TI-99/4A at a friend's house and had already written a few programs in TI basic and saved them to cassette. I took computer classes in high school but they were on the TRS-80 line, which I could only use at school.

The Christmas TI decided to drop the 99/4A console to \$50 plus you got a free speech synthesizer if you sent in two proof of purchases for 2 cartridges was when they finally gave in and bought me my own computer. I got the TI-99/4A with a RF modulator, Football and Car-wars. By the end of the holiday vacation I'd had enough of crashing cars and losing at football, so I took the money I earned moving lawns to Kmart and anywhere else I could find TI cartridges and bought as many games as I could find and also Extended Basic. I spent a lot of time programming and determined I needed more than just the basic console. I quickly determined that if I really wanted to use my TI to its full potential I'd need an expansion box. By then TI had dropped out of the home computer business so I was unable to find any P-boxes anywhere for sale at any price. And the ones I did finally find were way out of my budget. Finally I found one for sale in the Penny-saver classifieds for a reasonable price. I finally had a disk drive, memory expansion and rs232 card and could use it to its full potential!

I joined the Tri Valley 99ers users group who met at a local bank one evening a month and learned that there were many other "tI orphans" in the area and we could all exchange software and experiences and learn about new things coming out for the TI there.. I ended up being President of this group due to the fact that I was the person doing more with their TI every week than everyone else! We had the Myarc representative visit and he showed us the Geneve computer and all of its features. I **HAD** to have one so I convinced him to sell me his demonstration unit when he was done showing it off to everyone. I stayed with the group into my 20's until the amount of members dwindled down and it wasn't worth having meetings anymore.

I also set up my BBS on the TI-99/4A in the early 80s. Originally as a way to get more software for my 99/4A without costing myself long distance charges. Let the other people pay to call MY BBS and upload the programs to me! In 1986 I built a XT computer and moved the BBS off my TI so I could have the TI back for my own use. I still have my BBS running at **thekeep.net** on the internet and with one modem for dial-in access.

I got into other computers over the years with school and work but I've always kept my original 4/A and the extra PBOX as it was too heavy to ship. I sold my Geneve in the late 80's to a gentleman in Texas which I later regretted. He had a lightning

strike at his home and it pretty much destroyed the computer. I bought a broken Geneve later on and I had it repaired by *Richard Bell* which brought it back into my collection. I have always picked up any extra TI gear I found in my travels and have amassed a large collection of consoles, software, cards and P-boxes. etc..

The online users group, and now the TI-99/4A AtariAge forums really has given back the community I was missing in the TI world. It is so great to be able to email or post and get a response from not only other owners of the computer but also the people that developed the software and some of the hardware in the first place. I have been privileged to be involved in some of the new hardware and software projects to help revive interest in the computer for both new users just starting to find out about the TI and also old-hats who have been away for a while!

I credit the 99/4A with allowing me to develop my skills in development, problem solving and communications systems which has served me well in my career as a Network Engineer and IT Operations manager. I have the background to figure out things that my peers just scratch their head and say "how does that work". When you have had to build your own cables or write your own program for pretty much ANYTHING to connect to your computer and work properly, setting up a LAN is a breeze in comparison!"

Calling All GAMERS!

**GAME OVER YOU GOT A
HIGH SCORE
ENTER YOUR INITIALS**

Owen Brand (*Opry99er*) has started a TI Gaming competition on AtariAge where a TI-99/4A game is chosen every month and TI'ers can compete to see who can get the highest score. At the months end the person with the highest scores receives some type of prize.

If you want to read the message thread in its entirety and possibly participate in the friendly competition then click below:

<http://atariage.com/forums/topic/241547-official-ti-994a-hi-score-competition/page-1>



Brain T.I. Laser

Ok so no one was able to figure out my below **Super-Secret SHIFT838 Message**

8512884887367952358485128176963277283584940881763696

So I will give everyone a hint, read Volume 1 Issue #2 of the SHIFT838 Newsletter.

If you figure it out send me an email at shift838@att.net with what the message is.

Sorry, no prizes, but the first one to figure it out gets bragging rights and will be mentioned in the next edition of the newsletter along with how they figured it out.

Also with this newsletter, I thought it was fitting to mention no one has been able to find my Easter egg in my adventure, '*The Stafford Predicament*' that is used with the Adventure module. This adventure game can be downloaded off the FTP site or my BBS.



Resources

Contact information

To contact me please feel free to visit my website and click on the 'Contact' tab.

<http://shift838.99er.net>

Newsletter Topics

If you would like to participate in the writing of this newsletter or provide any topics for this newsletter please contact me via my web site.

Sites

There are a few of sites that I think should get their own list below. These are for the TI Hall of Fame and TI-99ers Unsong website. Please visit these below sites as both have great information.

<http://www.ti99hof.org/index.html>

<http://www.ti99ers.org/unsung/>

Floppy Days

Randall Kindig's Floppy Days: A great resource for PODCASTERS to listen about information about old computer systems!

These are the links available for '**Floppy Days Podcast**' covering the TI-99/4A that have been done over the last few months.

Episode #49 : <http://floppydays.libsyn.com/webpage/2015/11>

Episode #50: <http://floppydays.libsyn.com/webpage/2015/12>

Episode #51: <http://floppydays.libsyn.com/webpage/2016/01>

Episode #52: <http://floppydays.libsyn.com/webpage/2016/02>

Episode #56: <http://floppydays.libsyn.com/webpage/2016/03>

The main web site to Floppy Days:

<http://floppydays.libsyn.com/>

Remembrance

Also the below site has a list of all the TI-99ers that have passed. Please be sure to check them out.

<http://ti99ers.org/modules/Inspire/remember.htm>

Below resources are just a handful of sites that support the TI-99/4A and/or Geneve 9640 computers. It is in no way a full list. This section will be included in all future newsletters. If there is a site that you think should be mentioned then please contact me.

Web sites / FTP Sites

<http://www.99er.net>

<http://www.ninerpedia.org/>

<ftp://ftp.whitech.com>

<http://shift838.wix.com/shift838>

<http://www.ti99-geek.nl/>

<http://www.mainbyte.com>

<http://www.atariage.com>

<http://www.harmlesslion.com>

<http://www.ti99iuc.it>

<http://www.turboforth.net>

<http://www.ninerpedia.org/>

Yahoo List Groups:

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/TI99-4A/info>

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/TI994A/info>

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Geneve9640/info>

<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/turboforth/info>

Active BBS'

FuSiON BBS

Access: Telnet

System: Emulated Geneve 9640 via MESS

Software: FuSiON BBS Software powered by S&T Assembly code

Location: Texas

Content: TI and Geneve file libraries, message bases. Full ANSI support, Text 40 and 80 Column modes and BBS E-mail.

Telnet to: **fusionbbs.ddns.net** port **9640**

HeatWave BBS

Access: Dial-Up and Telnet

System: Geneve 9640

Software: S&T BBS Software

Location: Arizona

Content: TI and Geneve file libraries, message bases, door games and e-mail.

Telnet to: www.heatwavebbs.com port **9640** Dialup : **602-955-4491 @ 8-N-1**

The Hidden Reef

Access: Dial-Up

System: TI-99/4a Modified

Software: S&T BBS Software

Location: New York

Content: TI and Geneve file libraries, message bases, door games and e-mail.

Dialup : **718-448-9402 @ 8-N-1**

The Keep

Access: HTTP and Telnet

System: Pentium 4 running Windows 2000

Software: Worldgroup BBS Software (up to 256 user connections)

Location: Tigard, Oregon

Content: TI and Geneve file libraries, message bases, door games, multi-user and multiplayer games and e-mail.

Telnet : www.thekeep.net port **23** Web browser to <http://www.thekeep.net>

The Keep has TI File libraries, Message bases, e-mail, door games, multi-user and multiplayer games. The keep also has a modem line connected for anyone that would like to contact The Hidden Reef BBS from the internet through The Keep.

Simply telnet to www.thekeep.net on port 23, login to The KEEP and then type **/GO DIALOUT** at the main menu, then D1 to dial out to The Hidden Reef. It's that simple.

Vendors

SHIFT838 – Provides used TI equipment as acquired. Check with me often. A lot of the items need rehoming from other TI Users.

Arcade Shopper – Provides old and new TI equipment, upgrades and new runs of PCBs at www.arcadeshopper.com

Repair Centers

Richard Bell

Repairs available on limited basis, please contact Richard at swim4home@verizon.net for wait-time before sending any repairs

Tim

Myarc-related hardware repairs on a limited, as-available basis. Contact Tim at insane_m@hotmail.com for wait times or to request service.