Amazon

Dr. C. Wacko's Miracle Guide to Designing and programming Your Own Atari Computer Arcade Games

Customer reviews and Editorial

(Current,2017 pricing- Paperback from $70, Spiral-bound from $947)

[4.7 out of 5 stars](#)

[5 star](#) [83%](#)

[4 star](#) [17%](#)

By[RLink](#)on June 29, 2015

Format: Spiral-bound/Verified Purchase

Great shape! Mine had the full color cover showing Dr. Wacko. I like it!

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[5.0 out of 5 starsThis book taught me to program, and as a 15 year old, enjoy it.](#)

By[A. Newman](#)on February 21, 2015

Format: Paperback

Growing up I had the Atari 8-bit and the ST computers, and owned and read nearly every book for the platforms. The computer books if the 80s-90's were no different than today... lots of reference material, rushed and useless pulp books, and occasionally you have a gem like this. I have the version with the crazy artwork on the cover, and I've kept it even though I no longer have the 8-bit Atari. This book taught me to program, and as a 15 year old, enjoy it.

It is a bit tragic that this book's relevance is tied to the (relatively, today) obscurity of the Atari 8-bit computer - because all of the other great qualities still apply. It is original, well structured, entertaining, demonstrates solid understanding of the architecture, and each chapter builds upon and improves work done in the previous chapter. It would be pretty awesome to see this book "updated" for Python + Pygame, as this platform captures much of the "direct access to sound and graphics" that these old micros were so great at.

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ByD. Loewenon March 15, 2010

Format: Paperback/Verified Purchase

I bought this a few years back and never left a review, so here goes. I remember checking this out at the public library in my earlier days of using computers (late 80's/early 90's). It was a big help in understanding the basic principles of programming and software/game design. While much of the technical information is no longer applicable to modern programming, the concepts and the way they are presented here are still valid and alot of fun. The book captures much of the enthusiasm and creative spirit that was prevelant in the early days of home computers. The humor is also pretty good. If you are interested in computer game programming or just want to re-live some of the fun and inspiring moments from a simpler time, this is a good read!

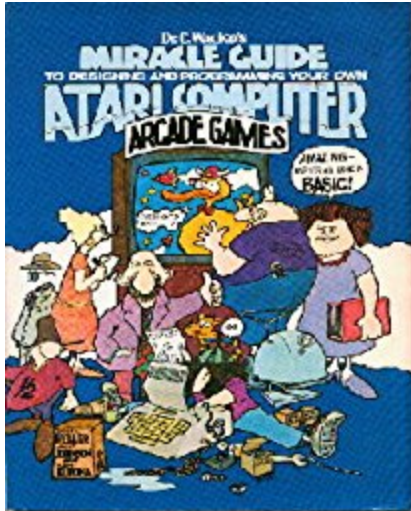Comment/ 2 people found this helpful. Was this review helpful to you?YesNoReport abuse

ByA. P. Chamberlainon July 14, 2010

Format: Paperback

I guess I shouldn't be shocked that used copies of this book are going for over $100. Along with the contemporaneous compilations of articles from the magazines Compute! and Creative Computing that are more readily available (Compute's First Book of Atari, The Creative Atari, etc.), this book pretty much defines the state of hobbyist home computing in the 1980s.

Just like the Atari 8-bit computers (with their parallel, multiprocessor design and asynchronous I/O), this book was way ahead of its time, and just as with the other reviewers here, many of its lessons stuck with me into my software engineering career as I moved on to far more powerful hardware. For example, the book is organized around a series of game-programming projects, each more advanced than the last; each project itself is developed incrementally, documented well, and tested at each stage (recalling the current trend towards agile development methodology). And action-game programming lends itself naturally to an event-loop structure that idles until a key is pressed or a joystick moves, just as '90s procedural GUI frameworks such as Win32 or the Apple Toolbox sit in a loop waiting for a mouseclick or keypress to trigger a function callback.

With its bold, whimsical, passionate approach to learning to program, this is a terrifically engaging book that will make you want to search out an Atari 8-bit machine and a floppy disk drive for it (not too hard to find on eBay), dig out that old TV you put in the basement when you went HD, and do some old-fashioned hacking.

*5.0 out of 5 stars*I used this book so much I litterally wore it out.

ByEric Cableon April 21, 1999

Format: Paperback

I was given this classic about 15 years ago. It was the basis of everything I ever knew about programming in Atari BASIC. Now I am learning Visual Basic and C++. All the basic concept I laened from Dr. C. Wacko still aply. It's unfortunate that due to the fact Atari BASIC and Atari computers have become obsolete, so has this hilarious and educatonal book. It's better than the "complete idiot's guide's" or "...for dummies" books could ever hope to be. Wouldn't it be great if David Heller wrote new books for current programming languages?

*5.0 out of 5 stars*Awesome! Here's the actual cover image.

ByHungryghoston February 11, 2016

Format: Paperback

This was my introduction to Atari BASIC programming! I could never get Myrtle the Turtle to work though. :(

# a tribute: dr. c. wacko and the whiz-bang miracle machine

[kirkjerk](#)

(recent entry on my site http://kirkjerk.com/)

Ever rediscover a half-remembered book from your childhood and realize that it was probably wildly influential on you? Such was the case with David L. Heller and John F. Johnson's "Dr. C. Wacko Presents: Atari BASIC & The Whiz-Bang Miracle Machine". I recently found a good PDF copy at [Atari Mania's Page of Atari 8-bit Books](#)
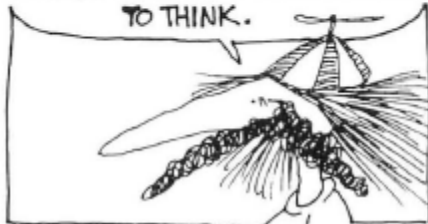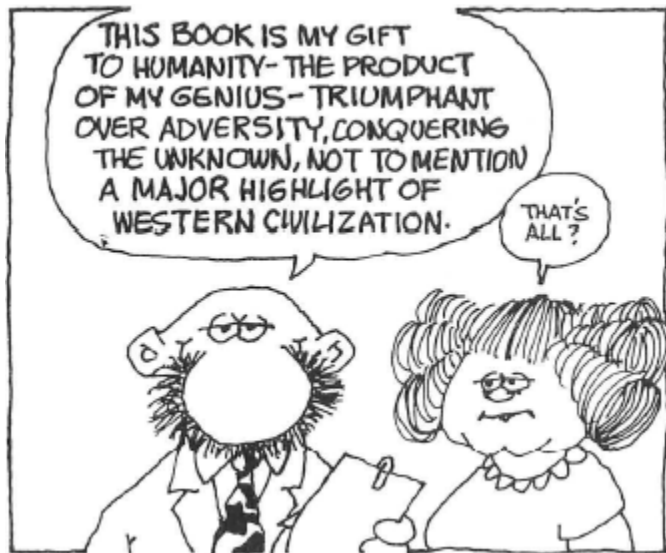
The book was a beginner-level but thorough guide to BASIC programming - I suspect I knew most of it by the time I got my hands on a copy, but it was still very cool. The style can perhaps best be described as "Early Doctor Demento" -- hardly a paragraph goes by without a gag of some kind, but still it seems like it would do a good job of explaining fundamental concepts.

I can even see the book's influence in my own guide to Atari (2600) Programming, [Atari 2600 101](#). (No cartoons, more's the pity.)

I was reminded of this book when I ordered some Eggs Benedict, and I thought about this chart in it:

Anchovy Burritos:	280 Calories each
Twinkle Cakes:	340 Calories a look
Guacamole Juice:	90 Calories per slurp

Clam Dip: 70 Calories a dip
Greaso Burgers: 470 Calories per bun
Quicko TV Dinner: 400 Calories a tray
Pizza a la Hollandaise Sauce: 900 Calories a sniff

I think that for years that was my main image of Hollandaise, some kind of insane calorie vortex. (I guess I forgot how the other foods needed only a glance...)

Atari Mania also finally let me read the book's -- prequel? It was much more advanced, but came first-- companion, "Dr. C. Wacko's Miracle Guide to Designing and Programming Atari Computer Arcade Games". I'd like to think if I had had this book at the appropriate time, I finally would have gotten those damn "player/missile" graphics and in general made some better games.

CUTAWAY OF GROVER'S '59 CADDY SPACESHIP