CPSC 599.82 - Retrogames (Winter/2014)

Tutorial on Stella Atari 2600 Emulator

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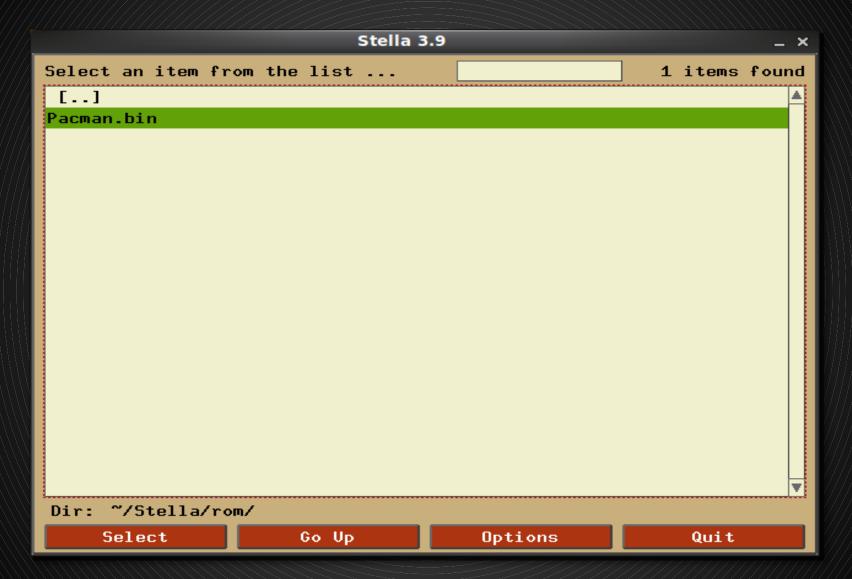
February 1, 2014

Meet the console



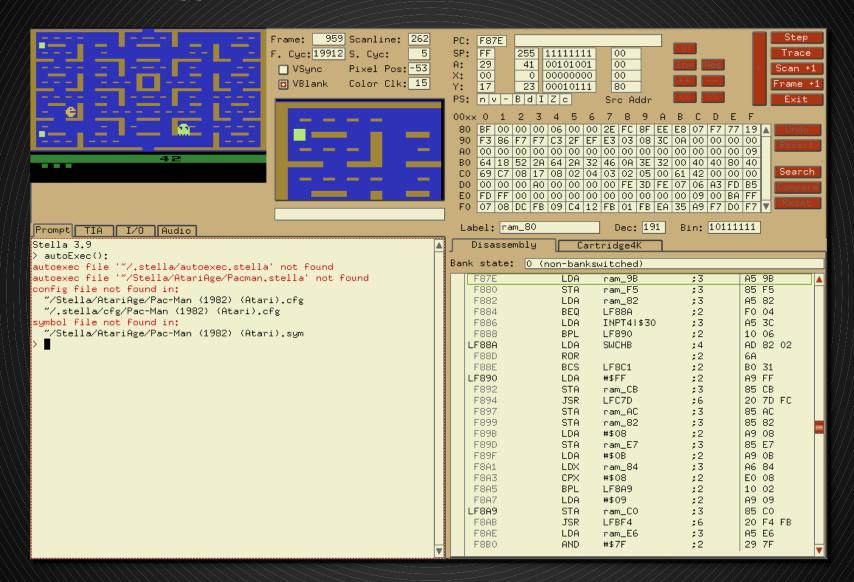


Meet the emulator



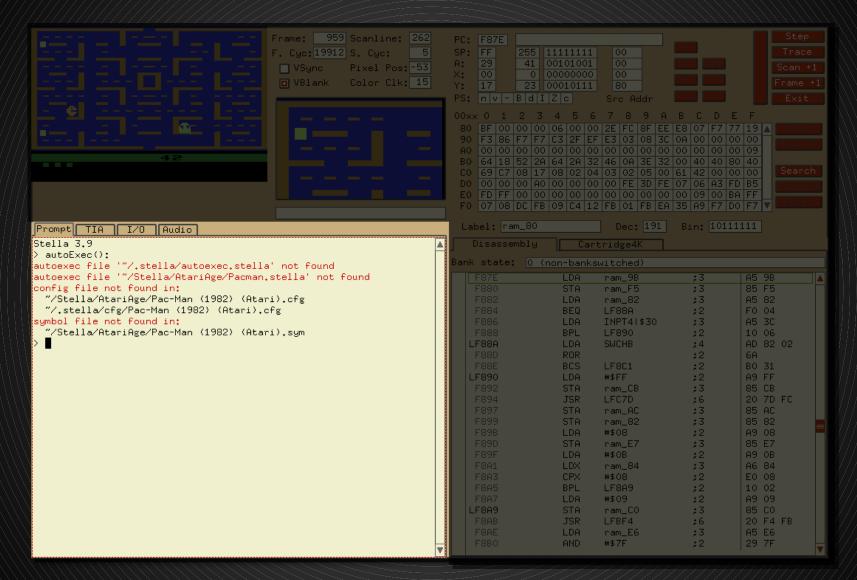


Meet the Debugger



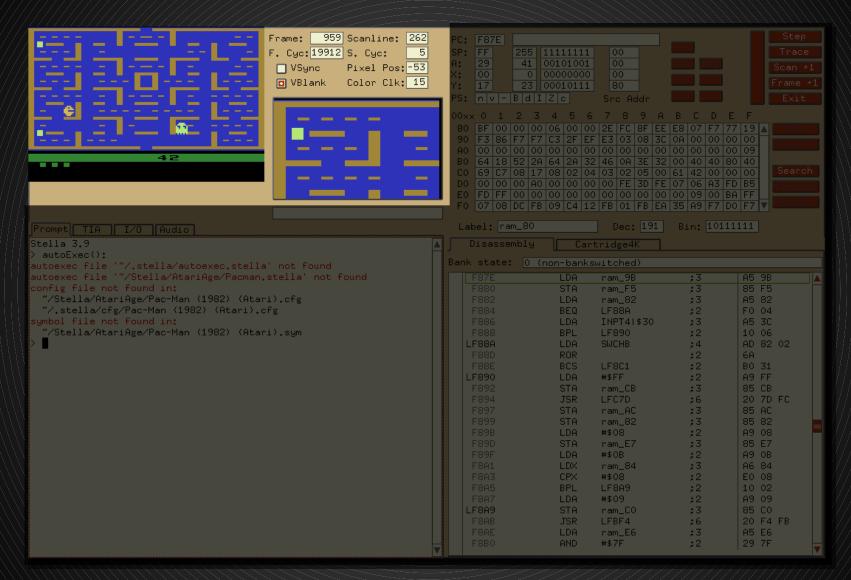


Meet the Debugger: Prompt area



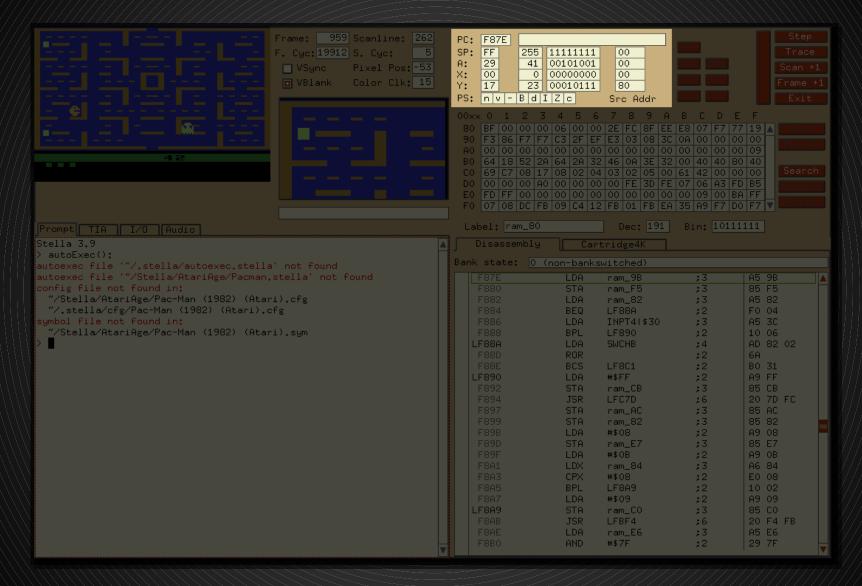


Meet the Debugger: TIA (Display, Info and Zoom)



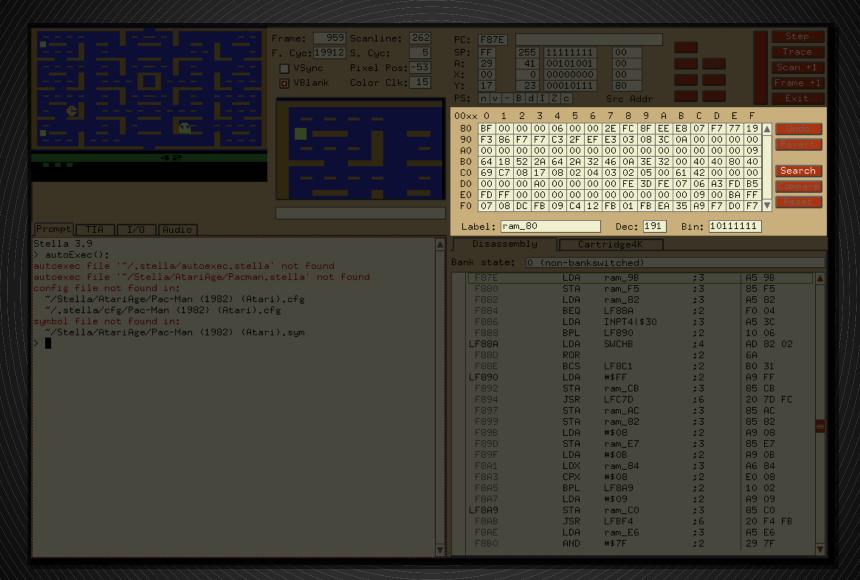


Meet the Debugger: CPU Registers



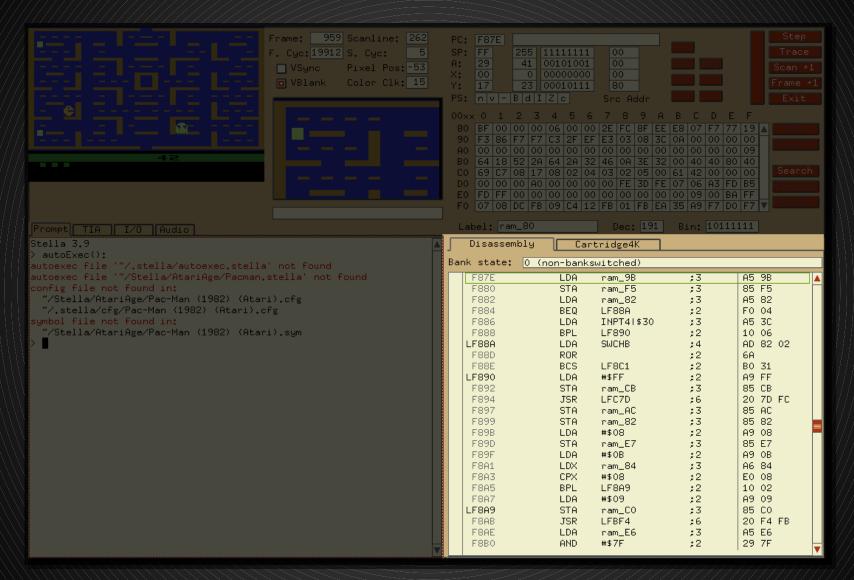


Meet the Debugger: RAM





Meet the Debugger: Disassembly





Before we continue...

A hint/suggestion for some laptop users





Let's hack Pac Man

- Goal: Get infinite lives
- First step: Locate lives in memory
 - Sub tasks: Search memory location, add more lives to confirm it, document it.
- Second: Never lose a life again
 - Sub tasks: Locate the relevant code, change it, test it, save it.



Where are my lives?

Manual method

- Look at the RAM (128 bytes, it's not too hard)
- More difficult if you had extra memory.

Dynamic method

- "Search" for value
- Force the value to change (Kill Pac Man)
- Compare
- Unfortunately, it seems to be buggy! :(



Adding documentation

"define" labels

- Pro: Updates the disassembled code
- Con: It's not persistent

Making notes

- Use your favorite text editor
- Simple and persistent solution
- Special file: <game name>.sym,
 - Where <game name> is given by Stella
 - Works as labels
 - Reload using "loadsym" (removed in 3.9.1)



Hacking the code

Need to identify the code before performing any changes

Manual approach

- Save the disassembled code: savedis
 - Stella 3.9.3 for Windows requires that the file already exists(!?)
- Search for it

Dynamic approach

Let the Debugger find it for you
 (Breakpoints, Watchpoints and Traps)



Stopping the code

Breakpoints

- Stops when PC gets there (break)
- Conditional: Stops when something happens (breakif)

Watches

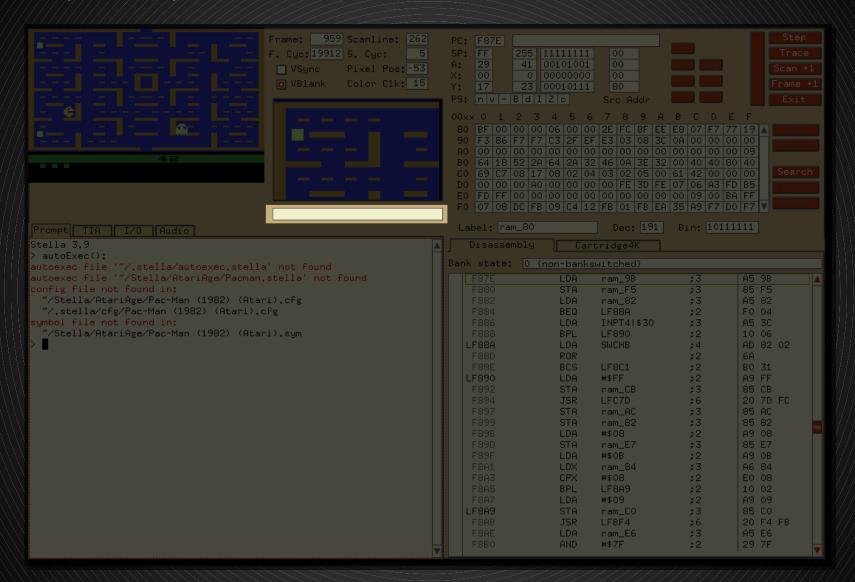
Evaluate and prints expression before prompt (watch)

Trap

 Stops when a memory is read (trapread), written (trapwrite) or accessed (trap)



Breakpoint/Trap Status





Let's hack it!

Summary

- Overview of the Debugger
 - Configuration (optional)
- Change memory (RAM and ROM)
- Some useful commands:
 - define, loadsym (note: loadsym was removed from 3.9.1 and newer)
 - frame, scanline, trace, step
 - break, breakif, watch, trapread, trapwrite, trap
 - savedis, saverom
- References:
 - http://stella.sourceforge.net/docs/debugger.html
 - http://www.atariarchives.org/alp/ (6502 Assembly language)



Appendix A - Some Assembly instructions

Inst	Description	Inst	Description
NOP	No operation	SEC	Set the carry bit
STA	Store A to memory	SBC	Subtract with carry
STX	Store X to memory	CLC	Clear the carry bit
STY	Store Y to memory	ADC	Add with carry
LDA	Load memory to A	CMP	Compare memory and A
LDX	Load memory to X	CPX	Compare memory and X
LDY	Load memory to Y	CPY	Compare memory and Y
INC	Add memory	EOR	Exclusive OR with A
DEC	Decrement memory	ВСС	Branch when carry is clear
JMP	Jump to address	BCS	Branch when carry is set
JSR	Jump to subroutine	BEQ	Branch when zero bit is set
RTS	Return from subroutine	BNE	Branch when zero is clear

