



# The MCCC News

The Metroplex Commodore Computer Club

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## Thoughts on Dread & More on the A500 Mini

It's been a strange almost-couple of years, what with our little global pandemic and all. It seems we've been over the hump at least a couple times, only to see a taller, steeper hump on the horizon. Nobody's happy about it, and everyone is looking for someone to blame for all the inconvenience, illness and (hopefully not) death. Maybe it's those who don't do enough, or those who get on others' cases for not doing what they think should be done, or those who do nothing out of fear and mistrust, or those who actively make things worse for everyone while bashing those intending to make things better. There's plenty of blame to spread around, honestly, but I think all the acrimony and conflict has dragged it all out longer than it should have, and allowed more new virus mutations to keep the pandemic rolling that much longer. Either way, if you're out there screaming and aggressively coughing at some low-paid WalMart employee who's just trying to enforce the home office's policy, you're probably not part of the solution.

Back to Amiga-related topics like I should be doing, there have been a few topics that have extended beyond the standard sphere of hard-core fans, at least a little. One is the new 3D first-person shooter game "Dread" created by KK/Altair that has an official first-level demo release for Amiga (and Atari ST). Based on what I have seen through online videos, the game, or at

least the part the demo covers, is visually similar to a halfway point between the original DOOM and its predecessor, Wolfenstein 3D, reminding a bit of the Amiga game GLOOM, but with a bit more variety in the apparent height of walls or objects. There don't appear to be textured floors, or raised/sunken areas or stairs, at least not in the demo, though that may change in later levels.

That's not really the point, however. What IS the point is that unlike basically every DOOM-style FPS seen previously on the Amiga, it is capable of running in full-screen on an Amiga 500 with 1 meg of memory at an acceptable speed. While it might not have the bells and whistles of the likes of Alien Breed 3D, or Breathless, or Quake, or— DOOM, those all needed A1200 or A4000 systems, or an extra video card, and probably a faster processor to run at more than a handful of frames-per-second, so Dread running as well as it does on a near-stock Amiga 500 is a technical achievement on-par with porting your favorite classic Amiga game to the Atari 2600. And yes, if it's important to you, Dread does appear to look better running on a stock A500 than on a similar-spec Atari ST.

The other "kinda big outside of hardcore Amiga fans" thing is the Retro Games A500 Mini, which I initially covered in my last article. I might have been a bit harsh in my early assessment, but I've done a little looking around and examination since then. I spoke out against the price, which appears to be set at roughly \$140 if you want to buy it here. It seemed high to me, and perhaps it is, but some individuals have made comparisons, showing that if one were to buy a Raspberry Pi system (4 or 400) and all

the parts and software required to make it do what the A500 mini does out of the box, its price is easily met or exceeded by the Pi. Of course the Pi is capable of far more than just emulating Amiga games, but in a purely like-for-like comparison, the A500 Mini is not as overpriced as it might first appear.

The other aspect comparing the two is convenience. While a Raspberry Pi is fully capable of Amiga emulation with either a dedicated Amiga emu setup or a multi-retro-gaming distro, it will take a certain amount of effort and know-how to get the emulator running how you want, source the (legal) Amiga kickstart ROMs, and get it all on the Pi, which may require a separate system to burn files and image to an SD card. Meanwhile the A500 Mini takes the home mini-console approach, supposedly working out of the box as long as you are smart enough to hook it to your television, offering a decent selection of games (only about half of which we know so far), and if you have a little more technical knowhow, it will be possible to play games that aren't included on the unit.

I understand this machine uses emulation, but I am curious what the "simulated specifications" are, what base Amiga model it is most like. If I were to guess, I imagine it is roughly equivalent to the Amiga 1200, possibly a little faster with a little more memory. I say this mainly based on the method which external games can be loaded to the system using WHDload, which for the uninitiated is a software solution to allow classic Amiga floppy games to be installed to a hard drive, as well as make it easier for expanded machines to run old games that didn't play well with hardware or operating systems they don't expect. While I welcomed the use of WHDload, I wondered why this was mentioned, as opposed to

.ADF floppy disc image files. I realized, unlike the average game console or Commodore 64, there is a lot of variety in Amiga hardware and system specs, and this is reflected in the various games and the times they came out. Since the A500 Mini states it can play Amiga 500, 600, and 1200 games (OCS, ECS, and AGA), it's pretty logical to assume that the Mini has a 'baseline' like an Amiga 1200, and the WHDload software is used to smooth out the rough edges of any game geared to older hardware, at least when loading games from an external source. Otherwise, there would need to be a separate emulation configuration for every game that might run on an A500, but bugs out on an A1200, or OS 2.0, or extra memory. That kind of thing is probably beyond the scope of a system like the Mini, so easier to set a standard reference platform, and let software take care of the rest, meaning that while the Mini may look like an Amiga 500, it's probably closer to an A1200 at heart. (actually likely some kind of ARM CPU, but whatever.)

What really drives my curiosity is what will the Mini be capable of outside of its game menu? The C64 mini and full-size versions were capable of booting to the classic prompt, and running BASIC programs or loading external software. Would it be possible to bring up the Workbench on the A500 Mini? Could you possibly run a word processor or paint program, and save out files to an internal or external storage device? Could you mess with vital files in the C: or S: directories, and wreck the Mini's ability to boot? Since it's emulation, it should be possible, at least in theory, but I would love to know some details.

When I gave my first impression of the A500 Mini last month, I wasn't too sure who would want it, believing it too pricey for the 'plug and play

games' crowd, and possibly too limited for the more savvy crowd, who might prefer a more versatile or powerful emulation solution. One thing I neglected to consider, however, is a certain nostalgia factor. While the Amiga might not have been a dominant force for gaming in the USA like something by Nintendo, Sega, or Atari was, it was different in the UK and many European nations, where "home computers" and "game consoles" weren't so distinct from one another. Many over there had some kind of Amiga as their 'game system' back in the eighties or nineties, and would welcome the opportunity to play some of those classic games they remember on their new widescreen TV with a minimum of fuss, much the same way as people clamored to grab a mini NES or other console here in recent years.

Will the idea work, and will the A500 Mini be successful? Who can say, but I'm a bit more willing to give them the benefit of the doubt. I'm still debating on whether I'd dare to pre-order one, or wait until more information and early reviews pop up first, however.

P.S. One thing I neglected to mention in my article, is that Retro Games announced they will also be selling separately the Amiga 'tank'-style mouse and the CD32-similar game pad controller accessories, in case you want extras. These are USB devices, so you can use them on your PC or Mac or Raspberry Pi or other USB-using system, for that reasonably authentic Amiga experience outside of an actual Amiga system.

Youtube links:

Amiga DREAD demo, side-by-side with Atari ST

<https://youtu.be/vj-GVCcd4yo>

Amiga DREAD demo no-frills play-through:

[https://youtu.be/0Ctaw5S\\_ee0](https://youtu.be/0Ctaw5S_ee0)

...Eric Schwartz

From the AmiTech Gazette

Dayton, Ohio September 2021

## A Couple of Interesting Articles

Improve Your Home Wi-Fi with Mesh, Powerline, MoCA, or More Routers

<https://tidbits.com/2021/08/19/improve-your-home-wi-fi-with-mesh-powerline-moca-or-more-routers/>

A Guide to Aspect Ratios: 8 Film and TV Aspect Ratios

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/guide-to-aspect-ratios#8-aspect-ratios-to-use-for-films-and-tv>

Thanks to Kevin Hopkins and the Champaign-Urbana Computer Users Group for leading me to these articles.

## The MCCC October Meeting Live-Stream

<https://youtu.be/yBTljQI4XI>

October 9 Meeting — Dallas Makerspace

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MCCC 2709 Wolff Drive Arlington, Texas 76015

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