

The Interface

"Taking 8-Bits Into The 21st Century"

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Three Of These Things Are Not Like The Other...

Happy Valentine's Day from the loving membership and staff of FCUG

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Newsletter of the Fresno Commodore User Group – Fresno, California
www.dickestel.com/fcug.htm



THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA

-by Lenard R Roach

"IN THE BEGINNING..."

(Genesis 1:1)

"Hey, Lenard," came a shout from another classroom. "Do you want to see this?"

May, 1977. I was heading towards homeroom when that shout came to my ears from the "gifted" room. By gifted, I didn't mean those who had challenges in life but those who had the upper hand in life intellectually.

I did not know this kid, but he certainly knew me. Not too long after my successful comedy performance at the Oregon Trail Junior High School Talent Show in April of 1977, people started to notice me. After years of begging to be noticed by someone, now almost everyone noticed me and... it was a bigger pain than not being noticed! Everyone wanted your attention. "Tell us a joke," one crowd would say. "Lenard, would you proofread this story I wrote?" another person would ask. It was becoming a nightmare! I barely got any classwork done because of all the demands that were asked of me, and most of those demands needed to be done on the spot. I tried not to let this new found fame go to my head. I tried

to help as many people as I could.

Therefore, to keep up this impossible image that I created with all those I encountered, I stepped into the room where the denim-decked out student was sitting. He was in front of a TV that had little images dancing on the screen. The kid pointed at the screen.

"Ever see anything like this?" he asked.

"Can't say that I have," I said. "What is it? Some new Hanna-Barbera cartoon?"

"Naw," he said. "This is called a video game."

"Oh, like Pong?"

"Sorta but only better. I coded this game myself."

Coded? What in blazes did coded mean? I tried not to look completely ignorant and tried to talk with a knowledgeable look on my face. "Oh really?"

"Yeah. Wanna try it out?"

The denim-decked out dude rose from his chair and invited me to sit down. I really didn't have time to goof off because I had a class to attend, but just to humor the guy, I sat down in his chair and looked at the screen. Apparently, this was some sort of combat strategy game set in space. He thrust a device at me that looked like a block of plastic with a stick coming straight out of the center. I looked at it carefully.

"It's a joystick," the kid said. "You can control what's on the screen with this."

"How?" I asked.

"Through this computer." He pointed at a machine that sat on a table to the right of me. This box had

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a typewriter-style keyboard built in and cords coming out from all possible plug-ins. One of those cords was attached to the little box that I had in my hands. I didn't know what to do with this box. I went ahead and allowed the dude to guide me on how to play this video game. He pressed a key on the keyboard. Soon the screen was alive with characters that were flying all over. On the bottom of the screen was a character that looked like a jet fighter. When I pulled the stick on the box to either the left or the right, the jet fighter went left or right. The denim dude tried to guide me as much as he could during gameplay. "Press the red button to shoot. Watch for aliens coming in from the top of the screen." Despite his coaching, my jet fighter in the game was destroyed, and I was sitting there dumbfounded.

"What in blazes did I just sit through?" I thought to myself.

The denim dude smiled. "Pretty cool, huh? Wanna try again?"

I gave the square box back to the kid. "No. I got a class to go to but thanks anyway."

"Okay," he said. "Stop back by in case you want to play again."

I got up from the chair, gathered my books, and walked quickly out of the room. "I hope I never get to see one of those things again," I whispered to myself. "That thing is just too weird."

It was 1982. I was working as the morning custodian for the Venture Department Store at the corner of 95th and Metcalf Avenue in downtown Overland Park, Kansas. Every morning at 3 am, I got up, got dressed, and started off on my ten-speed bicycle to ride the twenty miles northeast from Olathe to Overland Park and to the store. I

had to make it there by 6 am. My riding companion was a small transistor radio that clipped to my belt. Out of it came a single white earpiece that went in my ear. I listened to the early morning disc jockey on WHB 610 AM playing all sorts of music from country to rock. It kept my mind off the mundane ride over the hilly roads towards Overland Park.

I was on break on one particular Friday at work when I decided to stroll past the Electronics Department. My intended destination was the Bakery Department to get my usual 89 cent Texas-size doughnut. On an end cap facing towards the main aisle was a display of what seemed to be typewriters. As a fledgling writer still living at mom's place, I had the money to buy me a new typewriter as I kept wearing out the ones I got for Christmas every year with all the stories I would write and then file in manila folders that were scattered all over my bedroom. I stopped by the end cap to check out the display. On this end cap was something that I had only seen once before and that was back in junior high school. The starburst sign read as follows:

"New! Atari computer + gaming system! Sale! \$650!"

The Atari was connected somehow to a small TV screen that sat on a shelf above the units displaying a constant, scrolling image. All that was written in the scrolling image was the word "Hello." I got Da'shawn, the electronics manager's attention, and asked him, "What is this?"

Da'shawn smiled. "Have you ever seen one of these things before?"

"I think so back in junior high, but what is it?"

Da'shawn went into sales mode. "This is the new Atari computer plus gaming system. It comes with attachments like joysticks, tape drives, mice,

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and monitors, that are each sold separately. This is just the base model. The store got their first shipment in today, and we are selling them at the discounted price of only \$650."

"What is it doing now?" I asked.

"It's just scrolling the word 'Hello.' Do you want to see it in BASIC mode?"

BASIC? What the heck was BASIC? I didn't want to show myself a complete idiot when it came to a typewriter. "Sure," I said.

Da'shawn pressed a key marked STOP. The TV screen showed the words: BREAK and READY. Da'shawn then typed in the word LIST and pressed the RETURN key.

On the TV were the following words:

```
10 PRINT"HELLO"  
20 GOTO10
```

I glanced Da'shawn's way, again trying not to look like an idiot about such things. I tried to put two and two together as quickly as possible. It would seem like, from simple deduction, that line 10 told the machine to print or display the word HELLO onto the TV screen and line 20 told the machine to go back to line 10 and do it again. Each time the machine came across line 20, it always went back to line 10 to re-execute the PRINT statement.

"This is interesting," I told Da'shawn. "How did you get the computer to start reading these two lines?"

"Oh!" Da'shawn said. "That's easy. Just type in the word RUN at the flashing cursor."

Again, trying not to look uneducated, I typed the following command:

```
30 RUN
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Da'shawn laughed. "You've never operated a computer before have you, Lenny?"

Da'shawn got me. I showed my ignorance about such devices anyway, and he knew just to humiliate me further by calling me Lenny. I hated that nickname! Da'shawn took the time to show me that in order to execute the command, I had to type RUN on a separate line without a line number. He deleted my mistake, then typed RUN on the blank line. Again the TV screen scrolled the word HELLO.

I wasted my 15-minute break time at the Electronics Department and had to get to the back room to time out. I had a 2 1/2 hour bike ride back home, but before I started home I was going to get my Texas-size doughnut, go to the Venture restaurant, sit down, eat my diabetes-in-a-fried-dough-circle, and think about this Atari computer thingy. I was fascinated. I wanted to get one of my own but not right then.

Every workday for about two weeks during my break, I would stop by the Electronics Department and started tinkering on the Atari computer. I started using different variations of Da'shawn's BASIC program. I taught myself how to space out the PRINT message by simply adding a blank PRINT command, so the message on the screen didn't look so crowded. I tried different PRINT statements like "WELCOME TO THE VENTURE ELECTRONICS DEPARTMENT" and "LOOK AT ME! I'M ONLY \$650! BUY ME NOW!!!" It got to a point that Da'shawn had to tell me to leave the Atari alone before I broke it. Not to worry. I was going to own a computer someday...

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It was 1988. I had long forgotten about the Atari

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computer I saw at the now out-of-business Venture Department Store. In the place of Venture was a brand new Home Depot, and since I wasn't handy with tools or had the capacity to build anything, I never stopped by. I was married by now and had a young son who was making as many messes that he could make in the shortest time possible around our rental home on 19th and Central Avenue in urban Kansas City, Kansas. He certainly kept Alana (Mrs. Roach) and me busy, which left with very little time to work on our fledgling ministry of Comedy for Christ.

However, the baby RJ did eventually wear himself out and would take a nap, usually on the floor where he made his last catastrophe. Alana and I would pick him up and tuck him into his bed, rejoicing that we would have a couple of hours to ourselves. After cleaning up RJ's latest disaster, Alana and I would sit at my workstation trying to hammer out more comedy skits and jokes that would both entertain as well as educate the audience about Jesus and the Christian life. As a story would arise, I would start jotting down ideas and begin formulating a skit around that idea. Doing this in pen and ink in a spiral notebook soon started taking toll on my carpal tunnel. I would have to stop writing to relax my weakening wrist, thus breaking what we writers called "the groove." It would be hard to get into the groove again after taking a twenty-minute break to rub the wrist pain out, but I pressed on anyway.

On one particular Saturday we were brainstorming with our ministry partners, Jon and his sister GeAnn. GeAnn was a cute little filly with plenty of pep and personality. She was also quick-witted. She would come up with a couple of one-liners that would fit into a story or skit we could use in a future show. I was sitting at my desk with the team (Jon, GeAnn, and Alana) one day working on a skit. I was writing away as fast as I could as the ideas started flowing from

everyone. I stopped to rub my wrists.

"What's wrong?" GeAnn asked while I was leaning back in my chair and rubbing out the pain.

"Aw, it's this dang carpal tunnel," I said.

"They have a surgery for that now," GeAnn commented. "Can you get that corrected?"

"You got \$10K per wrists?"

"No."

"There ya go." I paused. "I've heard that a computer might be able to help in these situations. They are supposed to have the capacity to become a typewriter, and I can save the work on them and call them up at leisure."

GeAnn leaned back in her chair. "A computer, eh?" she commented.

"Yeah. It's supposed to be the new thing in typing."

GeAnn didn't say another word about the subject for the rest of the night. We finished our brainstorming session, and the brother-sister team left our home to go to dinner. That was the last to be seen of them until next weekend.

Next Saturday came. Jon, GeAnn, Alana, and I were ready to start another session of brainstorming. This time GeAnn brought a multi-colored box with a picture of a typewriter-like device on the front.

"What's that?" I asked GeAnn.

"You wanted a computer so I got one," she said.

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I was taken aback. She handed the box to me. I took it and looked it over carefully. I glanced up at GeAnn.

"You didn't go out and buy this for me did you?" I asked.

"No," she said with a smile. "We had it lying around the house. We played with it for a while but soon lost interest in it and put it away. We're not using it, so the family talked it over and decided that you can have it. It comes with a user's guide and a tape drive so you can save files, but you're going to have to find your own word-processing program to go with it."

I looked at the top of the box again. COMMODORE 64 was written in bold letters across it. I opened the box and looked at the beige, breadbox-shaped keyboard that was inside. Alana took the user's guide out and started flipping through the pages.

GeAnn continued. "There's also a big, gray printer back at the house. Dad didn't know if you wanted that or not, but if you ever find a word processor that works on the Commodore, then you're going to have to find a means to print what you have written."

I was delighted. "Sure, I'll take the printer," I said with a smile. "How am I supposed to print off a script without a printer?"

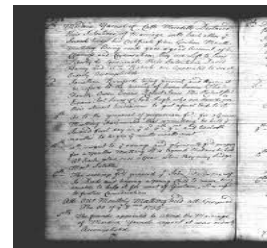
It was Jon's turn to surprise me. He handed me a small stack of three books.

"These are some game books that have some type-in programs," he said. "We never got the chance to type in all the games; there are too many, but you can pick and choose the ones that interest you. Before each program, there is a small description of each game and how it is played."

"What do I do with the programs after they are typed in?" I asked.

"That's where the tape drive comes in," he said. "When you finish typing in a program, you type in the word 'SAVE', then whatever you want to call the program, and then followed by the number '1'." We spent the rest of the day putting the Commodore 64 together. To get a screen image, we had to hook it up to the house JC Penney television in the living room. We selected a small, quick program to type in just, as a sample of what the machine could do. After typing RUN on a blank line, we saw the screen come to life with characters and words. We didn't do much brain-storming that particular Saturday, due to the fact that we all had something different to do and that was to work with the Commodore.

That was the beginning. I had stepped into a new world that I would remain in for the next 35-plus years. It's been a fascinating journey that I pray will never come to an end for a long, long time.



MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

-by Robert Bernardo and Dick Estel

January 2024

The year got off to a good start with most of the usual suspects in attendance on January 21. Robert, Roger, and Dick along with the latter's

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great grandson Jack, back for a second time, were in the first wave to arrive. Young Michael stopped to chat briefly, went back to his parents in the restaurant, and came back to take part in the meeting. Bruce arrived much later than usual, claiming to have forgotten about the meeting (but we suspected him of getting in an extra hour of sleep). Dave was ill and had announced his non-appearance a few days earlier.

Shortly after our arrival, Jack was playing a classic, Space Invaders, on the Mini PET which was newly bought by Robert and constructed by Duncan M. of The Other Group of Amigoids (San Jose, CA). Robert explained that this was a replacement machine for Larry Anderson, the webmaster who maintains the websites for the Southern California Commodore & Amiga Network, the Commodore Los Angeles Super Show, and the Pacific Commodore Expo NW.

Replacement? What did that mean? A few years ago Robert had borrowed two of Larry's Mini PET's, a version 1.46 and a version 1.58, to exhibit at CLASS and at the Vintage Computer Festival West. Robert stored the Mini's in the trunk of his Ford LTD Crown Victoria. Well, after being there for some time, Robert figured that the Mini's would be safer in a house. He put them in a box and brought them in. Unfortunately, after time passed, Robert forgot where the box was. The Mini's were too safe!

This year Larry kept hinting to Robert that he wanted to use the Mini's. Robert searched the family home in Stockton. He searched his house in Visalia. Not found. So, in order to maintain his friendship with Larry and to keep the websites running without problem, Robert thought that a replacement Mini would do until he found the originals. Even one Mini PET was expensive, and in order to save 100 pounds UK (about \$120 US) over a fully assembled Mini, Robert ordered the unassembled Mini and had Duncan assemble

the machine (which took about 4 hours). Robert assured the members that this would be their only time to see this Mini PET, because it was going to be delivered as soon as possible to Larry in San Andreas, CA.

In non-Commodore pre-meeting conversation, Robert reported seeing the movie Ferrari at a Regal theater which offered only VIP seating. Besides admission, this included all-you-can have popcorn, soda, and soft-serve ice cream, all for \$20 – probably a good value in these days of mind-boggling inflation.

Last month Robert brought a partially working AEA Pakratt PK-64 controller for ham radio and C64, and this month Roger asked for permission to fix it. Robert gave his permission and asked if Roger wanted to do another video for the April 14-15 CLASS. Roger was non-committal, but Robert, the long-time director, will make plans to film the video next month.

We watched the commercial Robert had produced for CLASS, in which Bosey the Commodore Dog made important computer decisions on our behalf. Member Michael immediately figured out how Bosey made his decisions in the video! The video can be found at <https://youtu.be/Zbs8wtCPo8k> We learned about some new products coming from Retro Games Ltd., who made THE64 Mini, THE64 Maxi, and THEA500 Mini. RG is releasing THE400 (an Atari Mini) at this very moment and later this year will release the THEA500 Maxi with functioning keyboard.

Before Dick and Jack and Michael left the meeting, the latter two were able to play a few more C64 games – Delve Deeper (a dungeon crawler), the Secret of Monkey Island (graphic adventure), Alternate Reality (another graphic adventure), Boom (a sideways shooter which took too long to load and was too difficult to play when loaded), the Briley Witch Chronicles 2

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(graphic adventure), China Miner Christmas (platformer), and Valkyrie 3 (a Shoot'Em Up Construction Kit game with the user flying a little biplane). They also looked at a few demos – Copper Booze (showing colored rows and columns of lines), FppScroller (showing a scrolly message with different effects applied to it), and Whirlybirds (a 3D demo in which the user moves through a snowy landscape).

Then Roger and Robert booted up the latest version, v1.43, of TRIANGULAR microOS on the C128 in 40-column mode. Though Robert was pleased with the speed improvement in navigating the desktop and that the sound in Synth was now working, he was not so pleased that the OS would crash sometimes, giving the statements, “undef'd statement error in 45” or “syntax error in 78.” Robert said that he would inform the programmer of these errors and other problems, like not enough color contrast between the background and the foreground on menu items. Other than those problems, the games – Crab in New York (a Frogger clone), GP Brazil (a racing game), Star Wars (shoot the tie fighter), and SimCity – worked well, though lacking in sound or enough sound effects.

Then Roger connected the VIC-20 with 24K RAM, and he ran the Bible program, Pentateuch (first 5 books of the Bible). Robert wanted to see this run and then send the program to Interface editor, Lenard Roach, who has been collecting Christian programs. One part of the program called Book Selection, which was akin to an index, ran very slowly, i.e., after pressing a key, you had to wait a long time before anything would happen. Lag was not present in other parts of the program in which a Biblical quote was shown on the screen and then was followed by a nicely-done, monochrome graphic. In fact, the program was in 40 columns and not in the VIC-20's normal 22-column screen. The graphics rivaled those done on a C64.

Finally, Robert ended the meeting by going through a C64 disk given by TOGA leader, Randy Abel. The disk was labeled, “Fun Disk,” and Robert wanted to know if it was really fun. There were several programs on the floppy disk, but the boot menu program didn't cooperate, and Robert had to go to each program directly. First was Up 'n Down, a game where you navigate a car through hills. Then there was BroadSides, commercial game from the company, SSI. You navigated your galleon in order to deliver broadsides against the enemy galleon. A very intriguing game which involved strategy, so intriguing that it would be better to read through the comprehensive manual, which was available on-line as a .PDF.

On the other side of the disk were three John Olsen adventure games, Revenge of the Moon Goddess, Perils of Darkest Africa, and Night of the Walking Dead. Because the games were all written by the same author, they all had the same look and feel, with certain words (text) colored for emphasis or as clues. The games were shareware/donationware games, John Olsen's mailing address listed. Robert wondered if John Olsen still lived in the Oregon town in the address. After a brief Internet search, Robert found two John Olsens who had lived in that town but had moved away to other Oregon towns. Robert wondered whether he should try and contact the Olsens, just to confirm if one of them was the programmer of the games.

FEBRUARY 2024

-by Robert Bernardo and Dick Estel

The usual suspects were on hand for our February meeting – Robert, Roger, Dave, Bruce and Dick. Pre-lunch conversation covered electric vehicles, a source of used camera equipment, artificial

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intelligence (the scary, modern version), and Robert's attendance at the final TOGA meeting hosted by 29-year president Randy Abel.

The full group name is The Other Group of Amigoids, and the club is in the Los Gatos/San Jose area. Randy is moving to Austin, TX, and his contribution over the years can be explained by the fact that it will require *three* members of the group to take over his duties.

We briefly discussed CLASS (Commodore LA Super Show) coming up April 13 and 14. Bruce planned to go, and Roger and Dick may be riding with him. We also expected newsletter editor Lenard Roach and his fiancée from Kansas City, KS.

Speaking of whom, it was noted that Lenard had been doing the newsletter for 18 years (see separate article in this issue).

Robert commented that there would be a 3-hour Maker Faire in Hawthorne, CA (south of the Los Angeles International Airport) in May. He did not feel it was worthwhile to transport equipment that far or even attend for such a short event.

Everyone was reminded that our next meeting would be in less than two weeks on March 2, a rare Saturday meeting. Robert will be traveling to Australia and New Zealand for most of March.

Demonstrations began with THEA500 Mini. It operated with the new software distribution of Aminimiga, which gave an Amiga desktop and provided games and other programs. Aminimiga was one huge file, essentially a hard drive image, so work files (for example, from a word processor) couldn't be saved in the usual way. However, files could be saved in a special desktop folder.

On the Ultimate 64, Robert also showed the

newish TRIANGULAR Micro OS complete with word processor, calculator, and games. Because the OS was written in BASIC, desktop operations were very slow at 1 MHz. and too fast at the U64's maximum speed of 48 MHz. . Robert found that 2-4 MHz. was the sweet spot for using the OS.

Afterwards, we experimented with Dancing Feats, a classic C64 music composition program, in which we set the beat, the bass sound, and other style choices, and then used the joystick to create tunes. No actual music was produced, probably because we were so bad at controlling the touchy control of the joystick.

We also briefly looked at a C64 desktop publishing program called Stop Press. It was aptly named, because we were unable to actually run it. It apparently required that a real disk drive be connected, and Robert didn't want to go through the trouble of reconfiguring the U64 to accept a real disk drive. Perhaps at the next meeting...

More successful was PETSCIIinoid, a version of Arkanoid but using PETSCII characters instead of sprites. The object of the game – aim the bouncing ball to remove tiles at the top of the screen.

After that game, Robert showed a classic C64 application, The Complete Fireworks Celebration Kit. The app would start up with a demonstration of fireworks exploding on-screen (multi-color mode). It would continue running that same demo unless a F-key was pressed. When Robert pressed a F-key, a menu would pop up in order to customize the fireworks display. The user could make the changes in the design of the fireworks, duration, and music. However, the controls were not intuitive, and Robert had to keep referring to a .PDF of the instructions. Also, even though he inputted different designs for the fireworks' explosions, they all seemed the same.

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To wrap up the meeting, Robert ran another C64 classic, Neutral Zone. In this game you turn left or right and elevate/declinate your gunsights before shooting off a fireball to destroy the enemy spaceships that are attacking your space station. No wonder Robert showed off this game; one spaceship seemed similar to a Star Trek cruiser and another spaceship looked like a Battlestar Galactica viper! Roger and Dave were impressed at the detailed look of the game screen and the smooth game play, all from this 1983-1984 game.

The meeting ended at 3, because Robert and Roger had to go to the “film studio” in order to film Roger’s presentation for CLASS.



A TRIBUTE TO AN EDITOR

-by Dick Estel

Recently Interface Editor Lenard Roach asked Robert and me how long he has been doing the newsletter. I have almost all the back issues (back to #1), and here’s what I learned and told Lenard:

“The oldest issue that I could find edited by Lenard is March-April 2006. It was not the FIRST one he did, but the context of the Godzilla indicates that it was early in his tenure.

BUT! The November-December 2005 issue of C= Voyages notes that it has been about two years

since the Interface was published, and lists Lenard as Interface Editor.

Therefore January 2006 seems the most likely. Hang on another 24 months, Lenard, and you will get your 20-year pin!”

(C= Voyages was an unofficial newsletter produced by Robert Bernardo to disseminate the latest news in the Commodore world.)

While doing this project it occurred to me how much we owe to Lenard for stepping in to take on this job from over 1,700 miles away. He was the editor of the local Commodore group newsletter in Kansas City KS, and around the time he became Interface editor, that club folded. I think he embraced handling the Fresno newsletter as a way of keeping his hand in, writing about Commodore and Commodore people.

We are quick to point out errors when we preview each issue, but we have probably been remiss in positive comments. I personally served two stints as editor, and Robert handled the job for a while, so we both know how much work goes into collecting, compiling and editing the material to get a good-size publication in our members’ hands every other month.

So Lenard, be assured we do not take your contribution for granted, and you have our heartfelt thanks as you approach 20 years at the editor’s desk.



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AMINIMIGA DISTRIBUTIONS & INSTALLATION

-by Robert Bernardo



(Earlier in 2023, I had bought the Amiga Mini, a tiny game console from Retro Games Ltd. The Mini contained an ARM processor board which had a version of Linux which in turn ran an emulator (Amiberry) which in turn permitted the Mini to run 25 classic Amiga games from its “carousel” menu. For those who wanted more than 25 games, extra games could be run from a USB stick inserted into the machine. I wanted more than running games. A few months later I saw Randy Abel, president of The Other Group of Amigoids, run what looked like an Amiga desktop on his Mini. I investigated and discovered Aminimiga, a package, a distribution which gave the user an Amiga desktop plus games, utilities, and other productivity applications. With the help of Duncan MacDougall of TOGA, I had Aminimiga installed onto a USB stick, just in time to show it and the Mini at the October Bay Area Maker Faire 2023. What follows is a somewhat technical article on installing a new Aminimiga distro.)

I had previously used v202F of the Aminimiga distro. Via torrent, I had downloaded the package and installed it onto a USB stick, the process taking about 75 minutes for the install. To run Aminimiga, I had to get an image of Workbench, specifically Workbench31.adf, and drop it into the Shared folder of the stick.

Folder Aminimiga → Hardfolders → Shared

The USB stick would be recognized by THEA500 Mini. I would move to its icon on the carousel, press the red button on the control pad, be taken to the Media Select menu, move down to Aminimiga, press the red button, and then press HOME on the control pad. After a few minutes, I would be on the Aminimiga desktop.

(BIG WARNING – When you are in the Media Select menu, you must cursor down to Aminimiga, press the red button, and then press HOME on the control pad. NEVER PRESS THE MENU BUTTON on the control pad when you see the Media Select menu on the screen, because if you do, the Mini will then try to rewrite the Config file on the Aminimiga distro. The Config is set a certain way in the distro, and any change will destroy it, thus rendering the distro useless. Then you’d have to reinstall the distro again.)

Released in early January 2024, a new Aminimiga distro, v212F, claimed to have a few more classic games, squashed more bugs, added more Internet apps, and removed Personal Paint (due to a copyright issue). Instead of going through the lengthy process of downloading the new distro and installing it, I paid about \$25 to get a ready-made distro on USB stick from www.Retro32.com. The package came in the mail a few days later.

With v212F, things had changed. On THEA500 Mini, the USB stick was still recognized. I moved to its icon, pressed the red button on the

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control pad, and was taken to the Media Select menu... but the Media Select menu was different now. It said Start Aminimiga (which was really Aminimiga UAE (Universal Amiga Emulator)) and Start Aminimiga by Amiberry v3. Well, if I clicked on Aminimiga, nothing happened or at most, a black screen. If I clicked on Start Aminimiga by Amiberry v3, the screen blanked, the green light on THEA500 came on and off (blinked), and after a minute or two, the Aminimiga desktop appeared.

Why wouldn't the Aminimiga option work? First, I thought that was because I didn't have the Workbench31.adf in the Shared folder. Dutifully, I put that file into the folder, reinserted the stick into the Mini, and booted up the system. Then I went through the process to get to the Media Select menu, and I clicked on Aminimiga. Sometimes I'd get an off-center white screen with some unreadable words on the side of the white screen; sometimes I'd get a black screen. What else was wrong? At least, I had made a little progress.

In late January 2024, I went to a meeting of the Sacramento Amiga Computer Club, bringing my Mini. Jerry Hall, the club vice-president, also had his Mini there. I told him about my Mini's problems, he took my USB stick, and he examined it on his laptop. He noticed that on the new distro, there was the latest firmware update 1.2.0 for the Mini. My Mini had the original firmware, v1.0.2 (I think), and his Mini did, too. Unsure whether I should update my firmware, he was more positive in updating his Mini and began the update process. The process ran smoothly, taking only a few minutes, and the Mini rebooted itself. The carousel popped up, and the USB stick was recognized.

However, when the Start Aminimiga menu item was clicked on the Media Select menu, the Aminimiga desktop now booted up! The

Aminimiga UAE had wanted not only the Workbench31.adf but also the new firmware v1.2.0 in order to run!



Jerry wanted to compare the Amiberry and the UAE versions with SysInfo 4.4, the program which measured the benchmarks of a computer. With Aminimiga Amiberry, SysInfo measured a speed of about 262 MIPS (million instructions per second). With Aminimiga UAE, SysInfo measured about 180 MIPS.

But which version was more compatible? In a limited test, he tried Photon Paint in both versions. With Aminimiga Amiberry, the Photon Paint title screen came up at a certain speed, not quickly but not slowly either. The pulldown menus on PP were unreadable. With Aminimiga UAE, the PP title screen came up quickly, and the pulldown menus were slightly better but still unreadable. Conclusions – Amiberry is faster but less compatible. UAE is slower but more compatible.

Then Brian Deneen, the president of SACC, got involved. He wanted to know if Final Writer word processor was usable on the Mini. Using Aminimiga UAE, he got into Final Writer, wrote a few words with use of a connected keyboard, and tried to save the file. FW gave a default save location, and he saved to that. However, when he tried to find the saved file, it was nowhere to be

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found. Not giving up, he wrote a few words into FW, and this time he saved the file in the desktop folder, WHDLoad Save. Success! The file was saved to that location, and he was able to retrieve it from there.

Another test – how would the Mini deal with Lightwave? The Mini had an emulated 68040 CPU and FPU, both needed for creating 3D objects efficiently when using Lightwave. When Lightwave was run under Aminimiga UAE, it seemed o.k. at first, but modeling the objects was taking time. Perhaps it was because the Mini was running a version of Lightwave without FPU. Or was it because the emulated FPU was not recognized by Lightwave for FPU? Result inconclusive...

With the success of the new distro on the Jerry's Mini, I thought it was time to update my Mini. I took my USB stick and ran the firmware update file. The progress bar scrolled right, reached the end, and then froze. Uh, now what? After 15 minutes, the machine was still frozen at that point, the screen warning, "Do not remove power until the update has finished." When Jerry updated his Mini, it only had taken a couple of minutes!

I could not wait any longer. The power off switch didn't work with the frozen Mini, so I pulled the power plug on the machine. After a few seconds, I reinserted the plug and powered up the machine again. The screen popped up with the frozen progress bar. Oh, no! I pulled the power plug again, reinserted it, and turned on THEA500 again. The screen showed the frozen progress bar again! Double oh, no! Was THEA500 bricked? One more time, I pulled the plug, reinserted it, and powered up the machine. This time the Retro Games title screen came up, followed by the carousel screen. Whew! It seemed all right. I pressed the Menu button and came to the Advanced Options screen. I clicked on System Info, and it showed firmware 1.2.0. Yes! I tried

out Aminimiga UAE and Aminimiga Amiberry. Both worked perfectly. All was well.

Wrap-up – to use Aminimiga UAE, you must have installed firmware update 1.2.0 and put Workbench31.adf in the Shared folder on the USB stick for your Mini. You can also use Aminimiga Amiberry. However, if you don't update your firmware, you cannot use Aminimiga UAE and can only use Aminimiga Amiberry. If you never want to use Aminimiga UAE and only want to run Aminimiga Amiberry, you don't have to have Workbench31.adf on the USB stick.



INTERVIEW: Chiptune Artist Paul Slocum

(Paul Slocum, creator of cynthCART 64, is a guest at the Commodore Los Angeles Super Show 2024. In honor of him, here he is in a Wired magazine article from 2007.)

As part of our continuing coverage of the Blip Festival, here's an interview with the chiptune artist Paul Slocum, of the Dallas band, Tree Wave. His gear for making music includes a Commodore 64, an Atari 2600, a Compaq Portable II, and an Epson LQ500 dot-matrix printer that provides the rhythm section.

•
Listening Post: First of all, what are you looking forward to about the Blip Festival? Did you go last year?

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Paul Slocum: I was not there last year. I'm really looking forward to Bodenständig 2000, I really like them a lot. I'm playing the same night as them, and I played with them twice before.

LP: What drew you to creating 8-bit music? Had you made other kinds of music before? What was alluring about this style of music that drew you to it initially?

PS: I didn't really know about an 8-bit scene, I was just kind of using whatever gear I had around to make music that made any sound. My friends and I had a band, and we'd use electronic toys, anything that was laying around, and I started writing software for some of the old computers, just because I knew how, and I experimented with making music a little bit in the 80s. When my friends moved from Dallas to Austin, and I didn't have them to work with anymore, I started experimenting with making music using almost entirely 8-bit equipment, which is not necessarily always 8-bit; some of the stuff I use is actually 16-bit.

LP: Is the term "chiptune" preferable?

PS: Oh it doesn't matter, 8-bit's fine, it's just technically what I use, but it really is the same concept as what people consider 8-bit.

LP: I was listening to a few of your tracks that are online, and they seem to have a different aesthetic than some of the other 8-bit stuff I've heard. There seems to be more of a shoegaze kind of feel going on, and maybe some more complicated songwriting. I'm just wondering what kind of other music you're into. Am I correct in thinking that you like shoegaze music, or is that just random association?

PS: No, most of what I listen to is guitar-based

music. I listen to some stuff with a few electronic elements to it, or stuff that manipulates the guitar electronically. I listen to a lot of My Bloody Valentine and Sonic Youth, also some stuff that doesn't really sound like any of the other 8-bit stuff—Beat Happening, Aerial Pink, that's the sort of stuff I'm into.

LP: Yeah, me too, we line up pretty evenly. I just bought tickets to see My Bloody Valentine in Glasgow. I don't know if I'm crazy...

PS: They're playing?

LP: Yeah, there's a reunion, and apparently it's official. There might be a US tour also. I won't believe it until I see it, but I bought tickets anyway, so...

PS: I don't read music news anymore... they're planning a new LP as well, I see. I heard that Kevin Shields said they were definitely going to do a new album, but not that they were going to tour, that's crazy.

LP: I know, I can't wait. I never saw them before.

PS: Me neither.

LP: Back to your stuff though. One thing that's really struck me about 8-bit music: Before I delved deeper, I thought it would all sort of have the same sound. This is a silly question, but how many genres of 8-bit music do you think there are? A lot of it seems to sound different.

PS: Honestly I don't listen to it that much. There are a few bands that I know, but I'm really not that familiar with it. I mean I know a few bands, but I don't really have a good enough view of the scene to know how it divides up within itself. Most of it sounds to me like they were listening to electronic music and also early chiptunes, and merged those together into this new thing—sort of a hybrid of

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the evolution of electronic music over the last 20 years, and then this weird thing that existed in the 80s, these composers who were writing music for videogames back then. That stuff has a style all its own, the old school stuff.

Chiptunes have existed since computers came out; it's only recently become more of a scene—or, relatively recently. The stuff in the 80s has a different style. It comes much more from a traditional music background. It's sort of like jazz mixed with weird limited synths, and also some classical stuff. The stuff you hear now is a little bit of that, and a little bit of more hip stuff.

LP: So instead of just aping the styles of the 80s videogame composers, it's become more of a vocabulary that you can use to say all kinds of different stuff now.

PS: Right.

LP: Do you have a video component in your show?

PS: Yeah, I have video for all my shows, which is all done on the Atari 2600.

LP: And you trigger all that stuff by yourself? Is the video an important part of the show?

PS: I think the music stands on its own as a recording. But as far as a live performance, I think the video component's important, partly because I don't think electronic music is very interesting to see live, so the video component kind of makes up for not being a rock star.

The video I use, some of it is programs that I wrote myself that run on the Atari, and some of it's Atari games that I've hacked and modified to do my own video. But [the video is] actually all programmed to some extent. The Atari has a sequencer in it that I wrote, and it does the

rhythmic parts of my music and when I play live, I synchronize the Atari, and the printer, and the DOS machine that I use manually, so it's a little bit like DJing. Once they're synchronized, the Atari will stay in sync the whole time, so the video will also stay in sync.

LP: The printer as rhythm section is sort of incredible. I've had a similar thought [*note: I remember now, my brother sampled a printer for this song*] it is such a great sound that you can get from those printers. How did you come up with that idea of harnessing it and getting it to play different tones?

PS: I bought one of those printers to do a different project that I was working on a while back—trying to make a mellotron out of a printer and using spools of cassette tape, taking them apart, and then also using a Walkman that I modified. As I got into that project and started taking the printer apart, I realized that it would maybe be possible to reprogram it. Actually, the problem was that I took the printer head out to make space for what I was trying to do, and when I took that out, the boot-up tech failed, so it wouldn't work anymore. I was trying to find a way to get past that. So then I started disassembling the printer code, and I got the schematics from Epson, and it kind of turned into this really big project from there.

LP: Wow. If you don't mind my asking, how do you know about all of this stuff?

PS: I have a computer science degree, and I have a part-time day job, which is embedded systems programming.

LP: I've been in traditional bands [and experimented with programming on a Vic-20 when they first came out], and to get started with this seems really intimidating. Is that a good thing? Or do you think it's possible for somebody

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to go from zero to 60 on this sort of thing?

PS: It depends on what you're trying to do. Anybody can sample videogames, if you just want to use the sounds. And then there are also programs that people have written that are available. Actually, some of my programs are available; you can buy cartridges. It's a little more work than buying a synthesizer from Guitar Center. You would have to buy an Atari off eBay, and get this stuff, and figure out how to hook it up—not quite as user-friendly as that, but not much more difficult.

LP: Where can people get your cartridges?

PS: Atariage sells them. They have a store, and [they] make the cartridges for me.

LP: I've heard people say that 8-bit artists view the MP3 almost as restrictive, because if someone has your 8-bit song file, they can go in and see how you did it, and manipulate it, which strikes me as an advantage of releasing a song in this format, that more modern file formats haven't really caught up with.

PS: That's true to an extent—with all-in-one devices—but it doesn't work for mine, because mine are done on multiple devices: all of my songs include at least one Commodore 64 part which is not sequenced, it's actually played. the Atari; the printer; and stuff on the 386 computer that I use. But if you're just writing Commodore SID files or composing on LSDj on the Gameboy that's true, you could just release your files. It's also true if you're using a MOD Tracker or something, release your MOD Tracker files.

But my philosophy with the stuff I do, I think it's a little bit different from others, in that I'm partly also interested in writing my own software to make my music. Not everything I use is my own software-- I use an old [inaudible] sequencer for

DOS, but I've written my own software for the printer, the Atari, and the Commodore 64, which I think is an important piece to what I'm doing. I just wrote new software for the PC, and it's not 8-bit at all. It's a software sampler/sequencer, and I'm going to start using that for Tree Wave. I never intended Tree Wave to be only an 8-bit project, you know what I mean? Those were the tools that I was interested in at the time. I've always been really interested in sampling, and I've been wanting to get back into that, so I feel like this new stuff really fits into what I was doing because I've written my own custom software that has this unusual interface, and a different way of thinking about sequencing and sampling.



CAR RACING GAMES FOR THE C64

-Compiled by Lenard R. Roach

(Part 4 of 4)

(To end the celebration of the 75th year of NASCAR started in 2023, these few stragglers from the Internet have been found and added to the list. This list and previous ones submitted is not conclusive and more may be found.)

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Scalextric



One of the greatest boons a game can impart a gamer is to give them the opportunity to explore their own creativity through various means inside the game itself. When it comes to racing games, Kikstart, for instance, improved its core gameplay in so many ways, altering the way tracks were set up and even adding night and winter versions that influenced how you tackled each stage; it was made a bit more forgiving, granted, but it also upped the available track ratio from 8 to 26 -- more than three times as many -- but also gave the players the chance to contribute their own designs in what was a surprisingly flexible stage creator.

This was most likely the thought that went into Scalextric as well. The game itself is a formula one-styled racing game that comes with its own selection of tracks, but also allows you to create and save your own if you wanted to. Since comparisons with Pitstop 2 is inevitable -- they're both forced two player, with the computer taking

the role of the second player if needed -- I'll run a game to game comparison thing, seeing as Pitstop 2 seems to be the benchmark in games like these.

If you go by graphical standards, Scalextric is really unimpressive. The car looks OK, but your playing fields are shoehorned into two rows each that cover around 1/3rd of the total screen, with a racing track map that is allowed to take up far too much space at the bottom of the screen. Granted, they come with an indicator showing where on the track you currently are, but I don't necessarily think that's a distraction you'd want in the heat of a duel. To the game's credit, it doesn't have Pitstop 2's magically bendy turns, which is one of the two only real advantages it has over Pitstop 2, and this allows you to time your speed a little better as you can see the turns coming a little bit in advance. On the downside, there are almost literally no extras in this game. You will only really see your opponent on the track, if anyone. There are no roadside objects and no other opponents to contend with. In fact, I'm rather surprised the mountains in the background are allowed to be there.

Look, I'm not demanding a lot here, but the complete absence of absolutely everything that would otherwise be a part of a race or the scenery really takes me out of the game. The controls are quite different too; Scalextric seems to take everything at a slower pace compared to Pistop 2. Where the cars in the latter flies all over the place, Scalextric's cars are more in line with simulators in that you can judge speeds and take turns much easier, which would be the second advantage it has. Turns will, if nothing else, make you fly off the roads in an arbitrary fashion. This is one of the biggest advantages Scalextric has over Pitstop 2, but when you don't have any other opponents to contend with, it becomes kind of meaningless. If the two playing are of equal skill, the race more or less becomes decided at the beginning, depending on whoever comes out on top in the

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opening duel. Unless a massive screwup enters the equation, you'll just watch two people take all the turns perfectly and... well, that's about as much fun as rubberbanding, only on the other end of the big "how to make racing less fun to watch" scales. The game controls are, if nothing else, fairly impeccable. Instead of having to keep the stick and/or the button pressed in their appropriate directions, you can build up your speed and then let go from pushing the stick forward, and the car remembers that speed like it's on the cruise control of cool.

Soundwise, they're about the same. Epyx was never really known for putting awesome gaming tunes into their games, mostly because they never really needed to, and neither is the creators of this game. When you take that away, we mostly have engine and skidding sounds. Conventional and practical, sure, but with the potential to become ear-gratingly obnoxious. Well, perhaps less here, since you do not necessarily get the opportunity to reach top speed very often.

The decision to include a track designer is very much appreciated. It's a bit eccentric in the way it handles the track building, so an instruction manual is strongly preferred instead of having to figure it out on your own, but once you know what to do, it's both relatively flexible and easy to use. The thing is; given how basic the game is, it's not really helping the game itself. In a way, I'm grateful to Scalextric for being a prime example of the need for a good game to be the core behind it all. Kikstart 2 had that good game, so its track designer was a very delicious icing on a game that was already great fun to begin with. Scalextric, sadly, is not nearly as good a game, and so the track designer can only do so much to make up for that. Which is to say, barely anything at

4x4 Off Road Racing



Description

In 4x4 Off-Road Racing you need logical reasoning and driving skills. Before you start you can choose between several cars, which vary by weight and power. There are many routes to choose from where the "hard-core" race is then carried out. Before it finally comes to the start, you have to choose from a pool of provided tools and extras for your car. E.g. your car can be equipped with a bigger tank, bigger tyres and a cable winch to get easier through the race. The tank allows you to fuel more gas, to make less stopovers. The "A/T tyres" help you, to get safely through the quicksand and the cable winch helps you with steep slopes. When you have retooled your car accordingly, you go on to the supermarket where you can buy things like fuel, oil, coolant, gear oil, spare battery, spare tyres, tools, mechanics, map, food&drinks and so on. But you have to be careful not to buy too much, as you have only limited space in your car.

Design

The game is, as already mentioned above, obviously designed with much attention to detail. There are realistic sequences built in as e.g. that the player has to buy important things as fuel, oil or coolant before the game to avoid getting disqualified later. Operation is done fully by joystick. However, the design of the tracks are rather simple and monotonous and the loading times are extremely long.

Hints

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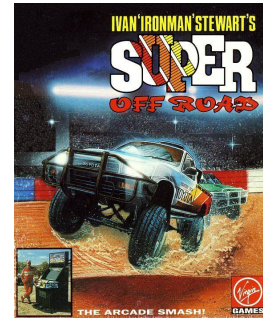
For each truck seven factors are shown:

- Power:** a mixture of HP and acceleration
- Weight:** the less weight, the better are the speed, MPG and the better it can be manoeuvred. A heavy truck needs more fuel.
- Gas Mileage:** These are the estimated miles per gallon (MPG). But if your truck is loaded with lots of equipment, it will need more fuel and reach a lower MPG than given.
- Endurance:** how much the truck can bare before it needs to be repaired.
- E.R.F:** how complicated it is to repair a truck and with this how long it takes to repair it.
- Payload without Cap:** how much the truck can load without additional cargo area.
- Fuel Capacity:** the capacity of the tank

The most important thing is the fuel, as the race is over if you have not thought of a reserve and the tank is empty.

If the truck stops for repair, the repair window with the required repair equipment is shown. If you don't have it with you, you still can choose the hammer and the repair is still possible. However, the overall state of the truck is diminished.

Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off Road



Description

Enter the world of off-road racing as 4 vehicles will face each other, on eight different tracks. Up to three cars can be controlled by human players. Fame, glory and bikini clad women await your victories and the taste of dirt awaits if you fail. Let a computer car beat you and you lose one of your 3 credits.

Successful races bring more money, which can be used to soup up their machine. Boosts to top speed, grip and acceleration can be purchased, and your nitro boost must be kept topped up. If you are desperate for upgrades, you can buy into your spare credits. Only your off-road driving abilities will be enough to pull you to first place in these races.

Design

The racing part of the game is shown in top-down view. The game consists of eight different tracks, each of these eight maps fit in one single screen without scrolling. This makes it possible to drive with three players simultaneously (two players using joystick, one using the keyboard). After each race prize money has been awarded (100.000 for 1st place, 90.000 for 2nd place, 80.000 for 3rd place and 70.000 for 4rd place), plus the picked up money bags during the last race. With this money nitro boost can be bought as well as tires (to improve cornering), shock absorbers,

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acceleration units and top speed accesoires.

SOURCES: Wiki-C64, Lemon64, and Wikipedia



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The Fresno Commodore User Group is a club whose members share an interest in Commodore 8-bit and Amiga computers. Our mailing address is 185 W. Pilgrim Lane, Clovis, CA 93612. We meet monthly in the meeting room of Panera Bread, 3590 West Shaw, Fresno, CA. The meetings generally include demonstrations, discussion, and individual help.

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