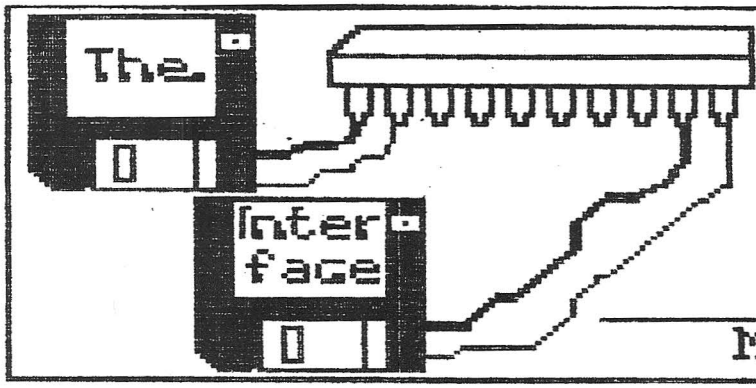


FC=UG

"Taking Commodore Computing Into The Twenty First Century And Beyond ..."

March/April 2010

-by Lenard R. Roach

It is time. We take a cruise down to 9th and Genesee - better known to those who live here as the Red Light District - where the ladies of the night display their wares to whoever is willing to buy, provided his wallet is fat enough. It is a place where businessee who display merchandise of ill repute are frequented by people from all walks of life; from the bleary eyed traveler who has spent a little too much time away from his wife and seeks an encounter with the fairer of the species, to the desperate man of religion who suffers a secret addiction that cannot be broken no matter how much faith he has. It is here that our research begins.

I have been told that, as a person claiming a religious point of view, to abandon this mad story. It could remain a blot on my reputation as someone who should not pursue such madness, but I think that it is a story that should be told because such a thing is out there and it should be investigated. I know that most of this could be shocking, and I will handle the subject material with as much discretion as I can.

With the success of last issues article on Commodore games for girls, I thought I would take another stab at a piece along similar lines, this time focusing on the dark side of Commodore - and that being sexually explicit games. I thought I would find the same thing that I did when I wrote about the games for girls; with very few entries into this realm. I thought wrong. I was given a website by a member of FCUG which led me to some of pretty strange sexual material archived that was available for the Commodore 64, and by strange I mean nothing hidden, full tilt, all out, sexual expression - things I wouldn't even show the most seasoned of Marine who supposedly has "seen it all."

I will not give out the names of the people who host the website since I do not have their permission to reveal the names, but I can say that they are not shy about what they do, even creating 8 bit digital images of themselves fully unclothed to show on the home screen. I understand that for the most part, people in this business fully view it as that - a business, with profit and loss margins, inventory, and employees that need to be paid. This strikes me as strange, until someone who works at such a shop explained the function of one of these places in detail. I figure that these folk who run this website have the same view as anyone else who is in this business. Yes, there are some who are actual perverts who treat this business as a cheap way to get

jollies and get into it for their own self gratification, but some do not. I look at this website as the former, with people who are looking to find what they can and archive it for both the curious as well as the perverted.

The structure of the website is done as such to where a user can access any game or drawing by simply selecting what they wish to peruse and then selecting with letter of the alphabet they wish to view the title thereof. For example, if someone would like to find the name of a certain adult star that was big in the days of Commodore, that someone would look under graphics and the persons name. The same would be done for games. I did not get a chance to count how many games were archived on this website, but was surprised as to how many adult games were out there for the Commodore 64. I also noted that these games were mostly made in Europe, and they seem to be more from Germany than anywhere else.

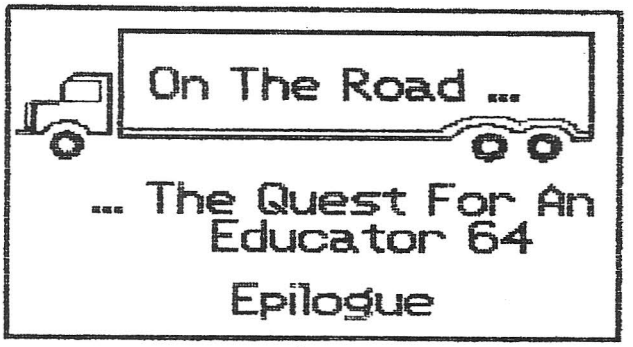
Now the big question: Did I play any of these games, purely as an experiment and not to get a rise? Yes, I have. Before the serious dawning of my faith, I used to dabble in the game "Farmer's Daughter." This game is a text adventure wherein you, as the travelling salesman, suffer a breakdown of your vehicle and go to the nearest farm house for assistance. According to the game, the most gorgeous of women answers the door and an instant attraction is felt, but any direct mention of any intimacy at the door brings to you a serious shot to the groin and you are dismissed from the property. Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to slowly convince the young lady at the door that an encounter with you would be the next thing to paradise, and all in sixty moves. Your hazards that I can remember are the two brothers who like to take liberties with any strangers no matter what gender they are and an irate tow truck driver who comes out to the farm and beats you to a bloody pulp for pestering him to come and tow your car. The tow driver, however, can give you an extra sixty moves if you treat him with respect. Call him wrong, and the beatings begin. I never finished the game, and frankly I didn't care to.

As for actual pictures of pornography in my possession, I did come across a disk containing some scanned magazine photos that were somehow transposed onto the Commodore, but I never knew scanners for the Commodore existed back in the early eighties. In any case, these pictures were distributed by the United Porn Federation and the four hundred block file contained five pictures of couples engaging in sexual acts. The pictures were of poor quality, probably due to the eight bit nature of the Commodore 64. The weird part of these photos was that the compliers tried to use the sixteen Commodore colors to accent the pictures, which caused some of the photos to be in red, green, and white. I reformatted the disk as soon as I found their contents, but knowing what the disk formerly contained I felt it better to throw the disk into the closest trash receptacle.

I found the disks in my possession the same way the Commodore Man found his contribution to my article, from a collection that was purchased from a former Commodore user who was parting with his system. The Commodore Man's research to this piece was to mention a Flintstone game wherein Fred and Barney tell Wilma and Betty they are going bowling, only to go instead to a brothel wherein the boys engage in several lewd acts with several different partners. The Commodore Man did the same thing I did with my disk from UPF - it was quickly reformatted and used for something else.

This little trip through the Red Light District of Commodore, like it would be driving down 9th and Genesee, was both weird as well as interesting. Just when you thought it was safe to boot up your system, you discover that someone, somewhere has taken your machine to a level that was possibly unheard of, until that one day while

prowling through a stack on hand me down disks, you come across that one disk that is marked in a peculiar way, and you inadvertently open an Pandora's box that you thought your machine was never capable of. Heaven help the Commodore.



-by Robert Bernardo

(Last summer I bought an Educator 64 from a seller in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, and in a series of two articles I wrote about the trials and tribulations of getting it back to California. It's picture tube was extremely dim, and it had to be put in storage until I brought it to Ray Carlsen, C= master repair technician.)

It was Monday, March 29. After attending the memorial dinner for the late Dave "Lord Ronin" Mohr in Astoria, Oregon the previous night, I was now at Ray Carlsen's house in southern Washington state. Ray had been expecting me, and I had brought him six 1571s and one 1541 to repair, and the most important one - the Educator 64. Ray seemed eager to tackle the repairs on the Educator 64. After talking to Ray for awhile about Dave, Commodore hardware, and Commodore shows, I drove off, hoping that the repairs would be successful.

It was only a couple days later when I started receiving messages from Ray on the state of the E64. He gave his diagnosis of the E64, "I also checked the Educator 64 and it does have a bad tube... very low emission, so a brightener wouldn't help. It just got used to death as the screen burn indicates."

Then he provided some info, "FYI: the analog video board in the Educator is totally different than the PET digital display board."

Finally, he provided some solutions, "I did some quickie research on the Educator tube, an Amperex M31-334GR 12" green phosphor CRT. One Internet site listed that tube for about $200. Ouch!"

He continued, "PETs like the 8032 used a similar M31-331GH for their monitor CRT. One site listed that number for a more reasonable $70. It's also a green screen 12", and the pinout is the same. I don't know the difference in those tubes but if I had to guess, I'd bet it's the persistence of the phosphor... how long the image lasts since the last vertical refresh. A long persistence tube might look smeary if used for video but if I had one of the PET tubes, I would try it."

After receiving those messages, I thought that I'd have to save up some money in order to buy a CRT. A couple of weeks later, I got an update from Ray. Everything was repaired! Ray really outdid himself this time.

Here was his solution for the video problem of the E64, "I found a tube for the Educator, a black & white tube out of an old portable TV set stored in the Carlsen archives (a four car garage that never housed a car). Once in a great while, I find it pays to hoard this stuff. ;-) The tube is an identical electrical match but required a bit of engineering to make it mechanically fit the cabinet. The result looks great. The monitor electronics needed a bit of TLC: a few bad capacitors were changed and board repair was required because of overheated components."

I thought a black-and-white screen was an acceptable replacement for the original greenscreen. Anyways, if anybody really wanted green, some green cellophane over a pair of glasses

would work. It was nice to think about trying to get a color screen in there, but the engineering to get that screen and control board in there would have tried Ray's patience.

More from Ray, "I noticed some of the keys need a hard press to make them work. (snip) A good cleaning took care of it." I never even noticed that the E64 keys needed work, probably because the original screen was so dim that I couldn't see if there was any response shown on the screen.

Even though there was a lot of space in the E64, as a precaution, Ray putheat sinks on the MPU, PLA and SID.

Ray also discovered this, "Somewhere I read that there were two versions of the Kernal for the Educator. The one that's in there looks like the standard C64 one. The alternate version apparently defaults to a setting that allows software to work that would otherwise look bad on a black and white TV or monitor. If it's important to you, and you can point me to a source for the other ROM, I'll get it and burn you another Kernal."

As a poor teacher in the early 1980's, I used a regular brown C64 with a black-and-white t.v., and it seemed to do well. I passed on putting in the alternate Kernal in the E64. I was concerned whether the repaired E64 monitor components would overheat again in the future. Ray answered, "Well, those big resistors normally run pretty hot. It doesn't harm them but it does eventually cause the board to blacken and it weakens their solder connections. What I did was reinforce those areas and move other components away from the heat producing ones. As much as that computer has been used, I'd say that monitor will outlive us all just as it is. :-) "

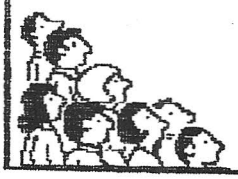
The Educator 64 came with a warning label on the side which said not to connect an external monitor to it. I asked Ray about that, and here was his response, "I did some experimenting with the Educator output and found that it will run both monitors at the same time although the video on both has reduced contrast. The external monitor, as expected, displays in color. The VIC chip video output is isolated and buffered by a transistor inside the RF modulator so there is no danger of overloading that IC. Since there are no schematics of the C64 modulator internals, I did a bit of reverse engineering on one and found the transistor (one of six) that drives the video outputs. With the added load of an external monitor, that transistor runs a tiny bit warmer than normal but well within its ratings. I wouldn't have a problem running it that way. As I said, the only drawback is that the video level to the monitors is reduced. You can compensate with the contrast and color controls on the external monitor. The Educator monitor has only the external brightness control... its contrast control is on the inside."

I also wanted to know about the power output on the E64, i.e., how many amps output at 5 volts, 9 volts, and 12 volts? Ray gave a general answer, "Judging by the size of the PS components, I'd guess it's no more powerful than the original black brick, although it would be more reliable since the 5V regulator for the 64 board is on a big heat sink. The 12 volt supply is probably good for more than the internal monitor, but I really don't know how much. There is only one big transformer to run everything, and it seems to be conservatively rated."

I will pick up the Educator 64 in June, and it will be on display at the July 24-25 Commodore Vegas Expo v6.

If you were to Choke a Smurf, what color would he turn?

Monthly Meeting Report



- by Dick Estel

Starting with this issue, we are going to attempt to provide a brief report on each meeting, for the benefit of our majority of members who are unable to attend in person.

Before getting down to business, I'd like to mention that we have a lot of fun, with conversations going off on all kinds of tangents in between actual business, and those who don't attend are really missing out. I can't really remember everything we talked about - for that part of the meeting, you have to be there.

February Meeting:

At the February 21 meeting we had the usual suspects, President Robert Bernardo, Treasurer Dick Estel, Brad Strait (who joined last September), and special guest Roger Van Pelt.

As far as formal business, Robert reported on plans for the Las Vegas Expo July 24 and 25. That Saturday will be the 25th anniversary of the release of the Amiga A1000, and we talked about doing something at CommVEx to acknowledge the event. Dick announced that Guaranty Bank, where we keep our checking account, has been absorbed by a larger company, BBVA Compass. Although this bank is unfamiliar to those of us in the west, it has a large presence in the south, and now a small presence in Fresno (two branches).

Robert told about his visit to the Macworld Expo, where he taped the performance of Warp 11, a musical group with a Star Trek theme. The female lead, Kiki Stockhammer, was an Amiga Video Toaster personality in the late 1980's to early 1990's. Robert said he wished he could have walked around with a C64 under his arm, as a reminder of who was really first and biggest in the computer wars of the 1980s.

Robert has obtained some disks containing scans of many Commodore magazines and newsletters, including RUN, Ahoy, Info and lots more, and has gone to a lot of work to make copies on DVD for each member at the meeting. He passed out the second batch of what will eventually be 20 disks.

The demonstration and much of the rest of the conversation focused on the transmission of Morse code via short wave radio, and how Commodore computers fit into the process, a long ago and newly revived interest of Roger and his father. From my ancient perspective, Roger looks like he could crash a high school prom unchallenged, but he is actually old enough to have been using Commodore computers for many years, and his technical knowledge is impressive.

He brought an extensive collection of equipment to make his VIC20 part of a ham radio setup, including the Hamtext cartridge, one of those little laptop shaped DVD players (to serve as a monitor for the C64, which was used in lieu of a shortwave transceiver), a Kantronics Interface (in essence, a radio modem), and the necessary software. Roger describes the software as halfway between a terminal program and an instant messaging system. However, my favorite item was a World War II era telegraph key that Rogers uncle used in Europe during the 1950s.

To summarize briefly, Roger used the C64 as a stand-in for a short wave radio transceiver. But instead of receiving the Morse code signal from another transceiver, it generated the signal itself (via software and telegraph key) and sent it to the Kantronics interface. The interface then converted the signal to a TTL signal which the Hamtext software on the VIC displayed as text on its screen. The Hamtext software is also able to translate text from the VIC to Morse code and send it to the transceiver via the

interface. The telegraph key was plugged into the joystick port. As Roger operated the telegraph key, we watched the text appear on the monitor of the VIC. (By the way, the Hamtext system was available for the C64 and several other computer platforms.)

My knowledge of the subject is limited and my explanation may be a bit ham-handed (sorry!), but Roger has promised (we have it on tape, Roger) to write an article that will explain it far better and in much greater detail.

In addition to business and talk, we ate pizza and sandwiches and drank sodas, and just had a good time in general.

March Meeting:

We had a special guest at our March 21 meeting, Leif Bloomquist of Toronto. He is a member of the Toronto Pet Users Group (TPUG), which has been in existence for over 30 years, and worked with three other members of the group to put the clubs entire library on a CD - over ten thousand programs, in D64 format. He gave a brief demonstration of the disk, which is available for $20 (see www.tpug.ca).

Leif is involved in many other activities, Commodore and otherwise, and you can check them out on his home page, http://home.ica.net/~leifb/.

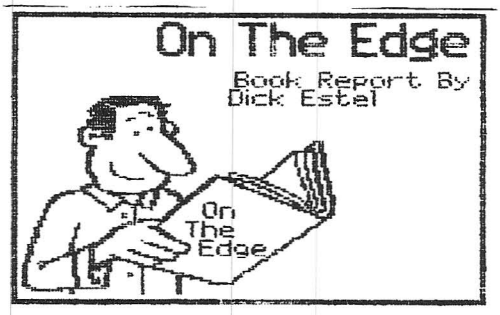
Attending from FCUG were the regulars, Robert, Brad, Dick, and Roger, who is now our newest member. Robert passed around a flyer for a new Commodore brand Windows PC - looks like a laptop with no screen. He also showed us a game he picked up at the recent TOGA meeting, The Settler, which is entirely in French. Our bilingual guest from Canada helped out with a translation of the minimum requirements. The game will be used as a door prize at CommVEx.

We looked at a cassette of games that was labeled compliments of Canadian Tire, which we learned is a department store chain similar to Target or K-Mart. Leif told us he got his VIC20 at Canadian Tire back in the day.

We took a look at Super Student, an educational series that Robert had bought from the late Dave Mohr. It has a package for each grade, K through 5, and was published by Micrograms Publishing of Rockford IL, a company that specialized in education computer programs. Tests proved that we are all as smart as a 5th grader.

Finally Robert loaded up Wolfman, a text adventure game. Leif was able to get out of the room it starts in, but we didn't have much luck proceeding further.

This was probably the largest member attendance we have had in a couple of years, and our thanks to Leif for including us on his itinerary.



On the Edge The Spectacular Rise and Fall of Commodore
(c) 2005 by Brian Bagnall; published by Variant Press
http://www.variantpress.com/books/on-the-edge

Several years ago FCUG President Robert Bernardo became aware of a book recounting Commodores early history, "On the Edge," by Brian Bagnall. The club became a distributor for the book, selling copies at CommVEx and elsewhere.

I glanced through it, saw some interesting paragraphs, and purchased a copy in September of 2006. It later occurred to me that I might not really want to read it, and it sat on the shelf until late 2009. But when I decided to give it a try, I found that it held my attention throughout its 557 pages.

I will not attempt a thorough

review, but I would like to share some comments and a few things I learned.

Since I came to Commodore in 1987, I had always thought of the company as being based in Canada and Westchester PA, so it was interesting to learn that Commodore achieved its early success as a Silicon Valley company,

Commodore came close to buying Apple, but the "Steves" (Jobs and Wozniak) wanted more than Jack was willing to pay.

The book starts out with a description of chip design and manufacture that becomes a bit tedious, but the author is a good story-teller, and his focus on the people involved keeps it interesting.

Throughout the book, it becomes apparent that Commodore could have had much greater success if its management had avoided a few stupid moves. Company president Jack Tramiel was somewhat of a visionary, but his vision was very limited - it was to produce the lowest cost computer possible, and have it ready by his arbitrary deadline, even if waiting a few more months would have produced a far superior product.

Meanwhile, Chairman of the Board Irving Gould refused to provide adequate financing for the company to become a long-lasting and dominant player in the computer business. They often refused to advertise adequately, although doing so could have created a huge demand for their products.

On the other hand, Jack was the definition of Chutzpah. For example, He sold the first PETs by requiring advance payment with shipment guaranteed within 90 days or your money back; most buyers waited closer to 180 days, but few asked for refunds. Without this method of financing, company probably would have gone under.

Technical advances by the company included primitive networking, what was in effect a digital webcam, and a working prototype touch screen in 1979. The plan was to be able to communicate audio/video via the computer. Commodore also pioneered the 80 column screen and lower case letters.

One reason they could beat the competition with time and features was vertical integration owning a chip company, so they could get the chips quickly and in necessary quantities.

Apple's claims at being first were just made up out of whole cloth. Quoting Jacks son Leonard: "Every month they had an ad asking the question, Why is Apple number one in the world of Personal Computers? And the answer of course was because they were number three, behind Radio Shack and Commodore. They just lied."

About Radio Shacks TRS-80, After a few minutes at the keyboard, many walked away dazzled by the promise of computers. My own experience: I tried to play blackjack, but could not understand what to do, and the clerks in the store apparently knew as little as I did. This (and a price that was out of my reach) caused me to abandon my desire for a computer for a few years, until an ad for a $200 Commodore 64 caught my eye.

The Commodore 64 was done fast and good enough, but not good. Although it was a huge success, it was the company's last moment of true glory. It could have been a LOT better if not rushed to market and made as cheaply as possible.

A new edition of the book is supposed to be coming out in 2010 with a Jack Tramiel interview (he did not comment for the first edition). The book badly needs an index, and hopefully the new edition will contain one.

Even so, this edition is worth reading for those who have an abiding interest in Commodore, and my copy will be given as a raffle prize at the 2010 CommVEx in Las Vegas .

About the Author: Brian Bagnall is the author of several computer books for McGraw-Hill, Prentice-Hall PTR , and Syngress Publishing. His previous book, "Core Lego Mindstorms Programming," has been translated into French and Japanese. He is also a frequent contributor to Old-Computers.com, an online museum dedicated to preserving computer history.