



THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA

-by Lenard R. Roach

I'd like to start this article by thanking our leader and president, Robert Bernardo, for standing all this time behind the Commodore line of products. Because of his relentless use of the Commodore, things like the CommVEx and this newsletter would not be possible. He has also inspired me to sit down behind my Commodore keyboard and start, once again, to compiling works using the machine. For the last month or so, I've been sitting behind the keyboard of my trusty Commodore 128 and writing all my articles and skits using Commodore hardware and software. And yet, despite all that is being done on the machine, I am still producing the newsletter on the PC. Why is this?

My friends, like I've said in the past, I feel like that I am being forced into using the PC so I can get things like publishing and writing done, but after observing what Robert does with his Commodore when it comes to doing such duties, I had to re-think my position and find out how Robert does this. The answer was sitting right there in my stack of slightly used Commodore software. Allow me to try and, with words, illustrate.

When I first started taking on the duties of The Interface's editor-in-chief, I was bound and

determined to make the entire work complete on Commodore hardware and software -- that's why some of the issues you received early on had crooked columns and offset pictures. I literally had to "cut" the columns out of a piece of paper and "paste" them onto a blank sheet using scotch tape, putting the pictures (made by The Newsroom graphics maker) on the top of each article's starting point. Yes, it was primitive, but effective. Then, I scanned each page of the newsletter into the PC and save them either as a .doc or a .pdf format.

Now when you "cut" and "paste" the way I did back then, all the columns would look straight when examined by the naked eye; only when they were scanned into the PC did the crooked columns appear. Also, when it came to putting contributions of articles into the Commodore, I had to type each article into the GeoWrite word processor one word at a time. With some of Robert's articles, it would take about two weeks to type each one in. Robert can get wordy sometimes, but that makes for interesting content and a healthy sized newsletter. I can always count on Robert to make sure the newsletter will be of a decent proportion, but typing in the text from the Internet one word at a time, it can get really taxing. How did we fix this problem of long hand text transposition?

Enter Dick Estel. Dick was cool enough to introduce me to a simple to run, yet complex to understand (due to my personal inexperience) called "Big Blue Reader." "Big Blue Reader" (named after IBM's nickname, Big Blue) is a text transposing program that works on the Commodore 128. This program, to me as a writer, was amazing. I could take anything written or produced on the PC and make it appear on the Commodore. This was just the thing the doctor ordered, and it also took working on the newsletter from a two week project into a one evening escapade, leaving me free to pursue other writing venues. However, in order for the newsletter to appear on GeoWrite and to print on the

Commodore printer, another program had to be introduced.

Enter Dick Estel again, with his shipping to my house a copy of "Wrong Is Write" for Geos. "Wrong Is Write" is a Geos program that converts text and makes it readable in GeoWrite, and vice versa. As an avid Geos user, I really enjoyed this program and the program was, for the most part, self explanatory. I started making writing on the Commodore a more common thing.

Then came the books. "Run/Stop-Restore" was written in Speedscript and GeoWrite, which was then converted to all GeoWrite, then copied using a photocopier I "confinscated" from an empty store space at the mall. "Run/Stop-Restore" went from nothing to assembled in one month during a lull in employment back in 1999. If you own one of the few copies in existence, you can tell this copy, due to it's crudeness, did not sell well in the world of printing perfection. The original text, as it appeared in 2000, is now on my website, www.lenardroach.com. Please find time to check it out.

Fast forward to 2010. Ten years, and several composed and published articles later, it was time to make an update to the book using a direct-to-press publisher. Author House in Springfield, Illinois, was nice enough to take on the project of making a professional copy of "Run/Stop-Restore" provided I can take the book out of Commodore GeoWrite and into .doc using the Microsoft Word word processing program. Since "Wrong Is Write" and "Big Blue Reader" work in taking PC to Commodore, let's try doing this in reverse. The idea worked brilliantly, and within three months and several re-writes later, five days after Christmas 2010, the first copy of "Run/Stop-Restore: 10th Anniversary Edition" rolled off the presses and was made available to the general public. This book has been a personal bestseller in the Roach archives and still manages to keep selling even here in the middle of 2014.

Yes, I've been a frog head and not thinking, after all the work I've done on the Commodore and PC with all the conversions, that I never thought of this before. I really thought that I was trapped forever to work on the PC using all their programs and leaving my Commodore in the computer room to collect dust, breaking it out occasionally to do something like budgeting and printing checks or envelopes. I was even going to re-write my Commodore Christmas story on the PC and not worry about trying to re-compose the text from Newsroom to GeoWrite. Now, with all the programs out of their dusty storage cases, and with lessons re-learned from Robert and others, I am back to composing works on the Commodore. I have a long way to go in getting the right cables and programs to take entire programs off the Internet and put them into my Commodore; I'm still stuck in having kind people in the Commodore universe mail me programs I want on standard 5.25 or 3.5 disks, which I try to pay for the disks and postage.

Thanks again for being patient with me while I get my head together and start working on the proper machines again. I was starting to feel like a heretic with me talking about working on the Commodore when I've been doing everything on the PC.

So here's how it goes down from heretofore at the Roach Center for BASIC Commodore Studies when it comes to composing anything in writing: First thing is to boot up the Commodore 128 and Geos operating system. I could probably use an upgrade from the 2.0 version I've been using and get something more up-to-speed. Next on my to-do list is to boot GeoWrite 128 v2.1 and set my margins. I usually use .5" for the left margin and 7.5" for the right margin. I also set the font to Commodore 10 point for the simple reason that I can use that particular font in printing an NLQ copy on my dot-matrix printer in case I need to sometime.

Up next on the list is composing the document. I usually have a plan on a slip of paper in front of me to guide what I want to write about, or I can just sit at the Commodore and start typing away, hoping that something with some good sense will come out on the screen. For anyone who would like to know about writing structure, I would like to suggest the book "The Screenwriter's Workbook" by Syd Field. This book takes you step by step on how to write a movie script, but it's principles can also be used in composing skits, plays, articles, and short stories -- just make a slight modification to Mr. Field's style and get started. You'll actually see how easy it is to write for Commodore or anything else when you follow the steps listed in the book.

Up next, after saving the work under a new name (since I use the word "Untitled" to start all my work on the Commodore (GeoWrite won't allow you to write in its word processor unless you title the work first.)), I get out of GeoWrite and use the program "Wrong Is Write" in Geos to convert the work from GeoWrite 2.1 to PET ASCII. This process takes about ten to fifteen seconds depending on how large the document is. I'm currently writing a four act play for the Women's Group at my church which takes almost two minutes in "Wrong Is Write" to convert. Lots of text in that work.

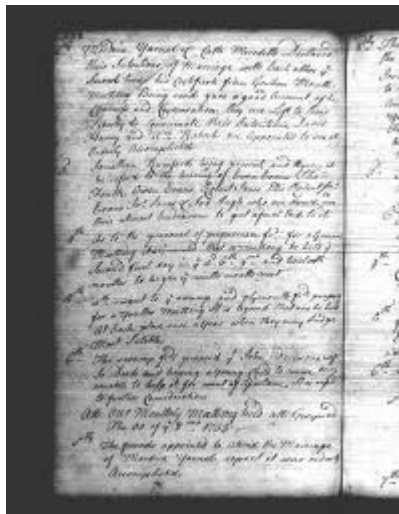
Okay, up next in the process is to get completely out of Geos and load into the Commodore 128 the "Big Blue Reader" conversion program. Upon completed boot, I like to set the things like the date and time since it does seem to make a difference in where the program falls on the disks. "Big Blue Reader" will require one 3.5 DSDD disk formatted in IBM 720K format. Luckily the Commodore, in "Big Blue Reader," can make that format happen in your standard 1581 disk drive. I've also discovered on the Internet that you can buy these soft sectored disks already formatted to 720K from www.oldsoftware.com for \$49.99 per 50 disks.

You can also get 5.25 DSDD disks in groups of 50 for the same price, but not formatted in Commodore, but in IBM. Jackets for the 5.25 will cost an extra \$4.99 to \$12.99 depending on the style ordered.

Select "Copy" from the menu on "Big Blue Reader" and select your document you just composed. Press the up-arrow on your Commodore to enter into conversion mode. Be sure to select "IBM Format" before pressing "Any Key" to continue. After pressing the key, watch the magic happen as your Commodore talks PC to your 1581 disk drive. The writer of the "Big Blue Reader" software should have got "Programmer Of The Year" when he developed this work since it is such a handy tool that no serious Commodore user should be without. In a few seconds, I'm popping the 3.5 disk out of the 1581 and heading for the PC sitting in the kitchen.

Booting the PC and waiting for it to load all the software off the hard drive takes several more minutes longer than it does loading anything on the Commodore, even with the Commodore running at 2 MHZ and the PC running at 1.8 GHZ, but once the PC is loaded, I insert the 3.5 disk into the drive on the PC, load the word processor, select "Open" and the 3.5 disk drive, then pull the Commodore processed document off the disk and into the PC's word processor. A few printing modifications and the document is ready for the newsletter. So, in essence, I am using the Commodore for writing and the PC for printing. A nice combination.

Let me tell you once more how great it is to be on the Commodore again. My cat lays on the open space of my Commodore computer desk, soaking in the sun from the open bay-like window while I listen to music or whatever on my iPod sitting next to him, all the time working on the Commodore. Oh, what a feeling!



MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

-by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

March, 2014

-by Robert Bernardo

I arrived at Bobby Salazar's Restaurant about 5 before 11, and I started setting out the equipment. Member Greg was already there, and he was soon followed by v.p. Roger and much later, members Louis M. and son Vincent. Member Brad had already e-mailed his apologies that he wasn't going to make the meeting, and treasurer Dick was absent, too.

As usual, we ordered lunch first, and while we ate, I started the meeting with old business and new business. Under old business, I told the members that another payment was going out to the Plaza Hotel for the July 26-27 Commodore Vegas Expo. Under new business, we agreed that the April FCUG meeting should be moved to the last Sunday of the month, due to Easter falling on the third Sunday. I told the members that I would be unfortunately absent for that meeting, because I would be at the William Shatner Weekend, the annual event in which we members of his fan club hang around with him and attend his Hollywood Charity Horseshow. It is also the time when I ask him to autograph a piece of Commodore memorabilia – this year the top casing of a Commodore 8050 disk drive (bringing the entire drive would be impossible, because it weighs a ton!).

As we neared the end of lunch, we had a special guest visit us – Scott Lurndal. He had come all the way from Sunnyvale to visit his lady friend and also to visit our club, ostensibly to

give away some Amiga items. Wow, what items they were! A boxed Amiga 1000 with everything except for the Kickstart and OS disks, a boxed Amiga 1080 monitor which needed repair, a boxed 1010 disk drive, and some programming books and hardware bits. When I asked him why he was getting rid of his items, he said that he had not used them in years and thought that somebody else could get enjoyment from them... but that was not the end of the story. I gently elicited him to tell us more, and after gauging our group for several minutes, he opened up. Boy, did he open up!

He spoke at length of how he's been into computers since the 1960s. Not personal computers, not mini-computers, but mainframe computers! He spoke about how he used to work with Burroughs (among others), one of the mainframe computer manufacturers of that era. He spoke about how the processor for one mainframe was spread over 9 cards! He spoke of how Burroughs was vertically-oriented company. He spoke of paper tape, huge hard disk platters, punch cards, removable drives, 9-track computer tape on reels, the V-500, booting a PDP-8 in 10 minutes, and 5 horsepower squirrel cage fans to cool mainframe computers. He spoke of the book, “The Adolescence of P1” and the first worm (a “self-aware” program), the Morris worm. He spoke of Plato and the massively parallel game, Empire. He spoke of Dungeon and Dragon games on mainframes. Whew! I should have had an audio recorder or videocamera going to record all the history he was telling. Much of it went over my head (because I didn't know much about mainframes).

These days Scott has his own company in Sunnyvale and consults/advises others on how to keep their mainframe computers going, like the Living History Computer Museum in Seattle. In fact, he will travel if he is called to help repair a mainframe. His expertise is in the programming for mainframes.

On his Linux laptop computer, he showed us a few minutes of one of the videos he posted to YouTube. The topic – mainframe computers (of course). In fact, he wanted to post more about mainframes. You can find his YouTube channel by doing a search for his YouTube handle – slurn 45.

After Scott finished with his oral presentation, we carried on. I had a brief presentation on the new VIC-20 Multicart/Development cart with game set 2 from Kent Rittenhouse. (A few years ago we played with the VIC-20 Multicart/Development cart with game set 1.)

Greg had brought in two C64's and two 1541's for us to test out, the former to be tested with the Commodore Diagnostic cartridge. For one reason or another, we did not use that

cartridge. Instead, we used the Ray Carlsen Computer Saver for testing the two C64 power supplies. One p.s. was good; the LED indicators on the Computer Saver reported no problem after having the p.s. running for many minutes. However, it was a different story for the other p.s.; after a few minutes, the Computer Saver reported that the 5V line was not working right. Whew! If Greg were to have connected that bad p.s. to his C64, it would have ruined the computer. Greg decided to toss the p.s., not even saving the power connector cable. I warned him that even the good C64 p.s. could go bad at any time and urged him to get a better one. In more testing, we found that one C64 didn't seem to have sound, but the other was all right. The same for the disk drives - one o.k., one with loading difficulty.

I had brought my Amiga 600 in order to show off the Jim Drew Amiga-from/to-Mac disk utility, SYBIL with cartridge; and the Coast-to-Coast Technologies' disk copier, Synchro Express II with cartridge. Unfortunately, it was the A600's turn to stop working correctly. The computer screen showed a sickly green color over much of the screen. At first, I thought it was just color impurity from the CRT monitor. Nope. I reluctantly cancelled the presentation of the cartridges and admitted that repair tech Duncan MacDougall would have to look at the A600 again.

We discovered Boray's SD2IEC music player V2.1 for the VIC-20 would not play any music at all (it was touted to play about an hour worth of music). I figured that the music player was PAL-only and thus would not work on our NTSC VIC-20.

Working much better were the Flappy Bird game for the C64 (Vincent beat all of us oldsters in scoring the most points), Reset #02 magazine's C64 cover disk (well, some programs were PAL-only), and prototype 2 of the custom-made C64/128/VIC-20CR/Plus4 power supply from Ray Carlsen. I opened up the p.s. for everybody to look inside its casing, and I took photos of its well-laid out interior. I had been testing it for quite awhile with a C64, and it did not fail when connected to my VIC-20CR. As always, it barely generated any heat; the computer to which it was connected ran warmer.

Finally, the meeting was adjourned around 4:30, but I couldn't hang around afterwards, because I had errands to run.

APRIL 2014

-by Dick Estel

For the first time since 2006, Robert Bernardo was unable to attend the meeting, but everyone else was there – Brad Strait, Roger Van Pelt, Louis and Vincent Mazzei, Greg Dodd, and Dick Estel. Vice-president Roger stepped in and ably conducted the meeting.

The "meeting before the meeting" consisted of a discussion of arcade games, of which Greg is a serious collector (more about that later). Louis reported on a hardware developer in Poland who is working on a board that will run the 8-bit Atari at up to 25 Mhz; when it's completed he will adapt it for the C64. He has a web site, <http://lotharek.pl/>.

Louis also offered some equipment to anyone interested, since he is trying to reduce the amount of "stuff" in his possession. Dick is in the same position and offered some new VHS tape. To his surprise, all available tapes were claimed by Roger and Greg.

After a delicious lunch, we got busy with our demos. First up was an FM radio hardware/software package that runs through the C64. The radio itself was a very tiny device, with a simple wire antenna (see a photo at <http://www.dickestel.com/images/fcug378>). Operating required an external speaker, and we set up a pair of PC speakers which plug into the radio via a 1/8 inch mini-plug. Selected keys on the Commodore are used to seek stations, or to go through the dial step by step. Roger had prepared for the demo by creating pre-sets for a number of local stations, entering the call letters and station names into fields provided for this in the software (photo at <http://www.dickestel.com/images/fcug379>). The sound quality and reception were very clear, despite being inside a large, old building.

Greg brought his Vectrex, a mini-arcade machine with a pull-out control panel (photo at <http://www.dickestel.com/images/fcug373>). The device had a vertical display, about six by ten inches. It took awhile for the video to come up, a condition other users have reported on-line, but once active it had a very sharp monochrome display. It used vector graphics and many games came with a plastic overlay which added some color. There is one built-in game, Minecraft (an Asteroids clone), and Greg brought two cartridges for us to look at, Scramble and Blitz, a football game.

There are many web sites with Vectrex info, including a Google discussion group at <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/rec.games.vectrex> and a Wiki at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vectrex>

We also looked at a new C64 multicart, whose name cannot yet be revealed. It included a number of games converted from the Max Machine, a Japanese Commodore computer that was produced after the VIC-20 and before the C64.

Continuing the game theme, Roger showed us a couple of games that he and his brother had typed in from a book of games a number of years ago. Several of us had done that, and we recalled the challenge of accurately typing lengthy strings of characters, with few actual English words.

As usual, the meeting ran overtime. Two different Amiga Kickstart ROM switchers were shown - a manually-switched one and a switcher activated with a Control-Amiga-Amiga keypress. Because of the high degree of interest by the club members and because the switchers are not available anywhere, Robert is considering a small production run of a clone. The members preferred the cheaper, easier-to-produce, manual switcher. Robert will get together with Greg Alekel of the Portland Commodore User Group and look into building the switchers.

Greg Dodd showed off his Amiga 2000, a replacement for the other one that failed two meetings ago. Robert provided the replacement, but the machine itself was rebuilt by Duncan MacDougall of The Other Group of Amigoids. In fact, Greg's failed machine was quickly repaired by Duncan and now sits back in storage.

Look For It!

Next Issue Out Sometime Around July 4th!

A HISTORY OF THE AMIGA PART 7 –

GAME ON!

-by Jeremy Reimer



The most powerful gaming platform

The Amiga started out its life as a dedicated games machine, and even though it grew into a full computer very quickly, it never lost its gaming

side. The machine's 4096-color palette, stereo-sampled sound, and graphics acceleration chips made it a perfect gaming platform, and it didn't take long for game companies to start taking advantage of this power.

While the slow sales of the Amiga 1000 limited the number of games that developers were willing to make for the platform, when Commodore released the low-cost Amiga 500 in 1987, everything changed. Now the most powerful gaming computer was also one of the cheapest, and game companies jumped at the chance to showcase their talents on the Amiga.

Mind Walker by Commodore (1986)

One of the first games ever released for the Amiga was a quirky gem called Mind Walker, written by Bill Williams and published by Commodore itself. Williams started his game design career on the Atari 800, writing classics like Necromancer and Alley Cat. His games were always unique, combining off-the-wall situations with innovative game play.

Mind Walker puts the gamer in the role of a physicist who has lost his mind. Instead of resorting to drugs or therapy, the protagonist of the game decided to send his split ego into the depths of his own brain. Your job is to navigate this surreal landscape and uncover paths leading to deeper and deeper levels, with the ultimate goal of finding the hidden key to save your sanity.

Your alter ego jumps around on brightly colored square platforms of varying height — fortunately, you can't fall off. If you reach the end of the screen it instantly loads the adjacent area. Floating gold balls try to zap you with deadly searchlights, but you can zap most of them with bolts of electricity that you direct with the deft skill of a Sith Lord. Over some squares hover strange pyramids that transform your avatar from a man into a red wizard, a flying bug-like alien, or a sexy

seductress. Different forms are required to find different parts of the path, and keeping track of the whole operation requires careful consultation of the overhead map. If the character becomes hidden behind an overly-tall platform, the player can switch to one of four different views by hitting the letters N, S, E or W.

Once the path is complete, the game shifts to a three-dimensional view of a psychedelic tunnel. The player has to grab a translucent green door with his disembodied hands, which leads to the final level in which the character fends off fuzzy-looking "bad thoughts" to find the next piece of his sanity.

The game has simple but evocative graphics that make good use of the Amiga's built-in hardware polygon drawing and area fills. Bill Williams had been a composer before he became a game designer, and the music he created for Mind Walker has an eerie, lyrical quality to it that fits perfectly with the game's theme. The game uses stereo pan effects to let the lightning bolts seem to sear across the room.

Like the Amiga itself, Mind Walker was unusual and thought-provoking.

Another unusual thing about the game was that it not only fit neatly on a single floppy disk, but it also had no copy protection and could be run directly from the Amiga's Workbench GUI. Furthermore, the game was multitasking-friendly, so you could easily run other applications in the background. Few Amiga games in the future would retain these qualities. Game developers, eager to squeeze out every last bit of power from the computer, would bypass the operating system and access the hardware directly. This allowed later titles to be much more graphically impressive, but at the cost of multitasking capabilities.

Bill Williams would continue writing games up

until 1992, when corporate interference on the Super Nintendo title, *Bart's Nightmare* (he referred to it as "Bill's Nightmare"), caused him to leave the industry altogether and pursue a second career as a Lutheran pastor, picking up a master's degree in theology along the way.

Defender of the Crown by Cinemaware (1986)

Cinemaware was started by Robert and Phyllis Jacob in 1985. Their goal was to create games that had style and presentation that were evocative of movies. This was an ambitious goal back when most video games were simple shoot-em-up or maze-chasing affairs, but the advent of the Amiga gave the small company a chance to realize their dreams.

Defender of the Crown was their first title, and it showcased the power of the new platform. The scene: you are a Saxon baron of an English fiefdom in the Middle Ages, and the king has just been killed without a clear successor. You must fight other Saxons and Norman invaders to conquer England and become the new king.

The game was one of the first to feature gorgeous hand-painted loading screens to set up the action, and the game itself was just as beautiful. Each turn begins with a stylized birds-eye view of Britain. From this menu, the player can choose to attack a neighboring county, stage a raid on an enemy castle, stage a jousting tournament, or occasionally stage a daring rescue of a beautiful maiden. Robin Hood pops up from time to time as a non-player character who can be either an enemy or an ally.

As in many games of its era, winning can be frustratingly difficult. In the raid screen, for example, you control a single fighter who must cut down enemy after enemy while his compatriots merely keep the rest of them away. Jousting is only slightly less difficult than the real thing, requiring a steady hand on the mouse to position your lance in the right position at the right

moment. Winning a joust can gain your side honor points or even territory, depending on the initial stakes.

Defender of the Crown was an Amiga-only game at the outset, and was often used by dealers to showcase the platform to eager young gamers. Much of the credit for the game's success has to go to the game's artist, Jim Sachs. RJ Mical, who did some consulting work for the game, recalled his talent.

"Jim Sachs, what a god he is," marveled Mical. "Jim Sachs is amazing. These days everyone sees graphics like that because there are a lot of really good computer graphics artists now, but back then, 20 years ago, it was astonishing to have someone that good."

Because Cinemaware was a startup company running low on cash, and *Defender* was the first product, it was forced to release the game before it was completely finished. Later, ports of the game to the Nintendo Entertainment System, Commodore 64, IBM PC, and the Atari ST would fill out the missing parts, including a more substantial army attacking screen. The ports could not deliver the same sound and graphics quality of the Amiga version, however.

Cinemaware continued to publish innovative games until 1991, when over-extension and feature creep on the Cold War title, *SSI*, caused the company to declare bankruptcy. Two early employees of the company, Lars Fuhrken-Batista and Sean Vesce, got back together to create an updated version of the game called *Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown* for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, and Windows PCs in 2003.

RPGs come to the Amiga

Faery Tale by MicroIllusions (1986)

Faery Tale is one of those games that everyone

who played it remembers. An fantasy role-playing game by MicroIllusions that featured a top-down view, Faery Tale resembles classics like the original Legend of Zelda and the Ultima series and contains a surprising amount of depth.

The game starts out by introducing the main characters via a virtual story book that slowly flips its pages. Three brothers, Julian, Philip, and Kevin have grown up in the small hamlet of Tambry in the land of Holm and are eager to explore the wider world. Julian, the bravest of the three, sets out first. The world, as in many RPGs, is inexplicably full of bandits, monsters, and undead creatures like skeletons. They often attack in groups that can easily overwhelm the player's character, especially with his initial armament of a small dagger. The action takes place in real-time, without turns or pauses, and surviving the game's early stages can be difficult.

If Julian dies, a small fairy will resurrect him, but after a number of deaths he becomes a ghost. The player is now transferred to Philip, who can talk to Julian's ghost and recover items from his body. If Philip fails, the quest is taken up by Kevin, who is the player's last hope. Fortunately, the game can be saved at any time.

Characters have various statistics that can be improved with time and training, as in many RPGs. Bravery reflects the player's strength, and Vitality his hit points (which go up at a slower pace as Bravery rises). There are also Kindness points that are required to talk with certain non-player characters. Unlike many role-playing games, Faery Tale lets the player attack innocent non-player characters, although because they then stay dead this is rarely a good idea. The player must also make sure he has packed enough food for his long journey, as hunger will slowly drain his Vitality.

Objects on the ground can be picked up, and treasure obtained can be traded in for better

weapons at the local shop. When the weapon is equipped, it is immediately visible on the player's character. Some items are magical, such as the Bird Totem that gives the player a birds-eye view of the map. There are colored keys to open certain locked doors, potions to restore health, and even trinkets to momentarily stop time in the heat of battle.

The game world is staggeringly large, and contains many surprises and twists, such as a giant turtle that the player can use to transport himself across the water. Later, to save the king's daughter from a horrible fate, the player must tame and fly a golden swan across an otherwise-impassable mountain range.

Despite having a fairly pedestrian fantasy plot (the player must accumulate five golden statues in order to open a portal to the Astral World and defeat the evil Necromancer) the game is still memorable more than twenty years later. I talked to my friend Domenico DiTomaso, and he recalled spending two happy months playing cooperatively with a friend to complete the game. "You could go anywhere," he said, marveling at the free-form game play that allowed the player to wander through the entire world without hitting a loading screen. "Just remember," he told me, "make sure you make a map when you enter the Dragon's Cave!"

Dungeon Master by FTL (1988)

Dungeon Master actually made its debut on the hated Atari ST platform a year before it was released for the Amiga. Because of this, the graphic quality was somewhat less than the Amiga was capable of producing, but the 3D first-person view made this dungeon crawl stand out from its competition. Although the graphics were largely unchanged in the port, the Amiga version did make good use of the custom sound chips. The stereo sound made monster noises seem to "pop out" in three dimensions, an important clue when enemies

could sneak up on the player from all directions. This advantage actually helped to sell Amiga 500s over Atari STs.

Dungeon Master was inspired by the crude three-dimensional graphics found on the Ultima series of games whenever the player entered a dungeon. By placing the entire game in that setting, the designers at FTL Games could concentrate on improving the 3D graphics and game play experience.

The game started out at the entrance to the dungeon, with only one direction of movement possible: go inside! In the first level, the disembodied player wandered around a "Hall of Champions" consisting of many different portraits of heroes hanging on the walls. Moving up close to a portrait caused the character to magically appear as part of your party: you could have up to four characters in total. Unlike other dungeon crawls, there was no other character creation process: you took the pre-defined adventurers as they were. When you were ready, you took the stairs down...

All the action could be controlled with the mouse, from turning and moving to picking up objects. Clicking on an object moved it into an empty hand of the currently-selected character; you had to open an inventory screen to move the object into a backpack. Excess inventory could be thrown with the right mouse button, and it would sail forward across the dungeon. There were many puzzles, hidden levers, and secret doors to unlock. Clues could sometimes be found in notes that were scattered around the top levels of the dungeon.

Combat took place in real-time, with the player required to manually switch between characters to take a swing or cast a spell at a monster. The spell casting system was quite innovative: for example, to cast a fireball, the player mixed a fire symbol with a wing symbol. If one of your characters died (this happened to me early on when falling

through a trap door) you could pick up their bones and carry them around to a rebirth chamber.

There were 14 levels in total in Dungeon Master, and completing the last level involved slaying a demon master named Chaos, who looked like a cross between Darth Vader and Amadeus. Chaos could not be killed with normal weapons, and had to be trapped in a magical cage before he could be dispatched. There was a plot line hinted at in the game, and detailed in the manual, which was written by Nancy Holder, a novelist who has since written books for Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Sabrina, the Teenage Witch; and Smallville.

Dungeon Master inspired a ream of copycats, such as Eye of the Beholder and Captive. It was the primary inspiration for the ground-breaking 3D masterpiece, Ultima Underworld.

Vertical scrollers, too

Xenon II by The Bitmap Brothers (1989)

Xenon II was a sequel to the popular, vertical-scrolling shoot-em-up game written by a company of Amiga fans called The Bitmap Brothers. Sequels were good to the Bitmap Brothers; the company's second version of its futuristic arena handball game, Speedball, was a huge commercial success and is remembered fondly to this day.

Before the advent of 3D shooters, one of the most popular types of game was the 2D scrolling shoot-em-up, a game usually set in space where the player controlled a single ship that was pitted against an endless fleet of oncoming enemy craft who couldn't shoot very quickly. The first arcade games had limited processing power and usually set the player against a simple backdrop of stars. Later games had more detailed backgrounds that could become obstacles all by themselves.

Xenon II's backgrounds and enemies were largely inspired by the arcade megahit, R-Type, which set

the player against a strange and somewhat disgusting array of space-faring worms and other ugly-looking creatures. Xenon II had space worms and giant space trilobites to go along with the more standard-looking enemy space ships. Unlike R-Type, which scrolled from right to left, Xenon II kept the scrolling old-school and vertical. One difference: the player could scroll backwards for a short distance in a pinch.

At the end of each level, the player had the opportunity to visit a shop, tended by a cranky old alien. He would give some advice about each power-up available for purchase, but if you pestered him for too long, he would snark back: "What, do you want me to play the game for you too?"

Xenon II didn't contain any brilliant innovations or redefine the 2D scrolling shooter genre, but it did show that the Amiga was capable of delivering arcade-like experiences at home.

Shadow of the Beast by Psygnosis (1989)

While most of the Amiga games up until this time had been superior to ports on other computers, there still wasn't a game that conclusively blew away the competition and left no doubt about which was the superior game platform.

That is, until Psygnosis released Shadow of the Beast. A side-scrolling platform game in the vein of Super Mario Bros., Shadow of the Beast pushed the Amiga graphics chipset to its limits.

Back before 3D graphics technology, side-scrollers would often use a technique called parallax scrolling, where images in the background scrolled more slowly than those in the foreground to give the illusion of movement in a large world. Few consoles at the time had the power to scroll backgrounds at all (Super Mario had static backgrounds) but some arcade games would have two or maybe three levels of parallax scrolling.

Shadow of the Beast had up to twelve.

The enemies were no slouches either. Unlike the tiny sprites of other side-scrollers, monsters in Shadow of the Beast could fill up to half the screen.

Shadow of the Beast had an intriguing back-story. The game's protagonist was a man named Aabron who was kidnapped as a child by the evil beast lord Maletoth, and twisted through evil magic into a horrific man-beast to serve his new master. When this creature witnesses a man being executed, he remembers the man as his human father and his childhood memories come flooding back to him. Escaping from Maletoth, he is determined to seek his revenge.

Finishing the game's 12 levels was a frustratingly difficult task. The Beast, while powerful in his own right, seemed to be constantly on the edge of death. Not only were there other monsters to deal with, but the Beast also faced an endless barrage of deadly spike traps that rose from the ground, flying squadrons of spiked balls, and even giant floating eyes. The Beast started with 12 units of health, and each touch of an enemy would reduce his reserve by one. If it fell to zero, the game was over.

The graphics weren't the only part of the game that stood out. "What I remember foremost about Shadow of the Beast is the music," said Amiga owner Narendar Ghangas. "The game had a foreboding sense of atmosphere throughout and the moody strings really suited the dark nature of the game. I remember being totally captivated by the synthesized music — it was haunting."

While some panned Shadow of the Beast for putting graphical eye-candy over depth of game play, the game itself was a commercial success, and was later ported to platforms such as the Sega Genesis (minus much of the color palette and several layers of parallax scrolling). It also

spawned two sequels, the last of which could only be found on the Amiga.

Lemmings by Psygnosis (1991)

If there was a single game that could represent the Amiga experience, it would have to be Lemmings. Released by Psygnosis in 1991, it was quirky, fun, and addictive. Players controlled a large number of colorfully-clad, green-haired lemmings, who needed help getting from the start to the end of each level.

Without the user's assistance, the poor lemmings would usually walk straight off a cliff to their doom. Fortunately, the player could, with a click of the mouse, give certain key lemmings specific "jobs". One important job was the "halt" lemming, who stood with hands outstretched and flicked his head back and forth, causing any lemmings to reverse their direction when they ran into him. An umbrella-wielding lemming would sail softly down to the ground instead of falling to his death. There was even a suicidal lemming option, who would count down from five to zero, squeak "Oh no!" and then explode. Sometimes this sacrifice was necessary, other times it was just fun.

Other lemmings could be tasked as diggers, or to build ramps to help the rest of the group reach inaccessible locations. Having all these options would make completing any level a trivial exercise, but there was a catch: each level gave the player a limited number of jobs to hand out, and not all jobs were available on all levels. If the user got really frustrated, there was always the "nuclear" option: setting all lemmings to count down from five all at once. The resulting chorus of "oh no"s and subsequent total destruction was strangely cathartic.

Lemmings was incredibly popular, and the game became a symbol of sorts for the Amiga community. Gail Wellington, the director of Commodore Advanced Technical Support (CATS),

once arranged for a whole group of Commodore employees to dress up as lemmings for a trade show. They had the whole thing covered: the purple outfits, the green hair, the appropriate stances, an umbrella, and even balloons filled with confetti for the inevitable "Oh No!" finale. They worried a bit about this last part: what would the people who had to clean up think of such a stunt? It turned out that their fears were unfounded: the cleaning staff was more than happy to tidy up the mess after being so thoroughly entertained.

While Lemmings was ported to other platforms, most notably the IBM PC, the Amiga version had superior sound and even some game play options that weren't available anywhere else: two players could play at once with each using a mouse, thanks to the Amiga's unique ability to have two rodents connected at the same time.

In 2007, Sony released a new version of Lemmings to its PlayStation Portable (PSP) system. With multiple ports to choose from, they decided on the Amiga code base as the basis for the game. Now a whole new generation could experience the delights of pushing little green-haired creatures around.

Tune in for our next installment, when we'll look at the lives of some of the most popular Amiga game developers, such as Team 17, Psygnosis, and the Bitmap Brothers.



a new car salesman, mostly for Toyota .

-by Dick Estel

INTRODUCTION

This is number eight of a limited series of articles saluting some of our past members, people who have made a significant contribution to the club. Our more recent members did not have the pleasure of knowing these men and women, many of whom have passed on. However, they made a lasting impression on the club and the author.

Questions and comments to our web address, info@dickestel.com, are welcome.

DEL CONTRERAS

It would take an entire issue of the Interface to do justice to the contributions that Del Contreras made to the group. For many years he was our technical expert, repairman and general advisor on the inner workings of our favorite computers. He operated a repair business out of his home, and was always ready to help members who were having problems, even the notorious “intermittent problems” that I often plagued him with.

Del was born in Gallup NM in 1921 and studied radio in high school. He became a civilian employee of the Department of Defense Signal Corps, repairing electronic equipment. During World War II he joined the Army, working as a radio technician, and later as an artillery Forward Observer in the Pacific.

In later years he had variety of occupations, traveling as a salesman for Motorola for ten years, and then operating a TV and appliance store. He also worked with his mother, who owned Zenny’s Restaurants, a very popular eatery in the 1950s and 60s with two locations, open 24 hours. In still another career change, he worked for ten years as

In retirement, in addition to computer repair, he built and repaired golf clubs, and was a regular player until his late 80s. He also developed an interest in genealogy and did extensive research, tracing his ancestry to Spanish explorers who came into New Mexico in the 1500s.

He and his wife Lupe had five children, one of whom followed Del into the computer industry.

Although he is no longer active in the club, he still does some repair work, for family only. In recent conversations Del has continued to show an interest in what is happening with FCUG, and has been willing to provide advice and information on computers.

2013 FCUG Financial Report

Checking IN	
Starting Balance 1/1/12	1,559.14
Donations to FCUG	12.00
Donations for CommVEx	0.00
Dues	72.00
VCR & DVD Sales	0.00
Other Sales	1.00
Transfer from cash	3.50
Interest	0.83
Total Checks IN	1,648.47
Checking OUT	
Transfer to Savings	0.00
Dinner/Picnic	
Newsletter	
Bank Fees	0.00
Charitable donations	75.00
Motel for guests	
Total Checks OUT	\$75.00
Checking Balance	\$1,573.47
Cash IN	
Starting Balance 1/1/12	\$96.78
Dues	\$48.00
Raffle	\$0.00
VCR & DVD Sales	\$0.00
Other Sales	\$30.00

Donations	\$0.00
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Total Cash IN	\$174.78
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Cash Out

Raffle

Transfer to checking

Dues

Misc sales

Club dinner	\$98.17
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Other	\$3.50
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Total Cash Out	101.67
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Cash Balance	73.11
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Savings	5.00
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Total Assets	1,651.58
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