

The Interface

"Taking 8-Bits Into The 21st Century"

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Summer 2021! Let's Hit The Beach! Wait. Wha?

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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

SEASONED COMMODORE VETERAN HELPS ROOKIE USER

Just when you think you've got a situation or problem completely figured out and solved one hundred percent, something pops up that shows you that you really don't know diddly squat and you haven't solved anything. Such was the case that happened to me recently when I was working on one of my books to get it ready for publication.

I'm an avid Commodore person, using it to pay bills on a weekly basis at least. Sometimes I come across a disk that doesn't have a label on the front. I sit there at my Commodore desk, staring at the 5.25", black, two-dimensional thing, wondering what I put on there and why did I take off the label. Could it be something that I was hiding from prying eyes? Illicit material?

I come across the blank disk problem periodically when I'm in the middle of a project. When I fill up a disk, I must look for a blank disk in order to continue that project. I prefer a blank disk. Yet, is the disk that I am intending to use truly blank? Or is it just full of needed information that I don't want to erase? Life is chock full of questions.

Usually I take the gamble. I remove my full disk, insert the unlabeled disk (without doing a disk

format or a directory read), and save my work, hoping against hope that I don't corrupt any files that I really want to keep on the unlabeled disk. Nine times out of ten, I win that gamble, and my current work is saved. Then I can exit the program that I am working on so that I can immediately investigate that unlabeled disk. I lose ten percent of the time... well, we won't get into that right now. It will only bring me to cussing and swearing which is something that I try to avoid in life, since one of my New Year's resolutions is to be a man with a better choice of words.

For a few months I had been working on a new skit book, "The Fourth Equinox." In this particular volume, I'd written three skits and plays, converted them from Commodore GEOWrite to PC, and saved them on a flash drive. Even with editing and refining the manuscripts to match the formats required by the book printer, Kindle Direct, the manuscript had fallen short of a page count with which I felt comfortable, i.e., I preferred to write thick books of 200 pages or better.

Years ago when I had "Run/Stop-Restore" published by Author House, I learned the company had condensed the manuscript down to a paltry 118 pages. My manuscript had been reduced to a simple bathroom reader. Back then it hurt, but I learned my lesson. I've had to focus more on content, to give what I thought the reader deserved – something to read and not to glance over. "The Fourth Equinox," with its three stories, had ended up being a small 143 pages. I was not happy with this, but I didn't have any more content to add at the time. If I wanted to publish this book, I would have to settle with this amount of fewer pages.

One evening I was working on my Commodore, doing what I dreaded to do but was a necessary evil when you're supposed to be a responsible adult. That evil was paying bills. During the

A Great Year For Commodore Under Way!

year, onto a 5.25" disk I would add new categories of new creditors that needed to be paid and subtract creditors that had already been paid in full. With all this writing to the disk, my disk would fill up with information. At this particular time, I had very little room left on the disk and needed to find a new blank one to start fresh. I went to locate a blank in my stack of Commodore disks and came across an unlabeled disk. With apprehension, I saved what information I had onto the newly acquired disk, exited my work, and then decided to see exactly what it was on the disk.

When I hit RETURN after LIST on the computer, I was freaked out a little with what I had found. This disk had a very old, two-act play that I had written back in 2004 while in my son's hospital room at Children's Mercy as I awaited his recovery from nearly fatal AML leukemia. I had forgotten all about this work. It was entitled, "A Baker's Christmas," and starred the entire choir of my local house of worship, with its three top singers as down-and-out transients who seek refuge in a busy mall on Christmas Eve and go through a Three Stooges series of situations that bring them from poverty to prosperity. It was written in two formats – GEOWrite 128 and Speedscript 3.0. I hadn't worked with either word-processing programs in decades since publishing houses abandoned the Commodore w.p. formats years ago with the ushering in of new word-processing formats. I had to adapt to the publishing house's PC ways; it was the nature of the beast.

Now that I had "A Baker's Christmas" to add to "The Fourth Equinox" and bring the page count up to something that I could find a little more comfortable, I had a new problem. I had to get the document out of the Commodore w.p. formats and into a PC format. I thought that having a computer would take care of answering any problem, but document conversion between two, incompatible computers just added more

questions.

Not a big deal. Dick Estel, one of the senior members of the Fresno Commodore User Group, had sent me copies of the CBM to PC converter program, Big Blue Reader. I would simply run BBR on my Commodore and convert the document into a .txt format, a format that the PC would understand. I got into my file box of frequently used disks and found a copy of Big Blue Reader and booted the program through Commodore 128 mode. Providence had other plans apparently.

SYNTAX ERROR IN 150.

Beautiful. My only hope to convert the Commodore w.p. files to PC was once again stopped, this time by a corrupted application disk. I went into my e-mail on my PC and sent Dick a note explaining to him what had happened. He had sent me his last copies of Big Blue Reader some time ago, but I was hoping he might have had one more in the dark recesses of his Commodore files. He replied that he did not. I scoured the Internet for available copies of BBR. A dealer was selling his copy for \$75 on Ebay, but it was the Commodore 64 version, and there was no guarantee the disk would work. He did not offer a refund if the disk failed in any way. I was beginning to panic. How would I convert Commodore files to PC without a converter? In my early years as the editor for the FCUG newsletter, "The Interface," I did the "line-by-line" method, i.e., look at the document on the Commodore screen and type it into PC. I really didn't want to go back to doing that again. "A Baker's Christmas" was a sizable document. I looked again through my storage, hoping against hope to find a working disk copy of BBR. After several passes through the storage, I found two copies of the program that were back-ups which I must have made a few years ago. I put a copy into the 1571 disk drive and booted the program up. Hallelujah, I had a working copy! My

panicked self breathed a sigh of relief. I was back in business. I stared at the opening screen for a minute.

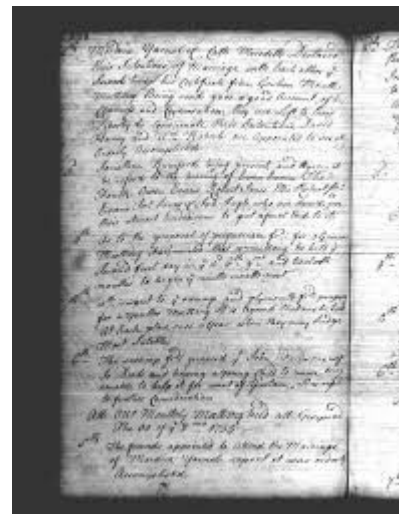
Um, how does this program work again?

Yes, I had drawn a blank on how to operate Big Blue Reader. I poked around at the Commodore keyboard, trying this combination of functions and that combination of functions. Through trial and error, I got the Speedscript version of "A Baker's Christmas" to convert and transfer onto a 3.5" PC disk. I was surprised I knew how the PC conversion function worked in Big Blue Reader, but now I had something to work with. Yet, I still was not satisfied. I knew that one day I would not be able to convert a file from Commodore to PC, because I didn't understand the process of getting "A Baker's Christmas" to convert into a PC word-processing format in the first place.

Once again, I sent Dick an e-mail asking him if he remembered the combination of functions that made Big Blue Reader convert CBM w.p. Files to PC, especially files that were written in GEOWrite. Dick got back to me very quickly with a Word document that gave a Reader's Digest version on how to operate Big Blue Reader, a document he had written during the times he possessed the program. I was excited. I now had a working copy of Big Blue Reader and instructions on how to operate it. I saved the instructions to my laptop and also printed off a hard copy so I could place it on my Commodore desk for quick reference. I sent Dick a congratulatory e-mail thanking him for his help and saving me the money that I would have spent on an inferior copy of BBR.

I discovered I was doing just about everything wrong in the operating Big Blue Reader. I was missing several steps before actual conversion could begin. With Dick's quick read manual, I was now able to avoid those mistakes.

I converted a fresh, clean copy of my Commodore-formatted story into a .txt file, ready for the word processor on my PC, ready for any needed corrections to clean up the document for possible printing. As for my working copy of BBR, I got out my disk copier from Creative Micro Designs in order to make a fresh back up of BBR onto a 3.5" disk. Somehow, this particular disk copier refused to recognize my 1581 disk drive as being in-line; I couldn't use its whole disk copier. I had to use the nibbler portion of the copying program, which recognized my 1581 disk drive, and made the copy. "A Baker's Christmas" made it into my newest play book and brought the page count up to 183. It was not in my personal comfort zone of 200 plus pages, but in this case, with all the difficulties I went through, I wasn't going to complain.



MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

May and June 2021

No meetings scheduled for May and June this year due to the pandemic, but we are so close to having one that we can actually see the light at the end of the tunnel. Let's hope that the light is not an oncoming Peterbilt.



FENDER TUCKER INTERVIEW

by Guest Eric “AmigaLove” Hill

Loadstar was a magazine-on-disk monthly publication produced in Shreveport, Louisiana, that served the Commodore 64 and 128 computer user base. It officially ran from 1987 - 2007 and was under the ownership of Softdisk, which also produced disk mags for the IBM PC, Apple and Macintosh computers. Loadstar, however, was the longest running publication of the bunch.

Loadstar provided an affordable and easy-to-use platform for Commodore users to get lots of carefully vetted high-quality software, tools and information. Contents included applications for education, games, graphics, utilities and more, all within its unique and very cool graphical "operating system" that continuously evolved and improved over time.

Possibly one of the greatest names for a C64 mag, it chose its moniker from the way we most commonly load our disks:

Load “*”,8,1

Rather than being a “cover disk” bundled with a typical paper magazine, Loadstar literally was the magazine in its entirety. It originally shipped on 5.25” floppy disks with programs on both sides primarily for the Commodore 64, although 128

programs and disks were also offered. In the mid-to-late 90s Loadstar would also make the move to 1581 compatible 3.5” disks as well.

Fender Tucker was the Managing Editor for Loadstar from 1989-2000, covering disk mags #47 - 199. Loadstar would continue to produce disks up to issue #250 after Mr. Tucker’s departure.

The following is an interview and correspondence I shared with Mr. Tucker over the course of last few months (July 2020 - Jan 2021).

If you would like to purchase a vast Loadstar archive, which covers issues 1 - 199, you can pick it up for only \$15 here. I describe in detail what it includes at the end of this article.

Fender Tucker also provided two biographical essays, one of which is the perfect place to start.

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HOW THE TOWER CAME TO BE

by Fender Tucker
August, 2020

I first heard about LOADSTAR soon after I bought a Commodore 64 back in 1984. I had hated computers in general back then because I had to take some computer classes back in the late 70s when I fitfully attended New Mexico State University, majoring in Electronic Technology. A “computer” was a building where I had to take IBM punchcards and wait with a bunch of nerds for the IBM 360 to process them. What a waste of time! I had one of the best jobs of my life at the time, playing guitar in the house band at the Las Cruces Inn, and since computers had nothing to do with my interests, (sex, dope and books), I was happy to have nothing to do with them.

A Great Year For Commodore Under Way!

Then, around 1981, my little brother John bought an Apple and convinced me that they were the greatest little puzzle machine ever invented. With a computer you could invent your own puzzles, program it to present the puzzle without revealing the answer, and then keep score for you afterwards. It was like having a friend with the same interests as you, but without a pesky ego to get in the way.

I bought the first computer under \$100, a Timex Sinclair 1000. I must have been really desperate for an egoless friend because I actually liked it. Then I got a Commodore VIC-20 for about \$200 and eventually a Commodore 64 for about \$300. I never thought of them as a tool to communicate with or make life more organized—as we think of computers now—but only as something to be programmed. And I never thought that there was any way other than BASIC to program them.

I was getting burned out on music in the early 80s. My back was killing me from holding the guitar for five hours a night and the rewards of guitar-picking were dwindling. The babes preferred the young guys with the cocaine more than they did the old, bald guy with the pained look on his face, sitting on the bandstand in between songs.

Instead I was spending all my time writing programs and trying to find new techniques. One of my first programs, after learning how to use a custom font on the C-64, was called BATTLE OF THE CHROMOSOMES. It was colorful, catchy-looking, and unpredictable. You set up a screen full of “germs” and let them eat each other until one eventually won. My friend Kathy Delaney would come over and watch TV while I programmed and she was quite familiar with the colorful little squiggles on the screen even though she wasn’t really interested in computers at all.

Around this time I heard there was a magazine on disk called LOADSTAR which would buy programs from guys like me and publish them. So I sent them BATTLE OF THE CHROMOSOMES—and never heard anything back. No big deal. I was used to playing LODERUNNER and the text adventure games of Scott Adams and knew my modest little program wasn’t in their league.

But one day I got a package in the mail while Kathy was there and when I opened it up, it was a plastic “blister-pack” with a LOADSTAR cover and disk inside. And on the cover was a microscope showing my little squiggles! Even Kathy was impressed. It said “CREEPING CHROMOSOMES — Mean genes in a life-like game of genetics”. And my name was on the back cover!

I wrote LOADSTAR and told them how flattered I was that they used my game, and asked if there might be some payment for the game. There was an embarrassed reply and a check for \$100 or so. I honestly can’t remember. I didn’t care about the money. I was a published programmer.

So I sent them some more of my games. MURDER IN THE MUSEUM and MURDER IN THE MONASTERY, two text adventure games, as well as a few simple puzzles. I got back a long, long letter from a “Jim Weiler” critiquing everything I sent in detail. He said my games weren’t very good, but that they had something that was sorely lacking in 90% of the stuff submitted to LOADSTAR: imagination. That was good enough for me. I wanted to be a programmer.

I also got a letter from someone else at Softdisk, the parent company of LOADSTAR, asking me if I could write some “Alfredo” games for the Commodore, which were quite popular on the Apple IIe computer. A disk was enclosed with some Apple files. I took them to a friend who had an Apple and looked at them. Graphic cartoons—

and I knew diddly about graphics. All I knew was the font-manipulating trick I used in CHROMOSOMES.

Then I received a form letter from Softdisk saying they were looking for an Apple editor. I called the company and talked to a man named Al Vekovius, one of the co-owners. I admitted I knew nothing about the Apple, or graphics, but I appreciated his offer. He said they were also looking for a Commodore 64 editor and I started to mumble that I'm afraid I don't know enough to be an editor, but instead asked, "Hmmm. How much does the job pay?" I had always made about \$9K a year playing in the band and lived from week to week as any musician did.

Al said, "Oh, \$20 thousand a year."

Yeeooow! I told him I'd get back to him and, after scrunching up my courage, called Softdisk back saying I'd love to come to work for them as a Commodore editor. I assured them I could do the job. Just as I had assured the US Army that I could type and drive a car when I was drafted back in 1967—and couldn't.

They sent me a check to fly out to Shreveport LA for an interview. I was met at the airport by co-owner Jim Mangham and he showed me a little of the town, including a big old house on Gladstone Boulevard in the Highland district that he and his wife, Judi, had just moved into and were fixing up. Al and Jim and Judi, as well as Jim Weiler, took me out to dinner and apparently I answered their questions satisfactorily. Later on I found that they were actually kind of desperate to get someone to take over the Commodore magazine because all of their interests were in the new IBM magazine, BIG BLUE DISK.

I said all my goodbyes in Las Cruces and packed my station wagon full of computers and clothes and drove from one of my favorite cities, home of the best Mexican food in the world, across the

godawfully large state of Texas to Shreveport, where Taco Bell reigned. I was very nervous about Shreveport because in the 50s my mother and three brothers used to drive through it every summer on our way to visit with my grandparents in Thibodaux LA, deep in Cajun country. Before I-40 was built, US Highway 80 wended its way through the worst parts of Shreveport and we always considered it to be the ugliest city we'd ever seen.

But I soon found that it had changed quite a bit from the 50s and was really quite beautiful. Especially the Highland district, where two years later, after Jim and Judi had split up and she and I had married, I joined her in the big old house on Gladstone Boulevard. The house that was to become Ramble House.

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Fender Tucker Interview, January 2021

Questions conducted by Eric "AmigaLove" Hill.

AL: First off, thanks for taking the time to do this interview.

I've read you were originally a musician for many years before entering the publishing world (with a first name of Fender - that almost seems too cool to be true). Can you describe how you originally got into computers?

FT: I was not a fan of "computers" in 1975 when I went to college after 3 years in the army. It meant going to the computer center, typing code on punchcards, waiting for the IBM 360 (or whatever) to compile and run the program, and debugging it. But around 1980 my little brother John bought an Apple computer and argued that with your own computer all the hassles of the computer center were gone. The computer was a machine that you could program to keep secrets from you and challenge you to find them. An

egoless friend or foe. So I bought a Timex Sinclair 1000 when the price dipped to \$99. Then a VIC-20 and by 1984 I had a Commodore 64.

AL: You started working for SoftDisk back in 1987 under the sister publication of Loadstar. Can you describe what SoftDisk the company was like when you arrived, and how you got the job? What roles did you have, and from when to when?

FT: I started at LOADSTAR in August of 1987 as the Managing Editor. I had nothing to do with the other magazines, Softdisk for the Apple II, Big Blue Disk for the IBM and later, Diskworld for the Mac. LOADSTAR #42 had just been published and for the next 157 months or so we cranked out issues. Mike Maynard and Jim Row did just about all of Issue #43 as I watched and learned. By 1989 Mike and Jim had left for PC work and Jeff Jones, from Gary, IN, and Scott Resh were assisting me. I believe it was around 2000 that we got to Issue #199 and Dave Moorman took over with further issues.

AL: At a high level, can you describe what Loadstar was for those here who might not have heard of it before?

FT: Softdisk was actually innovative. There were home computers and a few utilities and games for them but users were so starved for programs that they would actually type the code in from magazines. I typed a few in my day. So Jim Mangham, a PC programmer and inventor from Shreveport, LA, got the idea of typing in programs, saving them on a disk, and mailing the disk to subscribers. Great idea, but in 1981 5.25 in disks were expensive. So expensive that subscribers were expected to somehow store the programs and then send the disk back to be copied over with the next month's programs.

Thankfully, I didn't get on board until after the price of disks in bulk dropped and users could

keep the disks. I don't know if LOADSTAR ever was done this way.

AL: How often was Loadstar published and what physical forms did it take?

FT: LOADSTAR was always a monthly and started out on one 5.25" disk (both sides). By #45 there had been a couple of two-disk issues and by #46, I think, they were all two-disk issues. As soon as 3.5" disks became standard, we offered LOADSTAR on them, and added extra stuff from time to time.

AL: Was Loadstar offered at retail brick-and-mortar bookstores (e.g. Waldenbooks, B. Dalton, etc.) or other newsstands? How did customers find Loadstar to purchase it and/or subscribe? Do you recall how much it cost?

FT: I heard about LOADSTAR through a Commodore magazine, RUN or Compute! By the time I became Managing Editor it had slowed down to a trickle in bookstores, but apparently it was featured prominently in 1984-1986 at computer stores. In 1993 (I think) I went to a World of Commodore convention in Los Angeles, and at a snazzy newsstand in Hollywood I found some LOADSTARs for sale. We used to advertise in Commodore-related computer magazines, but that slowed down soon after I took over. Wasn't LOADSTAR always around \$79 a year? You'd think I would remember but I don't. [**AL:** According to some of my paperwork, I've since discovered it was offered at \$69/year in 1987, but this price may have changed over time. It was also offered in various tiers of 6 months, 12 months and 2 years.]

AL: Did Loadstar have a market outside the United States?

FT: We did, especially in Canada, Great Britain, Australia and Germany, I think. By the mid-90s, Doreen Horne of Australia and Lee Novak of

Canada knew more about the inner workings of our “presenter” (as we called it) than I did.

AL: How were the actual disks produced?

FT: The disks were bought in bulk and there were times when some batches were more error-prone than others, but those problems weren't mine. At peak times in the early 90s, when LOADSTAR's subscriber numbers were around 20,000 and the other magazines' even more, there would be stations with one person feeding up to a dozen fast-copy machines. A disk would take less than a minute to copy so the worker was like an automaton in Metropolis, inserting, ejecting, sleeving and watching one's soul drain into the swamp.

AL: Loadstar seemed to be one part newsletter, one part software distributor. How did you find and select the software you wanted to put into an issue of Loadstar? How much of the software was produced in-house versus public domain?

FT: By the time I took over in 1987 LOADSTAR was pretty well-known by the best programmers in the US. So every week I received a half-dozen or so “submissions”, of which a few showed promise and some were almost ready to go. At first Mike, Jim and I only checked programs for errors but by the time Jeff [Jones] and Scott [Resh] were hired we were much more comfortable with giving all programs a LOADSTAR look and modifying them. I never liked the standard C64 font and we always used our own, which fit into boxes better. In fact, I considered the 6502's font handling so powerful I insisted all graphics be different from the ones easily created using the built-in C64 font.

We rarely published stuff that was in the public domain until Jeff Jones started internetting around. The coders in Europe were coming up with all kinds of catchy “demos” that were all in

machine language and if he found a good one, we would use it.

AL: Was Loadstar created on Commodore Computers?

FT: 100%, although Jeff used his PC for the LOADSTAR Letter. I used a C64 when I started at Softdisk but one day Judi [Mangham, co-founder of Softdisk] and I were in a Sears and saw a C128 for \$300 or so. Business was good at the time and I said I want a new computer and Softdisk paid for it. By 1997 there were dozens of C64s and maybe 10 C128s on the shelves in the storeroom.

AL: Do you recall what the largest circulation for Loadstar was at its peak, and when that was? What was the largest revenue Loadstar generated in a given year?

FT: 20,000 was about the most monthly subscribers we ever had. 1992? As mentioned elsewhere the first meeting I ever attended at Softdisk, Al Vekovius, the boss, introduced me as the new Managing Editor of LOADSTAR then proceeded to announce that the magazine was “failing”. Compared to the PC magazine it was, but it was considered a cash cow because our expenses (salaries, equipment) were much less than the other magazines'.

One day around 1990 Al Vekovius said to me conspiratorially, “Guess what? Softdisk has more than a million dollars in the bank!” But other than that I have no idea what our revenue was. I was paid \$20K in 1987 and was raised to \$30K by 1992. For the previous 25 years, when I was a guitar picker in bar bands I was lucky to make \$10K a year so my LOADSTAR years were my gravy years.

AL: What was the largest your team got back in the heyday of the Commodore 64 and 128 market?

FT: Around 1988 Al told us in a meeting to keep our eyes out for good programmers. Mike Maynard and Jim Row were moving to other magazines so I took him at his word. Jeff Jones, a programmer from Gary IN who had won a LOADSTAR programming contest, seemed like a good candidate so I offered him the same deal I had received a couple of years before. He and his family moved down and Jeff became an integral part of the magazine. He learned machine language and designed a new presenter. Then I asked Scott Resh, who was brashly confident on the phone, to join in and he moved from New England, I believe. He turned out to be an ML wiz and wrote many tools for Jeff and me to use in our BASIC programs.

AL: Did SoftDisk (and/or Loadstar) fashion themselves to be a software and game development house? Can you talk about when the guys at id Software (John Romero, John Carmack) joined SoftDisk, and what the hope for that relationship was at the time?

FT: We never had any ambition other than to keep making LOADSTARs as long as possible. Al and Judi liked the fact that LOADSTAR was a consistent cash cow, but any ambitions were for the PC or Mac magazines.

I never talked much with Romero or Carmack while they were there. The Softdisk meetings were filled with complaints about missed deadlines and one day I suggested that we scale back our programs to fit the schedule and Carmack said, "We don't think that way." I never knew the whole story about the id guys. The book about them (Masters of Doom?) has a very short description of the brouhaha. The id guys came up with a brilliant marketing strategy and game and left the company just before it took off. They got the Ferraris and fame but LOADSTAR wasn't affected. I never liked Ferraris.

AL: Did Loadstar, or SoftDisk, ever create disk mags for Commodore's Amiga product line? If not, do you recall why?

FT: Yes, Softdisk had an Amiga magazine planned. But was there ever an issue? I don't remember.

AL: Can you describe how Loadstar was spun off from SoftDisk, and how you came to co-own the property? When did that happen?

FT: It was like an episode of As the World Turns. Judi and Jim Mangham had a dust-up about six months after I started working and got divorced. Al Vekovius dropped a hint that maybe somebody ought to keep Judi company and I had been thinking about it for a while anyway, so we went to a New Years' Eve party at George Leritte's, a PC programmer. The rest is history. When Softdisk dissolved in the mid 90s LOADSTAR was still doing well enough to keep me and Judi on a payroll. Jeff left sometime in the late 90s, I think. We called the new company J&F Publishing, and you can probably check my dates by looking on the issues. I'm guessing about a lot of the dates.

I read in the "Y2K Loadstar Letter #76" that the newsletter was put to bed at that point in the year 2000 and moved entirely to the website and disk formats. What became of Mr. Jeff Jones, author of the newsletter, at that point?

I hope Jeff can supply this info. [Jeff was unavailable to respond at the time this was published, but has since allowed the use of some of his photos]

AL: Do you still keep in touch with any of your colleagues from Loadstar and SoftDisk?

FT: Jim Weiler, an Apple programmer who started at Softdisk at its onset in 1981 (I think), has been my partner at Ramble House since the

beginning. He invented the RH process and in my opinion, we were one of the first print-on-demand companies in the world. Dan Tobias lives in Boca Raton, I think. The Vekoviuses are back in Shreveport and if this virus ever lets up, we will drive up there and visit them.

AL: Do you have a personal favorite issue of Loadstar that you think back on fondly or are most proud of producing?

FT: My favorite programs were by Jon Mattson, Lee Novak, Johnny Harris, Barbara Schulak. Graphics by Walt Harned. Music by Dave Marquis. If I were to scan LOADSTAR Compleat I would find many more who deserve mention. There's a game that I adapted. The mechanics of the game were taken from a book by Raymond Smullyan, but the theme was based on Philip Jose Farmer's World of Tiers series. It's called Veil of Tiers and the graphics were done by Walt Harned. The game turned out to be better than I expected and actually has some strategy to it. I can't remember which issue it was on.

AL: Were you with the company when SoftDisk decided to expand its product line to include becoming an ISP (internet service provider) and web host? If so, how did that transformation come about?

FT: I knew nothing about this. I used to doodle in meetings (for maybe a year) and I'd hear stuff about the internet but would tune it out. I had a CompuServe connection by 1991 but I was not much of a surfer.

AL: What was your favorite Commodore computer? Did you have any favorite software you used on a regular basis?

FT: You'd think I would know a lot about games and the computers themselves but I never did. The only game I ever got good at was Lode Runner and I later discovered just how relatively bad I

was. Some of those old LR screens are brilliantly designed.

AL: Do you still have any of your old Commodore machines?

FT: No, although I spotted a Super Snapshot 4 cartridge the other day.

AL: Loadstar lasted well beyond the lifespan of Commodore itself. At what stage did you personally decide it was time to step down? Can you talk about the time when Loadstar (and Loadstar 128) were deemed to be "put to bed" and how that came about?

FT: By 1999 we had cut back on our salaries (Judi's and mine) so low that Judi found another job in town. Dave Moorman said he would like to take over and we knew that he could do a good job. He and his wife had stayed with us at one time and Dave and I worked a bit.

AL: Can you describe how you came to become an independent book publisher under the Ramble House brand?

FT: In 1998 somebody at Softdisk challenged Jim Weiler to make a book with his computer stuff. After many trials he figured out a way to print the book from a PDF and bind the pages into a perfect-bound paperback using a glue gun and an upside-down clothes iron. He showed it to me. I was intrigued by an old mystery author, Harry Stephen Keeler, and I couldn't find any of his books. But I was able to get a few through inter-library loan and we decided to scan the library books and make Keelers of our own. But we also offered our services to other authors.

Vanity Press has been around for centuries. If you buy a bunch of your own books, you can get a press to print and bind them. Usually you need to buy 200 or so copies to make it worthwhile. We claimed to be able to make as few as 1 copy for

your \$20. We did that for a few years or so, during which I made about 2000 books. But then big tech invented something called a DocuTech machine which could make a book in a few seconds, and we realized we could sell more books, at a cheaper price, if we had Create Space and Lulu make books for us. So my bookmaking slowed down and I made my last book about a year ago. I numbered them and the number is around 4700 books made by my ink-stained hands.

AL: Thanks for your time and for telling us your experiences. I hope this walk down memory lane was as enjoyable for you as it was for us.

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The Compleat Loadstar archive is available for purchase and download from Fender Tucker to this day. It includes disk issues 1 -199 for C64 as well as 1 - 42 for C128 for both 1541 and 1581 drives.

In addition, it includes a vast archive of the many Lodestar newsletters, cover images, music files that have been converted to MP3, and several images organized by author.

You can place your order to download the entire collection for \$15 at <http://www.ramblehouse.com/loadstarcompleat.htm> and please tell Fender AmigaLove sent you.

Here's some of what you'll get in the impressive and historically important Loadstar treasure trove:

All 199 issues of LOADSTAR in .d64 and .d81 format
 All 42 issues of LOADSTAR 128 in .d64 format
 .TXT files of all of the text on the issues for fast searching on your PC
 All 21 issues of UpTime (a rival disk magazine that LOADSTAR soundly defeated and bought)

JPGs of all of the color covers of the issues when LOADSTAR was sold in stores
 PDFs of all 73 issues of The LOADSTAR Letter, Jeff Jones' excellent newsletter companion to LOADSTAR

MP3s of selected Knees Calhoon songs
 .d64 files of every LOADSTAR product published separately from the monthly issues: the Compleat Bible, the Compleat Programmer, all five LOADSTAR Extras, Barbara Schulak's puzzles, etc.

All of Dave Marquis' SID and MIDI music
 All of Walt Harned's artwork -- Walt is the most prolific artist ever for the Commodore computer
 You can find the rest of the Loadstar Collection, 200-250 - the issues after Mr. Tucker's departure - available for download at <https://loadstargallery.webs.com/200-219> These were produced from the years 2000 - 2008.

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Before signing off, Fender Tucker had one more small nugget he wanted to share with the Commodore community.

Enjoy.

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DOWN TO THE LAST BYTE

by Fender Tucker
 August, 2020

I imagine that programmers for our modern computers and tablets are rather blase about "memory requirements" since we now count storage in gigabytes or even terabytes. But there once was a time when bytes were harder to come by and programmers for the Commodore 64 and other 8-bit computers had to resort to all sorts of digital gymnastics to get things to fit. This is a story of how I was able to save the day by remembering a little algorithm that illustrates just

how desperate for memory we sometimes were in those halcyon days.

I was working with an excellent machine language programmer whose name I have since forgotten. He had written an important, serious tool (maybe a spreadsheet or database?) and it was just about finished. I wanted it for LOADSTAR badly. But he had a snag. He had one more small feature he had to add but he had run out of memory. A 6502 processor has 65536 bytes but much of that is used for other things so he needed somehow to squeeze in about 20 bytes. Not kilobytes or megabytes. 20 measly little bytes.

His program had quite a few features that were "toggles", meaning switches that went from on to off each time you went to them in the program. I had learned about a nifty algorithm that might be simpler than what he was doing for the toggles. Here is what he was doing. It was in machine language but in BASIC it would be something simple like

```
100 IF TOG = 1 THEN TOG = 0: GOTO 120
110 TOG = 1
120 Program continues
```

If it's 0 then it's now 1. If it's 1 then it's now 0. A simple toggle making TOG flip from 0 to 1 and back again.

So I suggested the algorithm I had learned. Check it out.

```
100 TOG = 1 - TOG
```

It does the same thing as the 3 lines above but in one quick operation that doesn't require any comparisons or IF statements. If TOG equals 0 then TOG becomes 1. If it's 1 then it becomes 0.

The programmer thought it over and changed all his toggles to a simple TOG = 1 - TOG and saved

the 20 bytes he needed to finish the program and have it published on LOADSTAR. Victory!

This may be the most simplistic algorithm story ever told but it illustrates the power of algorithms. There are some being devised that are worth billions to big business and science. There are algorithms that know you better than you know yourself. I am so proud to have been involved with programming when every single byte mattered. We did so damn much with those 65535 bytes and thanks to Robin Harbron and other old LOADSTARites there are still new things happening in the Commodore World.



Thanks to helpful cooperation from The Interface contributors and guests, we are getting the newsletter out in time. Please look for the next issue of our paper to come out sometime around September 15th, 2021.

Club Officers

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-The Small Print-

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.

Dues are \$12 for 12 months. New members receive a "New Member Disk" containing a number of useful Commodore 8-bit utilities. Members receive a subscription to The Interface newsletter, access to the public domain disk library, technical assistance, and reduced prices on selected software/hardware.

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Disclaimer – The club, its officers, members, and authors are not responsible for the accuracy of the contents of The Interface or the results of actions based on its contents.

Our disk library contains over 3,000 public domain programs for the C64 and C128. Members are entitled to copies of these disks at no cost if a blank disk is provided. We do not deal with pirated, copyrighted, violent, or obscene programs. Please call our attention to any programs found in our library which may violate these standards.