

THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA

Programming Conundrums

-by Lenard R. Roach

Ladies and gentlemen of the Fresno Commodore User Group, I am befuddled and bewildered. I've sat down with the five programs that I presented to the Commodore public at the 2015 CommVEx and I really don't know what to do with them. Just like jello, there's always room for more, but I don't know what that "more" is, at least not by this writing. What I think I need to do is stand back and make an overall assessment of the programs both as a whole and as individual Commodore works. Putting the entire works into a single package was a great idea, but, and I'm sure I've stated this before, each program keeps crashing into each other as a battle for the buffer ensues.

For example, I was paying my first of the month bills one evening using "The Ledger," my debt tracking program for the Commodore 64. As I started prodding along and typing into the Commodore 64 all the data of who gets paid where with what money, everything was fine. Then as I was working on some hospital bills the Commodore came up with an "OUT OF MEMORY" error message. This never happened when "The Ledger" was a stand alone program separated onto its own disk but now that its part

of a conglomerate of programs it starts acting up. To get out of the error message I typed RUN after the blinking cursor and "The Ledger" ran fine to finish the rest of the bills I was cataloging.

The one thing "The Ledger" does that none of the other five programs in the package do is perform a validation sweep of the entire disk that the program resides on. I felt it was important to have one of the five programs do the validation sweep because programs like "The Ledger" and "Money Manager 2K" do a lot of data transfers from Commodore to disk and back. Once a user gets used to finding his or her way around "The Ledger" they can start swapping information quick enough with just a few key strokes that the disk drive doesn't have time to settle down after a spin on the hub before data is being swapped again. This could have caused the OUT OF MEMORY error message I experienced on that day I was paying bills. Also, I know from experience that daisy chaining programs together is a hectic way to form a disk conglomerate. It is better for the function of the programs to be merged into one single massive program that requires no loading and dumping to the disk drive. However, I still have yet to find that certain Commodore program, either commercially made or freeware, which will do that particular job. The problem with making several individual programs into one major program is memory capacity. Remember, we are only dealing with 64K of space on the standard Commodore computer, but for simple ease and flow of data, merging is best. I know merging programs for the Commodore exist; I just have to find them.

Daisy chaining usually causes one program to overwrite another. If any data from the standing program remains during the overwrite, the Commodore figures the remaining data is part of the new matrix coming in and tries to run both together, thus creating an error message requiring a total shutdown and reboot of the machine and the loss of any unsaved data. The loss of data is

something I try to avoid when I sit down at my Commodore machine to code a program, thus I always have several points in a Lenard Roach program where data is dumped onto disk before any further work can be done. It's something my Commodore teacher, Carl Zuel, taught me: "Save early and save often." This little philosophy has saved my programming bacon several times during my journeys through the maze of coding; but daisy chaining, well, that's an animal of complete mystery where confusion reigns supreme. When it came to daisy chaining all five of the programs on the "5 Program Bonus Disk" I demonstrated at the 2015 CommVEx, everything worked well at home, but boy, at the show ... It was, shall we say, a pain to deal with.

I've been doing some research with a few manuals that I have here at the Roach Center For BASIC Commodore Studies and I've been reading about what the CLR command will do. Supposedly, CLR will remove all data, variables, and pointers off the machine and set everything to zero without disturbing actual program content but it must be used before any numerical data is entered. My programs usually carry very little numerical data except for "The Ledger" which is based on numbers when it comes to calculating the information in paying bills and how much is left to pay (basic addition and subtraction). Really, it can't hurt much to try CLR in a program or two and see if that will eliminate the overlap problems. I was also looking into the NEW command, but that would eliminate the program in memory as well as any data; not a good idea, but at least does what I am looking for, just, well, it's overkill. Therefore I'm looking for something between CLR and NEW, where CLR takes care of a little and NEW takes care of it all and then some. Man, the life of a Commodore BASIC programmer -- sheesh!

And, I'm sure this makes the problem worse, the "Main Boot Screen" where a user selects which program to boot, is itself a stand alone program.

So, in essense, I'm trying to daisy chain six programs together into one large conglomerate of software, trying my best to make the "5 Program Bonus Disk" function like a commercial piece of software that a person would find at the computer store. Maybe I should realize that I'm a small little minnow in the pond of big Commodore catfish and that my existence in the pond is based on pure blessings from above that I haven't been eaten by any of the larger fish yet. I know that my efforts don't go wasted in vain, but still it would be great to have this Commodore plan come together. What I really should have done was allow copies of the existing programs go out to those who would like to work with it and see if they can offer suggestions on how to make all those programs cooperate together.

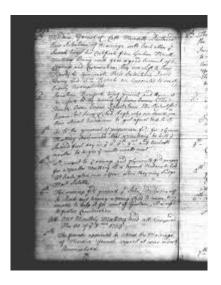
When I was working on "Check It Out," I took myself and the program to Wichita State University to see Carl, who was working on his degree in business back then. Carl, at the time, was one of the head geeks on campus and almost everyone at the university would come to him for computer help and advice. I showed Carl (on his Commodore 128) what it was that I was doing and what I would like for "Check It Out" to do. The first thing he noticed right off was my lack of checksums in the program. "You need more error messages," he said. I told him that only adults would be working with "Check It Out" and therefore checksums were not necessary. Carl gave me the funniest look and proceeded to give me a lecture on Beginning BASIC Programming. "Home computing is basically a new field," he would say. "If you don't want your program to crash on the user every two or three punches of the keyboard, you have to include checksums. Tell the user what he can and cannot do." He proceeded then to add a few short subroutines that would help me build into a larger base of "do's and don'ts" for the average user. I took Carl's help and advice (with a little grain of salt (hey, he is my Commodore teacher after all!)) and went back to Kansas City to finish the rest of the

program to get ready for the, then, last issue of RUN magazine.

I told you that story to tell you this: I didn't add even half of the checksums I did in "Check It Out" in "The Ledger," "Checkmate," or "TEA 4 2" for the simple reason that most users of the Commodore now are anywhere from thirty years old and older and, with the technology advances that have been made in the computer and electronics fields since the hey days of Commodore, more than likely a complete file of checksums and error messages are not necessary. I've added a few in my programs like file name lengths not past sixteen characters and simple "FILE NOT FOUND" messages. Usually, I set the BASIC commands to loop back to the beginning of the program if the user tries to do anything to program was not written to do. I find such coding, though I'm sure necessary (Carl would not steer me wrong), it was tedious, especially if the program was in great length and many checksums were needed.

With all the befuddlement and bewilderment that I've been experiencing when it comes to working with the programs, I'm having troubles trudging on in this journey of coding. I think I might be the only one in Kansas City, Kansas who still works with a Commodore machine on a regular basis. Most users now go with emulators instead of making space for the real machine so getting help locally seems to be limited. I know that those of the Fresno Commodore User Group are always willing to help, so I may just start knocking on some doors and seeing what can be done.

Till next time ...



MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

-- **SEPTEMBER 2015** --

-by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

The September meeting brought together most of the regulars - Robert Bernardo, Roger Van Pelt, Dick Estel, Louis and Vincent Mazzei, and Greg Dodd, along with son Gregory, whom we haven't seen for a while.

There was some further discussion about next year's CommVEx, since one of the sponsors had asked us to reconsider the pricing plan. The consensus of the group was to stick with the plan, \$20 admission covering both days, and no charge for tables.

Next month we do not have our regular meeting, since it is the annual club lunch. The date was moved to October 11, and the location will be the Grub House on Shaw Avenue near Cedar.

December's meeting will also be special, since we will travel to Patterson and meet at Greg's house, where we will finally get to see his arcade game collection and other equipment.

Louis brought two boxes of 3.5" double density disks for whoever wanted them; Greg was the first to claim them.

Our demonstrations started with a look at Loadstar disk number 1, in honor of former editor Fender Tucker, who is now blogging about his Loadstar days at

http://www.kneescalhoon.blogspot.com/2015/08/creeping-chromosomes.html

The disk, from 1984, was surprisingly sophisticated in operation, but the favorite thing on it was the game section, which captured the attention of Gregory, usually not a big Commodore fan. He quickly grasped the concept of some tricky game play, tried out a number of the games, and even understood the flow of the BASIC 2.0 which was used in creating the games.

Robert then showed us a very nice, graphical, 80-column game for the C128, Alien Invaders. Once again Gregory was the best player.

Moving on to other software and hardware, Louis set up his red-painted VIC-20 with newly-installed JiffyDOS. Unfortunately, it did not want to start up. Robert then set up his well-used VIC-20 with JiffyDOS while Louis investigated what was wrong with his. Robert tried to demonstrate eight, previously unreleased System IIII games for the VIC-20. Some of the games required that the 1 or 2 key be pressed. Robert discovered the 1 and 2 keys on his VIC were not working, and so, only about half the games were demoed -- Adventure World, Ms. Pacman, VICeye Arcade Game, and Video Quest. Once again, Gregory was the tester for all of the games.

Robert decided his VIC will have to go to Ray Carlsen for repair.

Meanwhile, Louis determined what was the problem in his VIC -- the JiffyDOS. As soon as that chip was removed, the computer was fine.

The Amiga 1200 had its own problems. Two newly-refurbished power supplies both failed to get it running, though the second one got to a Workbench screen but with no icons. The power supplies will have to go back to Duncan MacDougall of The Other Group of Amigoids for further testing and repair.

This month Robert brought Peter Hanson's heavily-optioned PAL Plus/4 in order to run the Botticelli Bilderdisk 40 slideshow of pictures. The artful pictures were a great way to end the meeting.

-- OCTOBER 2015 -

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

As always, our October meeting was actually our annual club lunch, which evolved from a picnic that was held for several years at the home of a former member.

Since this is not a "meeting," the rules are different:

- 1. No official business is discussed.
- 2. There are no hardware or software demonstrations (I was about to say there are no computers allowed, but let's face it, everyone has their smart phone with them).
- 3. Families are invited.
- 4. The club pays for lunch.
- 5. We go to a different restaurant from the one at which we regularly meet.

This year Robert Bernardo, Dick Estel, Roger Van Pelt, Aaron Van Pelt, Louis and Sophia Mazzei and son Vincent, Greg and Krysta Dodd and sons Gregory and Kristopher gathered at Guri's Grub House, a restaurant that specializes in locally sourced foods.

Everyone enjoyed their choices, from appetizers to sinfully delicious desserts (mainly chocolate brownie cake with ice cream and caramel topping). We had a fun discussion of various topics, naturally including computers.

In another tradition (or is it rule #6?), at the end of the meal Robert distributed gift grab bags to all the members.

Considering the success of this year's event, it's 100% guaranteed to be repeated again in 2016.



November 7, 2015 SC3 Arcade Party

-by Robert Bernardo

After picking up FCUG member Charles Gutman in Fontana, we traveled over to Claremont to attend the SC3 Arcade Party. We arrived a bit late, nearly 5 p.m. instead of the usual 4 p.m.. I did a quick look-through the backyard set-up of classic game consoles, arcade machines, the dining area, the raffle area, and the new sales tent. Then for the next 2 hours I spent time trying to get an Amiga computer going.

It was an Amiga 3000 computer, and I thought I was all prepared. VGA monitor... check. VGA

adapter... check... but wait... where was it? I dug through my car searching for the small device. Darn! I knew that I brought it, but where was it? Wait a minute... the Amiga 3000 plugs directly to a VGA monitor. No adapter is needed. Problem solved, right? Wrong! I found I brought the wrong keyboard; it was a keyboard for an Amiga 4000 computer, which doesn't work with the A3000. Duh! O.K., no worries. I had the Amiga 1200 computer packed in the trunk of the car. I brought that up and tried to power it up. No go! The PC power supplyconverted to Amiga power supply was not powering up the A1200 fully. The boot process would just get partway and then stop. No worries. I brought a Ray Carlsen, heavy-duty power supply and that got the computer going! Whew!

Unfortunately, I had no RGB monitor with me, and without the VGA adapter for the A1200, I could not use the VGA monitor. I had to make do with the Commodore 1702 monitor that organizer Steve Hertz provided. The A1200 outputs a color composite signal, too, but the one I had was a PAL A1200. The 1702 wanted a NTSC signal, and so, all I got on the display was a black-and-white picture, albeit a very sharp picture. Oh, well, it worked. Before we started the presentations proper, we watched the on-line video of cOS, the Commodore Operating System, from Jim64.

http://64jim64.blogspot.com/2015/09/cos-has-been-released-for-commodore-64.html#comment-form

Very interesting, but is it practical? And will it be further developed?

For the rest of the night, I relaxed by eating pizza and soda, talking to Charles, Jason Forster (who sold me his entire collection of Amiga disks, hundreds of disks filled with demos, cracks, and other programs), and CommVEx attendee, Saj.

Saj once again told me that he could provide A/V equipment for next year's CommVEx, provided that he is still working the Las Vegas night clubs next year.

As usual, by the time of the 9 p.m. raffle, it was very crowded with people jostling for a good view of the raffle table and listening for their raffle number. I lost out on the complete VIC-20 package and then a Colortone Musical Keyboard. However, I did win the PowerPad/Leo's Links combo package for the C64. Unfortunately, like the PowerPad I had in storage, it was missing its proprietary connecting cable to the joystick port. I'd have to try and find one or build one. At midnight, Charles and I packed up our C= gear into the car. Jason had left earlier after dismantling his sales table, and Saj had left earlier, too, for the long drive back to Las Vegas.

Once again, it was a nice event, and once again I told myself to be more organized next time.

Below is organizer Steve Hertz's report of the SC3 Arcade Party.

-by Steven Hertz

Thanks to everyone who posted pics!! And thanks for everyone who attended another SC3 event!! It was one of our best ones yet!!

Sometimes things don't go entirely according to plan. But that doesn't always mean things won't work out well in the end. So it was with the Nov. 7, 2015 meeting of the Southern California Classic Collectors (SC3). The weeks leading up to this event seemed plagued with bad luck. Of the five main SC3 planners, two had to work during the event weekend and a third was recovering from an illness that kept him from contributing as much. So that left basically half of the normal team in place for what was quickly shaping up to be one of the most-attended SC3 events ever. For

a while, we didn't know if we'd be able to host it at all. Just a few weeks before the scheduled date, we debated if we should delay the event or outright cancel it.

We really didn't want to cancel. We realize how much people look forward to SC3 – you've told us. We knew you had been anticipating the next party for months, and some of you were traveling long distances – even putting yourselves up in hotel rooms – just to attend. So we pressed ahead, short-handed or no, and the result was indeed one of the most – if not the most – well-attended SC3 arcade parties ever. Over 225 gamers descended on the famous Backyard in Claremont for a night of arcade and console gaming, pizza-eating, socializing, and trading... LOTS of trading.

The trading of classic game consoles and systems has always been a big part of the SC3 ethos, but we're constantly amazed at how this part of the event seems to grow and grow without end. Collectors came shoving entire moving dollies stacked with boxes of carts. Many left with less than they came with, but a few ended up with more. As one trader was leaving, we asked him if he'd moved a lot of stuff. He replied that he'd dropped \$600 acquiring more! Stacks of Amiga floppy disks, shrink-wrapped Atari 2600 games, Virtual Boy machines, a mega-rare \$400 Sega Genesis title – so much trade fodder was available this time that even the greatly enlarged area we prepared for it, complete with lighted 20' x 20' canopy, was positively overflowing.

If the trade tables weren't enough for you, this event featured two separate raffles. The traditional GameGavel raffle – featuring the ugliest Pong console ever made! – drew its usual throng of would-be winners. Beyond that, a second raffle of a complete Apple II setup was conducted by Sean, who also helped set up the event earlier in the day. Thanks to Sean, and to the other Shawn, who also helped get things set up. Big thanks to Jason, who brought several

arcade machines back to life right before the party started. Short-handed as we were, we really needed the help!

Vintage arcade machines are a big draw at any SC3 party, and even though technical problems plagued a few cabs this time, plenty were available. Of special note at this event was the Pac-Wall: a row of seven cabs in the Pac-Man series, ranging from the original 1980 Pac-Man down to 1987's Pac-Mania. Even the rarely-seen Professor Pac-Man made an appearance. In so many ways, Pac-Man is the face of the golden era of arcade machines. Wefelt this was a nice tribute to everyone's favorite yellow eating machine.

Pac-Man wasn't the only one who ate heartily that night. While we made an effort to have plenty of refreshments available, we may have underestimated the cheese-and-pepperoni needs of the humongous crowd. We went through at least 50 pizzas, and it seemed like pies were devoured the moment they arrived. Seriously, 20 pizzas disappeared in minutes! This is something that's hard to get right, and we'll keep working to

improve the pizza supply for future meets.

After chowing down on pizza, we had a different kind of treat available in the picnic area. Tenplayer Saturn Bomberman, projected on a huge screen! This is something we've wanted to do for some time, and even though we've had the proper setup at prior SC3 events, there was never enough space to get a good ten-person melee going. Not so this time. Bomberman has to be the ultimate single-console multiplayer experience, and we were stoked to see it blown up to epic proportions.

Despite a couple of hiccups and the general difficulty of being short-handed, this event turned out to be one of the best backyard blowouts that SC3 has ever had. We saw a lot of new faces; we

lost count of the number of folks who told us it was their first time at SC3. The phrase "OK, I've died and gone to heaven" was overheard from one newcomer upon entering the garage arcade. People weren't shy about expressing their excitement and gratitude this time around, and we really appreciate it. It's what motivates us to keep putting these events together! And we greatly appreciate your donations. All that money goes right back into paying for electricity, equipment rental and food, and enables SC3 to continue. THANK YOU to everyone!

We know your next question: when's the next one? Plenty of you asked during the event! The answer is... we don't yet know exactly. Our normal schedule is one in the fall, one in the spring. So expect it sometime in the April-May 2016 time frame. More exact times will be announced on [www.sc3videogames.com] and Facebook as spring approaches. Until then, keep gaming!



MEMORY LANE

-by Dick Estel

- INTRODUCTION --

This is number 15 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, some

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.

- JIM KIRBY --

Jim Kirby was certainly one of the more interesting members of the club. He passed away a number of years ago, and I don't think it would be speaking ill of the dead to also say he was a fairly strange gentleman.

In earlier days he had some mental health issues, but received treatment, and as he was fond of saying, "I'm the only person I know that has a piece of paper saying he's sane."

Jim was a teacher by profession, but I believe was retired at the time I knew him. He had major issues with the local school administration, as well as politicians at all levels. He made no secret of his feeling, writing strongly worded letters, and maintaining lengthy documentation of the problems he saw, real or imagined.

He was also a fun person to know, enthusiastic about the club and the Commodore, and ready to help out a fellow member at a moment's notice.

The world needs colorful characters, and it was our pleasure to know someone who personified that category.



Club Officers

>>--> Officers and Keypersons <--<<

President	Robert Bernardo
Vice-president	Roger Van Pelt
Secretary/Treasurer	Dick Estel
The Interface Editor	Lenard Roach
Librarian	Dick Estel
Club equipment	Roger Van Pelt
Meeting place reservation	Dick Estel
Grand poobah of the VIC-20	Vincent Mazzei

-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 Bobby Salazar's Restaurant, 2839 North Blackstone Ave., 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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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.