THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA
           by Lenard R. Roach

SHIFT-CLR/HOME
BOOK INTERVIEW

Recently we sat down with Lenard Roach to discuss with him the ins and outs of his new book released in March 2019 entitled "Shift-Clr/Home: More 8-bit Thoughts In A Gigabit World." The following is a transcript of that interview that will be appearing in an abridged version in an international Commodore magazine. This is that interview in its entirety.

TI: Thanks for taking time out to talk with us, Lenard.

LENARD: No problem. I appreciate your interest in my work and the chance to do a little promotion in The Interface.

TI: It is our pleasure. Let's get right into it. First, the title. Why "Shift-Clr/Home?"

LENARD: I wanted the title to scream Commodore computer. "Shift-Clr/Home" is a recognizable Commodore command. Any Commodore aficionado who picks up this book should be able instantly see that this is a book about that machine.

TI: The Commodore 64 on the front cover does help.

LENARD: My cover designer Tim at Monte Graphics and Photography specifically made sure that this volume had a Commodore computer on the cover to make up for the faux pas made by the last publisher of my work.

TI: We'll have to get into that some other time. Today we would like to focus on this book. What made you decide to release a new Commodore book?

LENARD: I basically write for the sheer joy of writing. My writing coach told me that everything is worthy of print so I put that lesson to the test and by golly if she wasn't right, but to answer your question directly, I accumulated enough stories, essays, and commentaries written from my hand to make another compilation book on my views, work, and adventures on and with the machine. I try to cover about everything one can do with a Commodore from programming to using software and even throw in some reviews on work that I've done. I also make an attempt to tell a humorous story or two.

TI: Your style with this volume is different than "Run/Stop-Restore." Why the change?

LENARD: It was basically that I wanted a change. I figured that I didn't need such lengthy opening commentaries but a short, simple synopsis should suffice enough to tantalize a reader to delve deeper into a section or to move on to the next chapter.

TI: When we went through the book we found that you talked a lot about your work on a program called "The Ledger." Would you care to explain why you spent so much time on this work by describing it so much in your book?

LENARD: "The Ledger" was the program that I was working on during the writing of those particular parts of the book. It was my pet project at the time so naturally the work got most of the

attention. I tried to reveal a little more about the program in each essay.

TI: As the writer of the book, how would you describe the volume in summary?

LENARD: This second book is much like the first. It is a compilation book of stories, essays, and commentaries about man and machine but instead of the machine being something like a car, it is a computer, specifically, the Commodore brand of computer.

TI: What problems did you come across in getting the book to press?

LENARD: My biggest problems were mostly on my end. I tried to release two books at the same time and overloaded my friends who helped me edit the book. My laptop also crashed during the writing process and I almost had to start from scratch. It was a year project that got extended an extra year to deal with all these hiccups.

TI: What are your personal favorite and worst parts of the book?

LENARD: You've already mentioned one thing that did bother me about the book and that's the apparent overkill of talking about "The Ledger." I should have spoken more on other subjects as well. As for the favorites I have to say it's some of the jokes and humor that I put in the book. I was a stage comedian from 1977 to 1983 so those things are tough to breed out of me. I don't think I could write a serious book even if I was advanced a million dollar royalty.

TI: We noticed that the book has a different, shall we say, flavor, to it. Is that it?

LENARD: Yes. There are plenty "how to" and "history of" and program guides on the Commodore. I wanted to approach the Commodore from a different angle. I also want to

appeal to the former as well as the curious user -- the person who heard about the Commodore from pa or grandpa and want to know more of the "feel" of using the machine.

TI: Have you had any feedback since the book's release?

LENARD: Only from family, friends, and co-workers who got a copy because I wrote it. They all think the book is a hoot and enjoyable reading. I haven't heard word from the general public yet. Heh, one reader even asked if I had a spare Commodore 64 and hardware so he could experience first hand what I discussed in my books.

TI: Well, your book is a welcome asset to the Commodore community. Thank you for taking time and effort to bring it out. We noticed that between the covers is some mention to The Interface and our help in bringing this book forward. Thanks for the kudos.

LENARD: It was my pleasure. I'm grateful to The Interface for giving me a platform to express my Commmdore ideas.

TI: Rumor has it that you are working on another Commodore compilation book. Care to share with our readers what that might be about?

LENARD: Yes, I am working on a third book but most of the work I've done on it was lost when my PC failed. I'm starting over from scratch but most of the original unedited text was backed up on a flash drive. This book will chronicle the demise of a Commodore club where the reader will read and hopefully learn from the mistakes made by the body and leadership of the club mentioned. It might prove to be interesting reading. That will be up to the Commodore public to decide.

TI: From what we understand your books are well received.

LENARD: Thanks. I'm finding out that the Commodore community is more tolerant of my Midwestern attitude that I write under than the church community that I've made books for, but that is neither here nor there when it comes to this interview. I'll save those comments for another venue.
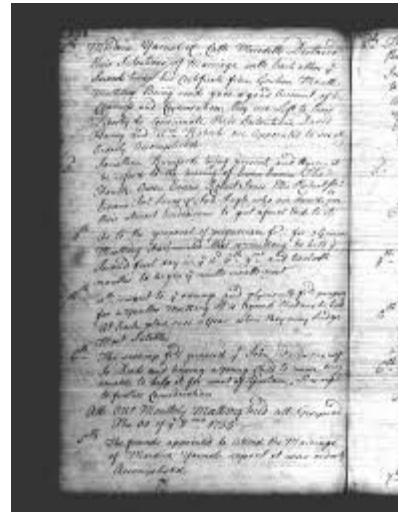
TI: Any final comments?

LENARD: Like anyone who writes a book I hope that everyone within eyesight will buy and read a copy then we pray for a "thumbs up" on social media. I hope that you will enjoy the stories, articles, and essays found between the covers of this book and my previous Commodore book, "Run/Stop-Restore: 10th Anniversary Edition." Both should be relaxing reads that should prove easy to understand as I try my best to refrain from using too much technical jargon. My thanks goes out to those who have previously purchased a copy and have shared it with family and friends.

TI: Before we close, can you tell our readers where they can get their own copy of "Shift-Clr/Home?"

LENARD: I'm marketing right now directly through the Amazon Bookstore, MGP Productions, and The Tech Shop. I also deal with a few sales out of my home in Kansas City.

TI: Thanks again for taking time out to talk to us, Lenard. We raise a glass to the hopes of great success for you.

LENARD: Thank you, Interface.

MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS
by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

January 2020

We started the year with just four in attendance. Was it the gloomy, overcast weather? Or did they stay home to watch the San Francisco 49ers on their way to a Super Bowl Championship? (Sorry, Lenard.)

Whatever the cause, Roger, Robert, Dave and Dick arrived at the Panera Bread Restaurant ready to delve into the amazing world of Commodore. But first we ate lunch, and the conversation during this part of the meeting is often as interesting as the formal meeting or more so.

There was a brief discussion of diets, particularly the paleo diet. No one in the group was interested in exploring the possibilities of eating as did our ancestors of thousands of years ago.

Going back a shorter distance in time, Dick reminisced about his early days with the club, which he joined in 1988. At that time membership was around 150, and we had a Thursday evening meeting as well as the monthly Saturday morning meeting. Exploring the genesis of the club, Dick

had recently talked by phone with one of the three original club founders. An article on the beginnings of FCUG will appear in the newsletter some time during 2020.

The topic of life expectancy came up, with someone questioning why in 1900 it was considered to be around 50 years. All of us had grandparents or great-grandparents born before 1900 who lived well past 50. Dick had read an explanation theorizing that the figure was an average. With the high infant mortality rate of that time, the average was based on a large number of people who lived less than a year combined with those who lived into their 80s,

After all this non-computer foolishness, it was time for business. Dick presented the annual financial report, which will appear elsewhere in this newsletter. Our total assets have moved up and down slightly the last few years but have stayed close to $1,200. Income is nearly all from dues, while the only expenditures were the club dinner and a donation to St. Jude Children's Hospital.

Robert reported on his planned trip to New Zealand and Australia in late February. He will visit four computer clubs in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide, and also will meet up with Gaelyne Gasson, a transplant from Michigan who wrote about Commodore and offered various, related services for many years.

Moving on to software and hardware, we made one small step in updating our new members' disk which had been unchanged for perhaps 30 years. Robert downloaded a text editor so that we could revise some very outdated information in the welcome message.

While Roger worked on that project, Robert loaded up the new version 1.2 of Super Mario Brothers 64, and several of us tried our hand at this classic game converted from Nintendo.

Though Nintendo had reportedly tried to shut down websites that carried the game, the developer did not care and released the bug-fixed version in December.

Next up was the C64 game, Gruniozerca, from Poland – a game where you control a guinea pig to catch the falling carrots. The problem was the game came with confusing instructions; when were you to catch the green or yellow carrots? Red carrots were o.k. to catch for points.

The new Elite 128 v2 was tried, but it always crashed, even though it was the NTSC English version. Perhaps it didn't like the JiffyDOS on the club's C128.

More successful were the other C64 games – Manic Miner 64 (a slow-moving platformer game, even in its new version), Super Vortex (a vertical-scrolling spaceship shooter), Deer Creek (an adventure in which the club members couldn't get very far), Kraken (guide a swimmer in a maze with octopus obstacles), and Amazon Tales 2019 (a sideways-scroller in which you avoid arrows and animals in the jungle). Of all these games, it seemed that Amazon Tales 2019 was the best of the bunch.

Links:

Gaelyne Gasson: https://gaelyne.com

February 2020

-by Robert Bernardo and Dick Estel

Once again we had just four in attendance at our meeting – Robert Bernardo, Dave Smith, Randy Stoller, and Dick Estel. Members from the Sacramento Amiga Computer Club were supposed to make the 3-hour road trip to Fresno and attend the meeting, but they never appeared.

The big news during the business part of the

meeting was a new computer show in Los Angeles, City of STEM. It's a month-long event in April; Robert will have a display table one Saturday. The Downtown Maker Faire in L.A. will no longer be "mini"; it will be a two-day event for 2021 with no show for 2020.

Robert talked about the arduous task of translating 69 pages of the German instruction manual for the C64 desktop publishing program, Pagefox. On his A.L.I.C.E. laptop, he has to type a page-at-a-time the German into LibreOffice (an OpenOffice clone), copy it, dump it into translate.google.com, copy the translation, dump it into a fresh page in LibreOffice, clean up all the Google translation so that it sounds like natural English, and then upload that translation to Las Vegas C= enthusiast, Saj Awan, who will add in the graphics from the original manual, and then finally make a .pdf of it.

To kick off the day's presentations, Robert passed around a little box that he thought had been stolen during a break-in at his house in 2017, but which he recently discovered. It contained a Vampire accelerator board for the Amiga A500 and 2000, which he bought back then for over $500. On Robert's laptop the members watched an on-line YouTube video of how to install it.

Robert talked a little about his first computer purchase in 1983, a C64 for around $200. Although he coveted an Amiga 1000 in 1985, the $995 price was out of reach at the time. In today's dollars, that's $2,885! He had to settle for a C128 for $200.

On his Amiga 3000, Robert started some classic demos which he has shown at the Commodore Vegas Expo, Bay Area Maker Faire, Pacific Commodore Expo NW, and Commodore Los Angeles Super Show, the demos being State of Art and 9 Fingers, both by the group Spaceballs.

Then we tried out some recently-released Amiga games, like Killerball (which looked like it was based on the cult movie, Rollerball) , and utilities like DPaint V (Robert worked on a roughly-drawn starship Enterprise).

For the C64, we looked at the new Shoot'Em Up Construction Kit game, Spearhead.

When all the members had left, Robert starting packing up the equipment but was delayed by a restaurant guest, Jose. He had a strong interest in classic computers and game consoles, so Robert stayed and showed him the Amiga 3000 and the Ultimate 64. For the next 2 hours, Robert let him try Amiga games, like Shadow of the Beast, Cannon Fodder, Star Wars, and Return of the Jedi, and C64 games, like the newest version of Super Mario Bros. 64.

The BackBit Cartridge
A New Way To Enjoy Your Commodore 64/128
       by An Anonoymous Contributor

INTRODUCTION

A few months ago, I got a serious bite from the nostalgia bug and went in search of a way to bring my old Commodore 64 back to life. My fondest memories of the machine are playing games like Summer Games II or The Great American Cross

Country Road Race with my friends during my teenage years. Great times.

Over the past 30 or so years, I've certainly played these games from time to time on an emulator on my PC, using WinVice or CCS64. But, emulating the games and playing with a keyboard isn't the same experience as sitting down in front of a real CRT screen with an authentic Commodore 64 in front of you and a responsive joystick in your hand. I was looking to replicate the experience of my youth. Only a real machine would do. But, I had been spoiled by how fast C64 games loaded on my PC.

Replicating C64 software on a PC can be fun, but it will never live up to the excitement of using real hardware.

I remembered back in the 1980s how long it took for the games to load. When I was younger and had a lot of time on my hands, it didn't matter that it might take four minutes just to get to the loading screen andanother three minutes to get into the actual game (if you were lucky). We used to joke that you could start the game loading, have time to make a sandwich, eat the sandwich, check the weather and sort your laundry and still have two minutes to spare.

Sure, the rich kids spent money to buy Fast Load cartridges that cut the disk access times down, but not all of us could afford such luxuries. Not to mention that those old disk drives could get fussy when they got hot. I had seen a game not load correctly from time to time, only to be fine the next time I loaded it like nothing had happened. Well, if I didn't damage my disk in the process (I was quite the clumsy teenager).

We just dealt with these problems and hoped for the best. But, that was a different time. In this day and age of SSD hard drives and on demand video, I certainly don't have the patience to spend 7 minutes for a game to start. So, the first thing I

did was set out to find solutions to these issues. Certainly, by the year 2020, someone had come up with something that could help, right? Right?

As it turns out, the answer was yes. And, to my surprise, there was more than one way to combat these problems.

This review is about the option I ultimately decided to pursue.

ENTER THE BACKBIT CARTRIDGE

The cartridge came to my attention on the Lemon 64 Forums (https://www.lemon64.com/), where the developer (with the username Evietron) had mentioned several promising features of the cartridge. Compared to other solutions that existed (like the SD2IEC drive), it only required that you use the cartridge slot instead of hooking up to several ports to power the device. The load times were said to be blazingly fast, where under optimal conditions a game could be fully loaded in a second or two. That sounded amazing, and I was hooked on the notion that I could play a game using real hardware (with an actual SID chip) and still get speeds equal to a PC emulator.

The cartridge also promised to support a number of common disk, tape and cartridge image types popular with emulators (D64, D81, CRT, PRG, P00, etc). This would make running the software even easier. It even has its own format (BBT) that could support up to 4GB of data in a single image, which I assume was for multi-disk games or huge collections on a single disk.

But, I was wary that it might be too good to be true. Often, these kinds of things never live up to the hype. Still, I wanted to find out so I purchased a BackBit cartridge and crossed my fingers.

MY WEEK WITH
THE BACKBIT CARTRIDGE

The BackBit cartridge arrived a few days later. When I opened the package, I was greeted to a bright red square with a button on the back and a bold "BackBit" embossed across the top. The feel of the cartridge was pretty solid but light in my hands. It felt well constructed and in my testing it slid both in and out of the cartridge slot pretty easily.

I'd done my research while the cartridge was on its way, so I had an idea of what kind of games were going to work with it. More on that later. I popped the games I had prepped onto my 1 GB microSD card (the cartridge supports up to 32GB cards) and fired it up.

My Commodore 64 lit up with a glorious red screen that said "BackBit" and then put me into a menu system that allowed me to select files. The menu system is fairly intuitive, though referencing the on-line documentation will help some users to figure out the advanced options. Not everyone will need those options, but it's nice to have them. I do wish that the cartridge had come with a small printed instruction booklet, but the documentation can be found on line at the website where it's sold.

The function keys allowed me to do various things with the files I put on the card, like erase them or rename them, both of which are handy options to have available. There are also options to set a particular file to automatically start whenever you turn on the power to the C64. This willbe handy for someone who needs that to do something like load up a certain cartridge every time. I can see using it to emulate a Fast Load or Dead Test cartridge, for example.

But, you're probably wondering how it works with the games themselves.

The good news is that with the right games, it's amazing. I sent a video to a friend showing him how fast it could load the disk version of the game M.U.L.E., and he was quite happy to see that the load time was about 1 or 2 seconds. Seriously. From the time I clicked the button on my joystick to the time I saw the yellow opening screen was that quick.

To be fair, some games are slower than this. This really isn't the fault of the BackBit cartridge, though. Some games have annoying load screens or text screens or menus you have to fuss about with. Some games also take a bit longer to load up due to things they do in the background that have nothing to do with disk access times. Some games are just stubborn. And yet, they are still multitudes of speeds faster than they would be with regular floppy disk access times.

All told, with all the prep I did and with games I had pulled from the Internet that were made for BackBit, I had around 400 games that were instantly loading, working fine, and had me up and playing like I did in my youth a long time ago. It was a delight.

THE DOWNSIDE

Now, it wasn't all sunshine and roses. While it was awesome that I had those 400 or so games running smoothly, there were a lot of games that were on my essential list that I wanted to have at my fingertips. At first, I was disappointed that so many of them weren't working when I tried them, using the D64 images I had on my computer hard drive. I was getting a bit worried.

However, it turns out that if you start asking the right questions and looking around a bit deeper, you can sometimes find exactly what you want. Sometimes, you can find more than you asked for. A day after wondering if I'd be stuck with just those 400 games, I was pointed to a collection of games that worked for BackBit, and after

combining it with my own library, discovered I now had 1,300+ working titles in a very short time. I continued to dig and found even more things through testing that worked great.

Do I have every game I want? Well, almost. There are some multi-disk games that I still haven't managed to get working yet. As more BackBit cartridges are sold, more people will probably continue to work on these missing titles and get them out into the wild for the cartridge. So, it's only a matter of time before most of these things are working as expected.

As for my essential collection (games I absolutely must have), there's only one that I haven't been able to get working…and the kicker there is that the game in question (Karateka) actually does work on BackBit, but not for me. It's something weird with my particular machine that chokes it; because the same file works for other BackBit users just fine. So, I can't blame the cartridge for that.

THE UPSIDE

As of early 2020, the BackBit cartridge is still in its infancy. But the future is bright. The developer (Evie Salomon) continues to push out firmware updates with regular frequency to both add features and fix bugs. For example, a user asked if the cartridge could support the Commodore 128 machine (which is also capable of playing C64 games in its special "64 mode"). That functionality is now present and is being actively pursued.

According to the developer, the hope is to continue to improve software support and that content developers will sign on to create exclusive content for the cartridge. There are several users who are creating game packs that will include hundreds (maybe thousands) of games compatible with the device.

FINAL THOUGHTS

So, if asked if I would recommend the device, I absolutely would. Everything from the active firmware development, to the speed at which games load on the system and the fact that this solution only utilizes the cartridge slot just screams at what a great buy it is. It didn't take me long to accumulate 1,300+ working games for the device and I like that when I turn the C64 on, the thing just works. It's not fussy and there's no arcane commands I have to learn to type to use it. I just pick my title (either with the joystick or by typing the first few letters of the game with the keyboard) click the button or press Return and I'm off to gaming heaven.

At this point, I don't think it's something I can live without. I even made a second optional purchase of a BackBit Button, which is a special button that attaches to the cartridge by a cable so that you can click it to go back to the main menu immediately (even when in the middle of a game). The cartridge has a button on it that does this for you, but now I don't have to lean forward as much; because I have an alternate and easier way to handle it. Plus, I liked the cartridge so much that I wanted to support the developer even more (and that says something).

While there are features of the BackBit I haven't used yet, there are a couple that sound intriguing. Apparently, the cartridge has the ability to "rip" a disk image from a real C64 disk if you have a drive attached to your system. It can also do the reverse and "burn" a disk image back to a real disk. That seems like a handy tool to have, and I can't wait to put it to use at some point.

All I know is that the BackBit is one of the best things I ever bought for my Commodore 64.

MORE INFORMATION

If you want to find out more about the BackBit cartridge, or even order one, go here:

https://www.backbit.io/

[Pricing starts at $79 US for the bare board. Work is in progress for a BackBit adapter for the VIC-20.)

Note: I'm told that as of the writing of this review, you can use the code FREECASE to get a free case for the cartridge. (Disclaimer: Good while supplies last, applies to any BackBit bundle which includes a case).

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

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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 and Marty, 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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You Think Your Commodore 64 Is Really Neato?