



THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA

by Lenard R. Roach

GAMES IN TOW – Bagger

(For the next few months here, I will be covering some of the games that I hope to bring along and display at the Commodore Los Angeles Super Show, whenever the state of California begins to open up the area for shows.)

Part One

“Bob, please come help check. Bob, please come help check.”

I remember my days in the late 1980s when I worked as the night stocker at a grocery store in a 24-hour facility. Somehow I always got called up to the front register to help a customer who came in at 2 or 3 am. Out of fifteen stockers, why was it me who always got called up? It’s something that I will never know; all I know is that it happened. What was worse was the quantity of freight cases I put up on the shelves was declining, because I was spending most of my time at the front of the store bagging customers’ groceries. I got chastised for it by the night manager. Sadly, I lost that job after only six months of working, as the store closed its doors due to the current economic crisis of the day. I found myself without work and once again had to look for some other kind of work through the local newspaper. Let me assure you that I did find some kind of work, and I

haven't been unemployed for these last thirty-plus years.

After a long hiatus of not using my Commodore for gaming of any kind, “Bagger” brought back those days of yesteryear as I sat down to play that game. “Bagger” stars Bagger Bob as the poor sap who has to deal with grouchy and complaining customers coming down the line demanding that Bob get their groceries sacked in a timely manner. Bob has four lanes of customers to deal with and only five lives to make it all happen. When Bob gets a customer’s groceries bagged in time, the customer instantly vanishes off the screen only to be replaced by another grouchy customer coming in from the left of the screen. Bob's station is at the right of the screen, which supposedly gives him plenty of time to send a bag down the line to satisfy the customer.

“Bagger” has a cool opening in which Bob is sending six bags across the screen. A customer comes underneath as the bags fall down and spells out the word BAGGER. A chime sounds, and the letters begin to show a hue for a few seconds before the motion is repeated. Press RUN/STOP to end this display and go directly into gameplay. Level One begins kind of slow-paced as Bob stands ready at the right of the screen while the customers start coming in from the left. A simple up or down tap of the joystick moves Bob between the four lanes. The fire button sends the bag down the lane towards the customer. By simply tapping three times on the fire button, the player can have Bob send as many as three bags at a time down one lane.

However, the game starts sending multiple customers down one lane at a time, sometimes more than three customers at a time. This means that Bob has to wait until one customer picks up a bag before he can send another bag down the lane. While this is happening, customers are coming down a different lane. This means that Bob has to abandon the crowded lane he was

attending so he could deal with the next lane. The lane-jumping continues until Bob either ends the level and moves onto the Level Two (or to the next level), or a customer reaches Bob without getting a bag and thus Bob loses a life. Each time Bob satisfies a customer, he scores.

Now let's add a little more difficulty to the game. As Bob is bouncing between lanes trying to give great customer service, some generous client decides to send Bob a tip which goes down the lane moving at twice the speed of the customers or the bags. Bob must pick up the tip before it reaches the end of the lane or else he loses a life. If Bob does pick up the tip, he scores. Sometimes these tips work out for him; as he gets the tip, he can also launch a bag down the lane to give to the next customer.

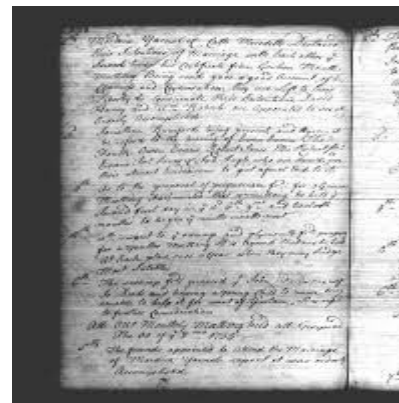
There is no GAME OVER display in "Bagger." When the player loses the last life, the game instantly goes back to Level One, and the player starts over again. No break.

"Bagger" becomes a fast-paced, hard-to-play, hand-eye coordination game full of action which can get the blood pumping and ups the frustration level of the player. However, I do have a gripe or two against the game. First of all, when it comes to going forward from level to level, the player never knows when this action will take place. The internal timer of the computer is in total control of that function; there is no display on the screen to let you know when the level is over, i.e., when the player will be moving on to the next level. There are times when the player will just start a level, and the next moment the computer flips to the next level. Also, let's not forget, as the player progresses from level to level, the speed of the game also increases. Soon customers are coming down the lanes at a great speed and the tips are moving at even a greater speed, and it's up to the player to keep pace. Soon the player gets confused and launches a bag down an empty lane. If that bag reaches the left side of the screen

without being picked up by a customer, the player loses a life. This is easy to do as the bags start keeping pace with the movement of the customers.

Last, there is a quirk in the game when sometimes Bob is just standing still waiting for the round to start. The chime will go off, and Bob will automatically send a bag down the lane he is standing on. This can be a good thing as a customer will pick up the bag and the player scores from the error. Other times the bag reaches the left side of the screen, and the player loses a life. It's a 50/50 chance that really does pay off more than the player loses.

"Bagger" was a game that came as a type-in computer program found in one of the more popular Commodore magazines of the day, as will be the rest of the games that I will be reviewing in this series of upcoming articles. Like I said at the beginning, I will be bringing a copy of this game with me to the Los Angeles show as soon as we can find out when the show is happening. Be sure to come to my table and see this game on display on the Commodore 64.



MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

No meetings yet! Can be blame the government for this one? Not sure. Keep you eyes right here

for more news as this pandemic continues to hamper our Commodore get-togethers.

THE 5 GREATEST HOME COMPUTERS – RANKED

(edited from the original Guardian article found at <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2020/sep/07/the-20-greatest-home-computers-ranked>)

5. Apple II (1977)



Attracted a burgeoning generation of coders ... firing up an Apple IIE 1983 model. Photograph: Zuma Wire Service/Alamy

While the UK had the BBC Micro, the US had the Apple II, a serious, highly expandable, multipurpose home computer, which was accessible enough to attract a burgeoning generation of game coders. It was the first major computer to ship with BASIC in ROM, colour graphics and up to 48k of RAM, and its successors kept refining the specs to maintain its popularity. As for games? Lode Runner, Choplifter, Prince of Persia, Castle Wolfenstein, Ultima, John Madden Football ... they all made their debut here.

4. ZX Spectrum 48K (1982)



People's choice ... Sinclair ZX Spectrum
Photograph: Alamy

The people's choice, the gaming platform of the everyman, [Sinclair's](#) 48K Spectrum, with its rubber keys, strange clashing visuals and tinny sound was absolutely pivotal in the development of the British games industry. From Jet Set Willy and Horace Goes Skiing to Knight Lore and Lords of Midnight, it drew the absolute best from coders, many of whom would go on to found the country's biggest studios.

3. [Commodore 64](#) (1982)



Revolutionary ... the Commodore C64.
Photograph: Interfoto/Alamy

With its huge 64KB of RAM, vibrant colourful visuals (including hardware-supported sprites and scrolling), and revolutionary SID sound chip, the C64 was the most powerful and multi-faceted games machine of its era. It could handle

everything from arcade conversions (Bubble Bobble, Green Beret) to experimental puzzle games (Sentinel, Hacker, Frankie Goes to Hollywood) to brilliant multiplayer sports sims (every Epyx [Games](#) title), and coders kept finding new depths throughout its 20 million-selling lifespan.

2. Commodore Amiga (1985)



Rich adventures ... Commodore Amiga 500.
Photograph: Felix Choo/Alamy Stock Photo

The last, truly great, gaming home computer before the dominance of the PC and the 32-bit games consoles, the Amiga saw an explosion of creative talent with studios such as Sensible Software, LucasArts, DMA Design, Bitmap Brothers and Psygnosis creating complex, visually rich adventures and opening up new game design conventions and ideas that stand today. It also inspired a vast [demo scene](#) of underground coders and artists, many still creating work today.



1. IBM PC (1981)



IBM developer David Bradley, a 5150 computer, and DOS floppy disk. Photograph: Bob Jordan/AP

Fighting through the myriad competitors of the 1980s, the x86-based PC is now inarguably the dominant computer platform for games. The original IBM 5150 was expensive at \$1,565, but its open architecture and adoption of MS-DOS allowed multiple third-party manufacturers to build cheap clones and establish a technological standard. [IBM](#) may have lost control of the PC industry years ago, but its decision to use off-the-shelf components and to publish the technical reference manuals behind its technology are why you're playing on a generic PC and not the ZX Spectrum 16GB.

[If you bought a Commodore PC, that would be all right for some users!]

VOLLEY FOR TWO

A new game joins the select club of games exclusively for the Commodore 128

By Guest Writer [Paulo](#)



It is not every day that we have a Commodore 128 release, so I am very excited about **Volley for Two**, an action-packed volleyball game for two players created by Jonas Hultén (Programming), Anders Larsson (Graphics), and Mikkel Hastrup (Music and SFX). Make sure to read Jonas' interview below!

Inspired by the old DOS game Arcade Volleyball from 1987, **Volley for Two** presents a colourful interface where the two players will play a street volleyball match. The game's great attraction is the ball physics, which is very close to what you would see with a real volleyball.

I had the opportunity to play the game already at length. Since it is a two-player game only, I asked my son to help me feel the gameplay and, at the same time, prepare the footage for the YouTube video. I confess we played way more needed for

this article and the video, because the game is really enjoyable.

For the first matches, you will most likely drop the ball too often, as it takes some time to get used to the player movements and understand the ball reaction to them. The players move sideways a bit too fast, almost with a sliding feeling, so the players will [have to] consider that when preparing to receive the ball and making the counter-attack.

The player serving the ball can only touch it once to send it to the other side. The receiver can touch the ball three times before returning the ball to the other side. Either way, if you exceed the limit, it will be a fault, and the point goes to the other player.

There are two difficulty levels: **high** and **low**. The only noticeable difference is that the ball is less bouncy and more predictable with the low settings. I've found playing in high to be more fun, and actually, I think my son and I did better while playing in this setting. As a separate option, you can also select between single or double jump.



The graphics created by **Anders Larsson** are simply amazing, showing a very elaborate background of a city that, although mostly static, comes to life with small moving objects, like the helicopter at the top of one of the buildings. The two players are also well designed with good animation and faces, depending on what is happening.

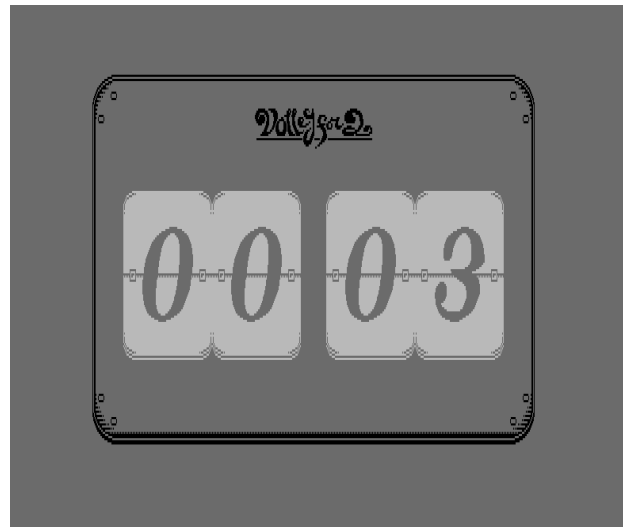


There are two, game music [compositions], one for the intro screen and another one during the matches. **Mikkel Hastrup** has nailed both of them, for they are fun to listen to and uplifting. The in-game one is my favourite with a bass-like beat that really puts you in the game. The sound effects are also fascinating, as they play when the ball bounces and highlights the messages displayed at the top.

Volley for Two makes use of the Commodore 128 second screen to display the scores. The regular 40-column screen is enough for the game, as the second screen was created to be used in live tournaments to show the scores on the big screen.

Another feature of the game that uses the superior C128 capabilities is the replay that shows the last moments that led to the score. If your C128 has an expansion like REU, SuperCPU, or GeoRAM, you will be able to enable the extended replay. If you are using the x128 (Vice) emulator, only the GeoRAM should work. If you don't have such expansions, don't sweat, because the game can be

played on a regular Commodore 128, and it can use either the joystick or keyboard.



I've talked to Jonas Hultén and asked some questions that he was kind enough to promptly answer.

VITNO: Why a Commodore 128 game? Do you have a personal experience with the machine back in the day?

Jonas: My first computer was a Commodore 64 so I don't have that personal history with the machine actually. I think I got my first C128 machine from my brother long ago, who had several. It was a C128 DCR, which is the best option in my opinion. A sturdy, separate keyboard and no fan. I roughly knew what the machine could do at the time, but I realized that there's a lot to be learned about the machine when I actually started tinkering with it a couple of years ago.

Thanks to Robert Bernardo, who drove very far in his car to meet up in San Francisco in 2017 to sell me his NTSC C128, I'm also able to do NTSC testing on real hardware. This game would never have worked properly without this, since the current C128 emulators aren't emulating REU and SuperCPU properly on the C128.

VITNO: How is the game developed? Machine language? Are you are a developer by trade or

[do] you limit your programming skills to the 8-bit machines?

Jonas: It's all written in assembler, except for the BASIC line that starts the game. I have a setup where I'm writing the code in Sublime Text, launch a modified version of the VICE emulator for quick test iterations, and I have a user port transfer solution through a Raspberry Pi to make the C128 accessible from the network. A custom internal function EPROM in the C128 makes it possible to boot straight into a file serving mode to allow me to transfer and quickly start the game on the real machine as well.

I work at Fatshark in Stockholm as a professional game developer, and I do 8-bit programming in most of my spare time.

ViTNO: How are you using the C128 exclusive features for the game? Would be possible to port it back to a C64 for example?

Jonas: The C128 is clearly a superior machine. To make the game run on a C64, some things would have to be sacrificed. Just as you would need to sacrifice something to make a C64 game run on a Vic20.

C128 features specifically used in this game are more memory, faster CPU, dual screens, more keys, dual-colour memory, and auto-booting. It also used the ability to move the stack area, but this was removed due to a problem with how the SuperCPU memory-mirroring works.

ViTNO: I see you are the programmer, and you partnered with Anders Larsson and Mikkel Hastrup. How did you guys find each other? How was the process to discuss graphics/music with the gameplay?

Jonas: I and Mikkel met the first time at a demoparty; I think it was Gubbddata in Lund. We didn't talk about collaborating at first. He had done music for several high-quality releases, but it took a couple of years before we started talking about making something together. The game had

programmer art for a long time before I asked Anders, who was also working at Fatshark, if he would be interested in helping out with the graphics. He hadn't done any VIC-II or VDC graphics prior to this game, so he had to learn everything about the hardware limitations from scratch! I'm very happy with the end result.

When they entered the project, there was already a playable game with programmer art and no sound or music. We started a Signal chat and posted our advancements and gave feedback directly on everything. They provided music, sounds, and graphics while I posted playable builds where they could see the result.

Anders posted some ideas for the game's theme at first and, after a few iterations, the street basketball idea was selected. Then it was all about the hardware limitations – which colours, how many, the pixel resolution, aspect ratios, and all that. Then he started producing graphics. He posted PNG images, and I had scripts that cut those into the sprite and bitmap data that the game uses. I was very impressed with the speed at which he developed skills to produce really high-quality graphics within the limitations.

Mikkel worked in a modified version of Goat Tracker and posted the effect and music files for me to put into the game every now and then. He was very thorough and was so good at finding details in the game that needed attention. He influenced both the game design and audio and made me rewrite things to make the experience better. The game wouldn't have been the same without him.

[Robert Bernardo did some testing for **Volley for Two** on his SuperCPU. He also proofed the English on the Help screens, cleaning up the punctuation, fixing the sentence structures, and adding missing vocabulary.]

ViTNO: Any future plans? Something else for the C128?

Jonas: Yes, I have a new idea for a C128 game, but it’s only “on paper” so far, and I can’t promise it will happen until I have a working [version].

The game is available for free following the link at the end of this article, and it is available as a downloadable, auto-booting disk image for 1541, 1571 and 1581. It supports turbo-loading and also has a fallback to kernal-loading for exotic drives. Both NTSC and PAL are fully supported with equal gameplay.

Volley for Two webpage - <https://vintageisthenewold.com/volley-for-two-a-new-game-to-join-the-select-club-of-new-games-exclusively-made-for-the-commodore-128/>

Volley for Two music - <https://soundcloud.com/encore64/volley-for-two-title-music>

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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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