FC=UG

"Taking Commodore Computing Into The Twenty First Century And Beyond ..."

May/June 2010

The Editor's Godzilla

-by Lenard R. Roach

I know that sometimes I can be a critical, hard-nosed piece of work that really should keep his fingers off the keyboard when typing about something he knows little of. One of the things I thought I knew enough about was the Commodore, but sometimes I am reminded that my knowledge of the machine is very limited and I really don't know what I am doing, to a point. Some of the things I can accomplish on the machine have been done by "sheer luck" and a simple understanding of Commodore BASIC. I am not a "pimp'n" programmer like Jeri Ellsworth, Vic Roberts, Greg Nacu, Maurice Randall, and even the late Jim Butterfield, or some of the other users of the machine that can make the Commodore jump through hoops with a couple of lines of code. I am just what should be called a "shade tree" programmer.

So what is wrong with that? One of the big selling points of Commodore was the idea that anyone could sit down and with a few simple BASIC commands can, in effect, make the Commodore do things that no other computer of the day could do. If I understand my history of Commodore correctly, this was the first computer with programmable keys, making them able to function in ways not normally designed by the manufacturer. This makes the Commodore fun and educational. I am still amazed after all these years of working on a Commodore how some people, a few with as much as an eighth grade education, can make wonderful, dazzling programs and graphics screens on this machine to astonish the user.

Some of the best learning I got for the Commodore came from three sources: One was all the different Commodore magazines that were out during the heydays of the machine; the other was from the different users groups around the United States that would send their creations around to other groups for file sharing and general swapping; and lastly and the biggest contributor to my Commodore education came from a giant of a gentlemen who we will call Master Z. Those who know Master Z's true identity will instantly recognize who I am writing about.

Let's start with the magazines: Some of them I have never read like Ahoy and Commodore, but the ones that influenced me the most was Compute Gazette and Run, with Run taking the lead above the other. Run had the most tips and tricks to be used in making a programmers work both fun and entertaining. I have used a few of those ideas in my own works, the biggest of them is the auto boot program for the Commodore 64, wherein a one block program is created that will load and run the

next program assigned to it. It will only load the program assigned which makes it exclusive to that particular program. To boot another program a second boot file had to be created. I also used Run because they were cool enough to publish my first program for me in 1992, and back in 1992, $150 (my fee as per contract with Run) was a lot of money. When I got the contract in the mail, I pulled a joke on my wife and went to her work with a sad look on my face and handed her the letter. She thought I got rejected again, but when she took the contract out of the envelope and read it, she play slapped me and then hugged me on my first victory into the publishing world. Yup, I owe my first actual paid for publication to the Commodore. The funny part of it is, I have never been able to reproduce the effect since most of my publications now are done for free or they are self publishing endeavors. No complaints; it's great practice to stay hip to the keyboard, but I still wish I could have got more works in print for money before all the magazines failed to carry Commodore. When I wrote Check It Out for Run, I wrote a second program for it called Check File Creator/Editor (renamed CheckMate), but by then Run was out of publication and the new owners, Creative Micro Designs wanted me to front $100 for the rights to use the code that I wrote for Check It Out to make CheckMate work. It turned into a fiasco, with me being to blame for not understanding copyright laws, and CheckMate never made it to print. Chock one up to being a stubborn pill.

Next are users groups: Working with users groups was a great way to get information and help in certain programming endeavors. I can't begin to think of all the help I got from other clubs in my getting works ready for general release. The Obligator Coordinator (now The Ledger), and The Envelope Addressor versions 1 and 2 would not be where they are now if it wasn't for the brutally honest efforts and opinions of other Commodore users throughout the country. My greatest help came from Kansas City's own Ken Clayton when he introduced me to a daisy chaining program that worked better than one I found in Compute Gazette. It was a simple adding of one line of code that made the programs TEA and TEA 4 2 run so well from introduction screen to the main program. I also cannot forget the work of Peculiar, Missouri's own Dan Fisher, who kept me focused on the works and even educated me on how to use WinVICE and 1581 Copy so I could send Commodore programs over the Internet without having to waste a stamp or two. This made for quick exchanges of TEA versions between us and his adding or subtracting of code to make the program better. We groups are fewer and farther between now, but despite this we are still ready to assist any Commodore user with whatever needs to be done, from finding someone for complex repairs to giving critique on someones Commodore work.

Lastly there's Master Z: Master Z brought me into the world of Commodore back in 1982 when he got one of the 64 units for his 18th birthday. He showed me what he could do on the machine and ever let me play some games on it. Master Z was attending Wichita State University when the idea for Check It Out came to birth in my head and I wrote the code for the program. Back then we were on Genie and I would swap the code with him over the network, which was useless since there was no way to put the code back onto a 5.25 disk unless he typed it in a line at a time. He convinced me one day to come to Wichita and let him work on the code to see if he could streamline it. He worked on the program for about an hour and soon the program was running sharp and its block size was reduced by about 20%. There is a line of code that I have used in every program that Master Z wrote for me in Check It Out. It is a line that tells the computer to print a line and then add dashes behind it until it reached the distance of 40 characters. No matter how much text you add (as long as your under 40 characters), the computer would

add the dashes until it prints 40 total characters. This same line of code is used in both The Envelope Addressor versions 1 and 2 when I designed the picture of the envelope for use in checking the envelope face. When Loadstar published the first version of the program, Reverend Moorman left the code in ready access for the user to read and see how this program worked. Please check issue 245 of the diskzene and see this code. Master Z died in 1998, so this code is written in memorial of him in all of my programs that require a screen or printer print out. The first edition of Run/Stop-Restore was dedicated in his honor as well.

I'm sure there are a lot of "shade tree" programmers out in the computer universe, many of which can do a lot more than I can on a keyboard with just a couple of lines of code. I don't claim to know everything, but when it comes to Commodore computing, I know just enough to be dangerous. Lord help us if I learn how to do the same thing on a PC! Bwah-hahahaha!
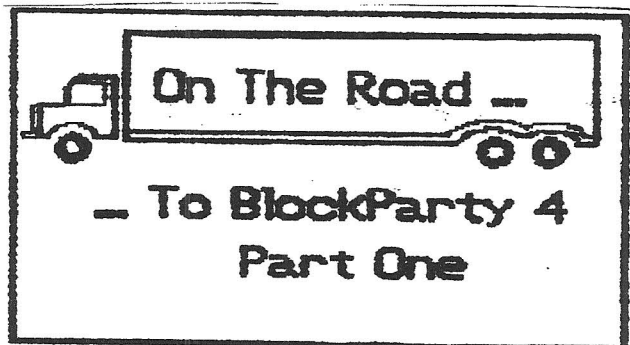
-by Robert Bernardo

The pain was intense. I was seated on-board the Continental Airline flight, just an hour away from Cleveland, Ohio, and my head was hurting. I had taken the red-eye flight out of Los Angeles, and the subsequent, short, fitful sleep on the plane had taken its toll on my body. I reached for the ibuprofen in my pocket, called for a cup of water, and downed the water and tablets.

It was another journey to another show. My carry-on and check-in suitcases were full of Commodore and Amiga goods to exhibit at the April 15-18 Blockparty 4, the demo party that was held in conjunction with the Notacon 7 show. I was going to meet fellow C= fan, Jim Mazursky, and we were going to set up tables of Commodore and Amiga computers in the gaming room for all attendees to use.

Luckily, as the plane drew nearer to Cleveland, my head cold was dissipating. Thank goodness. The plane dipped under the clouds, and I looked over an overcast city. Fortunately, I was prepared with raincoat and warm clothes.

There was no problem getting off the plane, though my checked-in bag took awhile to arrive in the receiving area. My cellphone beeped. Jim was waiting for me, just outside the doors. I sent him a text that I would be right there. With the suitcase finally in hand, I stepped outside into the cool, morning air and met Jim, who was waiting by a Chrysler minivan. He had brought the van, because he and fellow C= friend, Eric Kudzin, had come the previous night to the venue hotel with the vehicle stuffed full of hardware and software.

On the drive to the hotel, Jim and I spoke our respective journeys to Cleveland and of our plans for the tables at the show.

Jim brought me directly to my hotel, the Comfort Inn, which was only 3 blocks away from the Notacon/Blockparty venue, the fancy Wyndham Cleveland Hotel. Jim reasoned that though my check-in time was not until 2 in the afternoon, it wouldn't hurt to try for an early check-in if the room were available. His gamble paid off; my room was ready, and we hauled my heavy suitcases to the third floor. The room was pleasantly large and quiet but without a microwave oven or mini-refrigerator.

Downstairs in the hotel dining area, breakfast was going on, free to all hotel guests. I decided to sneak Jim into the breakfast. I had some cereal, fruit, waffles, and yogurt, and Jim got his breakfast items.   As we ate, we had more Commodore talk current developments, future developments,

rumors, my Commodore club, the clubs in the Midwest, and upcoming Commodore shows.

Afterwards, I went back to my room while Jim went back to the Wyndham, bringing my large suitcase of Commodore and Amiga stuff with him. I changed my clothes, shaved, and washed my face. Ooo, sitting on the soft bed felt so good... but no time to be tempted to rest. I walked the few blocks to the Wyndham.

Yes, the hotel seemed so familiar, after my having been to Notacon/Blockparty the previous year. I went up to the second floor and found that it was fairly busy with attendees checking in, others looking through their registration materials, and Notacon staff members discussing show matters. Registration was fast; I got my badge and looked through the program book. Hmm, there were 3 presentations out of the 22 for the day that interested me Computer geeks can do humanitarian work, too, Independent Film-making..., and Project Ruori. The first one was scheduled for 11... too early, because I would still be setting up things in the gaming room. The other two were later in the day; I wouldaimforthose.

Up to the third floor I went. I breezed by the rooms, peeking through the open doors - the Hardware Hacking room, the Video Games/Tabletop Games room, Notacon Radio, the currently empty Workshops room, the N7C Ham Radio room, and the Lock Sport (lock-picking) room. After the overview, I returned to the Video Game/Tabletop Game room - my base of operations for the show.

Jason Bean Viers, in charge of the room, was there, and I greeted him. Jim was not there, but I found the Commodore and Amiga hardware he had set up the night before. Neatly sitting on two tables in the corner were an Amiga 500, ram-switchable between 512k and 2 megs and rom-switchable between Kickstart 1.3 and 2.0, a C64 with 1541 disk drive, and VIC-20 with VIC-1541 disk drive, and another C64/1541 combination. To the left on another adjoining table were 3 extra television/monitors. For use in

any ham radio presentation, Jim also had another VIC-20 set-up for me. Everything was ready to go.

Jim had left my large suitcase by the tables. I opened it up and began unpacking its treasures. Extra joysticks, two big boxes of Amiga game disks, the box with the uIEC and SD2IEC card drives, and the piece de resistance, the Guitar Hero guitar, its PSX64 adapter, and the accompanying Shredz64 disk. Yes, the attendees would be rocking out to SID music!

I laid out all my materials and started connecting cables. Wait! Where was the wall power supply for the PSX64 adapter? The entire Guitar Hero demo would not work without it.

Jim arrived, and I told him about the problem. He dug around his boxes for a likely p.s. to use. Nothing. He left to go back to his room and look for more p.s.'s. He came back with more, but none of them had the right connector, amperage, or voltage for the adapter. A short walk to the local Radio Shack was in order, but not before I started setting up Jim's other VIC-20 in the ham radio room.

I walked over to the N7C Notacon Radio room. A few people were setting up their gear. One of them, Joe, was glad that I was going to put up a VIC-20 set-up there with my Hamtext cart. We talked quite a bit about 8-bit computers and ham radio. In fact, he said that he had a Commodore PET 4032 with 4040 disk drive and that he had ham radio gear for that! I was amazed. I told him that next year he'd have to bring in those heavy PETs and show us how to use them with ham radio.

I went back to the gaming room. I asked Jim to help me move his other VIC-20 set-up to the ham radio room. Jim had even brought some C64 ham software to show, but we couldn't spare another C64 to put in the ham radio room.

Back in the ham radio room, I put the set-up together, inserted the Hamtext cart, powered up the system, and gave the command to start up Hamtext. The main menu came up, and smiles flickered on the ham radio people there. Later on, another transceiver was supposed to come in, and I would be

able to use that with the VIC-20
and Hamtext and its interface.

It was time; Jim and I walked
the 5 blocks or so to Radio Shack,
me to buy the p.s., and him to buy
a few hardware bits. Ouch! Over
$20 plus tax for the p.s.. It
would have to do.

We then walked to a nearby
mall building for a look. It was a
beehive of activity, people being
there for lunch. I eyed all the
eateries American, Mexican, East
Indian, Japanese, Chinese, and the
non-busy Hungarian. I'd have to
come back to this mall later.

Back at the Wyndham, I
connected the new p.s. to the
adapter. Nothing! Jim checked it
out with his meter. Ah, the board
was not receiving any power, due to
an incorrectly-sized center pin on
the p.s.'s coaxial plug. Jim kindly
volunteered to exchange the plug
for another one at Radio Shack, and
he took the PSX64 adapter board
this time for a correct fitting.

While Jim was gone, it was
time for me to get the systems
going... it had been far too quiet
in the game room. I inserted my
Rittenhouse VIC-20
Multicart/Development cart of 30
games into the VIC-20 and ran a
random game. I ran a game in the
rightmost C64, saving the C64 in
the center for Guitar Hero. I
powered up the Amiga with a game.
I ran the C64 DTV 30-games-in-one
joystick on one of the extra
television monitors. Game heaven!

Jim returned with another
coaxial plug and the PSX64 adapter.
I connected everything together for
the Guitar Hero; disk drive worked,
Shredz64 splash screen appeared,
and then the main menu showed. It
looked good so far. I selected a
song and pressed the green button
on the Guitar Hero guitar.
Loading... success! The music
started playing, the notes scrolled
on the screen, I tried to keep time
with it, and I failed in my
miserable effort to be a GH
guitarist. It was working
perfectly! Just in time, too.

It was time to take a break
and see my first presentation of
the day, Independent
Film-making..... I left Jim in
command of the tables, and I rushed

down to the second floor and the
Palace East meeting room. Not a
bad-sized crowd to see Emily
Schooley speak about bringing your
ideas from paper to screen, and
everything in-between. Compared
to my amateur film-making, she was
a professional, having worked in
all facets of producing a movie.
Her talk generally described the
job of every staffer in a movie,
noted the pitfalls in production,
and gave helpful advice to be aware
of when making a movie. Later that
night, she would conduct a detailed
workshop in film-making, but I
would be unable to attend that.

Presentation finished, I
immediately went back to the gaming
room. More activity there.
Attendees were now trickling in to
try out Rock Hero on one side of
the room and the Commodores on our
side of the room. When they saw
the Guitar Hero guitar connected to
the C64, their reaction was
uniformly the same - shock and
wonder! It was quite a magnet.

Late afternoon, Froggy
Schneider, the co-organizer of
Notacon, announced that the
hotel-created lunch boxes were down
to $5 instead of the original $10.
I rushed out of the gaming room
back down to the second floor and
picked up a chicken salad wrap
lunch box for that price. Froggy
then said that the cans of soda
were $3 each what the hotel was
charging but that he would accept
anything. Not to force him to
absorb the cost of the hotel soda,
I paid the $3 for a can of Coke.

Back to the game room again.
The people just kept on coming and
coming, especially after dinner
time. Their incessant questioning,
their photo-snapping, their
video-taking , their playing on the
Commodore computers... it was
becoming a blur. However, I was
doing quite well on 3+ hours of
airplane sleep. The adrenalin was
pumping, and any effects of my cold
were forgotten.

My last session to attend was
Project Ruori, a musical band
composed of Steve Mokris on-stage
and Ashley Mokris in the wings.
Steve played a bit over half an
hour. Though Steve advertised
himself as using 8-bit music

devices in his productions, I could not hear any coming from the synthesizer he was using, and the strange, atonal sounds that he played did not bring back any memories of melodic SID music.

As soon as his concert was over, I returned to the gaming room and the Commodore/Amiga tables again. This time I found a note from Ken Snyder.

He and his coding group had seen the Amiga 500 on our tables and had found Octamed Pro, a music tracker for the Amiga, as one of the disks I had brought. He wanted to borrow the A500 and Octamed disk in order to compose an Oldschool music demo. He had left a phone number, and I called him up. He was down in the demo-coding lounge and said that he would be right up. A few minutes later, he showed up, explained his group's need for the Amiga, and wanted it moved to a quieter place for music composing. I figured that the little-used workshop room down the hall would be an ideal place to put the set-up. And so, Ken and I moved the A500, monitor, and attachments to the workshop room. I was very excited that now there would be an Amiga music entry.

It was now 9 p.m., and though I felt fine, I thought that I should call it a day. I hinted to Jim about dinner, but he didn't pick up on the hints. I decided to take off without him but not before peeking in on what was happening on the second floor.

The place was in full party mode! Two hotel bars were set up, the bartenders dispensing plenty of alcoholic beverages. I looked into the demo-coding lounge and reminded those associated with Ken that there was now an A500 for them to use. I looked into the Palace rooms; the partition had been opened, which made the Palace one, big room. Blaring music came from a band, lights were flashing, and people were dancing and drinking. Yes, it was party time!

But not for me. I went down to the first floor. The hotel had enlisted Jim to clear out spyware and viruses in one of their computers in the guest business room. He was busy doing that.

Satisfied with what was accomplished that day, I walked out of the hotel and into the cold night, toward Bricco Restaurant, an Italian restaurant that I had gone to at the previous Notacon/Blockparty. It was open late, and I decided to splurge on its higher-priced food. Mmm, Italian sausage over a penne pasta with olive oil. Sweet, yet spicy.

After the restaurant, I took the short walk to my quiet hotel. In the room I checked my e-mail quickly, and then I was in bed by 11. I slept for 10-11 hours.

(To be continued)

Monthly Meeting Report
- by Dick Estel
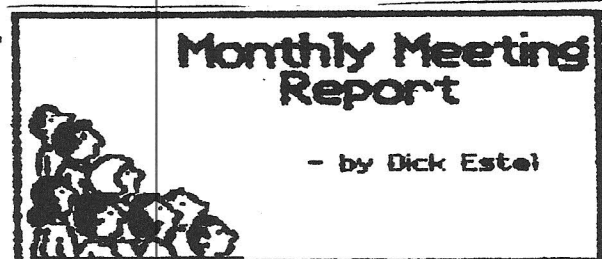
At the June meeting we had the usual complement of Robert Bernardo, Dick Estel, Brad Strait, and Roger Van Pelt.

Roger gave a brief report on the differences and similarities between the two Kantronics Hamtext cartridges for the VIC-20 and the AEA Computer Patch for the C64, which he had taken home after the May meeting. H tentatively agreed to do a video presentation of Hamtext for the July 24-25 CommVEx.

Robert announced two special guests for CommVEx, Amiga engineers Dale Luck and RJ Mical. Their appearance will coincide with the 25th anniversary of the A1000.

As an honorary member of the now defunct Astoria OR club, Robert received a membership in Meeting Commodore Users Through the Mail, and brought several of their recent newsletters. This organization has been in existence since 1986, and continues to publish a newsletter of ten or more pages.

Robert showed the uIEC/CF with IDE, a serial card drive from Jim Brain which uses CompactFlash memory cards and also had an IDE connection. This uIEC also came with a CompactFlash-to-SD adapter and an empty 512 meg SD card. It

was compared to an early version of the uIEC/SD card drive and the NKCElectronics SD2IEC card drive. It was briefly tested; Robert wrote a Basic program, saved it to the uIEC/CF, and then loaded it from it.

At the end of the meeting, Robert showed the C64C video he obtained from Syd Bolton of the Personal Computer Museum in Brantford, Ontario, Canada. We surmised that back in the 1980's this informational video ran in a kiosk to tell people of the C64C's features.

In a non-Commodore related development, we took a look at Robert's "new" 1970s-era Bronica 6 x 7 SLR camera, which uses 120 roll film. This camera was a popular tool for professional news and sport photographers, and weighs in at a hefty seven pounds - a bit of a shock for those of us used to lightweight digital cameras.