



THE EDITOR'S GODZILLA

GAMES IN TOW – Jewel Grab

by Lenard R. Roach

(This is the second of an ongoing series on games I wish to bring to the Commodore Los Angeles Super Show.)

Part Two

“Jewel Grab” finds the player in an underground mine where ladders and girders are used to reach black jewels located throughout the mine. The first thing the player must understand is that this mine is not theirs. The player is a thief, and he or she is stealing from the computer's mine. The player's character is basically a pale yellow, bean-shaped sprite that can move rather rapidly up and down the ladders, and cross girders throughout the mine.

Upon the player loading the game and typing RUN, the computer game stands ready to start. The player has the option to choose the speed before the start of the game, but I would suggest to start with Speed 1 just to learn the game. The player starts in the bottom left of the screen and a strange-looking, blue-hued, UFO saucer-shaped character resides at the top left of the screen. Pressing the fire button allows the game to engage, and the UFO starts by extending a radar dish to “scan” for the player. The

UFO then approaches the last known location of the player and seeks to make contact directly with the player's sprite. Every five to seven seconds, the UFO “scans” for the player and then approaches the player's last location. If the player stands for too long in one place and the UFO touches him, a life is lost. The game gives the player four lives to use before game over, and then the game starts over. The best hope for the player to stay alive is to keep moving, keep climbing ladders, and keep crossing girders.

The good news about “Jewel Grab” is that the only way to lose a life is to be touched by the UFO. If the player is going to be blocked in by the UFO, he can jump off from great heights and not worry about losing a life. The world where the mine is located seems to be of low gravity. A usable strategy to fool the UFO is to try and time the UFO's “scan” just by standing still during the scanning process. When the UFO leaves to reach the player's location, the player can simply move to a new location on the screen, work on grabbing the much coveted jewels, and move on before the next “scan.” If I remember correctly, the further a player goes into the levels, the more UFOs are added to the gameplay.

As the player progresses through the series of levels, he or she will discover that some jewels cannot be grabbed by either walking up to them or jumping to reach them. What is a player to do? Thankfully, “Jewel Grab” leaves the player with a couple of options, though they seem to be a little unorthodox and possibly a little weird. To reach certain jewels, the player can actually take pieces of the ladders and girders and put them where needed to reach certain jewels. So far this is not so weird but watch out! A simple slip up and the player can find himself at the bottom of the screen or other location with possibly no way to reach anything. In this case the player must choose to be caught by the UFO and lose a life so that the game resets to the original screen. The player must understand, however, that he or she cannot

grab several pieces of girder or ladder at one grab. The player can only collect one segment of either a ladder or girder at a time, go to where he or she wants to use it, place it, and go back to get more.

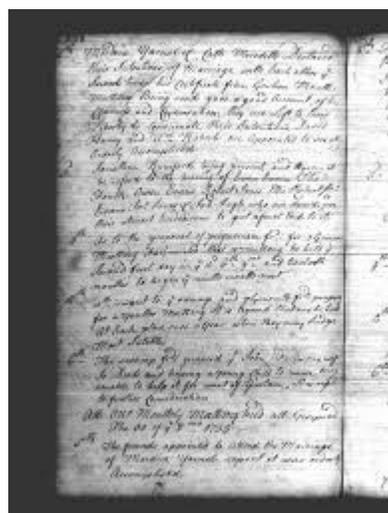
Now for the weird. As the player goes on deconstructing and building new ladders and girders, he can actually grab a recently used ladder or girder and remove it, just to place it where the player needs it. This creates a Looney Tunes type of effect like Wile E. Coyote standing over the canyon without any visible means of support and he doesn't fall. The sprite never falls unless the player steps off the ladder or girder and into the abyss, just to land on the bottom of the screen, or in this particular case, onto another extended girder or ladder. Yes, the player can rearrange the entire screen set up during the entire course of gameplay and can keep on doing this for as long as the UFO does not catch the player first.

Another great and helpful feature is the stopwatch that is located at one point on the screen. If the player can reach the stopwatch, all gameplay is stopped, except for the player's sprite, and then the player has about ten seconds of a break to do what he or she needs to do like build a girder bridge or an extension ladder in order to grab a beautiful black jewel. Sorry, player... only one use of the stopwatch per level.

“Jewel Grab” is a hard-to-play, thinking person's, dodge-'em type of game that is definitely full of action that will keep a player busy for hours trying to build girder bridges, extension ladders, and running from the UFO on patrol. When I typed in “Jewel Grab” and started playing it some thirty years ago, I had the hand-eye coordination and patience to deal with such games, but with my poor eyesight, impatience, and tremors setting in today, playing such games are becoming difficult. During my reboot of “Jewel Grab” in this day and age, I constantly found myself falling off ladders and accidentally jumping of the end of

girders and into the abyss usually into the waiting UFO and thus losing a life. Back in the day I had a plan on how to grab all the jewels on each level for several consecutive levels and still avoid the UFO. If I remember right, the best strategy is to go after the harder-to-reach jewels first and save the easy jewels for last. If the player just wants to score quickly, then he grabs the easier jewels first and leaves the harder jewels for the end of the level.

“Jewel Grab” is just one of several games that I will be bringing from Kansas City to Los Angeles and the CLASS event. Keep thinking good thoughts, and I will keep praying that soon we will have both a club meeting and a CLASS.



MONTHLY MEETING REPORTS

by Robert Bernardo & Dick Estel

September 2020

There was no club meeting in September due to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Things are still locked down. Keep hoping that we can meet again sometime soon.

October 2020

By Robert Bernardo and Dick Estel

Many years ago the club had an annual picnic in October, actually a potluck on the patio of a member who had a large tract of land and a beautiful home on the edge of the Fresno-Clovis metro area. This member and his wife passed away in the early 2000's, and after a couple of half-hearted attempts to meet in another member's backyard, we settled on an annual lunch which has a few well-defined guidelines:

It's held at a different restaurant from the one where we have our regular meeting. It's held at a different restaurant each year. There is no formal business, no demonstrations, and only minimal discussion of computer-related matters. Also family members are invited, and the club pays.

LUNCH IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

Readers will certainly understand that this year we faced the greatest challenge ever – where and how to safely gather under the rules in place and within the members' comfort zone. Fresno County just allowed limited inside dining, but most of us are not ready to eat inside a restaurant. Some were even hesitant about the outside seating many venues now offer.

President Robert Bernardo scouted a number of locations and found that Casa Corona, an excellent Mexican restaurant in northeast Fresno, had sufficient outdoor seating and separation that we were comfortable scheduling our lunch there. As it turned out, we had only five in attendance; we sat at three different tables, and no other patrons were seated in our area. Attending were Robert Bernardo, Dick Estel, Dave Smith, Roger Van Pelt and his brother Aaron.

All of us had been adhering to safe practices – limited close contact with family members, no

close contact with others, and masks in place when out in public.

We had not had a club meeting since February, so it was great to get together with friends once again. Discussion revolved around what we had been doing, how we were holding up, and especially Dave's regression to hippie days, since he had not been comfortable about getting a haircut.

Robert reported that AmiWest is still scheduled to take place later in October, with about 20 people expected. He was still uncertain about being inside with that many people, especially for the several hours he would normally spend at the event. With that uncertainty, he decided not to attend. Instead, he is planning a trip to Washington, to take items to repairman Ray Carlsen, with no-contact drop-off and pick-up.

All FCUG-sponsored Commodore events in 2020 were cancelled, but we are checking on the various venues, and hopefully the Commodore LA Super Show (CLASS) and/or Pacific Commodore Expo (PaCommEx) will be back in 2021.

Lunch

photo: <http://www.dickestel.com/images/fcug517.jpg>



AMIGALOVE INTERVIEW: JIM SACHS

Jim Sachs, the legendary ground-breaking digital artist and game designer accepted to be interviewed by AmigaLove. The following is the result of that process as well as some additional information provided during our correspondence.

AL: Questions by Eric K. Hill of *AmigaLove*

JDS: Answers by James (Jim) D. Sachs (pronounced "Sax")

AL: Right off the bat, Mr. Sachs, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview. You've been one of my artistic heroes for decades, and I know I'm not alone in letting you know your art and games had a huge impact on my life. And for that, I want to sincerely thank you up front.

I'd like to actually start quite early in the Jim Sachs timeline. I read that you were in the Air Force. What was your role and rank when you separated from the military?

JDS: I was a Captain, a [C-141 Starlifter](#) pilot. I was stationed at Norton AFB in Southern California but traveled extensively. I was in for 6 years, and was 28 when I got out. The Air Force wanted to make me an Instructor Pilot, but it would have meant moving to Texas, so I got out instead.

AL: Did you ever receive classical art training before or after you left the military? Did you do any kind of professional artwork prior to becoming one of the leading and most innovative digital artists in the 1980s?

JDS: No. I've always done a lot of drawing and painting as a kid but no real training.

AL: What was the first computer you ever purchased?

JDS: A Commodore 64.

AL: What made you decide you wanted to become a computer programmer and artist for a career?

JDS: At the time, I didn't think of it as a career, just something interesting to do for a while. Making movies has always been my career goal.

AL: Back in the early to mid 1980s to be a digital artist often meant one needed to learn to program. Did you teach yourself to program? What resources were you able to obtain in order to do this back then?

JDS: I bought books on 6502 machine language and taught myself.

AL: Your first published work was "[Saucer Attack](#)" for Commodore 64 in 1984, correct? Was this the project you used to teach yourself to program, or had there been earlier experiments?



Saucer Attack, Jim Sach's famous C64 game

JDS: After buying the C-64, I spent a few weeks typing in programs from magazines, then realized I could do better creating them from scratch. Saucer Attack was my first effort, then I started on Time Crystal, but abandoned it when the Amiga came out.

AL: At what point did you make the move to Amiga?

JDS: I had been monitoring its progress through magazine reports even before Commodore took it over. When that happened, I flew to Commodore headquarters in Pennsylvania, and got Developer's status on the Amiga.

AL: What was your professional relationship with Commodore? Were you ever an official employee?

JDS: I was always an independent contractor, though I did several jobs for them.

AL: Were you an employee of Cinemaware or a contractor?

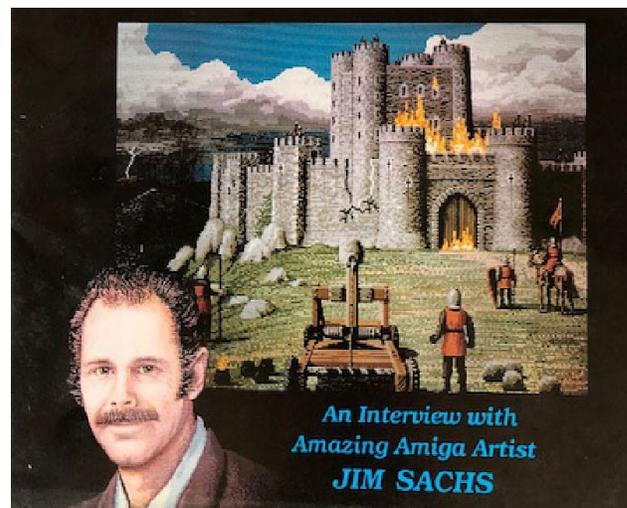
JDS: I was their Art Director, but still independent. The grueling schedule was not for me, and I left after the one project.

AL: Were you an early adopter of Deluxe Paint or Graphicraft (both programs look quite similar it's sometimes hard to tell what came first)? What were your preferred art tools in the early days of your career?

JDS: Graphicraft was a very simplistic paint program written by RJ Mical, mostly to allow the Amiga in-house artists to show off what the Amiga could do. It was ported almost verbatim by Aegis, and called Aegis Images. I used both extensively for the first couple of months on the Amiga. Then Dan Silva created Deluxe Paint, which was light-years ahead of anything else, and I immediately switched to that.

AL: *Defender of the Crown*, for me and others, was when your name really "hit the scene" in a most powerful way. The first time I saw the game was actually on a Commodore 64. And even though that port pales in comparison to the Amiga version, at the time it made my jaw hit the floor (plus the SID music is pretty fantastic). I couldn't believe what you'd accomplished and, frankly, I think it was a watershed moment in computing and gaming history demonstrating what was possible years ahead of its contemporaries. Can you talk about the process you employed to bring such realistic digital paintings and animations to life from concept to finished piece?

JDS: I put dots on the screen. One at a time at first. Green dots for grass, blue dots for sky, gray dots for castle blocks. Hour after hour. I was happy if I got one square inch of the screen done in a day. The first screen (the Saxon castle in the distance) took about two weeks. After Deluxe Paint came out, I was able to create a screen in 3 or 4 days.



A self-portrait and the aforementioned castle in a different scene as presented on the cover of Amazing Computing magazine, Volume 2 Number 4.

AL: Can you describe the team dynamic on the original Defender of the Crown at Cinemaware? Were you responsible for all of the graphics? Were you provided hardware and software or did you have to use your own personal gear?

JDS: As Art Director, I was responsible for all the graphics, but I didn't create everything myself. I would go to user groups and look for artists who could rough-in some of the screens, then I'd finish them myself. At one point, I think I had about 10 people working on various screens. All paid out of my meager allotment, of course. Same with software and equipment.

AL: Back in the day, people with your level of talent were few and far between. One other artist sometimes mentioned alongside you is Avril Harrison. Did you ever meet or work with Ms. Harrison? Who were some of the people you watched and respected during the exciting early days of the Amiga?

JDS: I admired Avril's work, especially the iconic King Tut pic, but I don't think I ever met her. Also, the Amiga in-house artists, Jack Hager and Sheryl Knowles. I hired Jack to rough-in the Brigands scene in Defender. Another artist, Joel Hagen, did some innovative work for JPL -- a mock-up of an exploration of an alien world.

AL: The games you were directly involved in that I know of include Defender of the Crown (1 and 2), Ports of Call, Who Framed Roger Rabbit and Centurion - all praised for their graphical excellence. Were there any others I might have missed?

JDS: I did the graphics for an easily-forgettable game called Arazok's Tomb. There were also a few individual scenes and opening sequences for various games, such as Ultrabots. Also, proof-of-concept animations for Mattel's Power Glove.

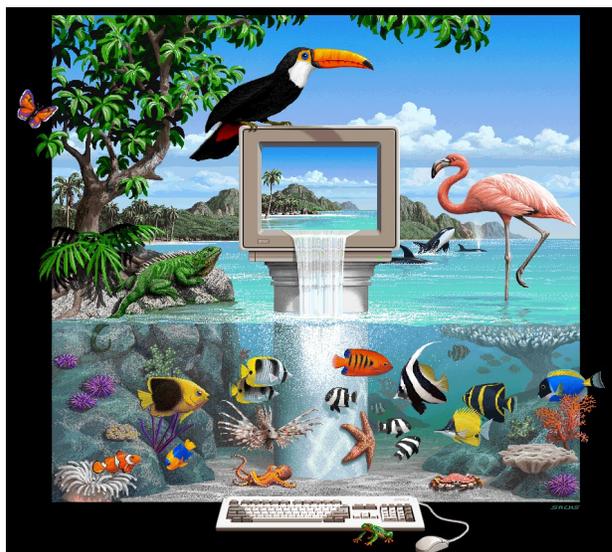
AL: When you did your series of Porsche illustrations, what was the purpose of those? Did you own a Porsche at the time?



Porsche illustrations by Jim Sachs.

JDS: No, I've never owned a Porsche, though I restored a 911 for a friend. The purpose of those screens was simply to stretch the graphics capabilities of the Amiga to the limit and develop a reputation

AL: Some of the artwork found in your unreleased [20,000 Leagues Under the Sea](#) is simply *breathtaking*. Did you use a drawing tablet of any kind to produce the artwork? How long would a scene like, for example, the shipwreck, take you to complete?



Amiga Lagoon, by Jim Sachs.

JDS: I always drew with the mouse. Scenes like that would usually take a week to 10 days.

AL: Something I've often wondered is how you transferred your digital paintings to print. Can you talk about the process you employed to create a piece of digital artwork (raster images, in relatively low resolution) to a gorgeous poster or cover of a book? The epic image for Brilliance comes immediately to mind. If that were printed today through normal means, it would be smaller than a vertical postcard and blurry. Back in the day, how did you do it?

JDS: I photographed all of my earlier low-res screens directly from a 1080 monitor with Ektachrome slide film. The CRT raster lines would blur the pixels together nicely. It wasn't until years later that color printers were able to do justice to computer graphics. The Amiga Lagoon pic that you're referring to was the first AGA hi-res image I did. It was commissioned by Digital Creations to show off their Brilliance paint program, and they gave me an Amiga 4000 as payment. I still did that one the normal way, with a mouse – just a lot more dots than usual.

AL: What was your working relationship with RJ Mical? Did you ever work directly with any of the other founders of the Amiga?

JDS: RJ and I had a somewhat contentious relationship when we were doing the game. He would complain about his 16-hour days, and I said that sounded like a vacation compared to my 20-hour days. We became friends afterward, and have remained so for 30 years. I worked with Carl Sassenrath when I did the splash screen and all the user interfaces for CDTV.

AL: Your work is legendary in its realism and attention to detail. Were you ever drawn to the siren song of 3D modeling and animation in the

1990s as those tools began to rapidly evolve?

JDS: When I was working with Aegis, Allan Hastings wrote Aegis Videoscape 3D, and I played with that a lot. I modeled the Nautilus, with an eye toward doing 20,000 Leagues as a 3D project, but the quality just wasn't there until Hastings and Stuart Ferguson went to NewTek and created Lightwave.

AL: After your Commodore years, you worked on a wildly popular screen saver called the SereneScreen Aquarium. I actually owned a legit copy for Mac on System 9.2 around the year 2000 or so. Can you talk about how you came about this very cool program, and what your personal role was?

JDS: Well, my role was creating it, start-to-finish. It was a one-man project. I had seen the pathetic fish screensaver that Microsoft was using on Windows, and decided to take the genre away from them. The Microsoft program just dragged 2D bitmaps across the screen, so I knew I could do a lot better with animated 3D models. It's still the No 1 screensaver, and available at SereneScreen.com. Sales have dwindled, but thanks to Roku, it still provides my income 20 years later.

AL: Something I've always wondered: was your beautiful ocean-themed illustration for Brilliance the inspiration to create SereneScreen years later?

JDS: Yes, I planned to use the different sections of that pic to develop a series of SereneScreen programs. Besides the saltwater tank, there was to be a freshwater tank, a terrarium, a butterfly habitat, and an aviary. But I got busy building my castle, and never completed any of the other programs.

AL: The level of realism in the Aquarium was stunning. The fish, to me, looked so incredibly lifelike, as if you composited video footage of real fish swimming in a 3D space. What hardware and software did you use to model and animate the creatures?

JDS: I created all the objects in Lightwave, went to aquarium shops to photograph fish and coral, and programmed the whole thing in C++ and DirectX. The hardware was just a standard PC.

AL: Today in 2020, I've seen a lot of your past work represented on the web as pulled straight from original files via emulation. Oftentimes, [this work is shown literally](#) without being re-formatted to a 4:3 aspect ratio. Does it bother you to see your art distorted for future generations?

JDS: It bothers me a lot ! Whenever I see one of those wide-stretched images, I always try to contact the owner of the site and urge them to fix the aspect-ratio.

AL: At what point did you migrate from the Amiga? Did you ultimately walk the path of the Mac, PC or Linux (or a combination of some sort)?

JDS: I switched around '94 after doing Defender 2 for CD32. I just went with the PC, not Mac or Linux. It was obvious the Amiga was done, and I needed a more widespread platform to create the 3D software for the CompuTrainer bicycle training device.

AL: Years ago I read that you had designed an incredible home in Oregon that was fantastical in design and scope. Did you ultimately complete the original design the way you wanted? Are you still in that home today?

JDS: I've been working on it about 15 years, and we hope to move in next month.

AL: Do you have any regrets about the Commodore days, or projects you wish you'd completed?

JDS: Well, of course the real heartbreaker was 20,000 Leagues. I've never completely recovered from Disney turning that one down.

AL: Do you think of yourself more as a programmer, or an artist, or a perfect hybrid between the two?

JDS: I'm an artist first. The programming aspect allows me to instantly know whether an effect will be possible, but art must lead the way.

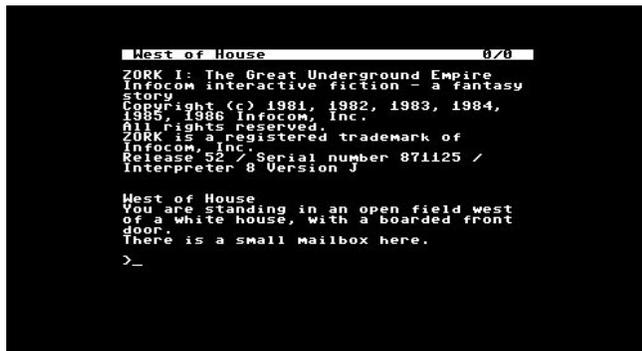
AL: Where have your interests taken you these days in your retirement?

JDS: Not really retired yet. At 71, I'm still hoping to start a career making movies
[AL: In fact, Mr. Sachs finished a screen play just days before completing this interview.]

AL: Do you still keep in touch with any of your colleagues from the Commodore/Amiga days?

JDS: I worked a lot with Reichart Von Wolfsheild (creator of Firepower, Return Fire, Disney Animation Studio and the Roger Rabbit game). He's been staying in my castle, riding out the Covid quarantine. I re-connected with quite a few of the old Amiga guys at the 30th reunion, including RJ, Carl Sassenrath, Dale Luck, and Dave Needle.





A Brief History of "Zork"

by Guest Contributor Rob Lammler

Zork is a text-based video game, a genre also known as “interactive fiction,” whose defining feature is the absence of typical video game graphics. Instead, the game’s environments and the actions you take are described for you. For example, the first line of Zork is, “You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door. There is a small mailbox here.” Using a series of simple commands, you direct the main character to do something, like “open mailbox.” To which the game will reply, “Opening the small mailbox reveals a leaflet.” Naturally, you would then “take leaflet,” “read leaflet”, and then maybe “walk east” to get to the house. The story unfolds from there as you collect items, like a sword, a lantern, rope, and other adventuring necessities, before entering a vast, underground cave where you’ll face enemies inspired by “The Lord of the Rings,” like elves, trolls, and the darkness-lurking grue.

How Old is Zork?

Zork was written between 1977 and 1979 by MIT students Tim Anderson, Bruce Daniels, Dave Lebling, and Marc Blank.

The young geeks got the idea for Zork from the first text-based video game, “Adventure” (also called Colossal Cave Adventure or ADVENT, because the computer it ran on could only use so many letters in the command line). Adventure was created in 1976 by Will Crowther, a student at Stanford, as a simulation of Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, with a few Tolkien-esque fantasy elements thrown in by fellow Stanfordite Don Woods. The MIT guys weren’t impressed with Adventure’s limited two-word command structure (“kill troll”), so they wrote Zork to understand complete sentences (“kill troll with sword”).

Most People Didn’t Have Computers Back Then, So Who Played Zork?

Originally, Zork and Adventure were both written for the PDP-10, a room-sized computer mainframe that was popular with universities in the late-1970s. Adventure was written in a very common programming language called FORTRAN, so copies of the game spread rapidly among mainframe users. Zork, however, was written with MDL, a more specialized language that wasn’t as popular. So, for a while, the only way to play Zork was to log on to the MIT PDP-10 through ARPANet, an early version of the Internet, and run it remotely. Zork was never officially announced to the world; people just heard about it through ARPANet, making it an early viral sensation.

Just as home computers were becoming more commonplace, a commercial version of Zork was released by Infocom, a company founded by Anderson, Lebling and Blank. However, they didn’t initially intend to sell Zork. They set out to create serious productivity software for the home and business market, but when they realized they didn’t actually have any of those programs written yet, they decided Zork sales could fund their future endeavors.

Since the game was too big to operate on these early home computers, they had to break it into three parts: “Zork I: The Great Underground Empire” (1980), “Zork II: The Wizard of Frobozz” (1981), and “Zork III: The Dungeon Master” (1982). Although Zork was first released for the TRS-80 computer, it was eventually ported to just about every home computer, like Apple II, Atari computers, Commodore 64, and the IBM PC. It was a pretty big hit, selling over a million copies.

The success of Zork compelled Infocom to forget their original plan of creating business software and focus on text video games throughout much of the 1980s, releasing over 40 games across a variety of fictional genres. Of course some of these games were Zork sequels and spin-offs, like the “Enchanter” trilogy (1983-1985), “Beyond Zork: The Coconut of Quendor” (1987), and the prequel, “Zork Zero: The Revenge of Megaboz” (1988).

What Made Zork Such a Hit?

There are quite a few things that set Zork and other Infocom games apart from the competition. For one, Infocom games had creative, addictive puzzles and mazes that drove players batty. Some gamers even wrote Infocom letters, asking for a hint to help them get past particularly tough brain teasers. This became so common that Infocom created a monthly newsletter for fans, called the New Zork Times, where they doled out clues, but also told players about upcoming games. Later, Infocom sold Invisiclues hint books. The books were printed with invisible ink that could only be revealed with a special marker, so players could get clues as-needed without spoiling anything farther in the game.

Marketing was also a huge factor in Infocom’s success. In the early 80s, computer games were mainly sold through mail order or at specialized computer stores. Zork and other Infocom titles,

though, also graced the shelves of bookstores. Readers weren’t necessarily concerned about the latest whiz-bang graphics, but they did appreciate the deeper storyline, descriptions, and characters available with Infocom titles. In fact, Infocom became so well known for its writing that when Douglas Adams, author of “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,” was approached to adapt his novel as a video game, he said he wouldn’t work with anyone but Infocom. The resulting Hitchhiker’s game, released in 1984, became one of Infocom’s biggest sellers.

Finally, during the development of the 1982 mystery game “Deadline,” the programmers realized they couldn’t fit everything into the game. So they created a portfolio of physical items, like mock crime scene photos and police reports, and included them in the box with the game’s 5.25” floppy disks. Players remarked that these “feelies,” as they became known, added to the overall game experience, so Infocom started including them with all their titles. Sometimes feelies were useful, like maps and blueprints, while others were simply there for fun, like an empty plastic bag in the Hitchhiker’s Guide game that supposedly contained a microscopic space fleet.

To capitalize on the success of feelies, new editions of the Zork games were released with items like travel brochures to fictional lands, a guide to an underground amusement park, a history of the Great Underground Empire, shares of FrobozzCo stock, and even a Zorkmid coin, the official currency of the Great Underground Empire. As you might expect, many fans purchased the Zork series all over again, just so they could add the feelies to their collection.

Is Infocom Still Around?

Sadly, no. In 1984 they finally got around to working on serious business software and released a database program called

“Cornerstone.” The company sank a lot of money into Cornerstone’s development, but it wasn’t very well received by consumers. On the verge of bankruptcy, Infocom accepted a buy-out offer in 1986 from Activision, the company behind video game classics like “Pitfall” and “Chopper Command.” Unfortunately, due to the increased emphasis on graphics in video games, as well as poor management at Activision, Infocom was shuttered in 1989.

After closing Infocom, Activision continued to use the beloved Infocom name and Zork brand to create additional sequels, like “Return to Zork” (1993), “Zork Nemesis” (1996), and “Zork: Grand Inquisitor” (1997). These games were a big departure from the original text-only gameplay. The new Zorks featured extensive graphics and even full-motion video scenes starring actors, like Dirk Benedict, Rip Taylor, and Michael McKean. Hardcore Infocom fans generally don't even acknowledge that these games exist.

What Does 'Zork' Mean?

The word 'Zork' doesn't really mean anything. It's just a nonsense word the MIT guys sometimes used as an exclamation (“Zork!”), but also as a placeholder name for a program that was still being written. However, the game was briefly called “Dungeon,” until TSR, the company behind “Dungeons & Dragons,” threatened to sue. They reverted back to Zork and the name simply stuck.

Does Anyone Remember Zork?

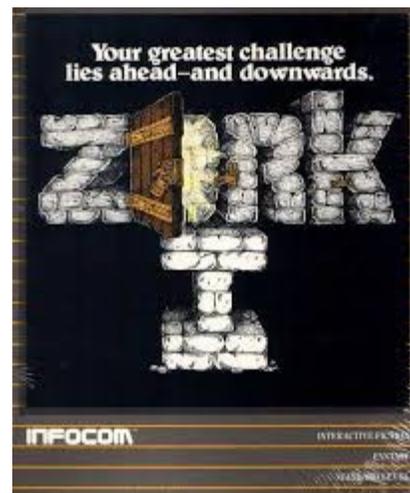
Just about anyone who had a computer in the early 1980s played Zork or one of its Infocom progeny. In addition, because of its mainframe origins, it was a big hit with early hackers and programmers, who included references to the game in their own programs. Zork is also a major topic of the 2010 documentary, “Get Lamp,” an in-depth history of the interactive fiction genre,

including interviews with almost all of the major pioneers of text adventures.

Perhaps one of Zork's longest lasting legacies is the *grue*, a “sinister, lurking presence in the dark places of the earth,” whose insatiable appetite for adventurers is only tempered by its fear of light from a lamp. One of the most famous lines from Zork — “It is pitch black. You are likely to be eaten by a grue” — can be found referenced all over the internet, in old and new video games, and in nerdcore rapper MC Frontalot's homage to Zork, “It is Pitch Dark” (the music video even has a cameo from Steve Meretzky, one of the lead game designers at Infocom).

Can You Still Play Zork?

Thanks to the Internet, good video games never die. A quick Google search will lead you to hundreds of websites that host an online version of Zork, and some even have it available for download. If you're a modern gamer with a copy of “Call of Duty: Black Ops,” an Easter Egg on the main menu lets you play Zork on your Xbox, PS3, or Wii. (Bonus: If you find it, you'll get the “Eaten by a Grue” achievement.) You can also play Zork, as well as many new interactive fiction games — yes, people still make them — by downloading the Frotz app for the iPhone/iPad.





IN SEARCH OF AN AMIGA CD32

by Guest Contributor Brad Hansen

(The Amiga CD32 was Commodore Business Machines last, marketed product before the company went bankrupt in May, 1994. The Amiga CD32 is known as the world's first, 32-bit game console. It's been theorized that if the CD32 had been sold in sufficient numbers, it would have saved CBM from bankruptcy.)

Where to acquire an Amiga CD32? I looked on eBay; there were a couple at \$1000 plus - not in my budget. How to hunt one out? The first person I thought of contacting was Robert Bernardo, president of the Fresno Commodore User Group, leader of the Southern California Commodore & Amiga Network, and leading figure of a couple of important Commodore shows like CommVEx, the Commodore show in Las Vegas; PaCommEx, the Pacific Commodore Expo in Seattle; and CLASS, the Commodore Los Angeles Super Show. Robert had helped me a few years ago when I was searching for a big-box Amiga. I contacted Robert, explaining to him that I was looking for a CD32 to write about it for the magazine. If you mention our magazine – Amiga Future – it gives you a lot more pull in the community. I never forget to mention it! Robert said I should contact the AmigaKit UK store. He told me that he had been there recently on a visit and noticed a large box with untested CD32's. My first real starting

point to check out! I thanked him and said that's what I would do.

I live in California; if it's 6 am where I am, it's 3 pm in the UK. The first hurdle – to call when you have a chance of speaking to someone. Early in the morning I phoned AmigaKit and spoke to Christopher (AmigaKit Technical Services), I told him who I was and what I was looking for. I mentioned that Robert had directed me to AmigaKit and mentioned the box of untested CD32's. The first thing Christopher told me was that the CD32's had been tested and that none of them were working. I replied that this was fine with me, that I only required a complete unit. I had a friend close by with a YouTube channel who repaired Amiga hardware. Christopher went away to talk to management and a short time later came back and said he could send me a non-working unit and at a fair price. I said great and asked when could he do that, and he said that at the moment he was quite busy; he had something like back-orders 500 orders to process, because things had really picked up since COVID-19. I agreed to phone him back the following week, which he said would be fine.

This began a 6-week routine of calling Christopher and him putting me off, but I felt I was slowly whittling him down. He asked if I would prefer a US power supply and then if I was interested in the CD32 joystick. I said yes to both these bits, but the price began to rise. He later told me that he had put together a unit but found the CPU was bad. He replaced it, and when he started it up, he got a green screen, which he believed only meant bad RAM. I started to think that part of Christopher's stalling was that he really didn't want to send me merely a piece of junk but really wanted me to have the right unit that as close to working as possible. I appreciated that. Finally by the end of that week, he shipped me that unit; the total cost including shipping was \$250.

The unit arrived in less than a week, packed incredibly well. Cheers to Christopher! I immediately sent it off to my friend Jonathan Vine, who runs the YouTube channel and store, "RetroFriends". Jonathan and I have been working together for a couple of years now, "I'll trade you this monitor, if you give me that scan doubler?", and such. We only live about 20 miles apart, but with the virus raging, it has been meant we had to do things by post/mail.

When Jonathan received the CD32, he tested the motherboard; a green screen usually means bad RAM, but in this case the RAM was good. Jonathan spent a number of hours trouble-shooting the motherboard and finally found two dead contacts on the Akiko chip, ran a by-pass on them, and then got the CD32 opening screen with sound. Will it spin up a CD? Sadly it would not, but after trouble-shooting the CD drive, Jonathan discovered that it had a broken gear that was almost impossible to find and which could not be 3D printed.

Anyway, as it happened, I did have another CD32, sort of, in that I had the case with a drive assembly. I sent that CD32 to Jonathan and after changing it, it functioned OK, so that was a bit of good luck! It loaded and played the CDs we had! However, it had a problem that a lot of CD32's suffer from, in that on closing the CD lid it did not start the drive unless you put some small additional weight on it. Credit to Jonathan, he is not someone who does things in half measures. He set out to find why this problem was so common on CD32's. What he discovered was that the center pin of that drive assembly was sitting too high to allow the lid to close all the way, so he fashioned a tool out of a screwdriver to adjust the pin downwards. He tested it a number of times to find the sweet spot for the pin to sit. Problem solved! Jonathan made 4 YouTube videos out of his extensive trouble-shooting and fixing of the CD32, which you can find at RetroFriends on YouTube. His video number 4 is the one that

covers the fix for the CD32 not spinning-up/closing lid problem.

It has been a 2 month journey from California to the UK and back again, with a lot of help from everyone involved, but it feels great to now have a working Amiga CD32.



The November/December issue of The Interface will be out sometime at the beginning of 2021, most likely in January, conditions withstanding.

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-The Small Print-

The Fresno Commodore User Group is a club whose members share an interest in Commodore 8-bit and Amiga computers. Our mailing address is 185 W. Pilgrim Lane, Clovis, CA 93612. We meet monthly in the meeting room of Panera Bread, 3590 West Shaw, Fresno, CA. The meetings generally include demonstrations, discussion, and individual help.

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

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