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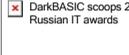
#### Welcome!

I'm pleased to introduce you all to the first ever issue of the official DarkBASIC Newsletter. It's now 2003, a lot of changes are coming and this is the place to be for all the latest news from the world of DarkBASIC and its active and vibrant community. Coming up in this issue you can read about the Patch 4 release for DBPro, find out about the new tutorials we're making, product development news, reviews, interviews and dare I say it – more!

As with all community lead publications this wouldn't exist without your input, so if you've got something to announce for Issue 2 then now would be a perfect time to write to me about it – email [rich@darkbasic.com](mailto:rich@darkbasic.com) and inform the DB world about your projects.

#### DarkBASIC wins 2 more awards

At the tail-end of 2002 DarkBASIC was proud to receive two of the most prestigious IT awards available in Russia. The first award was an experts' vote where DarkBASIC won first prize in the category of Computer Creativity at the annual all-Russian contest of multimedia CD-ROMs Content 2002. The second award came a few days later when DarkBASIC also scooped the Best Product 2002 award in the Home Entertainment CD-Rom category from PC World magazine - Russian Edition. This is a popular readers vote and DarkBASIC received 41.5% of all votes compared to the closest runner-up of only 20%.



It is easy to forget DarkBASIC users in other countries where they have their own skilled and dedicated communities. A quick glance at some of the Russian DarkBASIC fan-sites will reveal some very cool looking games indeed - try it out one day by clicking the flags on the darkbasic.com site.

#### Retro-Game Programming Competition Announcement

In our first competition of 2003 Dark Basic Software are on the look-out for entries to our brand new "retro-game" competition. We'll have some great prizes on offer more of which will be announced soon. The subject matter of this competition is retro-gaming! This can include brand new 3D remakes of old classics or faithful arcade-perfect conversions - the choice is yours, but the game must be a classic from the computer, console or arcade eras of yesteryear. Full details will be released onto the DarkBASIC web sites very soon - but you newsletter readers have the advantage in that you get to know about the upcoming competition right now and therefore have a little extra planning time :)

#### ZIPtools for DBPro

On January 3rd Guy Savoie (of RealGameTools) released his DarkBASIC Professional add-on ZIPtools. ZIPtools are a set of third party commands that will allow the programmer to have fast direct access to the contents of ZIP files from within their own DarkBASIC Professional programs. An example use might be to package up all of the 3D models and textures into a ZIP file and then use the ZIPtools commands to extract them directly into memory for use by your game. Features include: Unzipping by name or numeric index to a memblock, support for password protected zip files, extract all the filenames inside a zip file and store them in a string or an array and checking the compressed and uncompressed sizes of files. ZIPtools is a free download to all DBDN members and RGT customers. For more information visit the web site.



[RGT Web Site](#)

#### Visible Worlds - Creating Worlds Competition

To coincide with the launch of their new web site and the release of Visible Worlds, UnderWare Design is holding their first DarkBASIC competition. The aim is to create the most impressive roaming camera demo possible, via the utilization of a Visible Worlds portal system. The demo can be in first or third person style (RPG, FPS style) and its primary focus should be on creating a rich and full environment. Visible Worlds is a 3D video game visibility compiler that allows developers to turbo charge their games performance optimizing their 3D worlds into visible portals. Full details and a list of prizes are available on the web site.



[Visible Worlds Web Site](#)

Captain Zero	Virtual Insanity	Star Wraith 3 - Shadows of Orion
<i>By Shanon White</i>	<i>By Far From Earth Corp</i>	<i>By SW3D Games</i>
There is just something very honest and pure about this game. Like it isn't trying to be something it's not and yet at the same time it offers some great gameplay and arcade action. The basic premise is this: shoot everything, move from one planet to the next and repeat :) The action takes place in a 360 degree playing field with you looking down on your ship. Asteroids and aliens bombard you from all angles and if you blow them away you get to pick up bonus weapons and power-ups to make life easier for the larger foe on the later levels. There are some very nice touches in this title - I especially like the winding trails of the homing missiles, the devastation of the laser cannon and the enemy ships that split into swarms of smaller beasts requiring some frantic fire-button work to clear. There is careful balance between keeping away from them and maintaining fuel levels (perhaps in some cases it's too hard to do this as fuel runs dry very fast) but it's all part of this quality game.	Some of you reading this may be familiar with the classic puzzle game Sokoban - it involved pushing blocks around a grid in order to plug holes leading to the exit of the level. You could only push the blocks (not pull) which led to interesting dilemmas of getting them stuck in corners and suchlike. Take this concept, throw it into a blender mixing in a 3D environment, beautiful graphics, great music and sound effects and change the gameplay ever so slightly and you have Virtual Insanity. Where Sokoban stopped at pushing single blocks now you're treated to far more fiendish puzzles involving huge blocks, turnstiles that prevent blocks from passing and strict time limits. Some of the levels are particularly challenging but somehow this game just sucks you back to it time and time again. The presentation through-out is flawless with wild background animations complementing the high-tech 3D look of the levels. Oh and check out the boss key!	From the opening sequence of this game you know you are in for something special and Star Wraith 3 doesn't disappoint. The initial menu allows you to select from single player missions or opt for the multiplayer dog fighting route - online battles occur frequently or you can host your own session. So what sort of game is Star Wraith? From the screen shots you can obviously detect the "space" theme but what might not be so obvious is the wonderfully frantic nature of the combat. This is no sedentary space-trading Elite clone, it's more of a 3D shoot-em-up with varied missions, tactical weaponry and fast-paced explosive encounters. Indeed the speed of it is worth mentioning and you hardly get time to admire the gorgeous scenery as you roll past an oncoming squadron of fighters in a deft attempt to avoid their homing missiles. The presentation quality is high, the voice overs and instructions effective (and somewhat sarcastic on occasion) and overall this is a highly polished affair. Miss it at your peril.

#### Interview with Paul Varney / Far From Earth Corp and Lead Scenery Artist at Shiny

**Hi Paul - for the benefit of the readers could you please tell us what first got you interested in gaming and creating computer games?**

I first got interested in computers back in 1979 (I was 12 at the time). I lived at the time in Scotland and spent my weekends mesmerized by our TV pong game. A few years later my friends had either managed to persuade their parents to buy an Atari 2600 or a ColecoVision and my time away from home and an unhealthy addiction began.

We loved games with a passion, we were 14 years old and we craved the next big thing. Girls of course thought we were geeks, but hey, we loved our games! The girls could wait. So we put our money together and bought a Spectrum 48k. We'd spend most of our weekends buzzing around town from one friends house to another equipped with a pack of blank C90s and a Dixon's tape deck. We just couldn't get enough.

The art, action and storytelling in most of the games of course was very crude - some were amazing, but we found ourselves wanting more - I mean, we'd already seen the films Star Wars, Tron and The Last Starfighter so we demanded bigger and better. Equipped with P.A.W. (the Professional Adventure Writer program) we set about making our very first games. They were the usual stuff - "Escape from School", "Lost in Space", "Aliens ate my hamster", kids stuff, but fun, but most importantly these simple games were ours. We made them and our friends played them - it felt soooooo good!

The Commodore 64 changed it all. Games like of Uridium, Spindizzy, Alternate Reality and LCP changed my life. I sold my C64 in 1985 and rushed to own one of the first 60 Atari ST's to hit the UK and then rushed out and bought Starglider (I rushed a lot back then!). Shortly after that I bought my first Amiga and with these came the glory of Cinemaware's "Defender of the Crown", Accolades "Test Drive", CAD 3D and of course AMOS. I could go and on in great detail describing every little event that has led up to now, it seems just like yesterday, but needless to say after school and college I worked in computer games retail for 4 years (including **setting up and managing DMA Design retail division** - the GTA and Lemmings guys) and in 1992 I started my professional games career in game design, artwork and animation for Argonaut Software in London. Then Microprose, Scavanger, Eidos and Mythos. Eventually **I was encouraged to move to Sunny California to work as Lead Scenery Artist at Shiny** on a new game 'Sacrifice' and except for the long hours, it was the best move I ever made.

#### What first drew you to DarkBASIC? Did you find the language easy to pick up?

Around the start of 2000 I was becoming more and more interested in creating my own games for fun. I wanted specifically a BASIC language. Not C with OpenGL, but a language that allowed me to quickly get my ideas into action without hassle, something for the PC that was similar to AMOS. After 2 nights of searching the web and looking at engines I discovered Dark Basic (I think it was V1.02). I downloaded it and loved it from the first day I used it. I ordered it as soon as a version was available to buy and I have used it ever since. It is without a doubt the most satisfying piece of software I have EVER used. I've also dabbled with C and OpenGL and although I feel I'm becoming quite experienced I know I have a long, long way to go to achieve a fraction of the foundation DB has to offer rapid game development.

#### Approx. how many projects have you started in DarkBASIC and then aborted before you began work on Virtual Insanity? Will you revisit any of them?

I have about 40 projects started, most are around the 10% just playing with an idea stage, and some are very advanced. I released my first DB game 3D Solitaire over a year ago and since moved on to other projects. Virtual Insanity is the first of several titles I am planning on closing up this spring. I have 3 other titles almost complete, 2 of which are very different from anything in the market place and very specialist, and another I think (I hope) everyone will enjoy. As for the rest, they'll probably be resurrected at different times in the future, however I already have another 2 dozen ideas I want to see put into action so who knows what will be created and in what order. It's kind of chaotic, what with the day job, family and whatever suits my mood on any given day. The cool thing is, is that DB offers so much opportunity for creativity its hard to stay focused for a decent amount of time without saying to yourself "yeah, I should just throw that together in DB this evening, see how it turns out", the language is just too accommodating – its almost like a game.

#### Where did the inspiration for Virtual Insanity come from? Is it based on any other games?

I played a game a few years ago (around 1989) I couldn't remember the exact name but I loved it (Editor: We think it's probably Sokoban) and I couldn't put it down until I completed that damn thing. I always wanted more levels, more puzzles, but after completing it there were no more. So when I was thinking of a game to make that would allow me to cover a complete development cycle this one immediately sprung to mind.

**Did you work on the project on your own or in a team? If in a team who else worked with you, what did they do and how did you communicate to make sure the project got finished? Do you have any tips for other DB users trying to do the same?**

I started Virtual Insanity in March 2002 and a few months later showed it to a colleague/friend of mine who said – "hey, that's very cool" and from that day on he encouraged me to continue. Mark (now my business partner), was actually my producer on Sacrifice, so together we started to put together a more comprehensive list of what we would need to do to make this game in Dark Basic and make it of high enough quality to possibly sell (he's a producer after all, that's ALL he thinks about!).

Mark set out a full development schedule, listing the tasks required and since I was the only one between the two of us creating the artwork and programming (in the evenings and weekends), he would use all of his producer skills to get us through to completion. The guy is amazing. He has produced such amazing games as MDK, Carmageddon and Sacrifice, and although we are only a tiny team I had to respect his decision making if we wanted to make any progress – Professional development has taught me this much at least – trust the producer. Mark is now spending his time in marketing and PR.

#### During development did you hit any significant problems that you found work-around's for? Things that really got you stumped but you overcame.

The big problem with any design is design itself. Most of the problems I have encountered have stemmed from the simple mistake of loading up DB and writing code. DB itself has had many bugs, still has, but also an equally amount of workarounds. However, I was caught out more often than not by my hands-on organic programming approach (basically, just getting stuck in until everything stopped working) which often had me chasing my tail and abandoning a project and moving onto something else.

DB is designed to be creator friendly. Its greatest benefit to beginners is also its biggest downfall for beginners. It is so easy just to throw your idea together, but once you have your foundation working, my advice is to start again. You know it works, so re-write a more robust programmer friendly version to accommodate a full program flow. This will pay big dividends to your design and possibility of completion.

If you have a small team of your own, definitely split up the tasks to have only one of you dealing with schedules. You do need to set yourselves targets, regardless of the size of project. If you miss the targets, then don't beat yourself up, just set a new one, but when you do reach it, you can get onto the next while giving yourself a well deserved pat on the back. It sounds like work, but it needn't be. You can have a lot of fun watching your creation come to life and get better with every day. Before long, you'll be close to the end, don't trip up now, keep going, it's just around the corner. You'll know when it is finished and you can share your creation with the world and sit back and smile with a super smug satisfaction that hundreds, thousands and possibly more are playing your game – after all, that is why we do this.

Once you are finished, take a well deserved break and move onto another. If nothing else, your Dark Basic projects could help secure you a permanent job in games industry, it is an excellent portfolio tool. So try and not give up on your best projects.

If need be, start them again from scratch (Virtual Insanity was rewritten 3 times to get performance) it could well be worth it. A very good friend of mine (a lead programmer who has worked on games such as Wipeout, Dead to Rights and Pacman Worlds) often says that every good project is written twice.

#### The graphics and effects in Virtual Insanity are very good - what tips or suggestions do you have for other DB programmers? Are there any things they can do to ensure their game looks good even if they aren't naturally artistic?

Keep your ambitions simple. The first thing I did when deciding on VI artwork was to see where I could simplify the art and give it room for expansion if I had the time. For this, I concentrated on designing a backdrop system that could change for each level – For the most part I only had 3 different backdrops, but as the project grew, and when I needed a break from programming I would set aside an evening and create another backdrop. I like to think of it as chipping away with expansion in mind.

With art, if you feel it isn't your strong point, then keep it simple. Use plenty of gradients and flat color, and don't mix too many different colors together unless you are confident they work together. It's all very subjective, but big, bold and tidy can see you through. Using packages such as Texture Maker from Tobias Reichert can take a lot of the pain away from creating seamless and beautiful art. I'd highly recommend it. Fractal painter is also a good buy, however, a little pricey, but in my opinion far more powerful and creative than Photoshop. I've used both now for over 10 years, and I still say Praxel wins his hands every time.

#### Are there any other DB creations you've seen that really impressed you?

One of the first games ever created with DB blew my mind. Columns. Simple, all well written, a fast and of course highly playable. And all written in a little unknown programming language. That's what it is all about. Making a game that looks good is one thing, but keeping it fun and more than a demo takes a lot of work and thought.

#### What would you most like to see added to DarkBASIC Professional?

I bought DBPro a few days after it was released. I love it, I love the ease of the editor, the feeling of a professional working environment and the compile options, unfortunately it still has a way to go for it to make the grade. I think in time it will be a killer app. If I could choose a command, I'd want to say better access to vertex data (especially setting color and alpha at vert level would add so much to the power of the mesh). I've used the FVF format, but with more access to the renderable properties of the vert and tri it would open up a whole heap of wonderful visual opportunities. Oh, and being able to resize and camera align particle objects would be a huge help :)

#### What's next? When can we expect another hit showcase entry?!

I have several other projects pretty close now. I am planning on sharing these before I release so that I can get some better feedback and hopefully make changes based on that feedback for the final releases. I'm hoping everyone will find them at the very least "interesting" - and as for hit showcase entries I'll let the DB community be the judge!

#### Any final closing words?

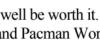
Keep your code well structured. Put everything in subroutines or functions and have a simple control loop branch. If your idea and projects develop, then this structure from the start will help it expand more easily.

And get some sleep, you'll need it to carry on with your project the day after!

[paul@farfromearthcorp.com](mailto:paul@farfromearthcorp.com)

#### Infinity Textures is now Texture Maker

Back in 2002 we started selling the texture generation program Infinity Textures. During December another company challenged the right to the title "infinity" and in order to avoid any legal wrangling the program was renamed to Texture Maker. It's still the same application just with a revamped title.



Texture Maker is available to buy now for only \$69.99

For those new to Texture Maker it's a very advanced texture generation program with a lot of powerful features. It can create perfectly seamless textures up to any resolution, it's 100% scriptable and new scripts can be downloaded from the Internet providing for some stunning effects. There is a built-in particle system that will create perfectly looping AVI animations of particle effects, so you can easily create a winding smoke trail and texture it onto a plane for an easy but powerful visual effect. There is also a landscape creation suite much like Terragen/Vue de Esprit that can build up image maps or randomize new landscapes, water effects, clouds, etc. Finally the invaluable genetic texture manipulator allows you to create wonderfully random textures and then modify them, merging them with other random textures ending up with results you could never have planned if you wanted to! Finished off with a powerful multi-processor engine and gorgeous Windows GUI this is an invaluable tool for 3D artists and games developers and is in use by numerous commercial software houses.

#### "Quake3" in 20 lines of code?!

On the [DB forums](#) we have a board especially dedicated to programmers trying to write the most impressive code for an engine in 20 lines of DarkBASIC code or less. It's open to contributions from anyone for either DarkBASIC or DarkBASIC Professional and some of the results are amazing! Each issue of the newsletter will be picking out our favourites and awarding free lifetime membership to DBDN to the winners. This month the award goes to the "Quake3" entry by Jonathan Gover. In 20 lines he has managed to create a 2-player FPS style game (on-screen at the same time) that sees each player charging around a spookily lit-maze firing at one another. The code is for DarkBASIC Professional only and is well worth looking at for the bones of an FPS engine.



[20-line winner](#)

#### DarkBASIC Professional Tutorials

Here at DBHQ we've been busy working on new tutorials for all DarkBASIC professional users - we aim to have 10 brand new tutorials online by the end of January 2003 and are already half way there. Topics covered so far include an in-depth look at Data Types, Rainbow Shading, Screen Scrolling techniques, FPS style explanations and abusing the Box command! There are many tutorials planned including RGS style control systems, an introduction to 3D scale and movement, starting Multiplayer games, 3D Math commands and more. The tutorials have been released onto DBDN already and will make their way onto the public DarkBASIC Professional site within the coming weeks. We're also seeking suggestions for new DarkBASIC Professional tutorials so if you have any - please do drop us a line.



#### DarkBASIC Professional Patch 4 is on the horizon

On January 16th we saw the first beta release of the much anticipated Patch 4 for DarkBASIC Professional. Released onto DBDN this patch offers many enhancements over the current release including a brand new 3D system. Objects are now in the new DBO format and the vastly increased 3D pipeline means more bang for your buck! Where before people were noticing speeds of around 20 FPS for several hundred objects on-screen at once, under the new Patch 4 and DBO format this has jumped to around 350 FPS with no code modifications on your part required! Objects also load and texture much faster.

The DBO System is the first step towards unifying just about all aspects of DBPro 3D handling. Ultimately all 3D comes down to some very basic code, and we determined the best way to maintain a language such as DBPro was to channel our efforts through as much re-usable code as humanly possible. Thus the DBO foundation was born.

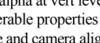
Known simply as the Dark Basic Object (DBO), it uses a very efficient pipeline to arrange and sort the 3D that will ultimately be drawn to the screen. This improvement has caused a mark improvement in speed. The method of heavy code reuse has made the code more stable, though we may experience a few tweak issues along the way as the Basic3D code has almost been completely rewritten and restructured. Although additional functionality is now at our command, the first release of the DBO system will not increase the number of commands. The technology does now allow us to save objects perfectly, clone objects including animation and visual settings.

The end user functionality will increase with Patch 5 as we not only plan to complete the bug fixes reported to date, but add the remaining 3DS, MDL, MD2 and MD3 formats back in plus new commands to take greater control of the object at the mesh level. Beyond Patch 5 there is no limit to what the DBO system may be used for, including matrix and BSP

Patch 4 will be released during first quarter 2003.

#### Lee in Develop 25

On Tuesday the 21st of January Lee Bamber took part in a development round-table organised by Develop Magazine. The appropriately renamed "square table", on the basis that the pub table was in actual fact square, was assembled to discuss the subject of user created games and game content. With mod enabled developers (i.e. quake3 and half-life modders) at one end of the spectrum and complete game creation tool developers on the other, they explored what drives people to want to create their own games and what the future holds for the market. The complete article can be read in issue 25 of the magazine, details of which can be found on the web site: <http://www.developmag.com>



#### Next Issue...

Thank you for reading Issue 1 of the DarkBASIC Newsletter - we hoped you enjoyed this small glimpse into the world of DBS. Next issue we'll be bringing you more news, another quality 20-liner, more showcase reviews and a new DBPro Tutorial exclusive to newsletter readers.

If you have anything to comment about this issue or contribute to issue 2 then please do [get in touch](#).