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Welcome!

As we step into the second edition of our newsletter things are really hotting up around here (which is probably a good thing to melt away some of the snow!). Our friends over at DarkBASIC are getting the programming competition of 2003 with some fantastic prizes. It's still not too late to enter either (the deadline is April 4th) so why not give it a go? There are some brilliant looking products from entires under construction surfacing on the forums and I'm looking forward to judging every single one of these titles. But now - on with the news...

DarkBASIC Enhancement Pack Now Available

The DarkBASIC Enhancement Pack (DBEP) has been around for a while now, originally bundled as part of our DarkMATTER product. But now we've opened it up so you can purchase just the DBEP for a knock-down price of $19.99. This upgrade will drop in no less than 190 new commands to DarkBASIC v1.08 covering various functions such as: Multiplayer commands, Memblock commands, Registry support, Environmental Audio, new input commands and the ability to now load in and access DLLs from within DarkBASIC. Full details can be found on our web site and please note this only upgrades DarkBASIC, not DarkBASIC Professional.

DarkBASIC Enhancement Pack

DarkBASIC Enhancement Pack

Dark Basic Software Wins Special Commendation Award

On Friday 7th February 2003 Lee Bamber and friends represented "Dark Basic Software" in the local Wigan and Leigh Business Awards and walked away with a special commendation award. Of all the businesses in the local area, Dark Basic Software was short-listed as a finalist and invited to a glamorous four-course meal and award ceremony. At the reception, Lee met the guest speaker Mrs Felicity Goodie who also presented the award. Lee was reported to be very happy, not least for the two bottles of complimentary champagne he received on his return to the DBS table.

Lee Bamber of Dark Basic Software at the Wigan and Leigh Business Awards

DarkBASIC Professional Dongle Launch

As any dedicated DarkBASIC Professional Developer will know - every few hundred compilations the program will ask you to insert the original CD-Rom for a quick security check. We appreciated that this may be too obtrusive for intensive users and educational facilities so we produced a special version of DarkBASIC Professional that checks for the presence of a USB dongle at compilation time. You can purchase this dongle (which will fit into any standard USB port) from our web site. Please note that you must own DarkBASIC Professional in order for this product to work.

DarkBASIC Professional USB Dongle

DBPro USB Dongle

Lee Bambers Programming Past

There have been a number of interviews with the main man behind DarkBASIC in the past, but very few of them looked back at what started it all going - what made him interested in gaming and programming in general. In keeping with our retro theme this issue we thought you'd find the following brief interview interesting. Over to you Lee.

ShootEmBuddies by Lee Bamber!

Lee tell us about your first computer/console you ever owned and what is your first "gaming" memory?

The first console I ever used was a device called 'Inter-Tele', which could run games by inserting a cartridge and playing on pads connected to the device with a springy wire. It was a very cool piece of kit for its time and had such games as tank-battle, sea-battle and racing. All very simple stuff by todays standards, but back then I would play it with my brothers, family and friends over and over. The first game I played on that was racing. Two cars in an overhead view perspective would race around a track and the first over the line would win. A strange sort of game as there was no split screen so which ever car lagged behind would receive a penalty and be transported nearer to the lead car. A cool part of the game was you could wander off the track and through the trees, a great way to see parts of the landscape that you normally would not be allowed to see if you followed the rules. I remember it vividly simply because I played it so much. Games back then relied so much on repeat-play that they where solid as a rock when it came to gameplay.

Which computer did you first start programming on and can you recall the first program you ever made or a program you created that you were proud of?

My first computer was a VIC-20 which came with a built in BASIC language. I programmed it from the very first day, which just happened to be Christmas day. The first program I 'copied' from the manual was something strange and silly to get me into the language. I think it was printing my name on the screen. The first program I could call my own was a text adventure. There was no defined plot as I recall, you simply started in a western town and wandered around to the railway station and the sheriffs office and picked up a few items. No real sense of a game to it, just a proud sense of achievement.

We know you were an avid AMOS programmer on your Commodore Amiga - what interested you about the language and what games did you make with it?

Just like the Amiga, AMOS was what I regarded as a revolution in the world of programming. It gave the user the power of the entire machine through a very simple and intuitive interface. I programmed AmigaBASIC before it and to load a picture was literally three pages of code. In AMOS it was one command. I spent years programming in AMOS, probably longer than I should have. Maybe I would be a better C++ coder if it was not for the ease and strengths of AMOS which had me hooked. I made many games in AMOS, and was the first language that allowed me to write quite good games that managed to make it to the magazines and public domain. Such grand titles as ShootEm Baddies, Calculus Combat and Aquakon marked my journey into the world of learning how to write games. My last game was called Relics of Deldroneye, and was my biggest and best achievement on the Amiga. It made more money than all my other games combined, and got some of the best public domain reviews I have ever read. With a little more polish it would have easily made commercial, but alas by that time the Amiga market was all but gone in the UK and the PC started to rule the waves.

Do you still have your Amiga, and can you name some of your favorite games on it?

I donated my Amiga to my brother, who as I understand put it into the loft and I think it is still there somewhere. I kept my games, art and source code archives for the machine for many years after I stopped using it however in time it became clear that my direction was forwards and I had no need to source such material and so threw much of it away. The Amiga was a great machine and really allowed so much to be created there was no limit. Some of my favourite Amiga games where 'Defenders Of The Crown' which had awesome graphics and a great sense of conquest when you defeated your enemies. Taking over old England was the goal, and I completed it many times. Most of my gaming life was on the Commodore 64, as by the time I had the Amiga my time was largely split between college and writing games. Playing them came secondary as my time was divided mainly into finding new ways of doing an old game idea. 'Lemmings' was also a favourite of mine. 'Super Cars' was also great fun, with the novel idea of buying and using weapons on the race track to put off your opponent, and the comic commentary at the end of the race. Very inventive stuff!

Where did you work after leaving school?

I left Wigan Business School at the age of 22 and went working for Europress Software. It was my first job interview and got the job on the spot. They wanted someone to write small multimedia applications and games, and my CV was full of games I had single handedly written so they cast me in a good light. I first worked on the Klik/Click series of products and produced all sorts of little goodies including such games as 'Zeb' and 'Lobotomy' with much help from a very talented graphics artist. It was a good team. He would think up the game graphics and I would make them do stuff. I also worked on other Europress products from time to time. After a few years Europress contracted me out to work for Lego for a year or so where I joined a team to write the programming language for the ' Lego Mindstorms' series. After that, I decided not to return to honest employment and go self-employed to see what would happen.

When did you start developing DarkBASIC and how did you find it at first?

The very first seed of the idea of a scripting language for games was planted by Rick in my last year. At the time I remember I was writing a game called 'Pontoon' which I recall did not get used anywhere. It was quite a good game too! At the time I continued my own thing, learning DirectX and C++. It took months just to get a triangle on the screen with the camera moving around it. I was so proud. I later wrote a game from what I had learned called Pobs which was a command and conquer clone with goo-people and goo-buildings. I would say this game was the start of DB development.

Are there any significant points about the development life of DarkBASIC that stick in your mind?

I recall a conversation I had with Malcolm, my uncle, which started to pour some serious thought into the idea of a game language for the PC. I had the skills to get all the music, sound and graphics doing their thing, so why not add a script around it all. We then set to work, with Malc writing the parser and myself writing and cleaning up the game code for the language. Alas my impatience got the better of me and I wrote a quick parser as a test to see the kind of speeds my language could produce. This little parser grew in size until it overtook Malcs efforts in the same field. We agreed to use the new parser and continue from there, which is of course another story. It was not long before the language was behaving itself and producing very cool things. Nothing quite like it on the PC too which meant I could probably sell it. Up until it being nearly complete I had not thought too much about selling it, as I was gainfully employed. Around the time I finished Lego, I decided I could start selling it and go self-employed. It was crazy but it worked.

Which DarkBASIC creations really impressed you or spring to mind?

There are so many now that I can hardly keep up. My time has been so focused on my daily tasks that I hardly have time to look up and smell the roses. The screenshots on the main DarkBASIC page speak of great productions that look and play great and are sure to help the careers of the authors in many different ways. I have been impressed with the dedication of the author of the game 'StarWraith' who has produced a trilogy of the game and manages his website and sales as a lonewolf developer. This kind of approach to making a name for yourself is something I can identify with right away.

What would you most like to add to DarkBASIC Professional if time or money wasn't an issue?

A complete collision and physics system to do away once and for all the issues of collision handling. It should be as automatic as switching on a light. At the moment the best you can get is sphere to polygon detection. Used for most game systems but not all, and I want to offer every kind of functionality. I want to add support tools to DBPro too. I think the language is complete enough to produce almost anything now, but users still need world, level, model, animation, sound, music and texture editors to make game creation an all round easy process. At the moment it is a little fragmented and I want to pull in these threads. There are other issues such as the lack of specific features but it seems the community is way ahead of me already in terms of providing menu, windows, mmorpg, port and device command sets through our third party commands SDK. I have heard nothing but good things from the developers who are using TPC SDK to enhance DBPro, and I am glad I made it a priority to implement and document this feature of the language.

Any final comments you'd like to make? Or pearls of wisdom to share with the readers?

I have so many pearls I could weigh a ship down with them. It is what happens to you when you program for over a decade. I am in the process of writing snippets every time one of those pearls are required, and collecting useful responses for an FAQ we are also working on. I figure the best advice I can give is the day to day advice as when people face those brick walls common in computer programming. The heaviest pearl I can think of at the moment is patience and time. You are not going to write the next Vice City in two weeks, no matter how good you think you are. It will take YEARS of dedicated effort to get to that point. The good thing about writing games is that you get to enjoy those YEARS on the road to ultimate success. If success however simply means the production of a game idea you have had, then you are a winner the moment you get something to work. And an extra pearl for those of you just starting out. Eat properly and go to bed at a decent hour. Establish a good daily pattern and do not do as I did which is work like a vampire deep into the night. It might seem like you are gaining, but in truth you are setting up a long term condition that is disruptive and hard to break!

3D Canvas Pro Version 6 On Sale

We're pleased to announce that we have struck a deal with Amabilis, the authors of the 3D modelling and animation package 3D Canvas and we are now bundling it with our DarkBASIC range of products. 3D Canvas Professional is a low-cost modelling package with features geared specifically towards game models. It includes the usual array of functions you'd expect from a modeller including 3D primitives, object building tools, deformation, sculpting, painting, spline-based and skeletal animation, inverse kinematics and more. The program works well with DarkBASIC and DarkBASIC Professional and with tools geared specifically for polygon reduction you should be able to create good looking, fast objects for your games. A full feature list, screen shots and free trial version is available on our web sites.

3D Canvas Professional now available

3D Canvas Professional

Retro Games In Development

As you probably know we're holding a Retro Games Programming Competition (if this is news to you please see the article directly below this one!). Programmers so far have had nearly 3 weeks to get their work underway and believe it or not we have had some finished titles sent to us already! On the DBPro and RGT forums you can see examples of Works in Progress that we seriously hope manage to make it to us for the deadline. Some notable re-makes include: Jetpac, Antartic Adventure, Metal Gear Solid (original MSX version), Bomberman, Q-Bert, Qix, Pacman, Super Mario and more! Click the screen shot on the right for a larger version and check out the forums for updated pics.

Retro Game Programming Competition

Dark Basic Software are pleased to announce our biggest programming competition ever! We've got some great prizes up for grabs from NVIDIA and all you have to do to be in with a chance of winning is to program your game and enter it before the deadline (April 4th 2003). The objective is simple - we want you to re-create and enhance a classic video/computer game. Do you have a favourite game from your youth? Perhaps you sank far too much money into the likes of Pacman or Street Fighter? Whatever the game was - if it was a classic then it qualifies. Be careful though - we're not looking for arcade perfect conversions, do not "rip" out the graphics or sounds, instead base your game on the original and enhance it. We'll be especially looking out for innovative uses of 3D but above all - gameplay. That is what made the classics of yesteryear so famous afterall. You could win yourself one of two GeForce4 graphics cards, boxes of Dark Basic software and life time membership to DBDN. So what are you waiting for?! Get coding and may the best game win!

DarkBASIC Retro Game Programming

Retro Game Programming Competition

Sherman 2	Limit Rush	Galaxians
Sherman 2	Limit Rush	Galaxians
By Crossbones	**By Binary Moon**	**By Minion Soft**
The objective is quite simple - you control a tank in an overhead race against 3 others and you need to charge around the landscape collecting the flags and returning them to your base. You can only carry so many flags at once and being a tank you can of course shoot - which means the enemy tanks will both steal your flags and try and kill you at the same time! What's more if you run over an enemy base you can steal any flags they've managed to collect and place in there so far. Somewhat unfairly they can do the same to you! This game is packed full of options to make things easier (we seriously recommend turning the difficulty right down to start with), the presentation quality is high and the gameplay hectic. Great fun.	We seem to have a theme of flag collection this issue, but that is also what Limit Rush is all about. Running under the guise of some futuristic gameshow you power your nimble little hovercraft around the 3D environment charging as fast as you can towards the flag/checkpoint before the others can get there. The one that gets the most wins! The presentation in this game is great, the 3D environment is very well portrayed and the models and textures all work well lending it an air of professionalism. What's more you can also read a whole tutorial on how the game was made in extreme detail over on the DarkBASIC web site, which just adds to the usefulness of this title - it's both fun and educational!	It might have pre-empted our retro competition but it's a superb game none-the-less. Minionsoft have done a great job of taking the classic arcade shooter Galaxian and churning it out onto the PC. The graphics are improved, the sound is frantic and booming, the effects quick and the action just sublime. From the opening screen to the instructions page you can't help but feel that this has all been created out of a love for the game and all things arcade and for that we adore it. One thing we did find was that on top-end machines it will run just a little too fast! So if you're packing the latest hardware (Pentium4 2.5Ghz or above) then you'd better have damned good reflexes.

Attack of the Harmless Grey Blobs 20-Line Winner

On the DB forums we have a board especially dedicated to programmers trying to write the most impressive program they can 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 we will be picking out our favourites and awarding free lifetime membership to DBDN to the winners.

The award this month goes to Ezzers for this fun little "run around a matrix, shooting stuff" game! Random terrains, things to kill and overall it just looks quite nice. Well done!

20-line winner

Magic Windows 1.2b and 3D Map Editor

Magic Windows is a complete GUI system developed in and for DarkBASIC. It provides you with a whole stack of commands with which to build your own GUI system into your games. It's easy to create dragable windows, buttons, icons, thumbnails and more with nothing but the function library provided for free on the web site. The author Fr£d£Äöric Cordier has crammed an amazing amount of functionality into this library and it is well worth looking at if you need a GUI system in your program but don't want to waste weeks developing one.

Also released by the same talented author is the latest version of 3D Map Editor 2.31r2. It is a complete 3D world/scene building package that uses 3D primitives and imported 3D objects to allow for quick and easy map creation. You can add in spheres, cubes, pyramids, objects, light sources, 3D sounds, matrixes, action zones and more into your map. The resulting file is saved in its special file format that you can load into your DarkBASIC programs with the supplied function library. This means very fast and very impressive 3D map creation with the minimum of fuss! 3DMapEditor also uses Frederics Magic Windows system so it's a great showcase of what is possible. Well worth checking out.

3DMapEditor

3DMapEditor Home Page

VSD Tracker 1.01

Van-Simple Designs has released the latest version of VSD Tracker. If you come from a 16-bit background (the likes of the Commodore Amiga) you will most likely remember the music was in a soundtracker format. This was a collection of samples mixed together in varying octaves, frequencies and with effects such as echo, flange and distortion. The resulting multi-channel tune could be used in games/demos. While there are similar packages for the PC this one is the first to have been created in DarkBASIC Professional. It comes complete with an example song, nice intro sequence, great sound editor (click the screen shot for a higher-res version) and replay source code in .dba format so you can play the tracks you make in your own games. You could use mp3 files instead - but a tracked song will be both smaller in file size and you have access to the volume of each channel meaning you can create nice VU meters.

VSD Tracker

New DarkBASIC Professional Technology Demos Released

A couple of days ago we released two brand new DarkBASIC Professional Technology Demos onto the site. The first one is a 2D demo that displays 11 different layers of parallax scrolling based on the classic game Shadow of the Beast. The second is a much longer demo called The Lab. It mixes together all of the fine elements of a demo today including particle effects, cube mapping, animation, stunning graphics and all perfectly in sync with the soundtrack. Both demos include full source code and can be downloaded from our site - check them out!

2 New DBPro Demos

2 New DBPro Demos

Psprites Library (Beta) from Underware Design

This library kit lets you simulate Sprites via using DB's 3D planes objects. These sprites have all the same basic features as normal DB sprites and a few more. So you can scale, rotate, ghost, detect mouse clicks collisions and more importantly, you can even make them use their own resolution independent of the current screen mode.

Being able to set their resolution is a handy thing, it allows us to create and display foreground information using Psprites, and we never have to worry about re-sizing this information depending on what resolution the player is running your game in. Also you can hard code the sprites positioning, and no matter what resolution, it'll scale the images and positions to ensure your virtual Psprites screen res.

Follow the thread and download from the Real Game Tools Forum

Next Issue...

It's been an absolutely packed issue, so much so we even had to leave a few things out! Sure enough Issue 3 will see even more coverage from the ever changing and ever impressive DarkBASIC community. Until then keep on coding, please enter the Retro Competition and participate in the forums. We do love to know what you're working on so why not tell us? rich@darkbasic.com