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Welcome!

The DarkBASIC community never ceases to amaze me and this month is no exception. It seems that no matter what time of the year it is people are always busy working away on some title or other. Wether it's a short 20-line program for the forum, a utility to help others or their own full game the creativity never stops flowing.

DarkBASIC Professional Patch 4 hits Release Candidate status

It's been a long time in the building, the last official Patch having been released on November 29th 2002, but this is one the largest updates to DarkBASIC Professional yet and it shows! Using the term "patch" doesn't do Patch4 justice, if anything it's a complete enhancement package that removes the entire 3D engine from the previous version and replaces it. What can the new version do? Well how about out-perform the majority of the competition?! It gives DarkBASIC Professional a boost in speed like nothing before it.

Power Tools for your DarkBASIC Professional Editor

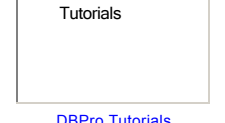
Color Arts released a new version of the DarkBASIC Professional Power Tools onto their web site. The Power Tools are a set of incredibly useful utilities that sit and work within the DarkBASIC Professional Editor. At direct access to your finger tips you have: An Advanced colour picker, Picture Viewer, Rem out old DB commands, add a Comment Box to the source, Insert Indentation, Show Source Stats, Bug Report tool, Help File Search, Global Variables and the new Function Factory which will allow you to create functions with ease.



DBPro Power Tools Web Site

80 Pages worth of Free DBPro Tutorials now on-line

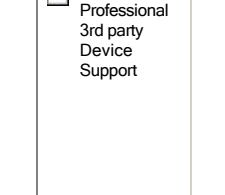
This month saw the release of the first 10 new DarkBASIC Professional Tutorials onto our web site. The tutorials are graded from Beginner to Advanced and cover various topics including: Rainbow Shader effects, UV Texture Manipulation, Field of View, Data Types, Star fields, 3D Dungeons and more. Each tutorial is a PDF file for ease of printing and comes with complete source code where applicable. Essential reading for any DBPro developer (beginner or advanced). We will be introducing new tutorials in the months to come.



DBPro Tutorials

Light Guns and Power Gloves

Hardware companies are constantly finding new ways to allow the player to immerse themselves even further into their games by creating alternative input devices. Two such devices we've been sent include the Act Labs Light Gun and Essential Realities Power Glove. Most of you are probably familiar with light guns, they allow you to shoot your monitor and are popular in amusement arcades. Well with our free download you can now support light guns in your own software! Slightly more interesting (and expensive) however is the Power Glove. This Virtual Reality styled device attaches over one hand and allows for flexible freedom of movement. It supports various top games (including Hitman 2) and you can now use it with DarkBASIC Professional via the free plugin we've created.

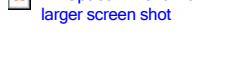
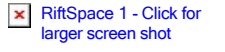


Tech Center

Exclusive first look at RiftSpace

Most people who have been following DarkBASICs progress over the years will be aware of the game Star Wraith. This popular and well received title has gone from strength to strength, appearing on magazine cover discs with much praise. However the developer has been hard at work on a new game known as RiftSpace. We've seen the first shots of this game and it's looking to be something really special. Features so far include:

- Players will be able to seamlessly enter and exit planetary atmospheres as needed to dock with stations, complete trade transactions, and negotiate contract deals.
The player will be responsible for the finances and maintenance of their mercenary squadron.
A dynamic economic model adapts to commodity values and supply/demand.
Over 20 planetary systems to explore and conduct business.
Detailed terrain and nebula effects.
Dynamic universe with active transportation and shipping vessels roaming independently as the player travels.



We'll bring you move news as and when we receive it - but look out for it because it's likely to be one of the hottest DarkBASIC games released this year if their previous track record is anything to go by.

You can see the current games on sale and in development at the StarWraith games web site at www.starwraith.com

An Interview with Andrew Vanbeck

This month we've put Andrew Vanbeck under the spotlight. Author of the great VSD Tracker, VanSeam and other popular DarkBASIC and DarkBASIC Professional utilities/games we thought we'd get an insight into what makes this developer tick.



Andrew, what first got you interested in gaming and creating computer games? How long had you been doing this before you found DarkBASIC?

I've been playing games for as long as I can remember, an uncle had a Commodore 64 and we'd visit every weekend just to play football tournaments on this ancient cartridge game. When I was about 7 or 8, my dad bought us a ZX Spectrum. Back then games were fairly rare so magazines would print games source code that you'd type in and end up with a usually non-working pacman game :) One day a neighbours son asked if I had a Spectrum - he was a professional games programmer and had his own company - (Carnell Software). Along with 5 of his games he gave me a copy of his book, which was a huge tutorial on making RPG style adventure games. I worked through that and soon realised that I could be doing my own things with BASIC.

I would spend hours in front of the computer making strange little text adventures and graphic demos, we got a C64 after that and I continued making strange little text adventures. I finally got my own computer when I was 15, an Atari ST and struggled with the terrible BASIC that was supplied with it until I discovered GFA Basic and started putting more thought into what I was doing. There was a cheap little add-on for GFA called Sprite Works, that really got me confident about my games presentation and speed, it allowed blitter commands and all sorts of cool features that were restricted to assembly programmers before then. Unfortunately after the ST popularity declined my brother and I bought a 486 DX33, programming in QBasic felt like I was using a C64 again, I missed the functionality of GFA.

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

I cut my teeth properly with PC game programming on Visual Basic, I'm a database developer by trade so was already confident in VB and started experimenting with the DX SDK's. I found them far too complicated and apart from making strange little screensavers I did very little with it. I think I discovered DB in the same way as a lot of people, doing an internet search for "3D game making basic". I downloaded demo v1.06 (I think) and was hooked. I'd used headache languages like COBOL and Pascal in college and BASIC was always considered an inferior language by lecturers, which I think is still common. However DarkBASIC suits me down to the ground, I spend 8 hours a day in front of boring database code, so DB is like a holiday for me! It's just so friendly and logical. Within an hour of downloading the DB demo I knew I needed this program.

How many projects have you started in DarkBASIC and then aborted? Will you revisit any of them?

I must have started a dozen projects before I actually finished one. My projects directory is full of 10% complete object-on-matrix things!. I still have a few nice test engines that deserve more attention, like a psuedo light sourced pool table, and a partially complete 3D chess game. I can't think of anyone who has stuck to the same project without diverging at least once. That's important though, it's the messing around code that teaches you what you need to know to make your ultimate game.

Where did the inspiration for VSD Tracker come from?

Back in the Atari ST days I got an ST Format coverdisk with a demo of TCB Tracker, after that I was hooked. I loved the simplicity of trackers, I'd used a couple of midi programs, but nothing that gave the same freedom. TCB was different from the standard tracker programs, it disregarded the standard .mod format and did its own thing. I'm a fan of retro computing and while trying to think of downloads for my ST emulator, I remembered TCB and decided to find it for a quick nostalgia fix. Playing around with that reminded me how complicated trackers still are, and thought about what benefits a home made format could hold. It's just a shame I have no musical talent! But VSD Tracker is my homage to the trackers of old.

Did you work on the project on your own or in a team?

VanSIMPLE Designs consists of myself and Tony Gooding, better known as 'Simple'. The tracker was developed so we could do some different things with in game music in our other projects, sick of instantly forgettable .mp3's that get repeated over and over. Tony has an amazing eye for quality, if there's so much as a pixel out of place he spots it!. I can draw and model a little, but it takes me ages, so it's great to have someone dedicated and concentrating on high quality all the time. Originally, the tracker was gonna be a little project with a basic GUI, I made up a basic GUI graphic set and emailed it to Tony. Then he sent back his version, after seeing the great work he'd put in we decided to develop it more and release it.

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

Most of the tracker was written in the 2 weeks before Christmas. I was determined to get another project done before the New Year. For about 3 days there was a completely untraceable bug that made my life a misery. It would crash for no reason, randomly too - so there was no easy way to track it down. It turned out to be a weird sound existence check. The worst is when a source file corrupts and you lose a huge chunk of code, usually the functions!. I had this problem too, but luckily the day was saved by some sensible advice from forum user 'David89'. The worst thing you can do when a bug appears or you lose data is to panic. Stop and think about what's changed, if it appears the bug wasn't there before, reboot and try again, use the clipboard to gather live info, and backup regularly. Sometimes all you need is a little break, most of my most troublesome bugs are solved while trying to fall asleep, stop thinking about those bugs and the solution often materialises without warning.

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

Well most of my techniques would be considered counter-educational, so if you don't mind, I'll ask Tony give some pointers:

"Patience! That's the best advice I can give. Take your time and always work in layers. This can save you time if you make a mistake or don't like what you have just done (just delete that layer) Sometimes I can be working on up to 100 layers at a time.

The total build time for the VSD Tracker GUI was around 28 hours. Sometimes I'll just sit back and stare for an hour at what I have completed so far to try and draw inspiration for what I need to do next. Even if I only designed for one hour per day on a particular project, it would always get finished in the end . Well that's what I tell myself anyway."

Are there any other DB creations you've seen that really impressed you or spring to mind?

There's a few really nice projects nearing completion, Dead Glory's 'The Magic Land' looks great, and Yusaku's Shenmue Zero is a great example of what can be done with DB v1.13. Ind's 'Dwarven Tale' looks like my kind of game, I like immersive RPG's, DT looks like it's gonna be huge!

What would you most like to see added to DBPro?

SET OBJECT ALPHA! :)
And real-time sound output monitoring.

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

VSD's working on an entry for the retro competition. It's proving great fun, and Tony's working like a dog!. Hopefully, v1.02 of VSD Tracker will be released by the time you read this, forum user Hubdule kindly supplied me with some .wav exporting code, so you can convert your songs to .mp3 at last.

We have a big project in the pipeline, but I'll keep schtum in the meantime ;).

Any final comments you'd like to make?

Basically don't be afraid to experiment, work on test code before trying to bring your project together, then try and recode as much as possible. Enter competitions too, there's a sorta busy hum on the forums right now, which means some cool games really soon. It's great to have a deadline, without one a lot of games get abandoned and forgotten about, just ask my projects folder :)

Retro Games Competition Final Days

Activity on the Dark Basic Software and NVIDIA Retro Games Competition is really buzzing as the final days draw near. There are now only 15 days left and people have started submitting their games already. Please note that there is no bonus for getting your game to us early but you will loose out if your game is late! 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 and again this month we present you with some new screen shots of titles we really hope to play soon: From top left we have Super Mario DBPro, Metal Fear Solid, HyperBowl, BombJack, Chuckie Egg and Ghosts 'n Goblins. They all look great but only time will tell how well they play :)



Visible Worlds goes Pro

Just announced was release V1.31 of the Visible Worlds package. This release sees Visible Worlds reach its most powerful to date. While the compiler has only had a few bug fixes and the addition of one new region type, "Visibility Triggers", the most notable new addition is the inclusion of support libraries for DarkBASIC Professional developers.

These support libraries will make the implementation of our Visible Worlds Portal and Vis technologies into your own Games/Demo as painless as it is for DarkBASIC Classic users.

Full details can be found at the UnderwareDesign web site: http://visworlds.underwaredesign.com/

Atic Atac By Minionsoft
Rubix Cubix By DARKsoft.net
Spiro By Kes James

MinionSoft are back with another quality classic game conversion. This time they've taken the Sinclair Spectrum masterpiece Atic Atac and given it the DarkBASIC treatment - with enhanced effects and music you control one of several characters (knight/wizard/etc) around a castle blasting away the baddies, collecting treasure and ultimately trying to escape. Good solid playable fun as always!

This is quite a fascinating little puzzle game. Gameplay revolves (literally) around a colourful rubixcubes in the middle of the screen. You can rotate each of the faces of the cube and when you have enough colours/wized-up you can "complete" them and they remove from the cube to be replaced with new colours. It's an interesting concept and once you get used to the rotation method it becomes a whole lot more challenging.

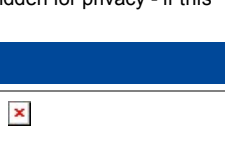
Do you remember those kids toys from years ago where you placed a pen into a plastic disc and span it around a larger disc in order to draw a spirograph image? Well this is a vastly enhanced electronic version of the very same thing! A whole stack of mathematical elements are under your control and you can draw and design spirographs in an amazing variety of combinations. A lot of pre-made ones are included in the package and you can save out and exchange your own. A really novel use of DarkBASIC and utterly fascinating to watch.

This Issues Winner is...

Starting this issue we're going to be giving away a free copy of DarkBASIC Professional to one lucky subscriber of the newsletter. The name will be picked at random from the list. If the winner already owns DarkBASIC Professional then can pick any one of our other software packages instead. This month's winner is Neill@Gold?????.freeserve.co.uk (part of the address hidden for privacy - if this is you, please email us now to claim your prize!).

Sky Roads 20-Line Winner

On the 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.



This month we've got a great little DBPro game called Sky Roads by Matthew Noble. The objective is to steer yourself along the winding road, speeding up for points and trying to make it to the end of the level without falling off. Nicely done and good fun to play! Do you want to win a free DBDN membership? Then get coding and post your work to the forum!

Next Issue...

Next month should be a bumper issue because we'll have the results from the Retro Game Competition in and collated! You will get to see the highs and the lows of the competition, find out the ultimate winners and of course download and play all the games for yourselves. It's going to be fascinating reading so don't miss out! As always we do love to know what you're working on so why not tell us? rich@darkbasic.com