

AMIGATECH-GAZETTE

"The Local User Group Newsletter to the World"



YEAR END HOLIDAY ISSUE

Wish Lists - Sci-Fi Graphics - Toys - Games - News - More!

Issue 13
December 2024

A publication for fans of Amiga, MorphOS, AROS, and other alternative systems, along with other general retro and nostalgic stuff.

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AMITech-GAZETTE

Issue 13 - December 2024

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Who Are We?

The Ami Tech Gazette aims to give you news, opinions, and musings on the Amiga computer and its relations, as well as other nostalgic things, with the feel and personal touch of your classic local user group newsletter.

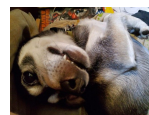
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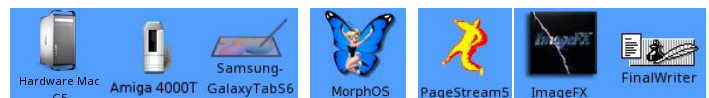


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Editor Realities

As I write this, the year 2024 is drawing to a close - a year that, in the USA at least, was marked by a lot of horrible political dumbassery surrounding an election. That's over now, and some people got exactly what they wanted out of it, others are extremely unhappy with the results, and a few others are having 'buyers remorse' as they learn more about what's to come from their votes. As it stands, we can only hope for all those promises of prosperity to actually come to pass, and be ready to act in protective ways in case the warnings of dark times were closer to correct. It's apparent 2025 is looking to be a roller coaster regardless, and the ride never seems to get easier from year to year.

There are a few things that 2025 has in store for me personally, and for the Gazette. The Ami Tech-Gazette has been going a couple years at this point, for 13 issues. Unfortunately, whether it's my problem or not, the Gazette has not built much of an audience in that time. While I won't be stopping the Gazette, for 2025 I will be scaling back, with fewer issues per year. I realize this isn't the best news for those supporting me through Patreon, but I do have plans to supplement this year with another project, which I hope will be of interest to Gazette readers. 2025 marks the 40th anniversary of the debut of the original Amiga computer. As an animator from the system's heyday, I have a new project planned for one or more animation works to celebrate the Amiga and its community of animators past and present. Supporters on Patreon will be privy to news, updates and previews for the project, as I work to drum up further interest and support. I'll do what I can to keep you updated, and I hope this will be enough for the supporters to continue their support, and possibly attract a few new ones as well. Wish me luck for the new year. I think we all could use some.

Eric Schwartz, Editor

News & Views

Relayed by Eric Schwartz
(40th Anniversary Edition)

Amiga 40 event in Germany announced

With the Amiga computer celebrating the 40th anniversary of its first release, the shows and gatherings are gearing up as well. "Amiga 40" will be coming to Kunstwerk in Mönchengladbach, Germany, going from October 17th thru the 19th in 2025. Info will be appearing at <https://amigaevent.de>.

Announcement video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXxKy6eyUL0>

Amiga 40th Anniversary event in Silicon Valley

If you'd prefer something a little closer to North America, the crew that brought forth the Amiga 30th event are coming back for the 40th, with presentations, a banquet, and a display of rare Amiga artifacts, coming in July, 2025. For info, updates, and support, you can sign up for the mailing list at <http://www.amigameditation.guru>.

Holiday Wish List

Written by Michael Barclay

Merry Chrismahanukwanzakah! (Why I can still say this word while toothless is beyond me... But it confuses others so points!) Whatever holiday you celebrate I hope you have a safe and fun one. Going from the horrors of computing to have fun good luck may seem a bit jolting but you get use to it. I'm just still trying to escape political yuck from all sides.

It was suggested I try a computer wishlist. Asking for things like this isn't something I'm good at. I know I do mention things I need or want but, it's always with the "I'll find a way to get or make it happen" and often do.





On the Amiga/MorphOS side of things what I need is getting things back together properly. I still haven't found the mounting hardware I need to get the a1200 back in the Zeos case I use. Mostly it's figuring out what I can use and getting to a shop I can get it. The stores I use to use are gone or "modernized" now.. I already have quite a few upgrades for her but, need her up and running before I go zooping her further. The only other thing I can think of is getting a Floppy replacement system. I still have a HD floppy Dell external drive but the other would be better long term. The Pegasos II needs to have her power supply checked or the current one fully swapped into the case so I can close it. Her second PATA header is dead as near as I can tell so I'll add SATA for storage. (I already have three cards I can try. I have the original one but missed that the sata connectors on it have been damaged since I got it which was why the cable were always so loose. The Dual G5 running MorphOS just needs me to spend time with her and get things installed software wise.

I often joke I can't be PC I use an Amiga.. It fits for winbloze and politically correct too. As to a wish-list there.. The winbloze system is 11 years old now. It's not a bad system as far as intel systems go. I built it to last and it is still quite strong and holding it's own with things... However, I'm being told from various sources (friends as well as some of the software that "won't support it" soon.) that it's "on it's last legs" . I may set it up as a game server or an "offline" game machine. I will have to somehow find a way to get a new system for Linux and going to AMD for it. I have to relearn quite a bit. I suppose there is a wish list in that, but that just comes down to scraping together the money. I have looked at the small "mini PC" and while I could use one for some things they likely won't handle all I do. I might get one short term till I can get a full system. The idea being that I could move it to the living room to augment the Raspberry pi I'm using for entertainment. (Video, youtube, twitch viewing) I have a lot of reading to do before I try that. Supposedly I have till October before panicking but MS would have me believe I'm already doomed.

My biggest wishes are for things to settle down. For some to quit trying to turn Amiga and MorphOS into winbloze. For folks to realize that old or different isn't bad. And while I'm at it I want my health back and my room mate to stop being a crazy driver magnet!

Brought to You by Amiga

Emulation - Written by Eric Schwartz

We know emulation, at least in the world of games and computers, as running code written for a specific system on a different one, with the help of intermediary software or hardware. While emulation was not invented on the Amiga, it was one of the earliest systems to make use of various types of emulation in an actually practical and useful way.

Almost from its inception, Commodore had a strong interest in getting the Amiga to emulate other platforms, presumably for the purpose of maximizing sales. After all, the Amiga would be a tempting computer if it could also be used to run software from your previous computer, or from your work machines. When the original Amiga 1000 was previewed to the public, it was alongside a software package tentatively titled "Transformer", which was a software-based solution for allowing the Amiga to run IBM-compatible DOS software. Reportedly, it was extremely slow and limited in capacity, which was common for emulation at the time, Similarly, there were a few commercial options to emulate the Commodore 64 system, often with an adapter cable to hook up the Commodore floppy disk drive, a popular option as many new Amiga owners were 'trading up' from the C-64, and wanted the option to still use their older software library. These ran slowly as well, especially on un-accelerated Amiga system, as it takes a lot of CPU grunt to emulate even a simple 8-bit machine. More successful was the Amiga Sidecar, a hardware expansion for IBM-compatible emulation containing an Intel 8088 CPU and 5-inch floppy drive, essentially most of a DOS computer that attaches to an Amiga 1000 for its ports and video display. This design was further refined into the





Amiga “Bridgeboard”, basically the guts of a PC (8088 and 80286, and later 80386 versions) that integrated with a ‘big box’ Amiga 2000, 3000, or 4000 system, having what amounts to two computer systems living in one shell, sharing resources such as ports, drives, and the display. The Bridgeboard enabled the use of PC hardware expansion as well through dedicated ISA expansion slots on the Amiga’s main board. There were trade-offs to working this way, but as it used its own Intel CPU, the performance was roughly equal to a dedicated PC running similar hardware, and there were potential advantages in sharing data between the Amiga and PC sides of the system.

Another popular option for running foreign software was the “A-Max”, a hardware dongle that housed the BIOS roms from an Apple Macintosh computer (you had to purchase or otherwise source the ROM chips yourself, to avoid legal complications), enabling you to emulate a Mac. As the Macs of the time used the same Motorola 68000-series CPU the Amiga does, it can run the Mac system and software at the same speed as an equivalent real Mac. In some cases, it was even a bit faster as the Amiga’s video hardware out-performed the CPU-based graphic display of the Macs of the era. (this was before the time when every system and its mother had a high-speed GPU built in) More options would come in time, like the Emplant multi-emulation system or the entirely software-based “Shapeshifter”. There would also be options for emulating the Atari ST computer, also 68000-based. They would all be similar in that the system ROMs and software for the target computer would not be included, and you would need to obtain them on your own, hopefully legally. Regardless, this would become the standard for emulating foreign systems using the Amiga. The most useful and practical methods were the emulation of systems that used the same base CPU as the Amiga itself, or by adding additional hardware/CPU’s that facilitate the running of new systems. It’s not exactly what we think of when we think of emulation today, but there wasn’t much in the way of better options at the time, especially where performance is concerned.

Over the years, computing power has increased in leaps and bounds. As more Amiga systems used more powerful CPUs like the 68040, 68060, and PowerPC chips, they became capable of emulating older 8-bit computers and game systems at roughly full speed completely through software, bringing those early dreams of migrating Commodore 64 and Atari users to fruition. With ever faster and more powerful PC hardware, it has become feasible to emulate Amiga computer systems at full speed, or greater speed than the original hardware, on Windows/Linux/Mac systems, or ARM CPU-based hardware such as the Raspberry Pi and its contemporaries, or even tablets and smart-phones. Software emulation of past hardware has become a common practice and way of life today, as many systems such as those ‘mini’ video game consoles or classic game collections find it more economical to run software emulation atop common hardware, than to recreate the older hardware. In this emulation-rich environment we live in today, it’s important to remember the pioneering role the Amiga played in the early days. While the methods for running software from foreign systems were different than what is used today, they managed to be practical and useful at a time when many emulation options were barely functional curiosities.

The Graphics Workshop

By Eric Schwartz

Episode 9: How to Paint Your Starship

A very popular application for 3D rendered computer graphics is science fiction vehicles and spacecraft. Part of this is because the alternative is building a physical model, which can be difficult and expensive depending on your skill. One of the earliest professional uses of extensive CGI in film was the spaceship effects in “The Last Starfighter”, as well as one of the first attempts at realistic-looking effects, as opposed to the stylized computerized world seen in “TRON”. It looks dated today, but was an important step along the path. Years later Ron

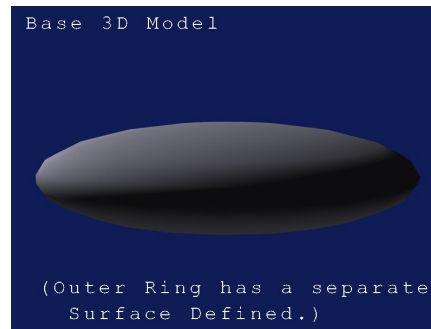




Thornton and his company Foundation Imaging would help revolutionize sci-fi effects with the all-CG space effects for "Babylon 5", first produced with Amiga systems and the Lightwave 3D software, then later using faster PC and DEC Alpha hardware. It was revolutionary as it showed how CG could exceed the limitations of the traditional motion-control photography with models and miniatures, and do so at a lower budget. Soon after, more television shows and movies would use CG for effects of all kinds, not just space vehicles. Famous sci-fi franchises that got their start using model photography, like Star Wars and Star Trek, would use CG for more spacecraft effects as well, with the results getting harder to tell apart from the physical model shots. Foundation Imaging, having all but created modern space CG effects, would move on to work on a number of Star Trek shows, from "Deep Space Nine" through "Enterprise". I enjoy working on my own spacecraft and the like in Lightwave, and will show you a little 'surface level' stuff.

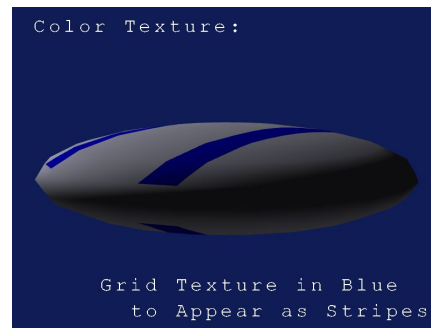
For the sake of this tutorial, I will focus on the surface texturing of a hypothetical spaceship, as that can be almost as important as creating the 3D model. Like all 3D modeling and rendering projects, it pays to plan ahead, and know what you're working toward before you put a lot of effort in. Many starting out think it's necessary to put a lot of detail into your modeling work, and sculpt in every detail, ridge, panel, or bit of color into the geometry. It helps to understand that, especially on a spacecraft which might be out in empty space with little to indicate the size of any given object, that surface detail goes a long way to give an impression of scale. Is your craft a small fighter or a massive carrier ship? The details will help to show that. A small vehicle might have more obvious seams and panels, or obvious windows or other parts that show where a pilot might go, for example. Conversely, a very large starship might have rows of tiny windows to indicate a large crew, and details might be less obvious or more blended together, as individual seams and panels would not be apparent to the eye, at least not without getting very close to the surface itself. With understanding the type of craft you wish to depict, you'll know the

type of surfacing and detail work will best sell that impression.



When working surface texture on your space model, it helps to think of the various surface characteristics as if they were different coats of paint on an actual model.

First, you start out with the base color of the surface 'skin'. This can be as basic as setting the color of the polygons. You can set different groups of polygons differently in the modeler, but be aware that each group, in Lightwave at least, is a separate surface to



the program, and must have all their attributes set in the main program if you want them looking right. Another option is applying a bitmap texture for your

surface colors, which can make it easier to apply more complex color detail, like stripes, or a camouflage pattern, or details such as logos, text, or



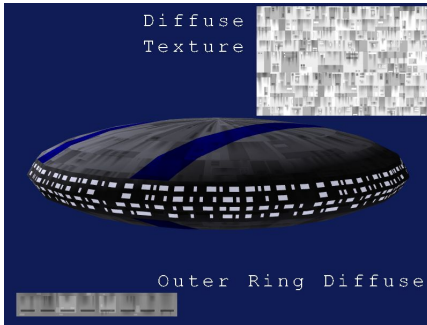
decals. Next are the 'Luminosity' settings. Normally, this is set to zero for a given surface, unless you want it to appear as if it is giving off its own

light. Textures and bitmaps can be applied here as well, with dark/black parts of the bitmap having no luminosity, and brighter spots appearing to be lit or glow. This can be useful for parts of your ship you might expect to give off light, such as the glowy bits on engines or weapons, or windows. You should probably resist the temptation to use 100 percent luminance, unless you want the glows to stand out too unrealistically. Next is the





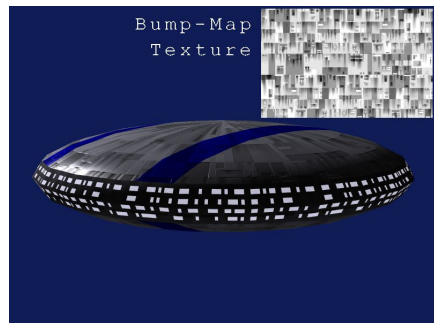
'Diffuse' settings, which is sort of opposite to luminance, as it darkens a surface depending on level (low number settings or dark/black colors in a texture bitmap). This can be quite useful to create variations in



tone on a surface, whether just to indicate different panels or sections on a surface, or show dirt or weathering for a 'used' look. Next in line are the 'specularity' settings, which relate to how glossy or dull a surface appears, as if you applied a clear top-coat to a physical model. Clever use of textures here can create some subtle and realistic effects. For ex-



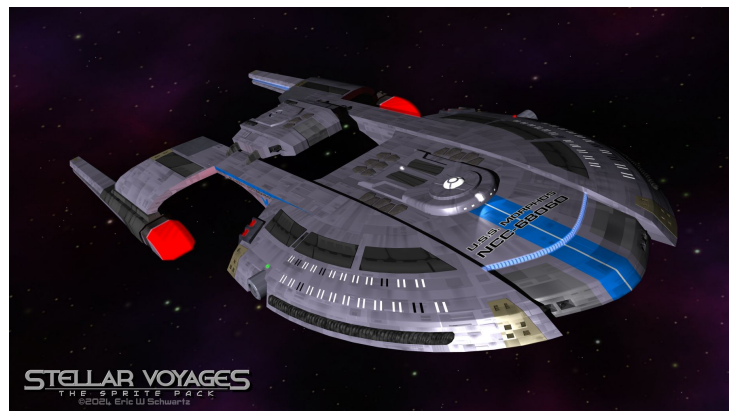
ample, many sci-fi models, both real and in CG, often use different specularity levels on different panels, which may not be apparent but show themselves as light plays across the surface, making the panel details pop. Next up are 'transparency' and 'reflectivity' settings, which I hope are obvious as to what they do. Exactly how (or if) you use these depends on the types of surfaces you are making, but like all the other settings, textures and bitmaps applied here can cause interesting effects, like details that are see-through or shiny and mirrored. More exotic or alien sci-fi designs could make good use of these less common settings. Finally, we have 'bump map-



ping'. I have covered this a bit a previous columns, and like the name, creates the appearance of bumps or raised/sunken areas on a surface,

according to the texture or bitmap. This helps make your surface look more complex than a flat skin. You can rough it up a bit with a simple bump texture, or use similar panel graphics that you might have used for the diffuse or specular texturing to accentuate the edges between panels. You should be aware of how strong your bump-map effect is, and not be too heavy handed with it. It's a function of the size and detail of the craft you wish to depict, as I mentioned earlier. A subtle bump map can add a little 'spice' to the surface texture of a large ship model, while a heavier, more obvious bump map would probably look too obvious and unrealistic. Conversely, stronger bump map effects would likely work better on a smaller craft with a more 'heavy' detail level. Like everything in this business, it often comes down to trial and error to find what looks and works best.

Just like painting and detailing a real-world model elevates it beyond a piece of dull plastic and gives it a sense of realism, learning to make and properly use textures and surface settings will do the same for your CG model, even on older Amiga rendering software. The more you try, the more you'll learn what works, and looks good to you. Hopefully you'll have fun and enjoy yourself along the way. That's the point of it all, isn't it?



Nostalgia Bait

From Eric Schwartz

For a large percentage of children, Christmas is THE major holiday of the year. The holiday season gives out free passes for kids to all but demand gifts,





be they toys, games, tech devices, or clothes if you're strange. I was certainly no different, and when the end of the year drew close, I would write up a formal list of gift items I would like to receive. It was doubly important for me, as I had a birthday in the preceding month, and my gift list would serve for both. One purpose of the written list was specificity. It's not enough to just tell people you want "Star Wars toys" - that would be too great a risk, leading to getting items you don't want, or already have. You have to let them know you're looking for Luke Skywalker in his pilot outfit, or the TIE fighter vehicle with the battle damage. When you're a kid, you know you can never fully trust parents, and especially not more distant family, to figure out what you want on their own.

Back in the day, a tremendous tool for creating a gift list was the many holiday mail catalogs sent out by stores. Not everyone today realizes that stores like Sears or JC Penney had actual toy selections, in the times when a "department store" had multiple departments. There was also a wider group of large stores sending out catalogs in the past, from Sears and JC Penney to Best Products and Service Merchandise. Most of these holiday catalogs had extensive toy and game sections, and I would go over them in great detail, using a pen to circle anything and everything I wanted. Sometimes I wouldn't bother writing out a holiday list, but instead hand my folks one or more marked-up catalogs. While the days of the plus-size mail order catalogs are long gone, it's interesting to see shops like WalMart or Target produce annual 'holiday wish books' in the same style, though they tend to serve more as promotions for visiting the stores or online shops. Even Amazon sends out print catalogs to help stir up interest in online shopping, in the same way the old catalogs did for the brick-and-mortar shops.

As I grew up, sending out holiday lists became less important. Part of that is with maturity comes the realization that demanding gifts is inherently selfish, even during the holidays. Also, you find it becomes easier to buy what you want yourself than expecting someone else to get it for you, and get it correct. Regardless, almost every child has that part of their

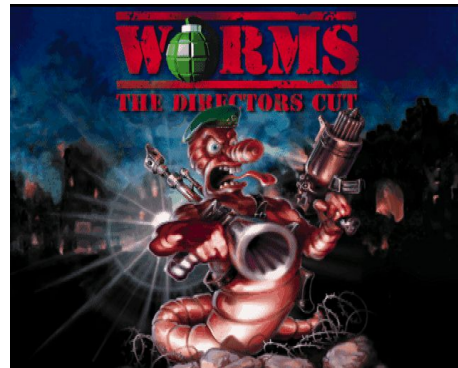
life when Christmas, birthdays, or any other gift-giving holiday becomes the most important part of life, and the source of limitless list preparations.

Retro Review

Worms: The Director's Cut
(Team 17, AGA Amiga, 1997)

Written by Eric Schwartz

I've mentioned on more than one occasion that



"Worms: The Director's Cut" is my favorite Amiga game, and a strong contender for my favorite game on any format. The "Worms" game franchise, originally

created by Andy Davidson, was probably the last game originating on the Amiga platform to make a big splash across a wide range of formats. At its heart, Worms is an expansion on the 'Artillery' or 'Scorched Tanks' style of game, with the audiovisual presentation adding cute appeal and humor to the experience, following in the stylistic footsteps of games like "Lemmings" and followed up by mobile apps such as "Angry Birds". "Worms: The Director's Cut", or "WormsDC" is the one game in the Worms franchise exclusive to the Amiga (AGA Amiga systems like the A1200, A4000, or CD-32 to be specific. Expanded RAM is also recommended.) It expands heavily upon the original Worms game with improved graphics, and previews several new weapon options which would appear in later titles like "Worms 2" and "Worms Armageddon" on PC and consoles. As such, WormsDC is the last great hurrah for the franchise on the Amiga, as well as a love letter to the platform where it got its start.

As an Artillery-style game, you have a team of four worms, and your goal is to destroy one or more opposing worm teams controlled by other players or





the computer. Each player takes turns controlling one worm from their team, given a limited time to move into position, take aim, and fire off one of many possible weapons, each with their own properties and potential for damage. These range the stan-



dard bazooka shot, which flies according to angle and power (how long you hold down the fire button before releasing), and is affected by wind. The grenade works similarly, but is not affected by wind, and will bounce or come to rest on the landscape, not exploding until its fuse time runs out. There are Uzis and shotguns that fire in straight lines, mines or dynamite that you can place next to an enemy worm and run away, and more limited use exotic weapons, many of which are only available by picking up a weapon crate that drops onto the terrain. Some of these include air strikes, various types of explosive sheep which bound, swing, or even fly across the land before detonating spectacularly. Perhaps the most frightening weapon is the rare concrete donkey

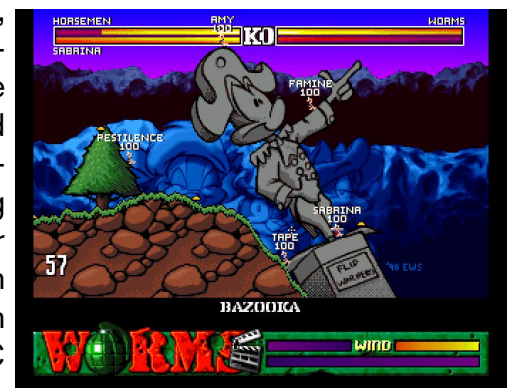


which made its debut in WormsDC, dropping from the sky and bashing its way through to the ground, causing untold chaos and destruction in its wake. I

could go through all the available tools and weaponry, but much of the fun is learning about them, and how to best make use of them, yourself. While it is possible to play WormsDC using a game controller, I feel the best way to play is using the mouse and keyboard, with the mouse used to select weapons (and aim certain guided ones) and keys controlling the movements of your current worm.

Playing against computer-controlled teams can be fun, if a little predictable depending on the 'intelligence level' of the opponent. Be warned that the high-skill computer worms have perfect trajectory calculation abilities, and can hit you from pretty much anywhere on the map if at all physically possible. The real fun comes in when you have other humans to play with, and against, and matches can become chaotic as players make unexpected choices, or outright mistakes, and plans change as the worm teams and the landscape are increasingly battered. Worms and WormsDC make for excellent party games, and it's no surprise that later iterations of the franchise on PC and modern consoles have fully embraced online play.

One thing that makes WormsDC truly special in my eyes, over and above being Amiga-exclusive, and the ultimate expression of the "first generation Worms" form of the game, is its level of customizability. On a simple level, in all Worms games you can set up own personal worm teams, named as you like, but there are more things you can do. For example, the sound effects and voice clips spoken by the worms are standard Amiga IFF 8SVX audio files, and it is possible to insert your own clips, or create an entire audio set for the game to use. If you have a paint program such as Deluxe Paint or Personal Paint, you can create your own custom landscape which can be loaded into the game by typing its filename. (just be sure to follow the template guidelines for landscape graphic creation) Hidden within the WormsDC files is a directory called 'bits', which contains example graphics and templates useful in creating graphics for WormsDC. In the main WormsDC directory is



also a program called "WormPrefs", which is a tool for your own customization work. In addition to creat-





ing full landscapes, you can also paint graphic sets for use in the in-game random landscape generator. (using a template image found in “bits”) You would use the WormPrefs program to load in the IFF ILBM file of your graphic set, customize elements such as gravity, or the colors of the sky or water, and BOOM, you have your own landscape style which can be randomly used in-game (or picked directly by typing its name). You can also paint your own graphics and use the WormPrefs program to create ‘mountain’ files (using the example files in ‘bits’ once again for reference) which appear in the parallax-scrolling background of the playfield, assuming you choose that mountain set as part of your own custom level or landscape type. With all these options (and more that I haven’t mentioned), it’s not hard at all to create your own personally curated Worms experience, with sounds and landscapes of your choice, or even your own creation. It helps to have plenty of RAM in your Amiga system to support these additional graphics and sound files. Your experience may vary.

Circling back to my original statement that Worms: The Director’s Cut is a favorite game of mine, I hope you can see exactly why. In addition to just being excellent fun for one to four players, it can also be something of a creative endeavor as you bring your own customized landscapes, graphics, and audio files into play, the game becomes something a bit more personal to enjoy on your own, or share with friends. The Worms franchise celebrates its 30th anniversary in 2025, and original creator Andy Davidson is planning to release an updated version of WormsDC to the Amiga public. He has been soliciting custom levels and more from the Amiga community, so when it is released, sometime in January according to him, you can expect a lot of new content to be included. You might even find some of the custom landscapes that I have created over the years. If you’ve never played Worms before, on the Amiga or in general, you owe it to yourself to check it out at least once.

Retro Review

Optimus Prime x2

(Studio Series 86 & Legacy United, 2024)

Review by Eric Schwartz

As 2024 draws to a close, we also celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Transformers brand, as the original toy line, comic book, and cartoon show debuted in 1984. As part of that celebration of the brand’s history, Several toys of primary hero robot Optimus Prime from the past seven or so years, as well as a variant of the 1984 original, were reissued. If that wasn’t enough, (and apparently it wasn’t) two all-new Optimus Prime toys were released in late 2024, both celebrating the nostalgic appeal of the Autobot leader each in their own way.

The first of these is the “Studio Series ‘86” Commander class Optimus Prime toy, ostensibly based on the character as he appeared in the 1986 animated movie. As expected, this Optimus turns into a cab-over style semi truck, and includes a full



size trailer. The trailer is an impressive size, and can open into a base or repair bay of sorts. While there is a lot of sculpted

internal details, the lack of paint makes the inside feel somewhat boring and featureless. Still, an articulated repair robot is included, as well as the six-wheeled silver ‘Roller’ car. These can be combined in various ways for different play options, and Roller is capable of seating small figures like the Transformers ‘Titanmasters’. The trailer also has pegs and tabs inside to allow you to store the robot’s included weapons. There is also a hidden compartment under the rear door of the trailer, which can be used to store included ‘blast effect’ pieces. These parts are





molded in a soft translucent orange plastic, and include simulated laser blasts which can be attached to the end of gun barrels, and two 'rocket blast' effects designed to be tabbed under the front of the vehicle, recreating a specific scene from the film in which Optimus appears to launch into the air. The truck cab looks good, and reasonably accurate to a real-world vehicle, with little showing to indicate it turns into a robot, save for a bit of a gap around the rear of the cabin.

Transforming SS86 Optimus Prime between modes is rather complicated and involved, more so than the average Transformers toy, but the process is designed well enough that it doesn't feel confusing or difficult, aside from an unusually tight fitting part here or there. It's impressive how clever it can be, folding panels together and changing the rectangular rear section into the more sloped shapes of the legs while hiding away the truck wheels. The resulting

robot mode is a sight in itself. It's very obviously based on the visual design from the animated movie and cartoon show, though perhaps more from scenes where the character is drawn on the stockier, blockier side. The robot mode is very clean, as expected from a cartoon-based design, though it does have a pronounced and slightly messy backpack, formed from a large section of the front of the truck folded up. It tends to look worse in photos than it seems in person, and doesn't bother me personally. The color scheme of the toy is also heavily based on the character's cartoon appearance, with bright saturated tones and areas that might otherwise be metallic appearing as white or flat gray instead. I think it works for this particular toy, but may not be to everyone's taste. The chest windows can be opened to reveal a chamber with the 'Matrix of Leadership', hidden under a cover. This



area is sculpted well, but unfortunately realized mostly in unpainted red plastic. The articulation of the robot is very good, with all the joints you need for many poses, and some extras such as jointed fingers and shoulders that allow you to bring the arms forward or back. Some other joints around the neck or legs could be improved with a better range of motion, but the overall impression is good. I've found some joints can be a little loose, such as in the legs and especially the truck smokestacks on the shoulders, which get knocked out of position easily. Optimus can be armed with his blaster rifle, which



can be held in the hand (somewhat loosely) or clipped to his backpack. He also has an 'energy axe' weapon (made from the same plastic as the blast effect pieces) which

can be plugged into the forearm after the hand is folded away. Some toys have an assembly error, where the tail lights of the truck cab, which become the robot's heels are flipped/reversed, but it doesn't adversely affect the toy, and is barely noticeable at all unless it's pointed out. All in all, SS86 Optimus Prime is a stunning figure, approaching the quality and looks of 'Masterpiece'-level toys, but with not quite as large a price tag.

Taking a very different approach is the Optimus Prime toy from the "Transformers Legacy United" toy line. Where the Studio Series 86 Optimus was based on the character's 1980s cartoon appearance, the Legacy version is instead based on the appearance of the original 1980s toy. It's not an exacting replica. For that you can find the collector-oriented Optimus from the "Missing Link" line by Takara-Tomy in Japan. The Legacy Optimus is smaller than the original toy it's based on, and made to be affordable, sold at the standard 'deluxe class' price of



roughly \$25. While the toy is based on the 1984 original, it improves upon it in several ways. The proportions of the robot mode are tweaked slightly to appear a bit more 'clean' and attractive, with less of the



original's awkward gangliness. It also adds a modern level of articulation and poseability, with some parts hinged to move out of the way and allow the limbs a fuller range of motion. The chest compartment can open in the same way as the original, but instead of a driver seat, there is a small translucent blue Matrix of Leadership accessory, which can be removed from



its place, though Optimus cannot hold it in his hands. The robot head looks near-identical to the original toy, save for a small window atop the helmet to allow

light in and make the eyes appear to glow. It doesn't work very well, but the eyes don't appear dim or dead when not lit. Several accessories are included - two different blaster rifles, based on the two different styles of guns carried by the 1984 toy, and a clear yellow 'energy axe', which can clip over one of the hands. As the guns as well as the hands are coated in paint, the accessories may fit very snugly in the hands, and risk getting stuck if you aren't careful. The truck smokestacks on the shoulders can also be removed and held as weapons, if you are so inclined. Transforming Legacy Optimus between modes is easy and fairly quick, as it is very similar in design to the original 1984 toy, save for a few differences. For example, where the hands on the original toy were extra parts that were plugged in place, on the Legacy toy they are rotated out from within the forearms in a

clever bit of engineering. Swinging that assembly down can be tight and breeds concern about possible breakage, so be careful during the process. The truck form is a good replica of the original toy truck cab, though smaller. In this form, all the weapons can be pegged into the rear section of the truck for storage if you want. While a trailer is not included, the cab is designed to be able to attach to the trailers from several past Optimus Prime toys, including that of the original.



It's interesting and special how two different Optimus Prime toys came out at close to the same time, with each aimed at a very different type of nostalgic appeal.



The Studio Series 86 Optimus is a high end, collector-oriented (though still relatively affordable at under a hundred dollars) made to appeal to fans of the cartoon character,

with a complex design made to facilitate that appearance. By contrast, the Legacy United Optimus is based on the classic toy, and is small, relatively simple and much less expensive, and fills the role of "fun desk toy to fiddle with in your free time" extremely well. Both items take nearly opposite approaches in intent, and both hit the marks they aim at. You wouldn't go wrong buying either, or even both, especially if you are a fan of Transformers, and Optimus Prime in particular.



The Canine Perspective

With 'Dayton' Duke



Humans are pretty big on these things called 'holidays', special days when they do different stuff than they usually do. Sometimes they come together in groups, or travel away from home. During this "Chris Miss" holiday humans like to come together around an indoor tree that you're not supposed to pee on, and trade boxes with each other. I guess it's kinda cool, because sometimes they give me stuff, like treats. If you want a REALLY good holiday though, the best one is this "Tanks Giving", because I get human food. They don't even bother putting it in a box or anything. Just put it somewhere where I can eat it, and it's automatically the best holiday in my eyes.

'Dayton' Duke

YouTube Link(s) of the Month

Modern Vintage Gamer: The First Amiga Virus
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ibEDSfthS0>

We tend to think about computer viruses in terms of today's malware, but they have been around since the 1980s, albeit not always so damaging, and often using the boot blocks of floppy disks to spread.

History in the Dark: The (Insane) Creation of A Charlie Brown Christmas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9t3Cdx22ODA>

For the holidays, enjoy the history of the holiday TV special that wasn't going to be a holiday special at first, and defied so much 'conventional wisdom' that hardly anyone thought it would become as successful and iconic as it has, including its creators.

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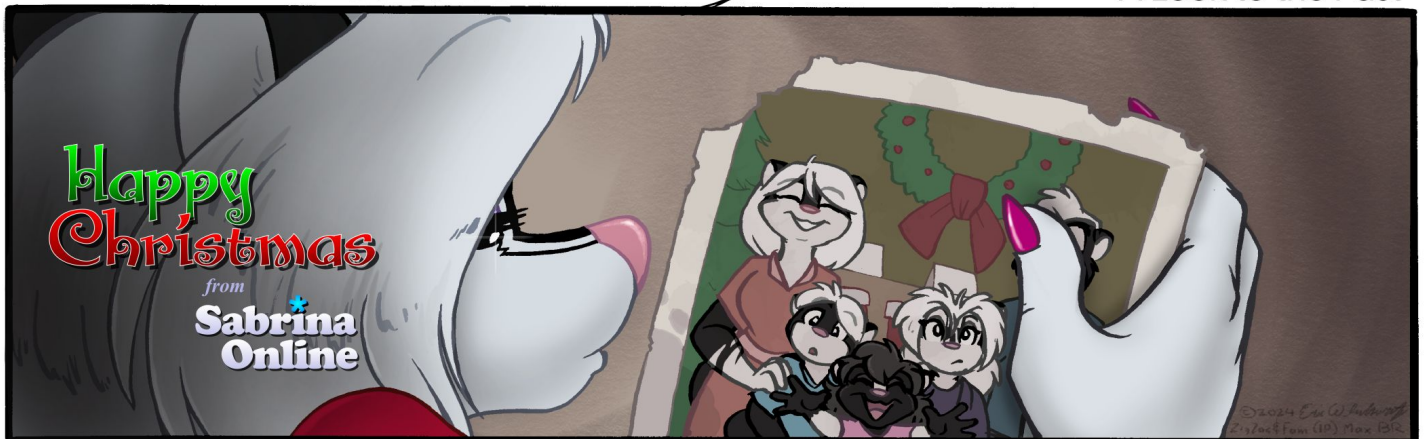
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"A Look to the Past"



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