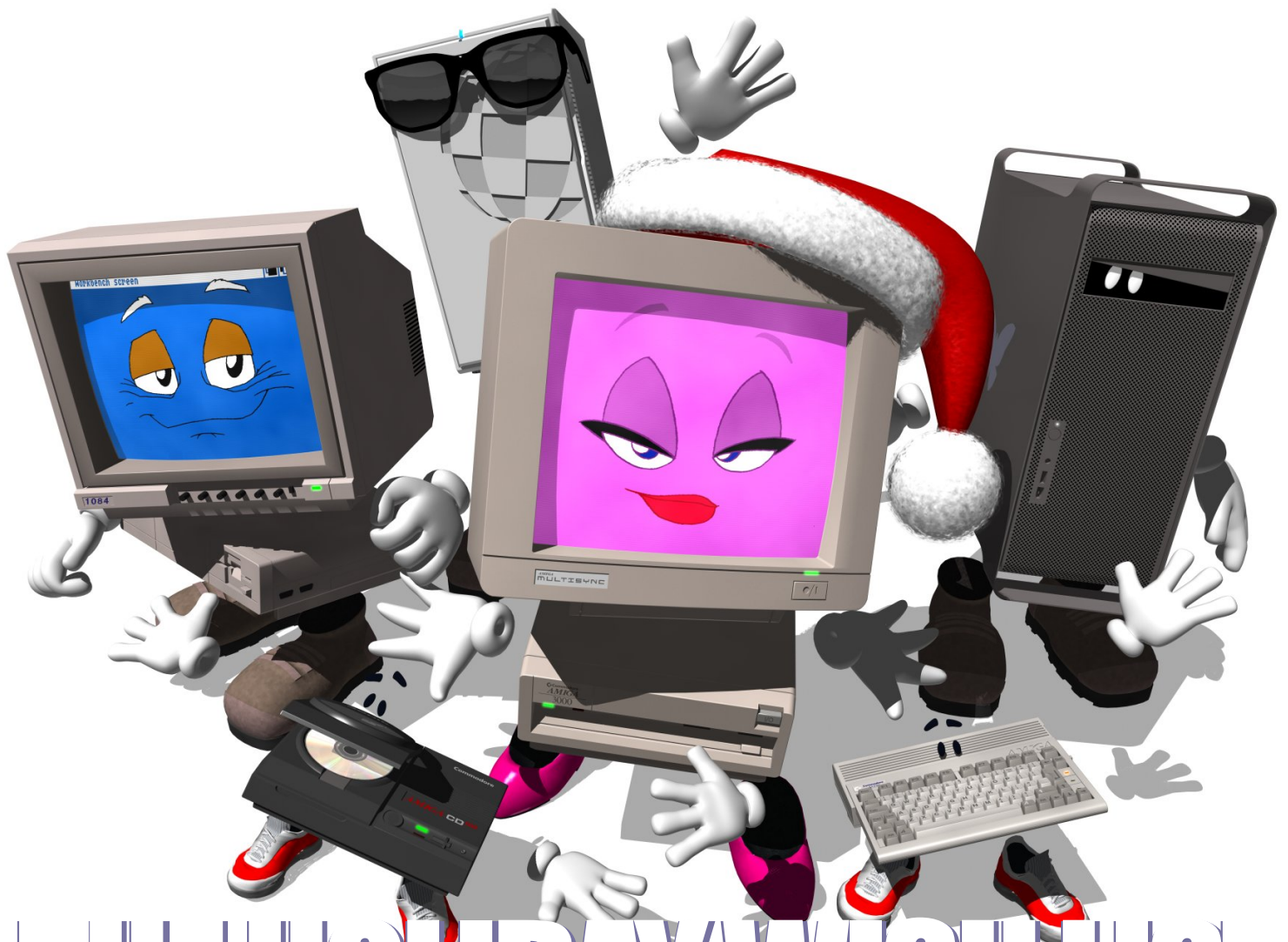


# AMIGA TECH-GAZETTE

"The Local User Group Newsletter to the World!"



## THE HOLIDAY WISH LIST

From our Editors and our Readers!

**Issue 07**  
**December 2023**

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 01 - January 2023

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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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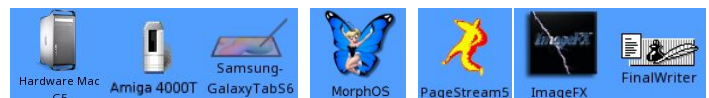


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# An Editorial Wish List

From Eric Schwartz and our readers

As I write this, the year of 2023 is drawing to a close with the accompanying holiday season, and 2024 is already promising to probably be an all-around roller coaster. Still, as it is the time for Christmas, Hanukkah, and various other winter holidays which might involve some gift-giving, I will indulge my inner child a bit - that inner child that used to scour through ads, catalogs, or maybe Amazon, and compile a list of items wanted as gifts from family months ahead of Christmas Day. This time however, I'll be writing up some things I'd like to see from the Amiga-and-related community, whether it's the hardware and software developers, or the community of smaller producers and fans. Some of these wishes are from me, while others come from readers of this newsletter. Some may be realistic and relatively easy to accomplish, while others may be pie-in-the-sky impossibilities, but sometimes you never know exactly what can and can't be done until the ideas are put out there. So here are a few things that would probably make the world a better place, or at least the world of Amiga and related systems.

Some readers put out requests to me personally, which wasn't my original intent, but as I am part of the Amiga community, give or take, it counts. The ask was for a collection of my classic Amiga graphic images and animation in a form like a disk image file or USB thumb drive, which could easily be browsed through on something like the A500 Mini. It's been a long time since I've tried putting together a collection like this, but if the interest is there, I should consider it.

This leads to another issue in much of 'modern' Amiga usage. There has been a lot of work with emulation, hardware recreation, and software like WHDLoad, which allow older Amiga software creations to be run, but that focus is heavily pointed toward Amiga games and programming demos. Meanwhile, there is a vast collection of Amiga-based animations and other creative works that are all but

forgotten, largely because they don't work as stand-alone software the way games or demos do. I've been interested in collecting and preserving Amiga animations, as they were a big part of my experience back in the day, but I find it difficult to enjoy many of them on newer systems, whether it be legacy Amiga hardware with upgraded CPU, OS, and video card, or newer hardware like the Vampire systems or emulation-based solutions. There are multiple sides to this problem. One is that most player programs for the animation files are out of date for newer operating systems and upgraded hardware, often crashing, glitching, or displaying their visuals pushed halfway off the screen. Another part of this is while the Amiga has standardized animation file formats, there are still many variations, each with their own connected player program. You have the IFF ANIM standard, but there's also ANIM3, ANIM5, ANIM7, among others. Some might include audio data, either with separate sound files and a script to organize them, or with soundtrack data embedded in the animation file itself. Perhaps you have old "movie" files popularized by the old "Sculpt-Animate 3D" software series, which may or may not have audio scripts of their own. That's not even counting animations from software that uses different methods than page-flipping images, such as Aegis Animator, Fantavision, or Moviesetter, which could be considered spiritual ancestors to 'Flash-style' object animation. It's very difficult to get many of these animation files playing as intended, short of dusting off or emulating some very old, unexpanded hardware. I would like to see someone tackle some modern animation player software designed to read these old formats and play them as close to originally intended as possible, or at least the various page-flip formats like Movie and the different ANIM variations, with and without multiple audio embedding methods. There can be versions for 'real hardware' Amiga systems, and for standard PC-type video card display screens or windows. This wouldn't need to work for everything, but at least it could provide a baseline to make gathering and archiving those classic Amiga animations for modern enjoyment more feasible. Then we can tackle new Moviesetter and Fantavision players.





The recent update of the Pagestream desktop publishing software for MorphOS as well as graphics software like Personal Paint for the PPC AmigaOS 4 shows the value of bringing classic software more up to date with the hardware it runs on. There are a number of pieces of software I'd love to see take full advantage of the systems capable of running them. Photogenics is a paint and image processing graphic program (mentioned in the 'Graphics Workshop' article) which needs a fast CPU for best results. A direct port to PPC CPU systems like OS4 and MorphOS would definitely smooth out some of the speed issues. Lightwave 3D, being 3D rendering software, can always use all the CPU power it can get, and a port to modern hardware could give us expanded abilities like an OpenGL 3D preview display not dependent on Amiga custom hardware. The developers of these two examples both 'abandoned' the Amiga, creating newer versions of their software for the greener pastures of Windows, Mac, and/or Linux. I'm not even necessarily asking for the latest version out for Windows to be ported to AmigaOS or MorphOS, but just to use some of their advancements for a bump in the versions where they got their starts, if the developers would allow it to happen.

We have received several Amiga ports of games from other platforms and the arcade over the last handful of years, as well as all-new games and older Amiga games updated to AGA graphics, or 24-bit graphics. There's always more that could be

done, however, such as the classic platformer Rayman. It would probably require too many compromises on the A500, but AGA systems, or something like the Vampire might better be able to tackle it. An updated Amiga version of the Worms or Worms:Director's Cut games would be nice too, adding more weapons and settings with a bit of a graphical bump, perhaps even adding some networking code, but not rolling fully over to the less visceral style of current PC and console Worms games.

While the logistics of it might not be easy, there is demand for a "complete distro" of Amiga OS, be it the 68K-based 3.2 or the PPC-based 4.1. The idea is to include a 'complete' and maintained software suite, with up-to-date versions of web browsers, mail and internet programs, office software, and graphics, available and distributed together, much the same way Linux OS distributions can be had, or even certain Amiga 3.x OS distros like 'AmiKIT' or 'Coffin', though much the software included with those packages are either unlicensed, unregistered, or assumed 'abandonware'.

Due mostly to large stretches of the Amiga having little to no development thanks to ineffectual and/or bankrupt owners, something not very well supported on the otherwise graphically strong platform is drawing tablet input. There is support for Wacom and similar drawing tablets, both older serial and USB devices, but it's support in graphics software itself is inconsistent at best. Most software views tablet input as roughly the same as mouse

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"XXXL Family Portrait"



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input, but how pressure at the pen tip is read depends entirely on whether the graphics software being used knows what to do with it, what driver it uses, what options it offers for translating that data into pen size or pressure, and so on. It would be good to get a more universal method for using pen tablets, as well as screen tablets on Amigas and Amiga-like systems. This could require patches or reworks to some decades-old graphics software, however.

While new games, ports, and relatively simple utilities pop up fairly regularly, we don't get anywhere near as many of the "big apps" for productivity and creativity that we had back in the 1990s. That's why it's so nice to see Amiga software like Personal Paint or Pagestream continue development on Amiga OS or MorphOS. New paint or animation software would always be welcome, both for classic and OS4/Morph/Vampire systems. I personally would love to see an updated Moviesetter with new features and not limited by the low-res, 32 color screenmodes of the original, for example.

I have seen people asking for more Amiga logo stickers and related merchandise, not unlike the apple logo decals that get frequently tossed around. To be honest, I'm a little surprised this type of merch and swag isn't a little more prevalent, as licensing would be one of the more low-effort methods for whoever still owns the Amiga trademarks to make a little money. Pretty much all current Amiga logo shirts and swag I see online is (probably) unofficial, so it would be a good idea to sell inexpensive licences to put the Amiga logo on anything anyone wants to try selling, from sweatshirts to travel mugs to beer can cozies, in a fully legal capacity. People still buy classic Atari and Nintendo wear, so there's gotta be some demand out there, in Europe if nowhere else.

Finally, There are people out there who want to see a comprehensive directory for all current Amiga-and-related hardware and software producers, as well as dealers/storefronts. I did a little looking on this myself and found this. While it is geared mainly to classic Amiga and OS4, it is reasonably up-to-date, and a good place to start before looking further.

<https://intuitionbase.com/dealers.php>

## The Co-Editorial Wish List

From Michael Barclay

Well the season of giving is upon us and as I look out over the net I see LOADS of wishlists.... So much for giving... This is mine, however, I'm putting a twist on this wishlist. This is my wishlist for what I would like to see for Amiga and it's various forms and flavors.

I think I'll start with that issue... I would love for the community to be a whole. While there is some good natured ribbing about version is better. There is also a lot of it still going too far. I don't want the old systems forgotten. I don't want people claiming the superior piece.. Classic Amiga 3.x, MorphOS and AmigaOS 4.1, Aros and the newer and older emulation systems.... We're Amiga users. There was a reason we went with these. They are what is right for us. So my first would be for Amiga to be a full proper community again.

I had my A1200 recapped. Still looking for mounting supplies to get it back in the case.. While working on this I have seen it's harder and harder to get network cards or adapters for some. The pcmcia card ethernet adaptor I had got damaged so I've been looking for a better solution. Having it poking out the front of a tower case wasn't one of my better ideas. I may have something but it would be nice for more of these to be found. I have heard there would be a way to get net to the A500 Mini so there is always hope!

I'm being a bit selfish with this request because my Pegasos II DVD drives are not working. I can't update it since I can't boot from the SATA card I



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have for it.. I would love a good and SAFE solution for the PATA/SATA situation. PATA devices are getting harder and harder to find. The Classic machines are in the same boat. I have tried getting some of the adaptors that do pata/sata but had to return all of them. None were safe and would have killed drives or the systems with bad soldering being the biggest thing.

I'm one of those that feels strong on "Something broke lets fix it" instead of "It broke time for a new one." Finding somebody that could get parts for some of our machines would be wonderful.

I'm sure to many most of these things sound silly and backwards. Maybe, but I'm an Amiga User and nothing is changing that.

## News and Views

From Eric Schwartz

### PiMiga 4.0 in work for (hopefully) release soon

From Chris Edwards, this 'OS Distro' smashing together Linux, the AmiBerry emulation software, and Amiga OS and software for the Raspberry Pi 4 or 400, among others, should be on its way soon, whether the end of this year or early next. Assuming it improves on version 3, it should be most impressive. I still can't get Lightwave 3D to render without the whole thing crashing, so hopefully that's a fix that finds its way in.

### AmigaOS 3.2 Manual coming February 2024

From publisher 'Look Behind You', this reference manual is 512 pages long, and will sell for 29.90 Euros for hardcover, or 14.95 for a digital PDF Ebook.

<https://lookbehindyou.de/amigaos32-handbook/>

### Apollo team updates Maggie 3D unit for Vampire and related systems

Just when you might've thought it impossible,

the Apollo team brings a 3D GPU to their FPGA-based Amiga compatible systems and accelerators, and are developing games and software to take advantage of it. While I'm not sure exactly what I might do with it myself, it's always interesting to see the 'what if' of how classic Amiga hardware might have developed over time. Visit <http://www.apollo-core.com> for more info.

### New web browser upgrades for Amiga and MorphOS

After a long time, the classic Amiga browser "IBrowse" version 3 is now available, with an overhauled HTML engine and many other improvements. It's a free upgrade to registered Ibrowse 2.5 users, and is available in 68K and PPC versions. Check out <https://www.ibrowse-dev.net> for info. Meanwhile, the webkitGTK-based browser 'Wayfarer' for MorphOS is now at version 7. It's about as high-end as web browsing gets on an Amiga-style system, though I admit, I've been sticking with the older, simpler OWB browser for most things myself. Wayfarer is available for free, but donations are appreciated. Visit <https://wayfarer.icu> for info.

## The Graphics Workshop

With Eric Schwartz

### Episode 3: The Looming Shadows

Many of you may be familiar with the 1988 movie "Who Framed Roger Rabbit", which broke new ground and made incredible strides in believably merging animation with live action footage. Another thing that the movie did that was never done previously, at least not to such an extensive level, was the use of complex shading on animated characters to give them dimension beyond that of flat drawings and help them match the lighting of their environment. This is something that's more common today, thanks to digital graphics, but that was not the way things were done in the 1980s. The animation was





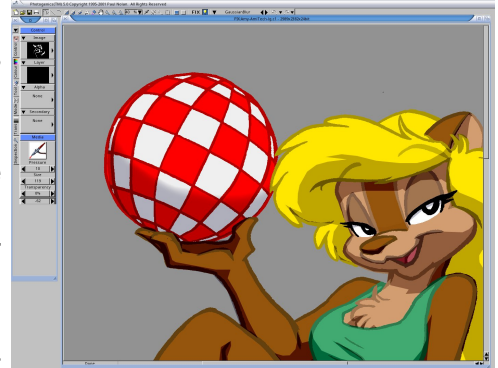
created traditionally the same way it had been done for decades - hand-drawn, then copied and hand-colored on clear acetate cels. For shadows, a separate cel was animated, drawn, and painted in black for just the shaded areas of the character or characters, which would (eventually) be layered over its corresponding animation partially transparent and out of focus to give the shadows a soft appearance, and not completely obscure whatever they covered. The same would be done for any additional shadows, highlights, color, or lighting effects, and the whole thing would finally be matted together with the live footage in a complex, multi-layered, multi-pass optical film printing process. It was an incredibly labor-intensive process, but the end results spoke for themselves. We will not be going through a protracted analog film printing process here, but I have used my understanding about those classic methods to develop some of my own ways of working on digital graphics.

If you were following the previous installment of this series, you'll know we've put together a flat colored image, and now we will add some more complex shading. My software of choice here is "Photogenics" version 5, though it is possible to use other software. Be warned that Photogenics can be rather memory and CPU-intensive compared to other Amiga graphics software, and you may wish to use a system with a fast CPU, or a turbo-speed emulation for best results. I am using this Amiga software on my MorphOS PPC system, for example. Once you load in your flat colored image, you can begin adding your shading effects. In Photogenics, you'll want to have the light bulb icon in the title toolbar selected, as this way you can work without directly altering the underlying image until you decide to 'fix' it. (Conceptually similar, yet different to the layers seen in other software.) Next to the previously mentioned light bulb is the "MODE" menu. Click it to open it up, move down to "retouch:", and choose "adjust" from the submenu. The tools on the left of the screen should offer you a set of options. For now, click the number under "brightness" and drag the slider down to "-50" or so (it doesn't need to be exact, as you can change it at any time.) Now you

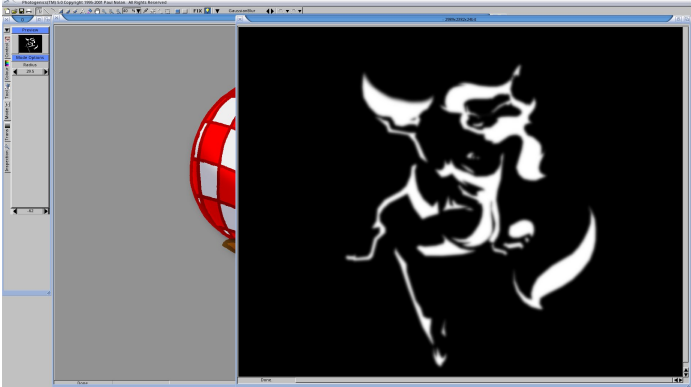
can paint on your shadows. There are several options for how to do this. You can use one of the paint tools (left side toolbox, 'control' tab, then choose airbrush, pencil, or whatever you like from the 'media' pop-up, and adjust its size and settings as needed.) Choose a drawing tool from the top tool bar, such as the freehand line. Using something like the airbrush, you can paint with a soft edge or light coverage. Another option, and what I'll be using, is a filled shape, such as from clicking the freehand line a second time, or polygonal shape (twice) for something with a bit more control. I will use the polygon tool to lay down shapes over the areas I want to appear shadowed (either come back to the first point or double-click to 'close' the polygonal shape.) Unlike

natural drawing media such as the airbrush, these filled shapes are solid and hard-edged. For either painting method, you use the left mouse button to paint, and the right mouse button can be used to erase what you have just put down. This way you could lay down a coarse area, then 'carve away' at it if needed. Don't feel that you need to pick out every little contour or bump in your drawing for shadowing. Sometimes a simpler, more uniform approach can be more effective. Keep going until you are satisfied with your 'rough draft' shadowing. It doesn't need to be perfect, especially if you are shadowing using hard-edged shapes, as the next steps will obscure many minor imperfections.

Once your shadows are ready, go to the menus at the top of the screen. Right-click, picking the "layer" drop-down menu, and choose "Move Paint Layer to Alpha". Looking at the 'control' tab of the left-side toolbox, you should see the shadows apparently disappear from the image you were painting on, and a new thumbnail appears in the "Alpha" box, with the shadows you painted appearing in white. From here, click on the thumbnail of your main

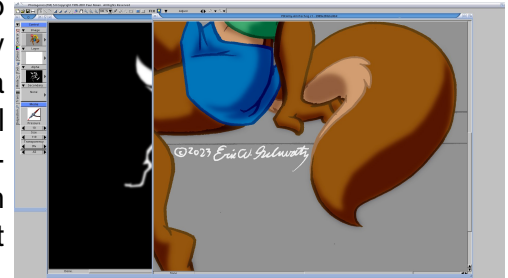


image, which should pop up other available images, including your shadow alpha pic, which you choose. Now go to the “image” menu at the top, and choose “New View”. The shadow alpha image will now appear in a new window you can work on. Here is



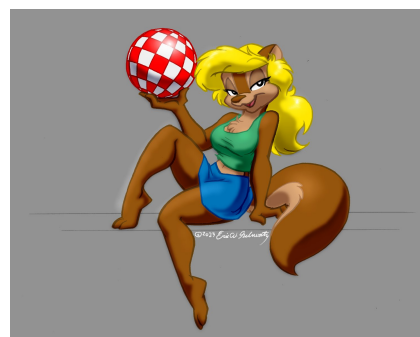
where we can ‘soften’ our shadow by applying a blur to it. To the left of the big “FIX” button in the top tool bar, there are two small boxes. Click the one that’s filled in, which will in turn fill the entire image with color. Click the paint mode button to the right of the light bulb to bring up its menu, then go down to “blur”, and choose “gaussian blur” from the sub-options. Your shadow image will be redrawn with the blur filter applied (this can take several seconds to calculate, so be patient). The toolbar on the left will now have settings for the blur filter, and the higher you set the ‘radius’ slider, the more out-of-focus the image will appear (and the longer it will take to calculate and update, so be careful. There are other blur paint modes that operate faster with less visual quality, if you get tired of waiting.) Heavier blur will give your shadows and image a softer, rounder appearance, and less give a more hard-edged ‘cel-shading’ anime-style look. If you are satisfied with your softer, blurred shadows, you can hit the “FIX” button to lock in the changes, and then go back to your original image. Even though it’s not visible at the moment, your edited shadow alpha image is still connected to the main pic, and if you click to fill the whole image (the solid-colored box left of “FIX” again), your shadows will reappear, now softened in appearance. Assuming you are still in the “adjust” paint mode, you can go to the “mode” tab in the toolbox at left, and modify the shadow effect to your

liking, changing the brightness to adjust how subtle or dark you want them to be, or adjusting the color or saturation as well. For example, you might add a little red or blue to your shadow to give them a warm or cool feel, respectively. When you have it how you like,



you can hit “FIX” to apply the changes and work on something else (when the light bulb is ‘on’, any changes made to the mode will affect everything you’ve done since the last ‘FIX’ until you hit ‘FIX’ again, sort of akin to ‘collapse layers’ in a Photoshop-style program.) With paint tools or airbrush, you can add more within the confines of your alpha image (an alpha channel, if you haven’t already figured it out, acts like a stencil to control how paint or other effects are laid down on your main image.) From the control tab of the toolbox, you can change your alpha over to ‘none’, freeing you once again to work on the entire image, and you can add highlights or other effects, either using the same process we just used to create the shadows, or just doing them freehand if you please. Just remember to “FIX” before you change to a different color or paint mode, if you want to keep what you’ve just done as-is.

This process was built around the way the Photogenics paint and image processing software works. Some software works in a similar way and can be adapted to these techniques, but others are more different, though you can still take the principles of them and apply them elsewhere. For example, you might create your shadows in another paint program



as solid colors, mask them out to create a separate image with just them, then load that shadow image into image processing software like Art Department Pro or





ImageFX to blur them and overlay them with partial transparency over your original color image. As I've said previously, my job is not to make you produce graphics like I do, but instead to find your own ways and methods of creating, apply whatever I can teach they way you want, and use the techniques and software you are comfortable with, even if it's not using Amiga software.

## **Brought to You by Amiga Desktop Video**

**Written by Eric Schwartz**

Many people are aware of how the Amiga computer platform and Newtek's Video Toaster were instrumental in pioneering the field of desktop video production, in much the same way Apple's Macintosh played a big part in bringing desktop publishing to the masses. Too many out there seem to believe the field of Amiga desktop video began and ended with the Video Toaster, which is far from the truth. The Amiga was pioneering the desktop video field before anyone knew what it even was.

As far back as the first 1000 model, the Amiga's display could be output and recorded if you wish via its composite video jack. This was nothing unusual, as many home computers and game systems of that era could output to a standard television. The Amiga did have an extra built-in feature that enabled it to use the video timing from an external signal, thus syncing with it. I'm not sure exactly why this was built in from the beginning - perhaps it was conceived the system might hook up to a laserdisc player, as laserdisc-based games were something of a fad during the time the Amiga hardware was being developed, or perhaps Jay Miner and the rest of the crew were just that forward-thinking. Some of the first hardware examples to take advantage of this capability were the "genlocks", including Commodore's own A1300 model, which was shaped to tuck snugly under Amiga 1000's casing. A Genlock syncs the Amiga's own video with a second video input and merges them, generally having the external video show through the Amiga's back-

ground color (color zero), making it appear as though the Amiga graphics are overlaid on top, similar to the blue or green-screen video effects commonly seen on television, like the weather map on the local news. It didn't take very long for people to see the potential in this, whether it was as elaborate as adding CG effects to a home video production, or something as basic but vital as adding titles and other text to videos. Software for creating titles was a big business on the Amiga, for recorded or even live presentations, from "TV Text" to "Broadcast Titler". Another interesting use of Amiga desktop video was in the early fan communities for Japanese anime and other foreign programs, where translations were created and subtitles were genlocked over the video. Dedicated subtitling software such as "JACOSub" made it easier for these esoteric programs to be translated and shared or sold among fans, without relying on large companies to license and produce their own translations and dubs. (for better or worse)

Desktop video on the Amiga was already going pretty strong before the Video Toaster, but Newtek's hardware really kicked it into high gear and brought it into the mainstream. The hardware gave you the genlock along with video effects and switching, and the included software gave you painting, titling, and 3D animation production. Basically, for a few (or several) thousand dollars worth of equipment, you could do all the things that would have cost tens of thousands of dollars in gear at the least to achieve before. It's no wonder that nearly every local public cable TV station, video production company, and more than a few broadcast stations had at least one Video Toaster in the building somewhere. Of course, not everyone wanted to purchase an Amiga computer to have these abilities, and for those people there was the stand-alone Video Toaster system, which was an Amiga with the Commodore branding covered over with Newtek labels, that booted directly to the VT switcher screen. Or if one would rather use their own platforms, there was the Toaster for Mac and Toaster for Windows, which was the same re-badged Amiga computer, but networked so you could control it via an interface on the other computer.



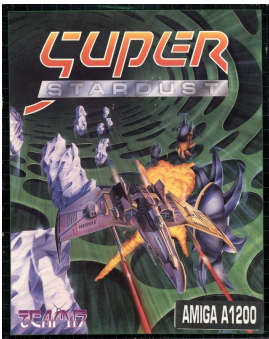


Sadly, the Amiga did not stay at the forefront of desktop video production. Commodore going bankrupt in 1994, throwing the Amiga into a chaotic limbo spiral certainly didn't help things, but what really kicked it out was the paradigm shift to digitally-recorded video, 'non-linear' editing, and later high-definition video standards. There were a few Amiga-based attempts to keep pace in digital video, like the Vlab Motion card and NewTek's Video Toaster Flyer, but the writing was on the wall by then. NewTek is still going with video hardware and software on other platforms, and their Lightwave 3D rendering software, which got its start on the Video Toaster, managed to become a big player in the world of CGI and effects for several years. Nowadays, we live in a world where a modest PC or even a smart phone is capable of manipulating high-def digital video in seemingly endless ways, but we must never forget it all started with someone hooking their Amiga 1000 to a genlock and a VCR or two, adding titles or drawing an animated effect on their video, then showing off the result to their friends.

## Retro Review

**Super Stardust (BloodHouse / Team17, 1994)**

Written by Eric Schwartz



Super Stardust is the follow-up to Bloodhouse's Stardust, in some ways a sequel, but in just as many ways an updated and improved remake of the original. Where the first Stardust would run on an Amiga 500, Super Stardust requires an AGA machine such as the A1200. It's more consistent and polished than its predecessor, and while I haven't played it, I understand its difficulty is far less punishing than the original Stardust, though the 'super' version is no slouch. There was also a version published in 1995 for the Amiga CD-32 console, which includes a CD audio soundtrack, rendered video cut-scenes, and makes full use of the extra buttons on the CD-32

gamepad. Given the semi-complex controls, this can be an advantage, so you might prefer to play the CD version, but the game itself is identical between versions otherwise.

Super Stardust (and its predecessor) are heavily inspired by the classic 1979 Atari arcade game 'Asteroids', or perhaps more from its 1987 arcade sequel, 'Blasteroids'. Upon starting the game, Super Stardust starts you off with a map and six zones to choose from, each conveniently labeled with the enemies you'll face, and a number ostensibly telling you how difficult that zone is. Picking a zone drops you into the action, and the comparison to Asteroids games become apparent. Your small spaceship is among a field of tumbling space rocks of different sizes and colors, and your goal is to clear the screen of them. The controls are like other Asteroids games, where you can rotate the ship left or right and push forward to thrust ahead. Pulling backward enables your protective shield, a very limited resource. The main button fires your weapon, and an extra weapon menu is brought up by the second fire button (if you have one) or the keyboard. In the CD-32 version, each function aside from rotation has its own dedicated button. Just like Asteroids, anything that flies off one edge of the screen will come in on the opposite side, including you. It takes very fast, yet careful and deliberate piloting to avoid collisions when the screen is full of flying objects, but thankfully your ship has a life bar, and can take a number of hits even when unshielded. Rocks will take a several shots to break up, splitting into two smaller rocks until the smallest rocks are destroyed. How much punishment a rock can take before breaking depends on its color, with gray ones being weakest, from blue to purple to the toughest gold asteroids. When a rock is fully destroyed, it may drop a power-up icon you can fly over to pick up. These can include common items like points, weapon upgrades,





engine upgrades for better speed, or a starburst which blasts apart anything nearby, to rarer items like refills for your life or shield energy, or even an extra ship. The more desirable power-ups tend to come from the tougher golden rocks. If you leave a power-up icon alone, it will slowly cycle through to less valuable power-ups until eventually disappearing, so it's best to grab them as soon as you can, or wait for something better if you don't need what's on offer at the moment. Breaking up rocks can be challenging enough, but many zones also include their own unique threats, from ships that chase you, or fire at you, or turn invisible, or any number of other threats. A few levels also offer weapon transport ships, which fly slowly across the screen. If you can destroy them and collect the dropped icon, you can increase your arsenal of weapons. You start off with a useful but relatively puny 3-way shot, and can add new options like a bouncing shot, a rapid-fire plasma, and a powerful but short-range flamethrower, as well as homing missiles. These are accessed through your weapon menu. A nice touch to this is you can set your ship to use one weapon, but divert the power-ups you collect to improve the strength of a different one. If you should lose a life, the weapon you were using at the time is downgraded one notch, but any others are unaffected, so learn to manage your weapon menu strategically. If all this isn't tough enough, there is also a timer ticking down, limiting how long you have to clear the screen of rocks and enemy ships. If the timer should reach zero before then,



you'll be subjected to a fleet of tiny ships which track and chase you around until you're dead, or you finish them all off. Clearing all six sectors on a map bring you into battle with a

large 'boss' enemy to defeat, then you travel to the next map, blasting your way through an impressive 3D tunnel sequence to get there. Some levels also offer an optional special mission, where you carefully navigate through a maze-like watery area to earn points and extra lives. (You'll need 'em) If you're skilled enough to fight through all sectors of all five maps, you'll battle the final boss - a penguin atop a penguin-themed Death Star. No, really.

Super Stardust is an extremely impressive-looking game, making good use of its AGA-only status (not that its non-AGA predecessor looked poor in the slightest). The vast majority of the in-game graphics are pre-rendered 3D CGI, with many large smoothly moving animated objects on screen at once. The warp tunnel between levels is especially impressive, with its fast-moving behind-your-ship pseudo-3D perspective, similar in general feel to games like Space Harrier. The audio presentation



is good as well, with driving techno-esque tunes and punchy sound effects, with more musical variety on the CD version. My only critique of the visuals is that of some inconsistency, with different sequences needlessly using different typefaces or info graphics. It's internal consistency is better than the first Stardust, however. The game itself is very challenging, and only gets harder as you go, though not so punishing that it feels too unfair. It's the kind of game that requires both fast reactions and measured, thoughtful responses to keep situations from getting totally out of hand. Back when I played this on the CD-32, I remember completing the game at least once, but my older self has struggled to get through the third level map. To be fair, I don't remember if I was using any cheats back then. While it can be balls hard, it never feels so impossible that you don't want to keep trying, and learn what new types of enemies are yet to be seen. A nice thing about the 'sector





map' design is if you need a break, you can pick a lower-difficulty sector (if you find one) to try to rebuild your strength.

If you are the type of person that enjoys a tough arcade Asteroids-style shooter, Super Stardust is one of the very best you can find, in my opinion. It's pretty to look at and fun to play, with enough variety to keep it from getting tedious. The developers Bloodhouse, AKA Housemarque, have made it into a mini franchise, later publishing Super Stardust '96 for PC and Super Stardust HD and Delta for various Playstation platforms. While those newer versions may have more flash, the Amiga version is an example of peak balance of simplicity and strong design as I see it. It might be tough to find a legit copy for a good price today, but any Amiga gaming fan owes it to themselves to try it out at least once.

## Nostalgia Bait

From Eric Schwartz

At least in our western world, where the holiday has gained power and economic influence far beyond that of a religious observance, most people probably have that fond memory connected to one or more Christmas presents from their past, whether the came directly from Santa Claus or not. There was one holiday gift, one I don't even remember what it was today, except that it was labeled specifically as having come "from Santa". I somehow broke it not long after Christmas, which is perhaps why I recall so little about it now. When I told my parents it was broken, my mother said "Aww, we paid a lot of money for that!", which kicked off the revelation that perhaps Santa was not this literal magical gift-giving being, and it was actually my folks who were doing the jobs attributed to him. Though if that was all it took for me to stop believing, I probably already had some suspicions by that point.

Not surprisingly, much of my youthful holiday present memories involve Transformers toys. More frequently, as I look back I find these memories strongly involve my parents as well. My very first

Transformers toy was actually a birthday present, which was about a month before Christmas. It was 'Mirage', a blue racing car, and it came with a story from my Mom. Transformer toys were brand new in 1984, and in high demand - maybe not "Tickle-Me Elmo Riot" popular, but still extremely difficult to find. My Mom had searched several stores looking for ANY Transformer she could find with no success, until she found a store with a total of two on the shelves, grabbing both. She then ran into another mother who was in the same boat, unsuccessfully searching for Transformer toys for her child. My mom took pity on her, and gave up one of the two, keeping the one that looked better to her. I was very pleased to get Mirage for my Birthday, so I'd say she made a good choice. Based on what I was told, the toy I didn't get was probably 'Ironhide', a red van whose robot form doesn't even have a discernible head. I don't know if I would've become the Transformers fan I am today if that would've been my first toy experience with them.

The following year, this time a few weeks before Christmas, my family and I were shopping at Sears. Believe it or not, Sears was an actual viable place to find children's toys back in the 1980s, and I discovered a most amazing Transformer there. It was a gift set box of five 'Aerialbots', good guy jet plane toys (jets mostly being the exclusive domain of the evil Decepticons at the time) which could combine into a larger robot named 'Superion'. Bear in mind that these robots had not yet been seen on the Transformers cartoon show or comics, so they were completely new to me, and selling themselves purely on the virtue of being cool-looking toys. I ran to retrieve my parents to show them this wondrous gift set, and beg them to buy it for me, or loan me money so I could buy it and pay them back, or ANYTHING. I just HAD to have these amazing toys now. My folks refused though, and I had to leave the store empty-handed, never to see that glorious box set again - until Christmas several weeks later, when the set showed up under the tree, much to my joy. I had my suspicions that I was denied earlier so it could become a gift later. I don't know the exact details, but it seems I was herded out that day by my Mom so Dad





could scoop it up behind my back. Devious, perhaps, but I won't fault them for saving a holiday gift for the holiday. Not a lot else compares to those early holiday gift memories, except perhaps when my family got our first Amiga 500 computer as a 1988 Christmas gift, or Christmas promise to be more accurate, as we didn't actually get it until December 31st, making the Amiga more of a 1989 thing for us.

## Retro Review

### Dinobot Grimlock

(Transformers: Studio Series '86, 2021)

Written by Eric Schwartz

The 'Dinobots', a group of Autobots that turned into mechanical dinosaurs instead of vehicles, and their leader Grimlock have been popular, oft-revisited characters in the Transformers franchise since they first appeared around 1985. The original Dinobot toys came from Takara's Diaclone toy line, just like most of the early vehicular Transformers, and were also originally piloted vehicles. (or 'mecha' in this case, I guess) As such, the Diaclone 'Dinosaur Robo' toys, and their Transformers Dinobot counterparts, include a small compartment in their construction where a tiny pilot figure could be placed, though the Transformers toys included none, being autonomous living robots in their lore, despite having a little canopy on their chest or back or wherever. The Dinobots, and especially Grimlock, were popular characters, in part because most kids are fascinated by dinosaurs, and also thanks to their prominent appearance in the Transformers cartoon series and the comic book from Marvel. In the cartoon, they were portrayed as monstrously strong but simple-minded, based on the old assumption that real dinosaurs were dumb beasts. In the comic they fared better, brutish but as intelligent as anyone else, with Grimlock even leading the entire Autobot team for a time. The cartoon portrayal was more popular and widely known, and even Marvel comics Grimlock would eventually adopt the cartoon version's 'Captain Caveman' style of speech later in the



comic's run.

Coming out in 2021, the "Studio Series '86" Grimlock toy is ostensibly based upon the character as he appeared in "Transformers: The Movie" from 1986. In actuality, the toy is somewhat more stocky and blocky than the character's

on-screen design, with a greater level of surface detail. You may view this as a plus or a minus, depending on how important scrupulous screen-accuracy is to you, but this toy definitely can't be mistaken for anyone else. Grimlock is a Tyrannosaurus Rex, or actually a very outdated depiction of one. Paleontology enthusiasts have a lot to critique here, as this dinosaur's posture has more in common with the classic rubber-suit Godzilla. Still, that is the way Grimlock looked in the cartoon and 1986 movie, for the most part, and the toy is quite charming in that sense. Articulation is pretty good in this mode, with



the dinosaur legs having a full range of motion and the tiny T-rex arms movable at the shoulders and elbows as well. The head can turn back and forth, raise and lower, and the jaw can open, with a small port inside the mouth to which you can attach a compatible fire or blast effect piece, should you have one. It's not perfect, however. The dinosaur tail is a bit flattened and stubby-looking, and he has no teeth in the front of his jaws, for a somewhat gappy look. These are the kind of details that bother certain people greatly, and others not at all.

Transforming between modes is pretty straightforward, in the sense that you generally start





at either the head or the tail, depending on which mode you're going for, and work your way to the other end. Robot mode is just as impressive as the dinosaur mode, if not more so, looking hefty and hulking, quite tall in relative scale with other Transformers robots released at the time, with a massive gold chest plate and wings formed from sections of the dino mode. Articulation is very good in this mode, with the head. Arms, legs, waist, and even ankles having a good range of motion. The whole design looks completely solid, with no real gaps or hollow areas, with one exception being the forearms, which have hollow spots where the robot's hands were hidden in the other mode. Grimlock comes with a twin-barreled cannon, which can be held in his hand, or attached to any of a number of ports all over the toy, accessible in either robot or dino modes. I would wish that the toy also came with a sword like several other Grimlock toys, but none was included here, perhaps because he didn't normally use a sword in the cartoon. One thing I'd like to point out is how solid and sturdy this toy feels to handle, which isn't that common in modern Transformers toys. The plastic feels like it wouldn't break easily, and all the joints are nice and stiff, many with clicky ratchets built into them. Aside from the gaps in the forearms, the only other visual knock I would give this mode is that the tinted 'window' on the chest obscures the details behind it, so I ended up placing an after-market sticker on mine.



For me at least, Studio Series '86 Grimlock is a real hall-of-fame toy, managing to balance modern standards for design, character accuracy, and articulation with the more chunky, sturdy feel of

something produced a decade or two ago. Depending on your interest in the character, and how much you focus on minor discrepancies, it might just

be a hall-of-famer for you as well. It is similar in many ways to the expensive 'Masterpiece' toy version of the character, but less complex and better suited to being handled from time to time. Unfortunately, while this toy wasn't too difficult to find when originally released In 2021, its after-market value has skyrocketed since then, usually going for at least twice the old fifty dollar price tag now. There are other variations of the toy available currently, such as a darker "evil universe" color scheme, and a bright yellow striped version based on 1990s concept art. If you are looking for the classic Dinobot gray color scheme, than you may be forced to pay an after-market premium, or wait and hope the rumors of an eventual reissue turn out to be true.

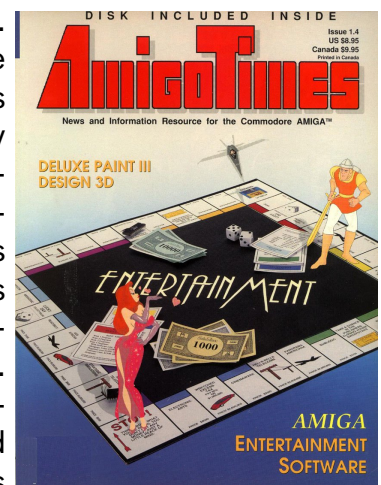
Oh, and this Grimlock also comes with a small non-transforming figure of the small Autobot Wheelie, which can attach like it's riding the dinosaur, but that accessory is pretty terrible, and can be safely ignored.

## Magazine Recap

**AmigoTimes (Sama Publishing, 1989-1989)**

**Written by Eric Schwartz**

I've mentioned previously that the period between 1987 and 1990 sparked a bit of a boom in Amiga publications in North America, seemingly coinciding with the release of Commodore's A500 and A2000 models. Sadly, most of those newcomer magazines faded almost as quickly as they appeared, leaving the already established Amiga mags remaining. AmigoTimes was a notable publication in a few ways. Firstly, it was Canadian-based, though it served the US as well, and its writers came from around the continent. Secondly, similar to INFO magazine that came before it,





AmigoTimes actually used Amiga systems heavily in the creation of the magazine itself, both for graphics and layout using desktop publishing software. Thirdly, most issues included a floppy disk with extra info and free software, and as such was priced higher than disk-free Amiga magazines, but not quite as pricey as Antic's Amiga Plus. Unfortunately, AmigoTimes had a short life even by Amiga publications standards, lasting barely a year, first appearing close to the beginning of 1989, and ceasing publication shortly before the end of the year. Still, the magazine kept a fairly high standard and polish, with a lot of color and gloss, throughout its short run, and it had the distinction of actually using the systems it covers in its creation. They say a candle that burns bright burns out quickly, and I feel AmigoTimes fits that saying extremely well.

## The Canine Perspective

With "Dayton" Duke



Around this time of year, I hear people talking about 'chris-miss' and 'holly day seasons'. I don't know too much about it, besides it getting colder outside. If anyone asks me what I want for holly-days, I would tell 'em I

want food. Food is always good any time, like money for humans, except food is better 'cause you can eat it. You can't eat money, but there are places called "drive throos" where you can trade money for food, which seems like an unnecessary extra step to me. Some people try to give me toys for holly-days, which is no good. Some of them make weird noises I don't like, and none of them smell like food. I don't need that - just give me food! It took a few years, but my human has learned these things, so I get food for holly-days. I think maybe holly-days means I get new and interesting food, different than what I usually get. Last year I got something called "buffalo jerky" which tasted pretty good, and it SMELLED terrible, which was even better! So, if you're looking to give your friends, or family, or animals, or animals who are

friends and family, just get them some food. I don't know anyone who doesn't want food, except maybe a really picky cat.

- Duke

## YouTube Links of the Month

### The Industrious Rabbit: Meet the Copper

<https://youtu.be/fdVrh7RnS-0?si=ixBveA9GFnSTpMTG>

Informative video on the Amiga's copper (co-processor) hardware, and how it is used in many applications you've probably noticed.

### Lady Decade: How AmigaCD32 Humiliated Sega

<https://youtu.be/5xS5v0QjIgs?si=mAK49d15KyG7ORVY>

The Amiga CD-32 game console might have been the last gasp of a dying Commodore, but it was surprisingly successful in its very short life, especially in the UK, thanks to some very clever marketing.

