

KILOBYTE

MAGAZINE

2017 / 2

BOARD WARS · NEW TAPES · C16 PROTOTYPE DISCOVERED · NEW ISEPIC FREEZER · SLIPSTREAM (C64) · DOOMSDAY ECHOES (CPC) · DEFENDER OF THE CROWN (ZX) · ALMOST HERO (NES) · AND MORE



8BIT
ONLY

IT'S ON TAPE!

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Photo: Joerg Droege

There are nice covers in your diskbox as well – we're sure of it! Please send your scans or photos to: kilobytemag@gmail.com

NEW MEDIA

Herlitz is a well-known brand in Germany. Most school kids came across this name in some way or another, as the produced mostly stationery supplies like notebooks, or cue cards. And at some point in

time, they also sold diskettes under their brand name – like their competitors in Germany, Pelikan and Geha, did as well. The turquoise color of the sleeves was striking, but their selling price was not that convincing for many users. (bk)

MONKEY BUSINESS

What does a monkey have to do with data? Noone knows. Whereas Elephant diskettes convey an impression what buyers can expect from the storage medium – an elephant never forgets –, monkeys don't do the same. They're intelligent alright, but they also tend to have a rather chaotic image.

Rulag might as well have called it camelopard or crocodile data. Somehow the company behind

this must have thought that monkeys are more likable. But Rulag, who produced those disks, have an interesting story that connects them to Commodore: Due to some clever licensing deal, they managed to put the Commodore logo on everything from walkie-talkies to blank CDs and whatnot in the late 90s to sell them in Germany. That, one must admit, was a far better idea than selling monkey data disks.

(bk)



When the C64 Reloaded motherboard was released back in 2015, it was in constant short supply. And it showed how large the demand for a new C64 mainboard is. So this year, two new boards have been announced – and they're quite different, but equally great.



It came out of nowhere, really: Gideon Zweitzer's announcement of a new C64 mainboard on 12th July. The man who is responsible for the 1541 Ultimate, which is basically a must-have for Commodore 64 owners today, gave a glimpse of another great hardware project which left many in awe. Discussions spawned in virtually every Commodore online forum about the specifications, when suddenly, just one day later, another announcement of a C64 mainboard made Commodore enthusiasts wonder where to get all the money from: Jens Schoenfeld of Individual Computers announced his C64 Reloaded Mk. 2 motherboard. But what seems to be two quite similar concepts at first sight are actually very different. Let's look at what is offered here – and what board is suited best for what need.

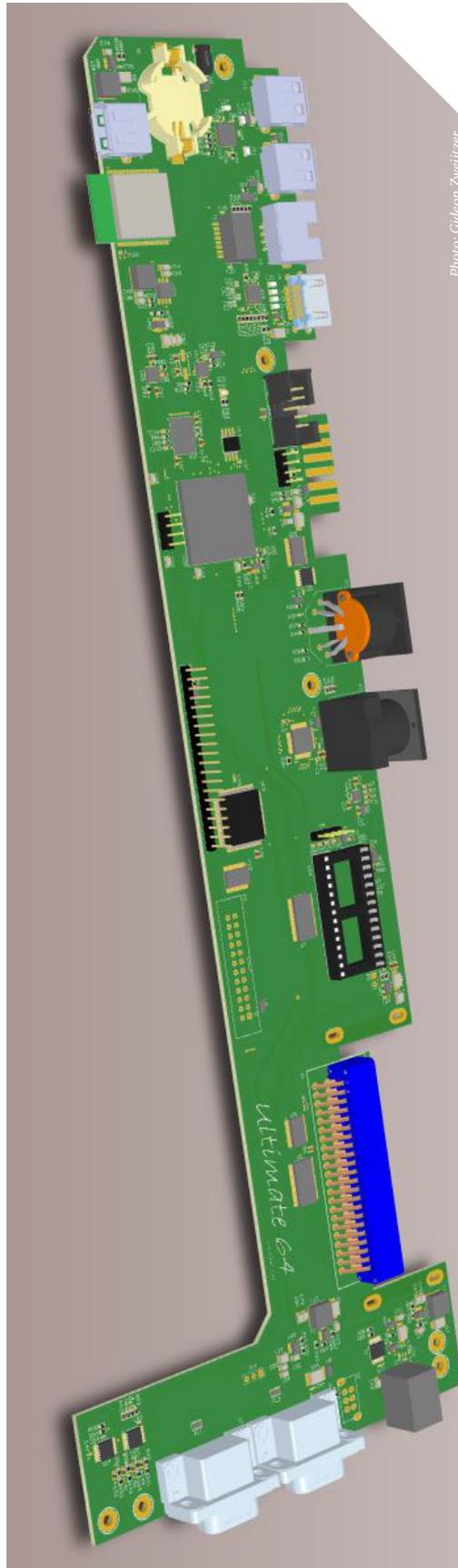
CONCEPT ART

The first striking difference between both boards is that Gideon's is still a concept. Though nobody questions his ability nor his seriousness, until now his Ultimate 64 cannot be preordered and he expects the production to be finished in the fourth quarter of 2017. The first pictures of two prototype boards surfaced on early August on Facebook. That being said, the next big difference between the two is the concept itself: Gideon relies completely on FPGA which implements the logic gates of all the internals of the original C64. This is not the same as emulation: While the latter produces the same output as the original, the internal mechanisms are not necessarily reflected accurately. Which is why some C64 demos will not work on your favorite PC emu-

lator, because it does not get down to the tiniest twists and turns of the chips' innards. FPGA will do just that: By implementing the internal state of the machine, its output will be the closest possible to the real deal. However, such a task requires a comprehensive knowledge of the original chips and their possible and not documented flaws as well. But the FPGA design allows for future updates to get as close to full-compatibility as it gets.

The Ultimate 64 features two sockets for your SIDs to plug in. You can use them for stereo output or to switch between 6581 and 8580. But you will not need a single real chip, as Gideon's board will also include a refined SID implementation that exceeds the dual SID capabilities by far. Nice to know, but the question would be: How many stereo tracks do you hear on your C64? And how many quadro- or hexa-tracks will there be, even if it was possible? We will see.

You can attach everything you like, as long as it does not plug into the Userport. That seemingly made room for two USB slots HDMI. However, all signals from the Userport are available from a pin-header on the board, so you can make it usable with some soldering skills. The best thing about the Ultimate 64 is that it comes with the 1541 Ultimate included. Not as cartridge, but on-board. Navigation functions via the power switch and the Retore-key. That is really all there is to say right



Gideon Zweijtzer's C64 motherboard uses FPGA and comes with the very popular 1541U implemented – a strong selling point.

now. Let's wait what Gideon will make of it – and if he meets his pricepoint of around 200 Euros, Wifi included.

A NEW MOTHERBOARD

The motherboard from Individual Computers is a whole other deal: It really is a board that comforts all the important original chips of the C64: CPU, VIC, one or two SIDs and two CIAs. It is more power efficient than the original boards and it can handle switching from one SID model to the other, or using them both for stereo sound. As far as compatibility issues go, there are no problems to be expected. After all, you will be using original chips, but they will not be included in the package. And unlike the Ultimate 64, you will not be able to play with this thing without real chips – it would be like taking an blank original C64 motherboard. A nice thing for the SIDs: There will be no need for jumpers, as the C64 Reloaded Mk. 2 detects the inserted chip automatically. You can tap the sound via an 3.5 mm stereo output. And as for the video: Besides the original A/V-output there will be a S-Video signal, which is the best possible output from the original hardware without messing with the signals, which is required for HDMI.

Being a full-fledged C64 mainboard, the Userport stays untouched. A small USB port gives access to some programming options for the board via PC, like for example the ROM.

This way, every user can upload four Kernal ROMs to switch between them. Of course there have been Kernal-Switches for the original breadbin that handled up to eight ROMs, but seriously ask yourself if you need that many.

And one more thing that makes this one really stand out: It is licenced by Commodore. Well, you might say, what in the past was not? Blank CDs and DVDs, telephones and whatnot. But the licensing policy has become stricter since, which is why it's increasingly difficult to get access to the brand name. A new motherboard for the C64 branded by Commodore is indeed a worthy object to put the licence on.

The new mainboard by Individual Computers will be sold on November 14th.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

So which motherboard to buy then? That really depends on your needs: If you are looking for the closest thing to the original and want to reuse your original chips as well, the C64 reloaded Mk. 2 is the best choice. You can also expect the highest compatibility from this model. If you have a spare C64 lying around, it's also the cheaper way to go, because you will not need to spend extra money for those little silicon wonders. And you can still use all the hardware you have on site, even for the Userport, without soldering anything first.

The Ultimate 64 mainboard is an

The first prototype from the Ultimate 64 mainboards shows two SID sockets instead of the originally planned one.





Individual Computers' board design also features two SID sockets.

Photo: Individual Computers

all-in-one-solution that will offer quite good compatibility, but it will almost certainly need to be updated for some time to match all possible problems. The FPGA core may be great, but as Gideon himself points out on his website, there is some testing needed to improve it further. What's certainly great is the implemented 1541 Ultimate, which costs around 150 Euros if you buy it for your stock C64 – so offering a complete C64 replacement that includes this for around 50 Euros more is very appealing indeed! Currently there is no release date yet and you can only

declare your interest in this board, not preorder it. If you want to make sure that you'll be able to play some C64 games or watch demos flawlessly this Christmas, the Reloaded is the safer way to go.

Having said all this, let's consider a moment what is going on here: Two new C64 mainboard concepts in one year, 35 years after the initial release of the machine itself is really something great. Both parties have put considerable amounts of time in their respective projects and we all can look forward to what will be up next. (bk)

10

LOADED

BRAND NEW TAPES MADE IN GERMANY





Photo: Audio-Service

Magnetic media have disappeared from our everyday life almost entirely. However, it is amazing how durable many of them are: Even after 30 years and more, many diskettes and cassettes are still in use. But while those thin floppies won the battle of magnetic storage back in the 80s over cassettes, you won't find new ones today. They are simply not longer produced. But with cassettes it is a whole different story: You can still buy brand new tapes, which is one of the reasons why many homebrew games for vintage computers have been released on tape during the last couple of years. While never that popular in the US, games and programs on cassette stayed relevant in Europe way into the 90s for Commodore, Sinclair and Amstrad users. The main reasons: They were cheap and reliable.

Luckily for vintage computer owners, cassettes are also getting more popular with musicians, too: The

demand worldwide is on the rise. One of the producers of brand new tapes is located in Leipzig, Germany: Audio-Service. Since 2004 the company produces not only vinyl records, but also audio cassettes. And in recent years, demand has gone up. „This is part of a general trend we notice back to honest and tangible things“, explains Franziska Kohlhasse from Audio-Service. „People are fed up with soulless MP3s and like to go back to music with emotions.“ Seven people work there, producing around 50.000 cassettes per year. „And we definitely notice that demand increases“, Franziska adds.

What applies to music fans, also applies to many vintage gaming enthusiasts: Games on tape are an important part of re-feeling the emotions of the 80s, when pocket money could only buy you so many things. Buying new cassettes today and loading games from them helps



BRAND NEW TAPES MADE IN GERMANY



Photo: Audio-Service

Piece of cake: Only a small amount of ferric tape from the so-called pancake will fit into this little cassette.

relive those emotions.

And luckily for computer users, the good old ferro tapes (IEC-I) are the only ones that are still being produced. Though chrome was always the first choice for audiophile people, it did not perform very well in data recorders which were designed to work best with the cheapest available media at the time: ferric tapes. It can be compared to using HD floppy disks in a DD drive. You might get lucky and the data will get saved, but do not rely on that it will function very long.

Audio-Service in Leipzig buys the so-called pancakes from vendors outside of Germany – some companies in India, China and Russia never stopped producing them, partly because cassettes were still regularly

used there. Then the team feeds the cartridge shell with the required tape length with the help of specialized machines. You can choose between lengths from five minutes (2.5 minutes per side) up to 100 minutes. The heavy loading machines click, spool and spin like it's 1989 again. And even if those Tapematic machines are old, they look like brand new. So they are in great shape and very well maintained.

If you buy only a small quantity – everything below 50 – you'll pay around 0,59 Euros per cassette. The more you'll take, the cheaper it'll get. Also watch out for special offers on the website: Sometimes cassettes with minor cosmetic errors are on sale for half of their regular price. Taking a closer look at the shop over



Photo: Audio-Service

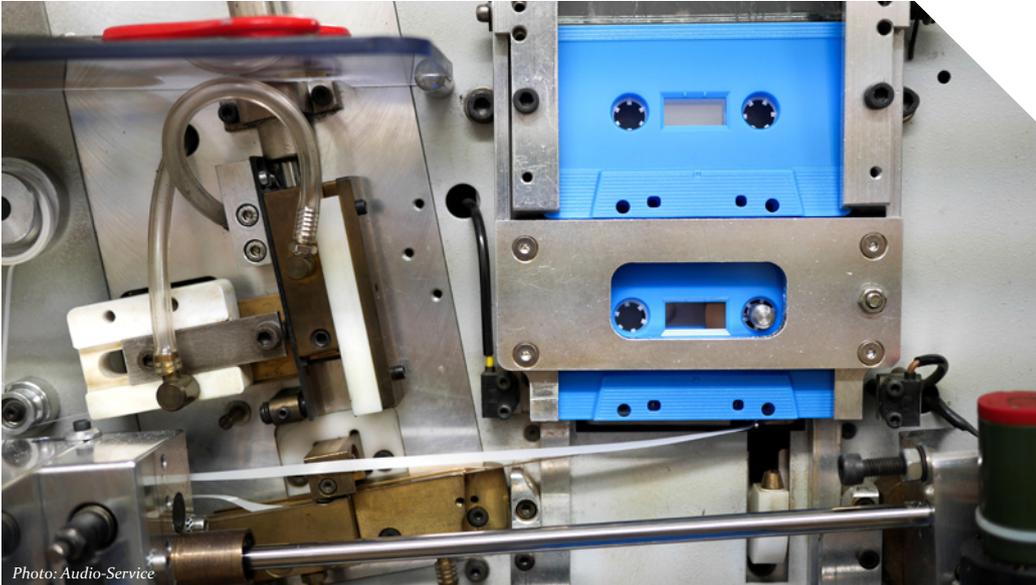


Photo: Audio-Service

This is one of the machines responsible for marring the cassette shell with the tape itself.

at Audio Service, you'll see a vast variety of colored cassettes in different lengths. You can also buy single and double snap boxes as well as soft boxes for all your storage needs. Almost everything is possible with regard to length, but for vintage computer users, 20 minutes are absolutely sufficient. One reason is that many data recorders have problems staying in-sync with tape lengths over 60 minutes. So you can order a bunch of cassettes to store your own files on. But you could also have them produced – Cinemaware's recent „Defender of the Crown“ tape release for the ZX Spectrum for example was mastered, duplicated, printed and packaged all by the guys in Leipzig. After all, it's only audio signals that are being copied over. Everyone who ever put a game tape into his stereo cassette player knows what strange sounds you get to hear this way. But there is even music that sounds quite strange as well, as

Franziska reports: „With some productions, you wonder what kind of ‚music‘ this is. But it is also fascinating because you get to know many different styles. Being an alternative medium today, cassettes also attract alternative music.“

When the company started back in 2004, cassettes were not all that popular than they are now, boosted by blockbuster cinema hits like „Guardians of the Galaxy“ amongst others. So why had they held on to tapes? „Well, I guess because of our love for music in general and this allegedly doomed medium. And a good portion also because of the fun of it“, Franziska says. And what about the future of cassettes? „Although the demand is ever increasing, we ask ourselves if this might only be a temporary thing. But we are also pretty confident that even then this product will have a future. After all, it survived till today, didn't it?“ (bk) <http://audio-service.biz>

IMPORTANT NOTE _____
Audio-Service will rename their shop to T.A.P.E. Muzik during the second half of 2017. You will find their new facebook site over [here](#).



The keys of this C16 prototype look like they were pushed or individually cast.

We all know the story of someone who strolls by a flea market, discovers some rare game or vintage computer and buys it for a few bucks. Some of those stories are urban myths, some are true. Here comes one for you: Imagine buying a Commodore 16 at a flea market that looks just like every other model from the series. At home, you switch it on and it doesn't work. So you put it away in your closet, shelf or whatever place you see fit and decide to take

a deeper look into it someday. After 15 years or so, you finally remember that you had it. So you take it out, plug it in, and it still doesn't work. Then you examine it more closely: The keys seem to have a strange look, as if they were pushed or maybe even individually cast. That is unusual, right? So you open it up – and then you see something you've never seen before: A circuit board that is printed only on one side. The case originally had the same color

as the Commodore 64. It looks like it was quickly spray-painted on the outside. And many of the chips are ceramic ones or burned EPROMs. It seems to be a Commodore 16 prototype. This was the discovery that Jens M. made earlier this year. He bought the computer on a flea market near the former Commodore Germany headquarter in the Frankfurt area years ago. And after he found out what he had, he contacted Thomas Wirtzmann, a passionate Commodore collector and co-host of Forum64.de, so that he could take a closer look at what was beneath their trembling fingers.

„It really was a pleasure and an honor for me to disassemble, check and photograph this computer“, says Thomas. The CPU was defunct, so he exchanged it with the last 7501 he had on hand from the same production era. Et voila: The

Commodore 16 started up like it was 1985 again. „Regarding the TED, we discovered that its sound had more bass than the later versions of this chip. It was really astounding“, says Thomas. However, the circuit board got hot rather quickly, so they decided against a lengthy stress test. But they did turn to former Commodore-engineer Bil Herd, who designed the 264-series computers as well as the C128. And as it turns out, he remembered this particular machine: „The C16 prototype you saw is real. This design came from CBM Tokyo office led by Sam Tramiel and the R&D manager was Yoichi Okubo.“ According to Bil, this layout was actually considered for mass production to further reduce cost: „The whole concept was that a single sided PCB with jumpers was cheaper than a double sided board. But my gut is that the jumper insertion was

Single Sided: The motherboard is only printed on one side. Bil Herd recalls that this was a way to keep costs even lower than they were. But it didn't work out this way.

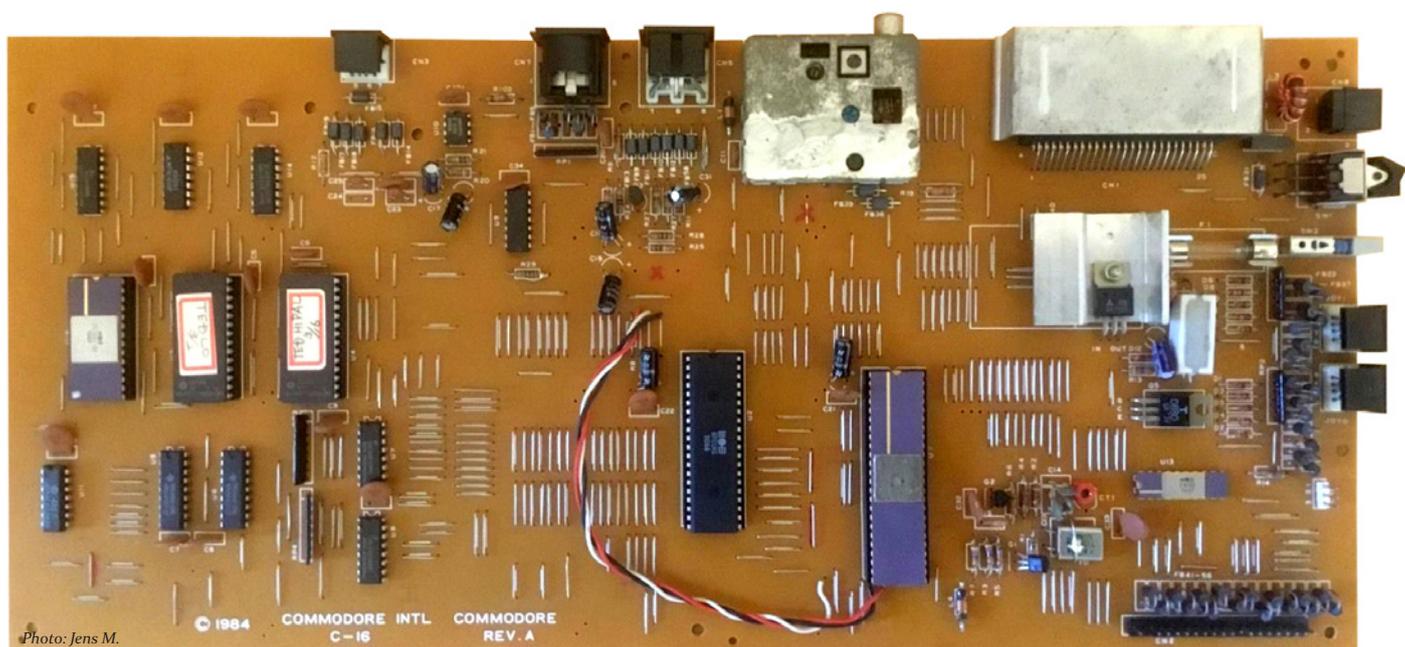


Photo: Jens M.

too problematic, or the square area of the PCB, even single sided, didn't justify the offset in other costs. This one probably has my fingerprints on it – including my now missing finger. This kind of cost savings out-of-the-silly-box thinking was the heart of CBM's mass production mentality.“

The computer has been sold on ebay and the buyer was happy to pay way less than what is usually charged even for the cheapest golden C64. Considering that it is, quite possibly, a unique piece of hardware, this was a one-time opportunity.

It's great to see this one-of-a-kind prototype preserved and in good collector's hands. It would be even

better to see it in a museum some-day – but who knows, maybe that's exactly where this C16 is going to end. *(bk)*

IMPORTANT NOTE

This article can only give a glimpse of the whole story that originated in the German speaking Forum64.de. Take a look at the technical details and the many great pictures of the prototype case over there. You will be amazed! Click on the logo to get directly to the thread:

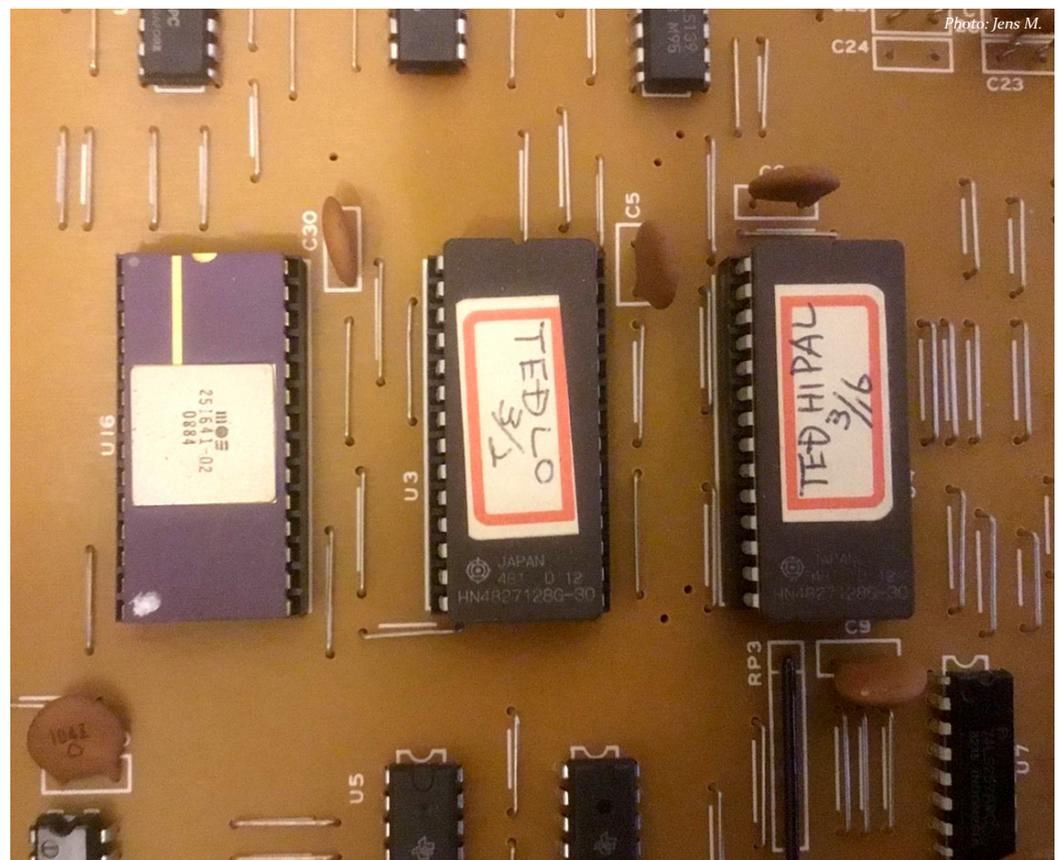
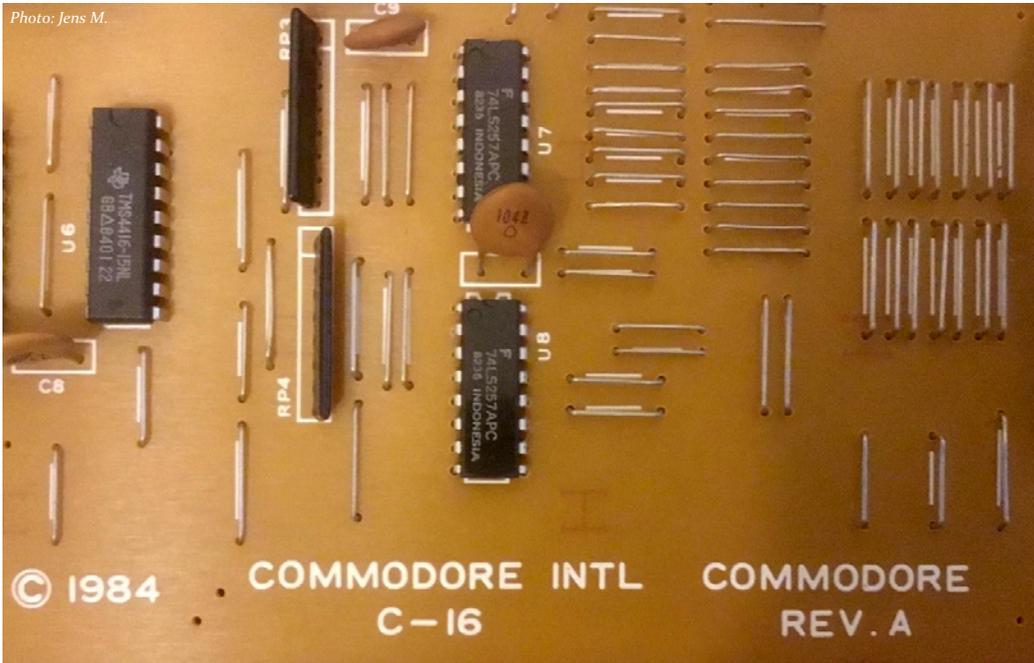


Photo: Jens M.



This truly deserves the name „Revision A“, as it must have been one of the first boards before production started. As it turned out, the many wires caused some serious heating issue which did not justify the slightly lower production cost of a single sided motherboard. So this design got shelved – and somehow luckily survived instead of gotten thrown away!

Typical for early models and prototypes: ceramic chips and a lot of wireframes.

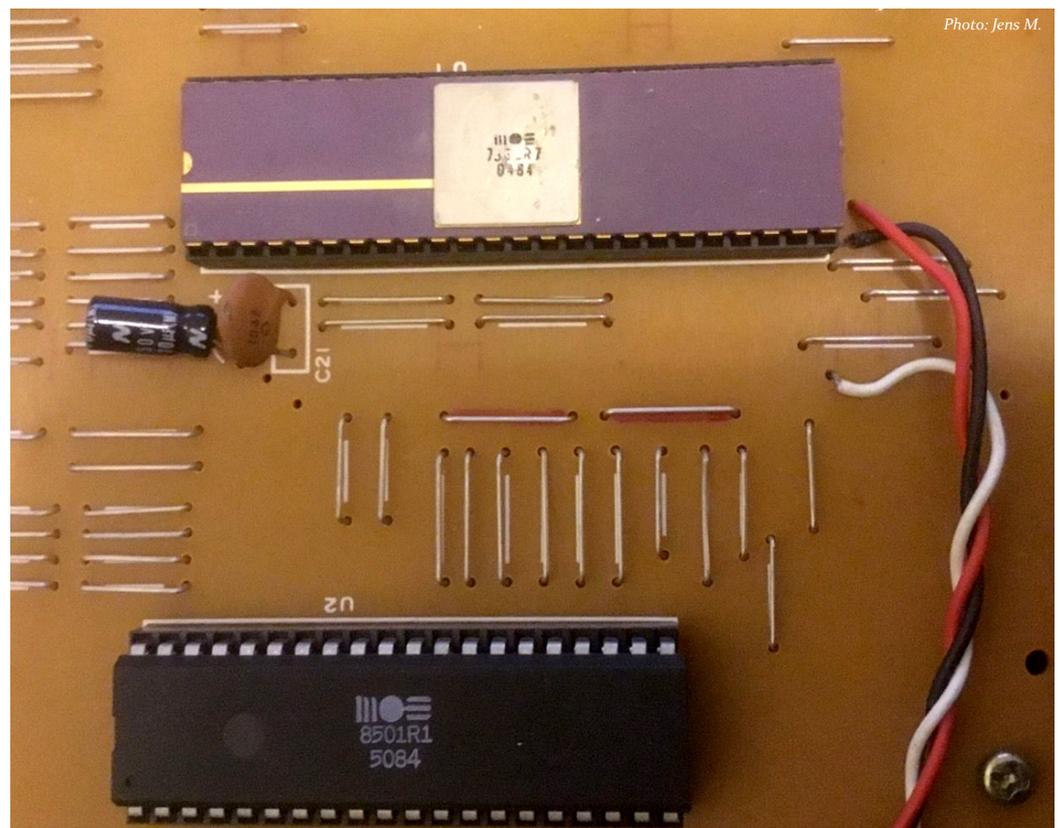


Photo: Jens M.

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR FIRST C64 FREEZER?



Photo: Thomas Christoph

The original version of 1985 next to the rerelease of 2017 from Thomas Christoph. You'll notice that the new cartridge is smaller.

When most people think of C64 freezer cartridges which would halt a program to allow you meddling with it, they probably think of Action Replay, Final Cartridge or maybe Nordic Power. But all the hype with freezers really started way before those were even prototyped. In 1984, two years after the debut of the Commodore 64, there was a young man called Charles „Chip“ Gracey at a Canadian highschool with enough imagination and skill to think: What if there was a cartridge that could help me freeze programs with the switch of a button? So then I can go on and hack it or even make snapshots – a common feature nowadays which many gamers use on their emulators. But it was a revolutionary idea back then. In 1985, his idea

became reality: ISEPIC (pronounced icpick) was the world's first freezer cartridge – not only for the Commodore 64, but at all. Chip transformed his hobby into a business and managed to sell 20.000 ISEPIC carts worldwide. The word spread quickly as magazines covered the new device in numerous articles. By warning readers that this device could be used to make illegitimate backups of games and productivity software, they basically put a great commercial neon sign in their windows. They might as well have written: „Buy some disks and this cart and you're all set!“ Alongside this, ISEPIC was also advertised by distributor Starpoint Software as „revolutionary new concept in software de-protection for the Commodore 64.“

It did quite well in the market, but other companies soon jumped on the train and eventually, ISEPIC was forgotten – until this year, that is.

ISEPIC RELOADED

One of the buyers from 1985 that were really amazed about what this little thing could do was Thomas Christoph from Canada. „Over time, this cartridge became my favorite piece of hardware I had ever owned, and as such, it held a special meaning for me“, he remembers. „Not only was it a cool device, but it also reminds me now of many good friends I had and good times spent with them.“

When Thomas bought an old ISEPIC card from ebay last year, it didn't work. But instead of hunting for another one, he sat down and thought about reproducing this thing. „I of course had the utmost respect for the original developer, and would never have entertained doing this without permission. So I got in touch Chip Gracey through his company Parallax Incorporated.“ Chip was flattered and surprised, as he did not know that there was still a quite vibrant community around the Commodore 64. So he gave the project his blessing and Thomas started his work. He dived into electronic basics and CAD to reach his goal. But that were not the only challenges he was facing: „It proved to be quite difficult to source compatible parts that accurately matched the specifications of some of the

long ago discontinued components found on the original cartridge“, Thomas says. For example, the heart of the cartridge, 2K SRAM, had been discontinued for many decades.

„But in the end I found a number of different solutions that would work and I can most certainly keep up with demand from the size of the community that exists now.“

This re-issued ISEPIC cartridge is a faithful and respectful reproduction of the original board, electrically identical, designed and produced on a gold plated board. There is much love for detail in this one: The toggle switch is dimensionally identical to the original, and it's also placed in the exact same location on the board. Internal mounting holes are also precisely located. It also works with SD2IEC and UK1541. The cartridge comes in a custom 3D-printed case and costs 65 Dollars – the same price as the original. (bk)

<http://corei64.com/store/>

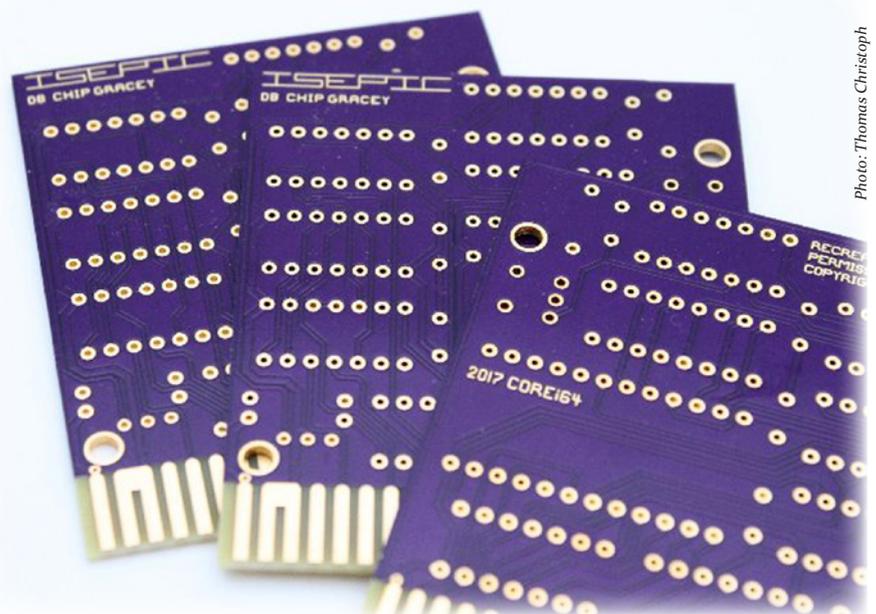
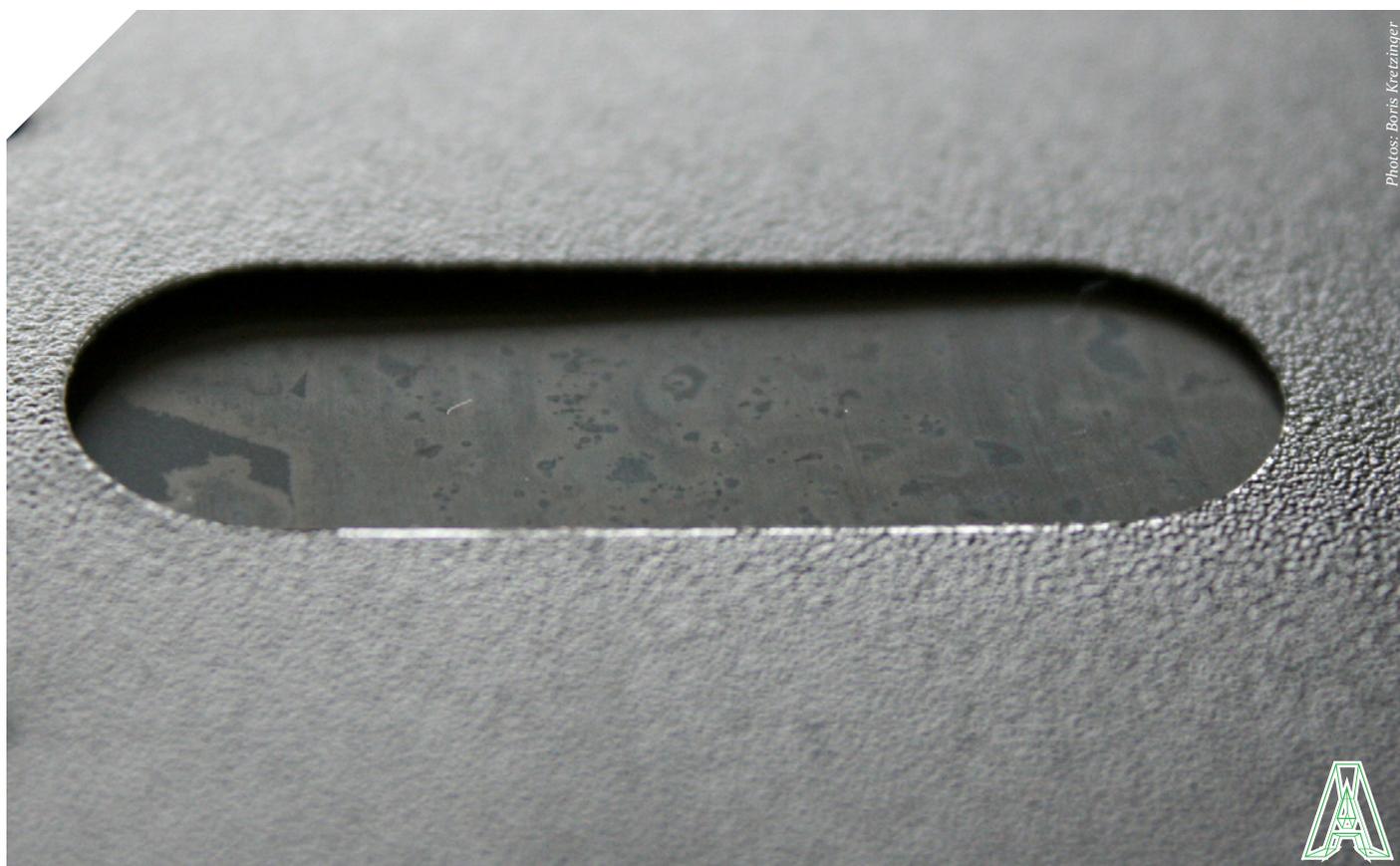


Photo: Thomas Christoph

DON'T THROW DIRTY DISKS AWAY - CLEAN THEM



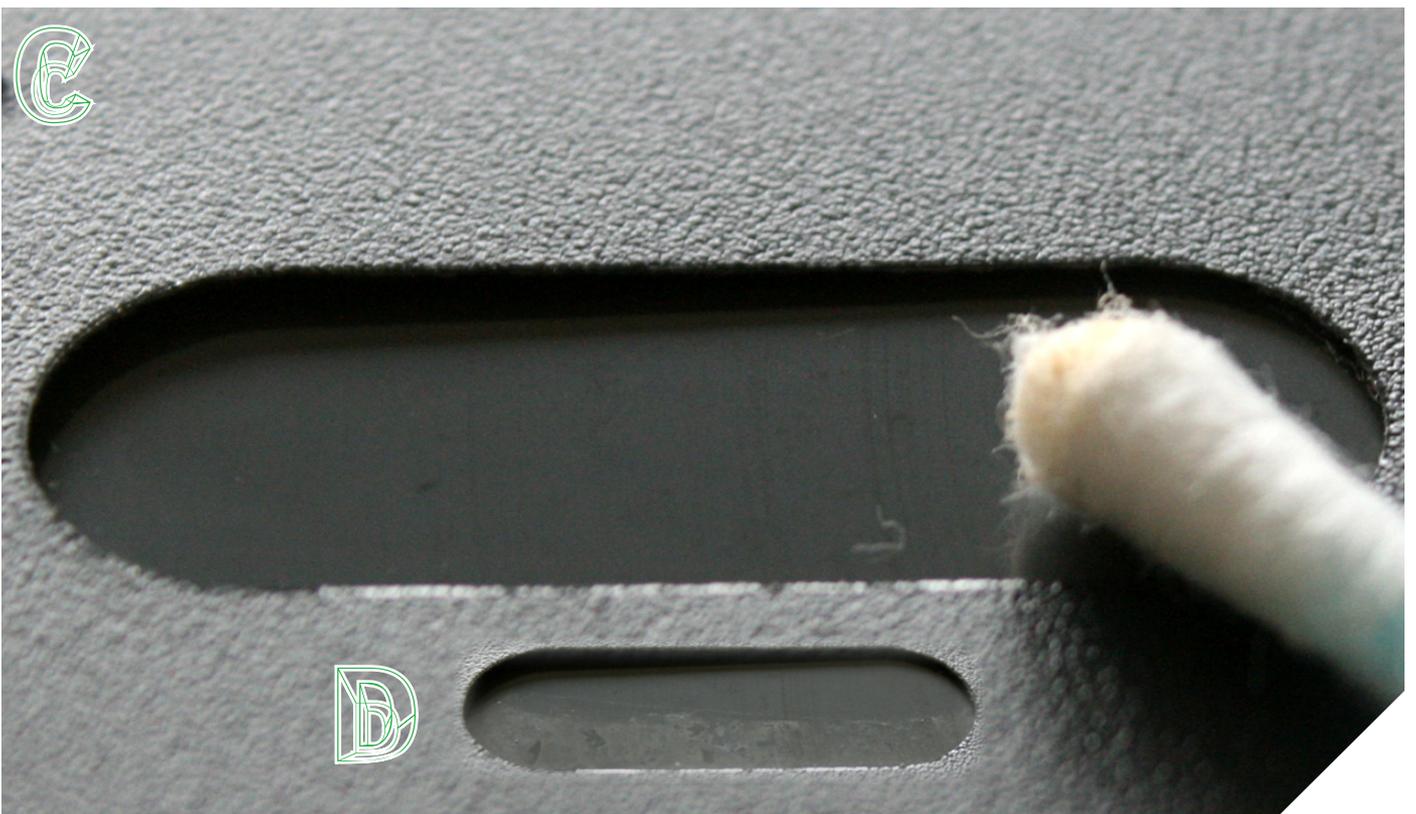
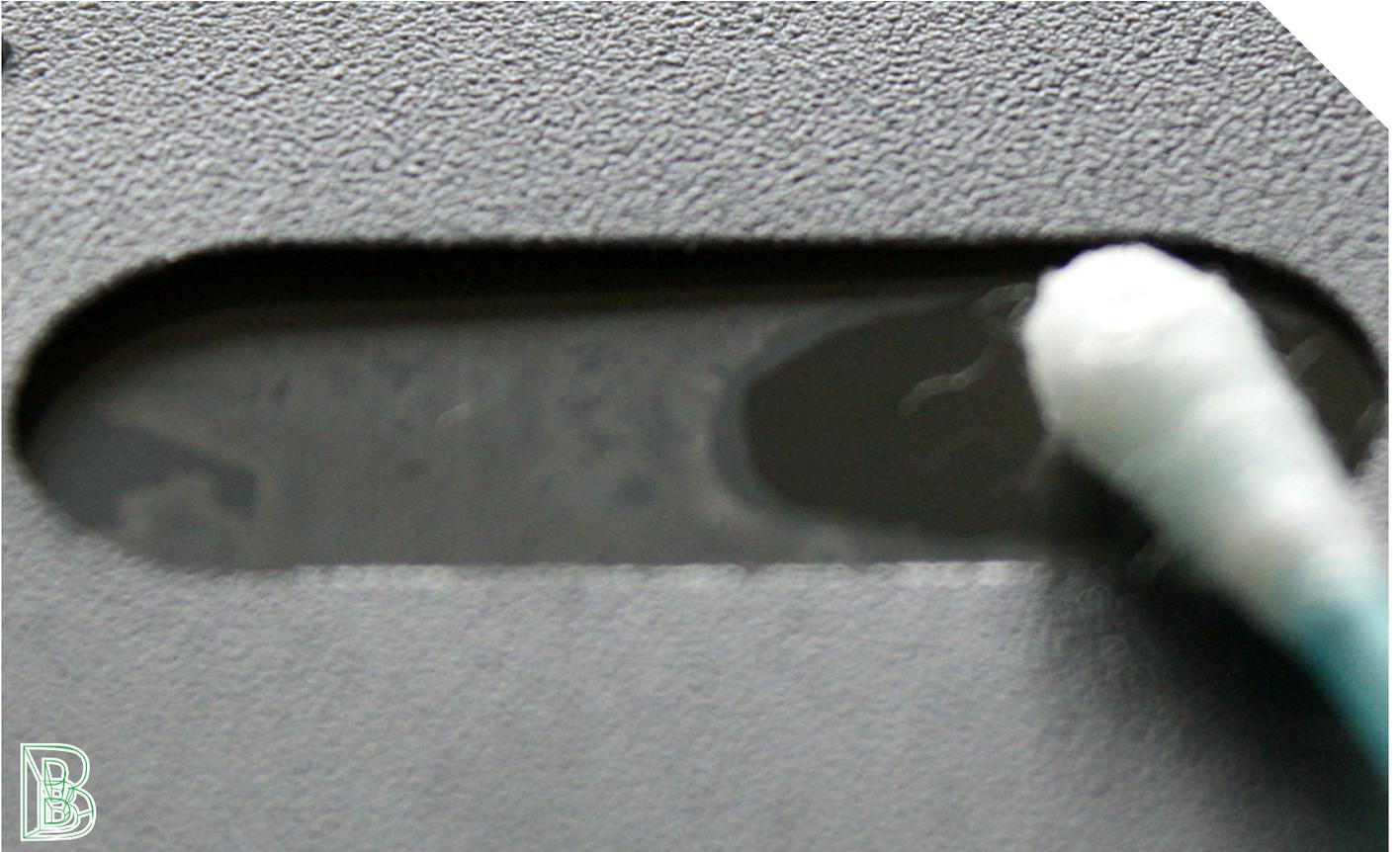
Photos: Boris Kretzinger

Dirty Deeds: You most certainly won't be able to use such a dirty disk.

But you don't have to throw it away – and you don't have to open it up to clean it. Save your precious original games with cotton buds – and a lot of spare time.

So you stored your good old disks in the cellar or in the attic? Or you bought a collection from someone who did? In any case, many vintage computer enthusiasts know a common problem with 5.25" floppy disks: If not stored at a constant temperature and humidity, they get some wild grain over time (A). It will contaminate the head of your disk drive, so don't even bother putting them in – unless you cleaned them first. Now there are tutorials out there on how to open disks up and clean the entire cookie. But you can get around that with just some Q-tips, a bottle of glass cleaner and patience. First, spin the disk carefully until you see the index hole. It'll serve as indicator so you'll know when you're

through with the whole procedure. Then put some windex on one side of the Q-tip and start applying it on the disk's surface (B). Don't push too hard! Then take the other end of the cotton bud and dry it carefully – again, don't use pressure at all (C). You will see how much smear comes off, so change your Q-tips often, at least every third spin. After you've cleared the first small area of the disk, spin it around until you see the next dirty zone (D). You will notice the difference easily. Repeat the steps until you reach the index hole again. It can take more than two dozen cotton sticks per disk to get it clean, and it will take around half an hour. But after that, you're precious disk is ready for action again. (bk)



IT REALLY SHOULD BE NAMED RETROCOM



C64 and CPC living in harmony side by side at Gamescom 2017.

This year's Gamescom was full of news: Microsoft showed off their new Xbox model, Nintendo gave a glimpse into their upcoming „*Super Mario Odyssey*“ and Commodore presented its new mainboard and cases for the C64. Wait – what? That's right, as in the previous years there was much to discover at the retrogaming area: Individual Computers licensed the brand name Commodore for their upcoming mainboard C64 Reloaded Mk. 2 (find more details in this issue's story „Board Wars“) and also for new cases for the C64C in black, SX64-style, classic beige and bread-bin gray. It was really great to see

the Commodore brand name on some oldschool hardware back at a fair, even if it took a small but very prominent place over at the booth of Return magazine. They will be selling the cases through their shop exclusively. If you wanted to, you could get one right there on the spot in a great looking packaging. As for the games, there were also several new titles for 8bit machines being presented. Publisher Polyplay had a couple of news to show: „*Rescuing Orc*“ for the C64 is a nice little platforming game that takes place in the world of „*Magica*“ – another game that was presented for the Amstrad CPC (see review in this

issue). Polyplay puts a lot of effort into their games packaging and even has all of them shrinkwrapped. Next, there was some familiar music to be heard, medieval chimes and trumpets introducing a cinematic game, an interactive movie so to speak: „Defender of the Crown“ for the Intellivision. The sounds and graphics look outstanding for this platform and the game easily surpasses the Sinclair version. According to Elektronite, who are working on finishing the game, this conversion will be licensed by Cinemaware Retro, making it another addition to the seemingly ever expanding library of DotC ports for retro computers and consoles.

Fans of the NES could also discover something new: „Twin Dragons“ by French developer Broke Studio. It's about two dragons named Dinky and Minky (who sound a bit like they could also add to the list of names for Pac-Man ghosts) who have to rescue their kidnapped yet unhatched brother. And so the story sets the tone for a rather sweet looking and very playable platformer. The game is not ready yet and the final version will contain seven worlds with two stages each as well as boss fights. Also, graphics and sound will get enhanced for the final product. If you are a fan of Chris Huelsbeck, the retro area had something to offer: Not only was Chris there himself, but he also signed some Turrigan stuff at the Factor5 booth. Furthermore, his very first C64

was displayed: It featured a Kernal switch, a second audio port and another port for connecting a piano keyboard. And speaking of keyboards: Phase5 presented their new keys for the C64 in different colors. They will be available around December 2017. If you were there on the first days of the fair, you might even have had the chance to get a sample key

Are you keeping up with the Commodore? Many people stared at the brand name and the cases in disbelief: Commodore at Gamescom in 2017?



IT REALLY SHOULD BE NAMED RETROCOM



for free. Besides all the news for old consoles, there was also much to play with standing around, from Atari 2600s to Dreamcasts. Ever played Pong with LEDs or Super Mario with a giant NES controller? There you could. And people had a lot of fun with all the nice gimmicks and games, while enjoying the exhibition around early virtual reality and 3D gaming. The exhibits were shown in glass cabinets everywhere in the retro gaming area. You could hear people talking about what they had when they were younger – and also what they need to have again. (bk)



WORLD OF MAGICA



RESCUING ORC

How far would you go to help a friend?

Armed with your trusty sword, enter the dangerous WORLD OF MAGICA where things are not always what they seem.

This is a mission to find what happened to your friend Orc, exploring five different areas and fighting twelve different types of enemy, each with its own behaviour and personality.

RESCUING ORC is a jump & slash game, a mixture of platforming and action, with a bit of adventure for good balance.



SOME HIGHLIGHTS:

- Single player adventure
- 12 unique types of enemy
- 5 areas to explore
- In game music and sound effects
- Both joystick and keyboard are supported
- PAL and NTSC compatible

Available on diskette, cassette and cartridge.
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a game by **usebox.net**

distributed by **poly.play**

If you ever wondered when a game will come out that looks like it was one of those fancy C64 demos with all their great 3D effects, then wait no longer: Here comes Slipstream.

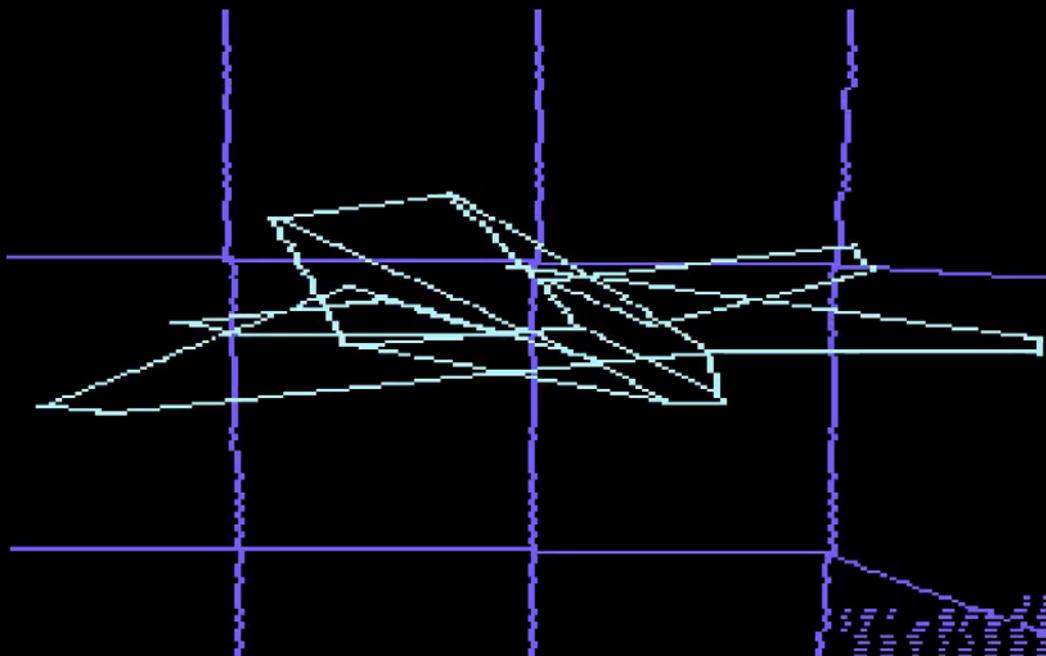


One of the very first thing you'll ask yourself when playing „Slipstream“ for the first time will most certainly be: „What the hell is going on here exactly?“ Like in „Rez“, you fly around and control the crosshair to select enemies to shoot at. You can also move your ship to avoid being shot. You could use two joysticks or the firebutton to do this.

The games release took everybody by surprise, and it is difficult to describe. It looks and plays a bit just like „Rez“ did on Dreamcast or Playstation, and that is what inspired the coder the most. But there also was another game: „Originally I wanted to build a wipeout clone for the Plus/4 with a fullblown 3D engine, but it got too slow – sometimes below one frame per second“, explains Stefan Mader, creator of Slipstream. „Then I started to look for other 3D games and Silpheed on the Apple II GS got into my view. From there the

idea arised to make just small 3D objects and have a good framerate this way.“ So in a way, the technology somehow dictated the game concept here. And it took him around 400 hours spread over a period of six to eight months to get the game done on the Commodore Plus/4 and the C64. „The game was firstly a Plus/4 game and I implemented some changes for the C64 version“, says Stefan. „For instance, the crosshair uses now a sprite which is updated at 25 fps and the explosions are also upgraded with faster animating sprites.“ This way, he could make up for the fact that the Plus/4 is around 25 percent faster than the breadbin. However, you'll experience that the Plussy indeed offers a smoother gameplay. But if you own a Cameleon or SuperCPU for your C64, it will runder with 50 fps.

Being a game with many filled vector graphics, Slipstream does not utilize



the full color palette of the Plus/4. The loading pics are also identical to the C64 version: „We had a very limited amount of memory for the loading screens, so we chose to take almost the same four colors for both versions“, Stefan explains. Slipstream will be published by Psytronik in three different disk editions only. „It would be possible to make a tape version of the first six

levels and I tried that, but you won't have a menu or all the other parts of the game“, says Stefan. Which pretty much makes it senseless. The disk version however will have a separate highscore list for one and two players.

If you have not played the game yet, you really should do it now. It is not that easy, but an amazing experience on Plus/4 and C64. (bk)



The soundtrack is as ravy as you would expect from a game that was inspired from „Rez“. And the Start sequence with all the distortion effects is also quite impressive.

Sky's the limit: There is a lot more happening onscreen than this screenshot can depict. The landscape at the bottom of the screen is changing, and in later levels galaxies in the background are spiraling while all hell breaks loose in front of your spaceship.

DEFENDER OF THE CROWN (ZX SPECTRUM)



Photo: Boris Kretzinger

Only 27 years after the planned release of Defender of the Crown for the ZX Spectrum, collectors can pick up the game now, limited to 250 copies.

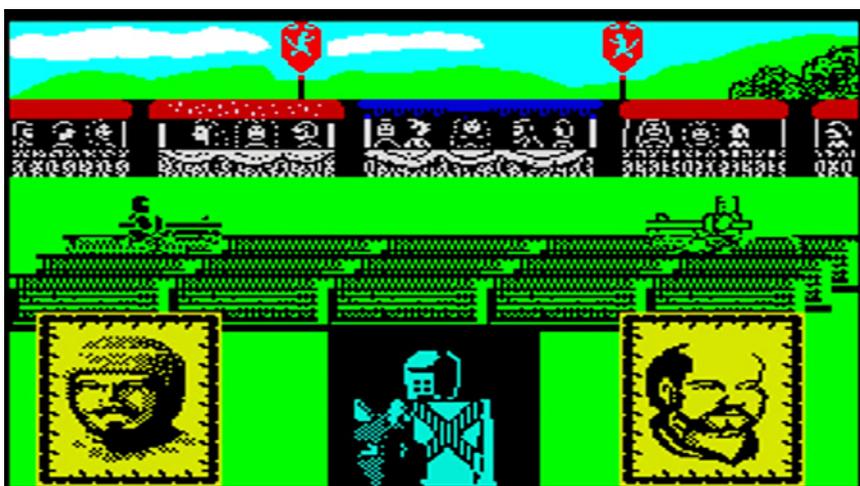
„Defender of the Crown“ was the flagship of games by Cinemaware back in the 80s: With its impressive graphics, even on 8bit computers like the Commodore 64, it set the tone for what the company was aiming for in all their releases: Getting players to believe that they were immersed in some kind of interactive movie instead of just another game. After its initial release in 1986, the game stayed popular on many platforms until the early 90s, with even seeing ports for the Nintendo Entertainment System in 1989 and Philips CDI and Commodore CDTV in 1992. It was considered to be one of the must-have titles for any platform. But one 8bit machine was not gra-

ced with its presence though: The Sinclair ZX Spectrum. When Hungarian developers named „The Cat“ approached Mirrorsoft in 1989 with their conversion of the game, they approved at first, but then made up their mind and never published the nearly complete game because of



the vanishing interest in new games for the ZX Spectrum. Eventually, the game found its way into the wild as ROM image via Spectrum fan websites.

In 2016, Cinemaware Retro under Sven Voessing took it upon themselves to contact the former developers David Taletovics, Tamas Kaproncai and Norbert Dombi and made a deal for the finally official release of the game for the ZX Spectrum on cassette. „The game is fixed for 48K and 128K and also now includes the missing end screen, which makes it stand out from the ROM-file you can find on the web“, explains Sven. Some minor bugfixes have also found their way into this limited release. So what does the game offer on the little Sinclair computer? First of all, the box comes with two cassettes, one with the game itself and the other with the Soundtrack from the CDTV version of the game. A poster and a sticker are also included. The game is a true conversion to the original, but several compromises had to be made due to the limited hardware. Many backgrounds are either missing or very plain, the music and sound effects are reduced to a minimum as well. However, this conversion shows that the game also works within the limits of the ZX Spectrum, and the graphics are quite good. For Spectrum users, it really was a shame that the game was never officially released, but at least that happened now. (bk)



The screenshots give a good impression of the games atmosphere. Color clashes are visible here and there, but very well minimized.

<http://retro.cinemaware.com>

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GAME ON

DOOMSDAY – LOST ECHOES (CPC)





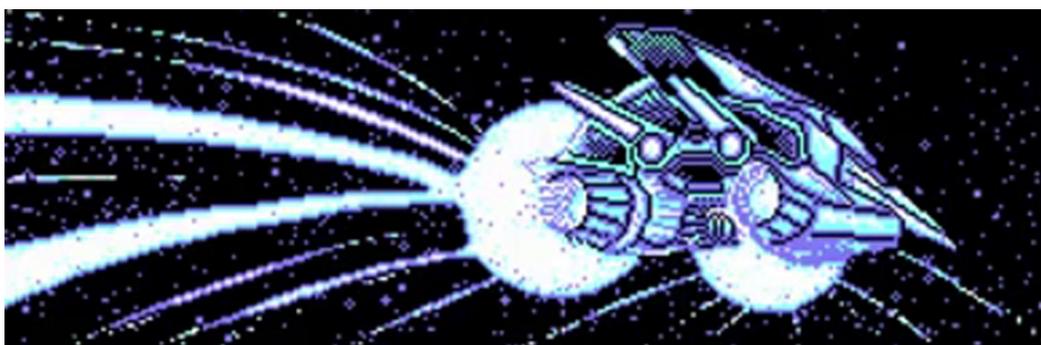
Doomsday – Lost echoes puts a lot of effort in atmosphere, not only with the text, but also with a lot of love for details in the pictures.

A long black coat, a rather grim look on his face and dark circles around the eyes: Mike does not look all too friendly at first. He calls himself a renegade, deserter, bounty hunter, scavenger, mercenary, hitman ... you get the idea: He does almost everything if the payment is right. And he is the protagonist of the latest and quite elaborate graphic adventure „Doomsday – Lost Echoes“ for the Amstrad CPC. The game is set in a dark and distant future world and takes on some elements of the cyberpunk genre. So Mike fled from something in his ship, called the Doomsday, and went to what he calls his home – which is basically a piece of metal named „The Pit“, orbiting some planet in a godforsaken place in space. Some strange mission and a very good advance payment lure him into the abandoned Regus

station to find some missing worker. And although this sounds like a trap to him, Mike flies over there and our journey starts.

ALONE IN THE DARK

The setting has a great atmosphere and almost immediately pulls the player into the game. To achieve this, it borrows some inspiration from the „Alien“ movies as well as from „Outland“. And it is fun and scary at the same time to roam the floors of the old station and dig out information that helps you on your quest. „Doomsday“ also shows some nice little touches here and there that will put a grin on your face as soon as you recognize them. For example, there is a Nuka-Cola fridge (a nod to „Fallout“) and there is a Amstrad CPC poster somewhere at the station – amongst other little



DOOMSDAY – LOST ECHOES (CPC)



things that you can discover. And it just works great in this world that gets painted in subtle colors to set the right mood. Although the CPC could display far more colors at once than are shown onscreen in this game, those colors are very well chosen. They don't go for bombast, they go for mood. And that works just great.

You can tell that the artwork and the story script took a serious amount of time to polish. The graphics of every screen for example are hand-drawn and then ported over to the CPC. The story is great and gets the feeling for the setting and this strange world across very well. What the game lacks completely though is any form of music or sound effects. This is a true pity because a right soundtrack would have added immensely to the atmosphere here. But you can

always go over to Youtube and play some cyberpunk snythwave album in the background.

The way you play through the game results in one of three different endings, which is another great thing for an 8bit game. Also, the manual is a real piece of art itself, looking like it's from a game that was released sometime in the 80s: It's worn-off and a bit scratchy. And there are some concept art designs to be discovered there, too.

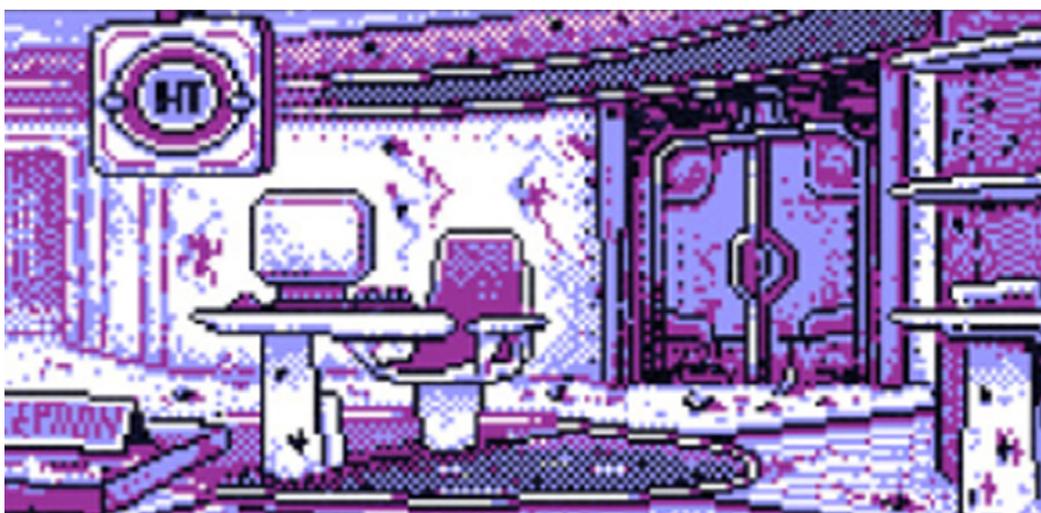
All in all, this game is a must-play not only for Amstrad fans, but also for all 8bit game enthusiasts. It's a great adventure, it offers some horror moments, some action (yes, action in an adventure!) and combines it with a very enjoyable space quest that borrows enough inspiration from all the right places. Highly recommended! (bk)

*Ready for some action?
Adversaries like this
large Mecha will get
your adrenalin flowing.*





Photos: Doomsday Productions



From sketches to colored graphics: All screens in this exceptionally well-made adventure for Amstrad's CPC are hand-drawn and then ported to the computer.

The game is available for free. However, if you want to put it in your shelf along with other great CPC titles, Polyplay offers a special edition.

www.polyplay.xyz

MAGICA



Magica is a single-screen arcade game in which you control a young sorceress on her quest to recover all of her stolen potions. The thieves, ghosts, wizards, orcs, witches and knights, are her adversaries in this game, all with different characteristics. Its gameplay reminds on a mixture of „Bubble Bobble“ and „Solomon’s Key“: Shooting enemies with your spell makes them dizzy. While they’re sitting around, not knowing what hit them, kick them to retrieve the potion they are holding. After having defeated all adversaries on one stage, a door opens up and you can go to the next stage. However, you must clear the stage before the timer runs out, otherwise you’ll lose a life.

Juan J. Martinez is responsible for the code, graphics and sound effects of this cute Amstrad CPC game. It’s a nice and really not that difficult platformer to kill some spare time. But beware of the different characteristics of the enemies: For example, the knight carries a shield with him that makes him invulnerable to head-on attacks. Better shoot at him from behind. The 50 stages can be played through in around half an hour with some experience, with the timer being the hardest enemy of them all. It’s really enjoyable to improve your highscore by finishing all enemies off as fast as you can, thus earning more points for the unused time in each level.

Polyplay offers a variety of editions on tape or disk that come with a nice



and detailed instruction manual as well as a Magica figure to place on your shelf. A nice and fun game! (bk)



The loading screen was made by pixel legend Vanja Utne. The game is sold by Polyplay for 12 to 17 Euros, depending on what you want: Tape, 3" or 3.5" diskette. www.polyplay.xyz

ALMOST HERO (NES)



Photos: Mega Cat Studios

Black is beautiful. After all, it's a game about a ninja, so the cartridge shell can't be purple.

If you enjoyed „Double Dragon“ and „River City Ransom“ on the Nintendo Entertainment System, you will most definitely like „Almost Hero“. Done by Mega Cat Studios, this sidescrolling brawler lets you play as ninja through a world full of tough and bad guys. And that's all you need to know storywise. „Almost Hero“ succeeds in bringing back the action and precise control we know and love from Technos hit titles. It also comes with a tongue-in-cheek attitude and does not take itself all too serious. Want an example? How about the marketing claims of the title on the official website: „Choose your ninja path, from self-defense class drop out, to industry-saving

philanthropist. Play as either ninja hopeful, Orville or Reginald, and be the hero you always knew you could be as you battle against a colorful cast of villains in this throwback to the beat 'em up genre.“ And it is a good kind of throwback indeed that offers some fun, even for two player simultaneously. „I think some of the most fun that we had was in writing names and descriptions for the items that you can purchase in the game“, says Andrew Marsh from Mega Cat Studios.

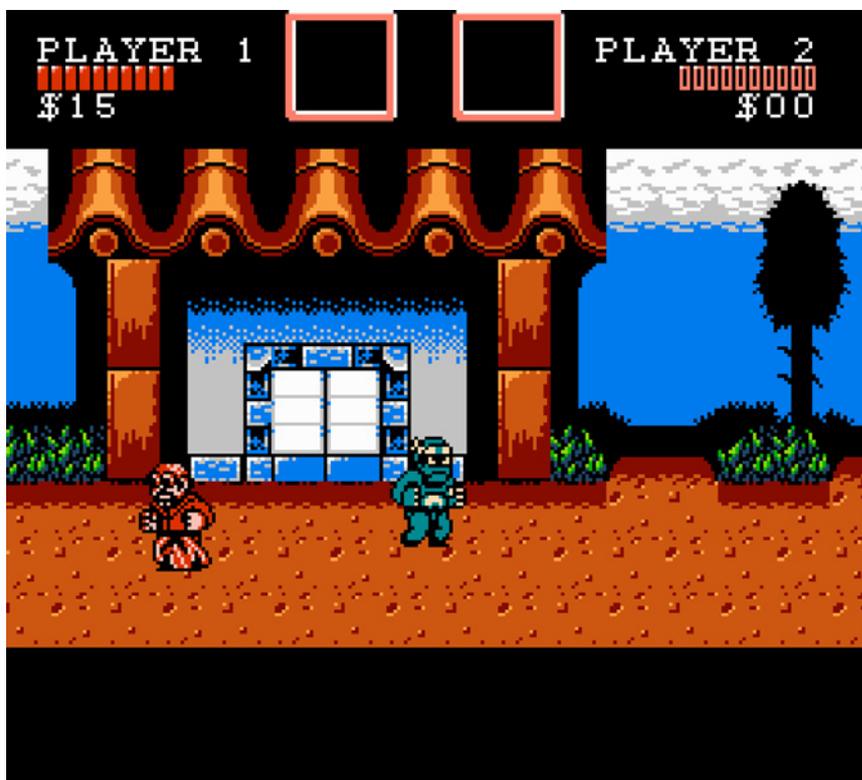
Unlike in most other beat em ups, where standing still will help the player to fight the enemies off one by one, in „Almost Hero“ strategy and awareness of the surroundings are

important. „Enemies can easily overwhelm the player if they just stand still and attack, so the player needs to make smart decisions about how to tackle the enemy“, Andrew explains.

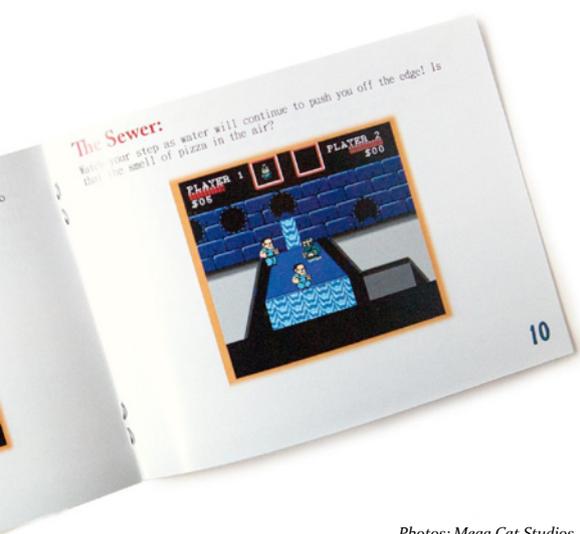
The music throughout the game is fresh and has that certain tempo you'd expect for such a theme. It also clearly nods to its paragons on the system. Graphically, „Almost Hero“ is also a great looking NES title with colorful and detailed backgrounds and a nice little hint here and there to classic games: Does it smell like Pizza in the sewer? And doesn't that turtle shell over there look familiar somehow?

You can tell that the programmers had a good time making this game – and it certainly shows. The complete game with box and manual can be ordered for around 50 dollars. If you're just after the cartridge, that will still make 40 dollars. (bk)

<https://megacatstudios.com>



Everyone can be a hero – as long as it's a well-skilled ninja. Almost Ninja is a fast-paced run down the memory lane of the best beat 'em ups for the NES.



Graham Axten's the Bear Essentials



Help Bear collect fruit for the winter in this new platform game featuring simultaneous music and sfx. Face 60 enemy types while exploring 60 screens spread out over 6 unique areas! Free download from pondsoft.uk - Jewel case disk version £10

"Bear?" asked Hedgehog, "what's that you've got there?"
"It's a new C64 game from POND". Bear said with a big smile on his face, "and it's got a ME in it, look!"
"Oh", squeaked Hedgehog. "Can I have a go?"



pond