



Cherry Darling interview



Recently, besides the many spectacular but widely known ports, we introduced some well-made games as well. In the last issue on one short page an Arcanoid clone called Voxelnoid have been highlighted. In the meantime some other games also aroused our interest to learn more about the previously unknown Cherry-Darling team. Especially a video from the team proved this fact which shows the arcade flying shooter experience in for us, enthusiastic players. Let's see what we definitely have to count from them to get.

AM: Please introduce the team members briefly.

CD: Cherry Darling's two core members are Daniel "Daytona675x / Inqui" Müßener (age 37; Concept, Code) and Markus "H2o" Kunkel (age 40; Concept, Design, Gfx, Web-site). Depending on the particular game requirements there are other people involved too when it comes to music, sound and additional graphics (esp. Daxx, Triace, Lycan, WOTW, Teis, WODK, Brainbox, DSM, skIn) as well as testing (AmigaGuru, Yasu, tommysammy, BSZili and many more friends & family).

AM: What's your past in terms of Amiga-developments or simply using of any models?

CD: Markus is pretty well known in the Amiga demo scene for decades, being a member of Rebels and TRSi and a frequent Revision helper. He's credited on quite some great scene demos.

Daniel has no scene-roots. He simply learned programming on the Amiga and C64 and rediscovered his Amiga-love about three years ago when he noticed the existence of those NG systems.

Most of the other team "freelancers" are demo scene members and as such often have Amiga roots in one way or the other.

AM: What was developed by you all as a group or individuals, which is the one you're most proud of?

Daniel: I'd say the NG Amiga Battle Squadron "enhanced" ports for Cope-Com were something to be proud of. Markus: To be proud of would be the wrong term maybe, but concerning games I still like our Card game. But since more prods will appear soon...

After all we're proud of any production we actually release :) And probably Ace of Hearts is the one we're most proud of until now if you want it to put that way, because it features the most "professional" appearance with its high quality CD box.

Q: Why have you decide to support the Amiga and compatible platforms?

CD: Because we like to :) Supporting Amigas is fun.

And because we can :) When Daniel developed the Battle Squadron "enhanced" versions for Cope-Com he also used and enhanced his portable C++ framework to support all kinds of NG

Amiga platforms. Since then it's very easy for us to have Amiga support for all our games, as long as the respective game features are supported by the target OS. This means: all 2D titles can be compiled for all systems without any further adjustments. With 3D titles it's a bit different; naturally AOS4 RadeonHD systems are not supported then until now. Although some games (e.g. Voxelnoid) may kind of work by using Wazp3D, but not without graphics bugs, of course.

AM: Which was the most successful Amiga game you made? When do you evaluate a process as successful? How Amiga releases are performing compared to other platforms?

CD: Successful in terms of financial success? Ace of Hearts. We earned enough to compensate the CD production costs.

Other than that... Unless it's about honor and fun: there's no success. Sales are low and donations are even lower. We guess you simply cannot expect financial success on the current Amiga market.

VoxelBird and Voxelnoid were presented on demopartys and both were ranked 1st in the respective competition. So in that terms we consider both as being successful.

AM: Could you please introduce the Wings Battlefield – Duel Edition in details? We see a really promising production in it. What are the main features even which didn't unveiled yet in the short video you've shared already.

CD: Wings Battlefield is some sort of a modernized variant of the C64 game ACE II. The general "behind pilot" view style is borrowed from Cinemaware's Wings. But here it's all about head-to-head near-ground air combat above complex terrain, with lots of hills to hide etc. And since you can play it with up to 4 players simultaneously the game experience is also a bit like a Bomberman session.

Actually all main features were already mentioned in the video: up to 4 players via split screen, player profiles, CPU players, procedural level editor, online high scores, TATE mode (= rotate your monitor by 90 degree to allow for better split screen areas, especially in 2p and 3p modes), FSAA (if your GPU is capable enough), native support of RadeonHD systems without 3D drivers on AOS4, localizations (anybody wants to do a hungarian translation?).

AM: What will be the min/max/recommended configuration for running the game, (CPU, gfx-

card, OS version, etc.)? Can it run even on a CybertormPPC with CVPPC or will even the mA1 be too weak to play it?

CD: The game features quite a lot performance / quality controls. So even a slower CPU should be okay. AROS: x86, 3D card. MorphOS: 3D card. AOS4: a mA1 should do. You'll need either a RadeonHD or a Radeon Warp3D compatible gfx-card. Don't expect it to run on classic Amigas, at least not in a playable way. Some textures are pretty large and there a many. Of course they could be scaled down to somehow get it to work but then it'll just look absolutely ugly. The poly-count is also pretty high. Even if you reduce the terrain quality etc. to the minimum we doubt that it'll be fun - if it runs. We can't test and therefore we don't promise anything. Btw.: other version aren't planned, this is an Amiga-only title :)

AM: Will there be a version for LAN gaming too, for more than two players to be challenged simultaneously, as a small World of Warplanes with different planes, selectable maps? Will the map-editor be available within the game or with a later release?

CD: For now there'll be no LAN/WAN option. It's just too much work to get that 100% right. If the game turns out to be rather successful we'll probably add that later. (This feature has been implemented since then :).

However, as being said, up to 4 players can play simultaneously via split-screen. A procedural map-editor similar to LotusIII's editor is included. Like in LotusIII the level settings are converted into an alpha-numeric string you can use to easily share levels with friends. There won't be different types of airplanes. The same for all. However the plane's / player's colors can be freely adjusted.

AM: Is it true that the gfx engine doesn't use the Warp3D, but the Composition instead? Why was this decision made? What performance do you expect against using the W3D?

CD: The gfx engine can do both. There's a Warp3D version for systems that support Warp3D. But there's a special build that uses Compositing instead. We wanted to give all those AOS4 users who bought costly new hardware but are still waiting for those 3D drivers promised 3 years ago (users like ourselves) a real native 3D gaming experience for the Radeon HD 4/5xxx setups they bought. And with Compositing we get at least some hardware support in form of a filtering / blending triangle-pusher.

The performance on such RadeonHDs is actually higher than on current Warp3D supported hardware like the Radeon 92xx. That's because a) Warp3D (or the R200 driver, who knows) is slow (MorphOS with the same hardware is about twice as fast), b) Warp3D is buggy (e.g. triangle-strips are broken, forcing us to use a slower render-path) and c) those RadeonHD GPUs are very fast, even the pretty limited Compositing-APIs can't kill performance ;)

AM: When will be a playable demo available?

CD: When it's done :) Hopefully this first quarter of 2015. But since we already got delayed we'll better not give a concrete release date. It's those damn last 10% that eat 90% of the time. That and some personal issues got us delayed.

AM: When will be the full game released, what is the estimated price? Also a big boxed version will come or it just will be ready to download from the CD site?

CD: It will be released at the same time as the free playable demo. We didn't decide yet if there will be a boxed version. And we haven't made a decision regarding the price yet. A download version probably will be around <= 20 €, a boxed version maybe about <= 30 €.

AM: How do you see the future of the Amiga, the AmigaOS and compatible NG systems' future?

CD: In our opinion the NG systems will remain what they are now: niche systems for hardcore and die-hard Amiga fans. We don't expect them to become even near competitive to main-stream OSes, neither regarding amount of software available nor regarding OS features like real multi-core-support nor regarding number of users.

But although this may sound like a "dark future" we don't think it is. It's just our realistic view: it's a niche and it will remain a niche. Nevertheless NG Amiga systems are and will remain fun. And we believe it will be that way for quite some more years – until the last Amigan passes away :) We'd be more than happy though if some modern techniques like OpenGL / GLSL were fully supported someday. But then again: part of the fun is probably to make things work even on such limited systems.

Anyway, to ensure the future of NG Amigas it's most important to have hardware supply. Affordable hardware. AROS is on the safe side here. MorphOS hardware is affordable at least, hopefully the supply of old PPC Macs never runs out. With AmigaOS4 that's a different story. Even the cheapest systems are quite costly. Let's just hope that our development system never dies... A-EON's machines are just insanely costly; we don't really see the point of such developments. Yes, great machines, no doubt on that, but at about 3k €?! Phew, no way. ACube with its new Sam460cr is on the right track – still quite an amount but at least somewhat acceptable considering the small market.

Therefore: unless the price of AmigaOS4 hardware doesn't drop significantly or AmigaOS4 gets ported to cheaper hardware like PPC Macs we think that AOS4 has the least bright future of all those NG Amiga flavors. After all AOS4 is the flavor where you get least for most bucks at the moment, last not least also because of its bad gfx driver situation. Hopefully this gets fixed, the sooner the better. The RadeonHD 4650 and 5450 in our development machine get rusty :)

AM: In your thoughts what is that key component which is missing from the AOS / MOS / AROS systems to enable high quality applications' developments? What would you ask from Hyperion and/or A-Eon during the next period?

CD: AOS4: the embarrassing lack of 3D support. A real show killer. And to be honest: even the compositing 2D APIs are quite bad. Lots of bugs (e.g. transparency artefacts on R200 in 16bit mode; crash on R200 if you feed more than x triangles into CompositeTags), lack of features (no multiplicative blend mode; no mul-

texturing (only dumb alpha textures); no vertex colors; no normalized texture coordinates (you always have to supply real texture dimensions, which is totally dumb since it complicates things when you want to change texture-sizes) and consequently no texture repeat (a real show-killer in some situations); and, and, and. Sometimes you really start to ask yourself if the guys who designed this ever used it or even tried it in the real world and not with some sort of 3D Hello World app.

We actually already sent lots of bug-reports and a wish-list to Hyperion quite some time ago. Result: not one fixed bug, wish-list canceled. Although we were also told back then that Warp3D was deprecated (which was the reason not to further discuss or wish-list); but hey, looks like it is not that deprecated after all, at least if you look at the AmiStore. So if they changed their mind on that issue, maybe they also considered enhancing Compositing, who knows. Maybe the next SDK update got some nice surprises for us, we'd be more than pleased!

MOS and AROS don't suffer from such massive key components missing. Well, at least nothing we need is missing :) However, it depends on what your expectations are when you say "high quality applications development". Do you expect the latest AAA game titles to appear? Do you expect Unity3D to be ported? Forget it :) Do you expect more open-source applications like Firefox to be ported? Yes, to some degree this will happen for sure, all NG systems are capable enough (or at least not far from being capable enough) to allow such ports.

Or do you expect more high quality games from us or other small developer groups like us? Will happen :)

AM: Which are those utilities or tools which would help your work if those or an up-to-date version would be available under AmigaOS? What would you need to completely move your projects' developments onto Amiga?

CD: We are used to use tools like Photoshop and RAD development systems which we simply don't want to miss. And even if those or truly comparable applications would magically appear on NG Amigas: why should we do such a move? All our development tools work well on Windows or OSX. We don't need Amigas for that task.

We need Amigas for one thing only: for fun (and of course for testing and playing the final games).

We chose what's best for a task. And for development and work that's other OSes and cross-compilers.

Last not least it's also a productivity issue. For development we need a rock-solid OS that doesn't require a re-boot every time you make a mistake. And that's something AmigaOS doesn't deliver by design. So, unless Amiga systems don't offer the same stability as those mainstream OSes it would be stupid to make such a move. It would simply result in fewer games from us. Luckily that's not an issue.

AM: Any plans after Wings Battlefield DE release?

CD: There are two casual games that are almost done, "only" levels / achievements / maybe some fine-tuning missing. Most likely we'll finish those before moving on. On the other hand Revision 2015 is approaching. Maybe we'll come up with a new small game for that event, but only if Wings Battlefield gets finished in time.

AM: Would you like to share anything else with the Hungarian Amiga Community, our readers?

CD: We also have some friends from Hungary, who always supported us in all ways (demo scene & game dev.). We cannot mention everybody here, but let's take the chance to send at least a big "hello and thank you" to the Hungarian musicians from "Strayboom" who contributed perfect sounds and sfx – although the respective games aren't finished yet... Sorry for that, but be assured: forbearance is not acquittance :) And another big "thanks"

to BSZili for providing us with a fresh AROS cross-compiler! And thanks to you for that Amiga Mania interview and YOU for reading it :)

Reynolds



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