In Emulation

Damian Walker continues the series with a look at the Commodore 64.

The Commodore 64 was popular in a huge number of countries, not least in the U.S.A., where traditionally the market for home computers was much bigger than in Europe.

The C64 was quite a capable system for the time. It was launched in about 1982 and had a 64 kilobytes of memory. It could handle graphics at resolutions of 320×200 or 160×200; the higher resolution suffered from limitations in putting too many of its 16 colours too close to each other, but the lower resolution relaxed these somewhat, and the hardware sprites, gliding "in front of" the screen, were free from these restrictions. The C64 was distinguished by a soft palette of pastel shades, which allowed more realistic backgrounds than on machines restricted to primary colours. Sound was impressive, with 3 channels, each capable of a variety of expression.

The emulator that allows you to run Commodore 64 games on EPOC32 is called E32Frodo, an EPOC port of the Frodo software available on some other systems. Frodo was written by Christian Bauer, and the EPOC32 port was done by Alfred E. Heggestad and Jal Panvel. Frodo includes everything that's necessary to boot a virtual C64, so you needn't find your own ROM files. Just install from the SIS file, and run; it's as simple as that. Files in D64 (disk) and T64 (tape) format are supported. The program runs on everything except the Revo, whose screen is not tall enough to accommodate the C64 display.

Games are freely available for the C64, though some sites are more circumspect about offering them than others, so you may have to hunt around for games. The line between abandonware and plain illegal downloads, for those who make the distinction, is not as clear on the C64 sites as it is on the Spectrum sites.

The Commodore 64 excelled in arcade-style games, and it is probably for these that players will want to install Frodo. *Armalyte* and *Great Giana Sisters* are two good examples. The C64 was very strong on role-playing adventure games, of which *HeroQuest* is a good example, though you might think of it more as a board game conversion than a straight role-playing game. There are some good games in other genres, such as the excellent strategy game *M.U.L.E.*

I found the emulator a little clunky, compared to Z80 reviewed last month. Certain EPOC conventions are not followed (like Ctrl-E for Close), and the file browser doesn't work properly, so when loading disks you have to type the filenames in full. It also fails to run many C64 games, probably due to difficulties emulating the 64's complex architecture. Not having had a C64 myself in its heyday, for a game selection I deferred to the users of the Lemon64 web site, and downloaded their top 20 rated games. But of those, more than half failed to run. One can experiment with settings to coax a few games into action, but a success rate of less than 50% will leave many C64 owners, looking forward to a nostalgic look at their favourite games, somewhat disappointed.

The best online resource for the C64 is Lemon 64 (www.lemon64.com). This site offers limited downloads, though, and those wanting to find games to play will be better off at Gamebase64 (www.gb64.com). Cronosoft, (www.cronosoft.co.uk) also sells new C64 games.

Despite its problems running certain games, Frodo is a good effort and is well recommended for those interested in the C64. Next month I'll look at the Apple II.

This month brings some interesting news, showing that the EPOC32 platform still isn't dead. I've also had queries about the programming tutorials in earlier issues of *EPOC Entertainer*, so we may have more budding games developers adding to the library of games available—who knows?

There are another two reviews for you in this issue. *Agora5* is a game that's intrigued me for a while, with my interest in abstract board games and with its spectacular graphics. Also reviewed this month is *NetHack*, a game well known on Unix and other platforms, which is also available on EPOC32.

The series on playing games under emulation on an EPOC machine continues, this month with a look at playing Commodore 64 games on your Psion. Like the ZX Spectrum covered last month, the "64" was, and still is, a popular machine with plenty of games available to play.

If you've any comments or queries about the content of *EPOC Entertainer* then please get in touch!

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News: A New Game Release

Damian Walker introduces Intergalactic Space Rescue, a game released last month.

In May a new game was released for EPOC32. *Intergalactic Space Rescue* puts you in control of a space rescue ship. You take part in up to 10,000 rescue missions, in which you must find a stricken starship in a sector of space and rescue its crew. Your progress through the missions will depend upon the effectiveness of each rescue.

The game works on all EPOC32 machines from the Osaris to the netBook. It's completely free to download and play, and for the curious the OPL source code is also available.

Feel free to try it out and let me know what you think!

By	Damian Walker
URL	psion.cyningstan.org.uk
Licence	Freeware
Compatibil	Osaris Revo S5/5mx Geofox S7

A Gamer's Market
Damian Walker reviews Gilles Contastin's Agora5 board game.

Prolific EPOC32 author Gilles Contastin has been mentioned before in the pages of *EPOC Entertainer.* Issue 5 put all his games in the spotlight while issue 11 reviewed his Cruel5 card game. Now it is time to look at a board game, Agora5.

Agora5 is the EPOC32 implementation of the interesting modern abstract board game Agora. This is an apparently rare game that's difficult to track down on the net, not least because many other things have also been named after the ancient Greek market place. But some rules are available at *http://homepages.di.fc.ul.pt/~jpn/gv/agora.htm* on the excellent *World of Abstract Games* web site.

The game is played by two players with eight pieces per side on a board which is depressed towards the middle, like the inside of a crater. Pieces move around the board one square at a time, and one may capture an adjacent, lower stack by moving your piece on top of it. You may also subvert an adjacent higher stack by slipping your piece underneath it; if you gain the majority of pieces on that stack you can take control of it. The varying heights of the playing spaces on the board mean that smaller stacks can be more powerful than taller ones, if stood on higher ground.

Gilles Contastin's version of this game is designed for the Psion Series 5 only. It will run properly on the 5mx, Ericsson MC218 and Psion netPad, and in letterbox mode on machines with larger screens. But there is no version for the Psion Revo or Oregon Scientific Osaris. The game runs only in French, so players who do not understand this language will need to look at the rules on the net.

The first thing that strikes me about this game are the excellent monochrome graphics. A moonscape is displayed as a backdrop, perhaps in allusion to the crater-like topography of the board. For some reason Einstein's face is imposed upon this. But the board itself is impressive too, being shown in a 3-dimensional perspective (it would be difficult, of course, to represent the game in a 2-dimensional view). Sound, though, is completely absent.

I was hoping to use Agora5 as a good way to learn how to play. It's a shame, then, that either a bug, an oversight, or a non-standard rule set has spoiled the playability of this game. One tactic available is to surrender a piece to a higher enemy stack; this apparently suicidal move does increase the proportion of your pieces in that stack, however, and makes it easier to subvert in subsequent moves.

Unfortunately it seems that, under some circumstances at least, this tactic is only available to the computer. At first I thought my understanding of the rules was at fault, and that
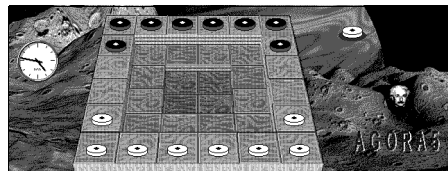
some forgotten rule was preventing me from surrendering to a stack. However, at one point I saw the computer surrender a piece to one of my stacks but the message "INTERDIT" greeted me when I tried to make an identical move at the opposite side of the board. This, of course, ruins the playability of the game completely.

For this reason I can't recommend the game, except perhaps as a demonstration of the graphical capabilities of the Series 5. For that purpose, it's difficult to beat.

By	Gilles Contastin
URL	Pagesperso-orange.fr/psions5-3495/
Licence	Freeware
Compatibil	S5/5mx
Rating	☆☆

An Adventurous Rogue
A review by Damian Walker of the famous NetHack game on EPOC32.

Owners of many computers are familiar with the game Rogue, or other games regarded as "roguelike". These games, originating on Unix computers with terminals, use text characters to depict a dungeon through which the player wanders, fighting monsters usually shown as letters, collecting treasures usually shown as symbols. The spartan, or downright ugly, appearance of these old games is regarded by some as part of their charm. Because of the playability of these games has guaranteed their longevity, the 1970s aesthetic has been preserved
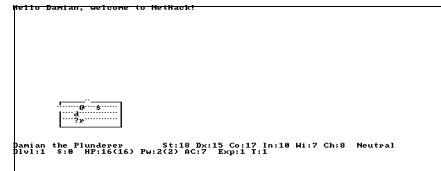
through to the present day.

In Nethack this genre reaches its zenith. The visuals are no better than in Rogue, but the level of sophistication and charm is far greater. As well as the usual monsters and treasures, Nethack adds such things as shops, and a companion on your troubles—usually a little dog or a fluffy kitten—who nips at your enemies and consumes their corpses. Duncan Booth has ported the game to EPOC32.

While some versions of Nethack have been spruced up with simple tiled graphics, the EPOC32 port remains faithful to the original, with the character represented as an @ sign and the dungeon inhabitants as letters. Some graphical characters have been introduced, though, looking a little like the IBM character set. So walls are made up of solid lines (not +, - and | as in the original), and a few things you come across in the dungeon are truly graphical, such as fountains and boulders. But I think it a shame that the opportunity was not taken to adopt an appearance more like Castle III (reviewed in *EPOC Entertainer* 10).

The user interface is terrible, though that's inherent in the game and can't be blamed on the EPOC32 port. There are so many different things to do in the game that it's difficult to provide easy ways to get at them all, especially in a 1970s Unix fashion. Very often as you're starting out with Nethack you'll be pausing in the game to find out exactly how to open a box, drink from the fountain, or the many other things you might want to do. Copious documentation, including some good additions for EPOC, help for those with the patience to read.

The game play makes up for the shortcomings in the graphics and interface, though. As well as a variety of monsters and treasures, there are other things to add to the game. Shops and your little companion I've mentioned already. There are scrolls and potions, all of which have different effects, some stranger than others. There's also a little humour in the game too.

Being a port of a Unix game, there are some little compatibility issues. A word of warning: *never* break out of the game with Ctrl+Shift+Fn+K if you can possible avoid it. The program finished, but kept the 2M of memory it borrowed until I soft-reset the computer. But a positive side to the compatibility issues is that the game works on all EPOC32 machines from the Osaris to the netBook. It may be difficult to run on 4MB EPOC machines, though, if you're using them for anything else.

Given that adventure and role-playing games aren't EPOC32's strong point, I'm happy that Nethack has been ported to the platform and can recommend it to anyone who likes the genre. Be prepared for a disappointing visual experience, though, and a steep learning curve with the controls.

By	Duncan Booth
URL	
Licence	Freeware
Compatibil	Osaris Revo S5/5mx Geofox S7
Rating	☆☆☆☆