



# MCCC News



Fort Worth

May 2017

Dallas

## Commodore and Commodore UK

Welcome to tax times. I hope everyone has theirs squared away by the time they read this. It's been a stunningly rough tax season for me. After losing my father in 2015, much of his assets which went to me qualified as 2016 income, (even if most of it was stuff I didn't have direct access to) bumping my tax burden up by a factor of twelve. I'm managing, but funds are going to be tight for a good while, Wish me luck, 'cause I could use a little.

Since this has been my "can't catch a break" year so far, my long-running quest for the Vampire A600 accelerator card has hit a snag as well. Around the end of March, it was posted on Amiga.org and Kipper2K's website that all V600 orders had been addressed, and I used up all my available restraint to not scream curses loud enough to explode my house, because "all" did not include mine, which had been in the hopper for at least six months. Whether a clerical error or a spam filter is to blame, I can't say, but apparently I missed out, and now I have to get in contact with Kipper2K, who is far worse at responding to email than I am (which is saying something), and pray to all available deities that my requests don't fall in the same bottomless pit the first one did.

I'll leave the Amiga sphere news to our club president, save for one thing. There is a Kickstarter

backed project for a book, which has met its initial funding goals: "Commodore: The Inside Story," by David Pleasance, a name you might remember as the boss of Commodore's UK branch. There have been several books and video documentaries on Commodore and the Amiga over the last decade or so, and most seem to cover similar ground. This book looks to offer a unique perspective, written by the person who ran a successful arm of Commodore despite the mismanagement of the home corporation. (It was successful enough to be a serious contender for buying out the bankrupt Commodore in 1994.) I imagine this promises to be an interesting read once published.

I often wonder if the decline of Commodore and Amiga was inevitable, or if better decisions and better oversight could have kept the Amiga platform going as far as the present day. It's no secret that Commodore shot themselves in the foot enough times to eventually bleed to death, often through shortsighted decision-making and a frequently tone-deaf understanding of the systems they wanted people to buy.

It's easy to point to Commodore UK as a model of Amiga success, but it was also catering to a specific market which was quite different to one like the USA. To give an example, home computers like the Sinclair ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, Atari ST, and Amiga (among others) were the primary home gaming platforms in the UK for most of the

1980s and were marketed as such, while consoles like the Nintendo Entertainment System that dominated the US from 1985 on had a far lesser market presence. It wasn't until Sega's Mega Drive/Genesis and the Super Nintendo came out that the home computers' dominant grip on the UK games market began to slip. It's hard to say if the marketing techniques that worked in the UK would have worked in the US. While an Amiga can easily best the NES in game-playing prowess, (with the possible exception of sticking with the single-button Atari joysticks for way too long), computers were still generally more expensive and less convenient to "pick up and play" than the average game console, even if they were more powerful and versatile.

Still, it's widely considered a mistake that Commodore pushed the infant Amiga as a business machine instead of a game machine, marketing and pricing it accordingly, despite Jay Miner's original vision of a powerful game/computer hybrid system. The Amiga only escaped the exclusive domain of early adopters and hackers/tech enthusiasts when the A500 and A2000 models were introduced, splitting the "personal" and "professional" Amiga markets and helping the Amiga flourish in the gaming market (especially in the aforementioned UK), and bringing the Commodore Amiga to its strongest point in its history. This was thanks in part to some rather sane management by then-CEO Thomas Rattigan, who was of

course fired shortly afterward. It's hard to say if he was directly responsible or if it was more a "right place, right time" thing, but it would seem Commodore would have done better without bumping Rattigan.

I suppose you could say the same about kicking out Jack Tramiel, but historical evidence strongly implies we probably wouldn't have gotten the Amiga we did, or possibly any Amiga at all, if he was directly involved, so I'll give that one a pass.

As previously mentioned, the UK branch of Commodore was quite successful in its own market, more so than Commodore as a whole, and their profits undoubtedly propped up the global company more than once. While it's far from a given that what worked in the UK would work elsewhere, it would seem reasonable to me at least that the UK branch should have been the go-to consult for marketing and related decisions, even if their advice was not used. Surely someone who helped the Amiga go toe-to-toe with dedicated game consoles and make the CD32 the top CD game console in its market (for its very short life) knows something.

Outside of gaming, the Amiga's most successful professional arena was that of desktop video, thanks

to the machine's power in fast-moving graphics and video scan rate, and especially Newtek's Video Toaster, which, paired with a "big box" Amiga, could replace tens of thousands of dollars in video switching equipment for only a few thousand. It wasn't exactly in Commodore's nature to do so, and they historically preferred the mass market to the niche market, but I think it would have been in their best interest to form a "strategic partnership" with Newtek, sharing info and steering technological directions to enrich each others' market presence, and keep a dominant hold on the desktop video market as long as possible.

With a stronger position (and a

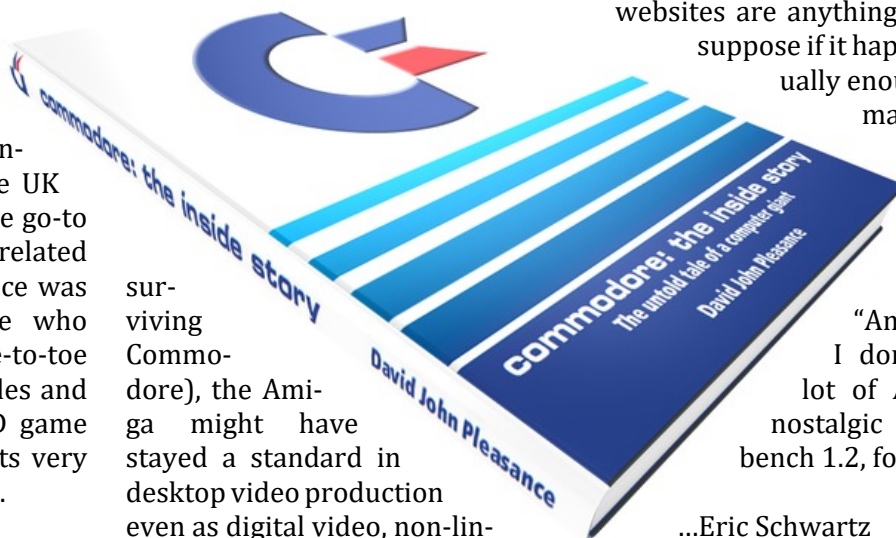
surviving Commodore), the Amiga might have stayed a standard in desktop video production even as digital video, non-linear editing, and high definition took over. It's hardly a sure thing. After all, Atari, Nintendo, Sega, and

Commodore didn't stay top dogs of their respective markets forever, but it's always easy to think about what might have been.

Who knows what the Amiga might have been if Commodore was competent enough to survive to the present day. It might be unrecognizable compared to when Commodore went under in 1994. Microsoft/ Windows and Apple/ Mac OS are very different from their 1994 selves after all. Today we have Amiga OS4, MorphOS, and AROS to show us what might have been. Then again, an "evolved" Amiga could have wound up as standard Intel PC architecture running some UNIX-derivative operating system, like so many others today. It may yet happen, if discussion threads on Amiga and MorphOS websites are anything to go by. I

suppose if it happened gradually enough, not too many would complain about changes or loss of "Amiga-ness." I don't know a lot of Amiga fans nostalgic for Workbench 1.2, for example.

...Eric Schwartz  
From the AmiTech Gazette,  
April 2017



## May Calendar

May 1 — MCCC Chapter Meeting  
7:00 PM — Grand Prairie Airport  
3116 S. Great Southwest Parkway, Grand Prairie

May 1 — Board of Director's Meeting  
Approximately 9:00 PM — Location TBD

May 29 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

MCCC 2507 Tamaron Cove Cedar Hill, Texas 75104  
<http://www.amigamccc.org>