



MCCC News



Fort Worth

October 2018

Dallas

Developments: Current, Past and Future

Instead of news or the like, I'll begin my column this month with a story of my trials. You might remember my column a couple months back, where I noted I was having some problems with my G5 MorphOS system as I worked to install the new 3.11 version of the OS. Well, a couple days ago (as of this writing) a seemingly new problem arose. The system refused to boot—just one of those “I decide not to work today” things computers are known to occasionally do. I was worried, as I use the system for work, and it's a little hard to figure out what's wrong if you can't get the machine running.

With a little fumbling, I was able to get my system to boot from the MorphOS install CD. Since the machine appeared to be working normally from there, I started thinking the problem might be more software than hardware-based. After a little checking, the problem showed itself as a repeat of my issue from a couple months ago—a disk error, but this time getting in the way of the boot process instead of just messing with the web browser. Another difference this time is I still had the redundant OS install I set up before, so after switching around boot priorities, The machine was booting again without a hitch. I tried to run the 'SFSDoctor' to fix the disk error, but this time I was unable to successfully get the fix done. At least I have the spare OS to work from, and was able to (mostly) back up my original OS partition so I could pretty much continue without missing a step, aside from having my old small OS partition sitting there with “do not cross” crime scene tape over it.

I'm not sure exactly what went wrong. It seems as though the disk error(s) are linked to the Odyssey Web Browser in some way, either by some power-off or other interruption occurring while the browser was writing to disk, or possibly the browser cache writing to the same sectors over and over and weakening them, like wearing a path in the carpet. I'm investigating the possibility of directing the web browser caches to a different little-used disk partition, but if not, I'm hoping the 'worn carpet' metaphor is correct, and I've bought several more years by moving to a different, barely-used block. Regardless, I'll have to keep my eyes open for potential disk problems, and prepare for the possibility that I might need to get a new hard drive before too long.

On a different note, one day I was looking some things up and learned that in 1971, the year I was born, the first commercial all-in-one microprocessor chip, the Intel 4004 with the full power of four bits and three quarters of a megahertz, was released. At this point I understood, though in many ways I already knew, that my life has covered the entirety of the modern computer era, the consumer computer era. While I can't say I recall every Altair kit or TV pong machine, I can say I've experienced many of the highlights.

My family got the Atari 2600 VCS when they were a new thing. I remember the 'big three' of 1977, the Apple II, the Radio Shack TRS-80, and the Commodore PET. By the early eighties my family had a Commodore 64, so I was well-versed in the idea of a computer built around a command line and a BASIC language interpreter, largely there to run games and other software from tape, disk, or cartridge.

By the mid-eighties, the sixteen bit era was starting to take hold, along with a paradigm shift. The graphic interface

was growing, along with the mouse and WIMP (windows, icons, menus, pointer) ideas 'borrowed' from the Xerox PARC research group, spawning Apple's Lisa and Macintosh, the Atari ST, the Commodore Amiga, and the latecomer Microsoft Windows (so good PC users stuck with straight DOS for quite a while). Meanwhile the US gaming market was taken by storm (after a crash) by Nintendo, using a machine already considered borderline obsolete in its home market of Japan at the time (but then it got better).

I remember the nineties largely as a war of bits and clock speeds. Game consoles warred with escalating numbers of bits, while their fans argued over whether each was 'really' 64-bit or not, and whether that actually made one better than another. Meanwhile, the computer industry and dealers touted how many megahertz their CPU could pump out, also to much debate as to whether that translated to a faster, smoother experience for the user or not. Unfortunately this was the time we lost Commodore, as it struggled to compete in a market increasingly dominated by Windows PCs (and flail at 'cash cow' consumer goods like game consoles). The Amiga system they helped spawn continued for a while, and attempted to advance in various forms and directions, but it would never regain its (relative) prominence seen in the late '80s and early '90s.

The '00s would see the Intel-based PC become a dominant standard unto itself, where it seemed like every computer was roughly the same hardware, whether it ran Windows, or some breed of Linux, or Apple's Mac OSX. Computers moved from expensive tech toy to kids' educational tool and game machines to an appliance with the internet on it. While some people cared about the specs of their system (bleeding-edge gamers mostly), many didn't really wor-

ry too much about what CPU or video card or OS was part of their machine as long as it did what they wanted it to do. Into that environment stepped a new contender, and along with it a new paradigm. It started with MP3 players and Palm Pilots, which merged with cellular phones, and Apple, finding all these pre-existing ideas and whipping them into slick, easy-to-use new packages that made people believe they were all-new inventions, from iPod to iPhone.

With the 2010s, the 'smartphones,' and their tablet bigger brothers had all but taken over the casual duties people used desktop or laptop computers for a few short years earlier. The hardware from these devices spreads to make our clocks or refrigerators or whole houses into networked 'smart' things. Voice interfaces grow in ability, to the point where we approach a paradigm of living with chatty, "Star Trek"-style computer usage. However, even as computers and devices grow more powerful and ubiquitous, nostalgia grows alongside it, with classic computers and game systems from past decades recreated or emulated, so the past can be relived and people can enjoy the uncomplicated games of their youth, or even play all-new games designed in the style of past classics.

I think a little about our hometown heroes, the Wright brothers. It's worth considering that Orville Wright survived until 1948, and I can't help but wonder what it must have been like for him as one of THE pioneers of powered flight, to see aircraft develop and change over the years, through two world wars, to the early jet age, into something wholly different from the 1903 Wright Flyer, yet built on the same principles.

Sometimes I think the same about computers. An Altair 8800 is not a Commodore 64 is not an Amiga 4000 is not an iMac is not a Samsung Galaxy Note. An Atari VCS is not an Amiga CD-32 is not an X-Box is not a Nintendo Switch. None of them will be what we might see in the future, but all of them are, at heart, the same thing, a microprocessor-based computing device. I hope to have a lot of years left in me to see what is yet to come. I'll be right there to check it out, and hopefully my Amiga and related systems will hang around long enough with me so everyone with their holographic brain-interface will ask me why I'm bothering with the strange dinosaur computers that you have to touch to operate.

...Eric Schwartz
From the AmiTech Gazette,
September 2018

Amiga OS 3.1.4

The new, cleaned-up, polished Amiga operating system for your 68K machine fixes all the small annoyances that have piled up over the years. Originally intended as a bug-fix release, it also modernizes many system components previously upgraded in OS 3.9.

Contrary to its modest revision number, AmigaOS 3.1.4 is arguably as large an upgrade as OS 3.9 was, and surpasses it in stability and robustness. Over 320K of release notes cover almost every aspect of your favourite classic AmigaOS—from bootmenu to datatypes.

Some highlights:

- Over 20 Kickstart ROM modules and many more disk-based core OS components were fixed, updated, or added.

- Native support for all Motorola 68000-68060 CPUs, and a more robust Auto-Configuration process.
- Support for large hard disks, including boot, for any OS 2.x/3.x-compliant controller driver supporting HD SCSI_CMD, TD_64 and/or NSD. Dedicated boot partitions are a thing of the past, even on legacy devices. You can also use variably-sized "super floppies."
- A modernized Workbench as powerful as the OS 3.9 version, including new or refreshed Preference editors in the legacy OS 3.1-"GadTools" style. Its tools such as DiskCopy and Format fully support large media. Printer, hard disk and many other support tools have been fixed and upgraded.
- Remember "Diskdoctor"? It earned its PhD and is now ready to reliably rescue data from your floppies or hard disks.
- The CLI/Shell and many of its commands have been reworked and modernized, now sporting native support for pipes, softlinks, hardlinks and long filenames. New commands support running Workbench programs from the Shell or upgrading ROM modules.
- CrossDOS and the CD-ROM filesystem are now smarter, faster, and multi-threaded, adding Rockridge and Joliet extensions as well as UDF.
- Fully reworked, modernized and bug-fixed printer drivers include support for PCL and PostScript, along with legacy NEC and Epson printers.
- An optional upgradeable intuition.library provides off-screen dragging of windows for native and P96 RTG screens.
- A colorful, professionally designed icon set is included, along with the traditional four-color icons.

October Calendar

October 14 — MCCC Meeting
2:30 PM — Grand Prairie Airport
3116 S. Great Southwest Parkway, Grand Prairie

October 14 — Board of Director's Meeting
Approximately 4:30 PM — Location TBD

November 4 — Newsletter Deadline — 8:00 AM

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