The Vampire V4 Stand-Alone System - Part 3

Well everyone, welcome to 2021! Is everything better yet? No? It's actually WORSE in some ways? Yeah, that tracks. Looks like we're going to need one of those Rug Doctor machines completely filled with bleach to wash the stink of 2020 out. I guess we can only hope the hard-edged, spiky, let's say… extremist elements of the start of this year are smoothed out and moderated so things will be calmer going forward—or just smack 'em all with a large hammer, I dunno.

It's not ALL bad though, and there is some Amiga-related news to be had. On one side, the new version 3.15 of MorphOS in now available from www .morphos-team.net, along with a new SDK. The new release fixes bugs and updates the code base of included application software.

On a different note, there was a recent article appearing on the New York Times website on retro computing, focusing heavily on how prices for vintage hardware and their parts has risen over the years, but giving mention to a number of classic systems, not the least of which being the Amiga, with testimonials from YouTube personalities such as "MsMadLemon." If that's not enough, you can look through the comments on the article for one ostensibly from Snoop Dogg, touting the virtues of the Amiga 2000 and Video Toaster.

https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/08/style/retrocomputing.html

In my continuing series on the Vampire V4, I plan to bring mine to the next meeting, though I don't have a lot new to report on it yet. I was expecting a core update for the FPGA chip around the start of the year, but it hasn't shown itself yet as of this writing. If that changes, perhaps a core update can be demonstrated at the meeting, but don't hold your breath.

One thing I forgot to mention in my more detailed rundown of the hardware ins and outs of the V4 is, not unlike the Raspberry Pi micro systems, it uses a USB mini-plug for its power, requiring a USB power supply/charger. My V4 was sold with one, but for best performance I would recommend something that can output up to 3 amps. Instructions say it can work with less, but my experience seems to say otherwise. Also, like the Raspberry, there is no power switch onboard, so you will have to rely on an external switch of some description to turn the Vampire on and off. (it behaves like a real Amiga, so there is not a software-based shut down). If you have other powered devices attached to the Vampire, such as a video scan converter that I recommended in my previous article, there is a possibility power can bleed to the V4 from those external devices. In my case I connect the V4 and all connected powered devices to the same plug strip, and use the power switch on that strip as the switch for the system.

On the software and operating system side of things, you are welcome to try to construct your own Amiga OS installation on a CF card, but the easier option is one of the off-the-shelf OS distros' readybuilt to work on the Vampire V4. One of these is "Coffin OS," built on an Amiga OS 3.9 install. With a lot of 'abandonware' applications, games, and more included, the legality of which is very dubious. It is also somewhat out of date as of this writing, its last version dated from April of 2020, and not taking into account a few core updates to the Vampire hardware since then.

The other main option is the Apollo team's own "Apollo OS" built upon an optimized version of the open-source AROS. It also includes a lot of Amiga software, games and demos of similar 'abandonware' nature, though perhaps slightly less brazen about its appropriation. Both of these OS distros give you the bulk of what you will need to make use of the V4, including the means to bring files and software in via micro-SD card or connect to the internet using the V4's on-board ethernet connector. (you may need to tweak some software or settings, as Coffin's default TCP stack is a demo version of Roadshow) Both also include a diverse range of software which you can try out to see what works well and what doesn't, and affords you the opportunity to test out your own software.

As I've said in previous installments, the Vampire V4 still has a way to go before it is a mature system, but it is already quite useful, and shows off its potential well. When the hardware through its core updates meshes well with a strong Amiga (or Amiga-based) operating system distro, in the words of Doc Brown, "You're gonna see some serious shit."

…Eric Schwartz
From the AmiTech Gazette
Dayton, Ohio, January 2021

Interesting Links

I miss the Commodore 64, my first console and computer:

https://gizmodo.com/i-miss-the-commodore-64-my-first-console-and-computer-1845885388

Ebay: Cabletronic accelerator for Commodore Amiga CD32:

https://www.ebay.com/itm/CA-BLETRONIC-accelerator-for-Commodore-Amiga-CD32-4-MB-RAM-VGA-JUST-2-KNOWN/254822730284

Raspberry Pi Pico now on sale at $4:

https://www.raspberrypi.org/blog/raspberry-pi-silicon-pico-now-on-sale/

February Meeting Livestream

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMmti9JGy3k