

BOBR album



JAN LOREK
2023

Bobr Album
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Chapter I

The origin

"Retromaniacs", hmm... it's probably such a mainstream term nowadays, after all, we were not "retro" back then. At the time, 8-bit and 16-bit computers and pixelated games were our reality, which simply faded away after a few years. So what? Silence... we were fascinated by the new and rapidly developing technology. This is how, before the age of 30, Lady Nostalgia visited us and said - "Hey, Fellas! You seem to have forgotten something. Where are all your beautiful feelings stored on tapes and floppy disks? Don't you get itchy hands because you don't feel a joystick?" We thought, why not fulfil the dream from those years about publishing my own computer games magazine? Perhaps, we can also try to publish some games on cassettes, floppy disks and cartridges? In the beginning we had an e-zine, which after a while turned into a professional periodical. The same happened with software. The first budget style releases on tapes, up to professional boxed cartridge releases. We did it! We are very glad that a few years ago, internet connections, allowed us to hunker down and gather into a sizable group of retromaniacs that is still active today. This is what happens when nostalgia mixes with passion.

Arkadiusz Kosiarski

The history of Bobr Games begins before the sole proprietorship was founded by my humble self. My friend Szymon never stopped playing on an 8bit Atari. As we were kids, we were sometimes playing at his house on an Atari XE, sometimes at my place on a Commodore 64. For me, there came a moment to sell the old computer, but Szymon kept his. As adults, we were still sometimes playing on his Atari, not only the old games, but also the new ones. There was a Polish company "GR8 software" that was publishing physical releases of games. The boxes were crafted with love, always with some really nice goodies. The one that I liked the most was a release of "Bomb Jake", a "Bomb Jack" clone, which had a yellow cape with the game's title embroidered on it as an additional item. I knew at that time that I would like to deliver a similar product at some point.

Many years later I met Komek, who was at the time the Managing Editor of the "Komoda" magazine. We are still friends, and he agreed to write the foreword for this album. One of my first texts for his magazine was about "Knight and Grail". It was a marvellous game and it also had a wonderful physical release from Psytronik. As I never owned a disk drive for C64, I did not buy that box, hoping to see it at some point as a cartridge, most probably from RGCD. It was good to know, that for my favourite retro computer there are also people that not only create games, but also have enough passion to prepare physical releases.

Soon after “Komoda” became “Komoda & Amiga plus” we started a discussion regarding a physical print of the magazine. It took a while, but Issue 6 finally brought our dream into reality. We did not lose our investment and the magazine grew bigger as a result. It was a matter of time to do the same with the virtual cover disk. As you already know, at that time I did not have a disk drive. I need to confess that I was also missing a real Commodore 64. I was playing only on my PC using an emulator. It was a good moment to change that, as in my head I was already seeing a really nice boxed release with our magazine logo in. Moving forward with the disks seemed like a natural progression, but I had no idea where to get the disks from. During the research I found something different: a company in Poland that is still manufacturing tapes. The prices were reasonable, so the medium was decided, but there was still a matter of what should be on the tape.



As my personal dream was to provide a Collectors Edition, I started to look for an idea that would make both the physical contents of the box and the digital contents of the tape work nicely together. Not long before that, a pretty simple, but entertaining controller called “Sibuga” had been introduced to the retro scene by Roman Werner. It was just a button, created for games that use only the fire button. There were quite a few games based on that simplistic idea, where one of the most notable examples is the widely known “Flappy Bird”, converted to C64 by Sos. We had a feature inside issue 9 of the magazine on both: the Sibuga and the single button games genre. As an addition, the virtual cover disk contained a few productions just for the fire button. Combination of the controller and the games seemed like a perfect match for a physical release.

After a few emails, we had an agreement with Roman regarding the production of buttons. Fellow editors agreed that I can use “Komoda & Amiga plus” as a brand of the release. Jan Lorek signed up to create the cover. There was one last item that was missing, that is hardware to easily duplicate the tapes. It is possible to do with a high quality tape recorder without touching the C64, but I did not have access to such device. It was plausible to connect together multiple Datasettes, but I was told that it may cause some issues if the headers are not aligned properly. The best solution at the time was Ultimate-II+ cartridge, but none were available. The next production batch was planned in a few months. It felt like forever at that time. Luckily, the creator of this fantastic device Gideon Zweijtzter agreed to share a refurbished unit right away.

I felt very lucky at that time, as there was no obstacle that could prevent me from delivering my first physical release. As I wrote in one of the emails to Roman “my main goal here is possibility to write on my resume *Game Publisher*” and it became a reality.



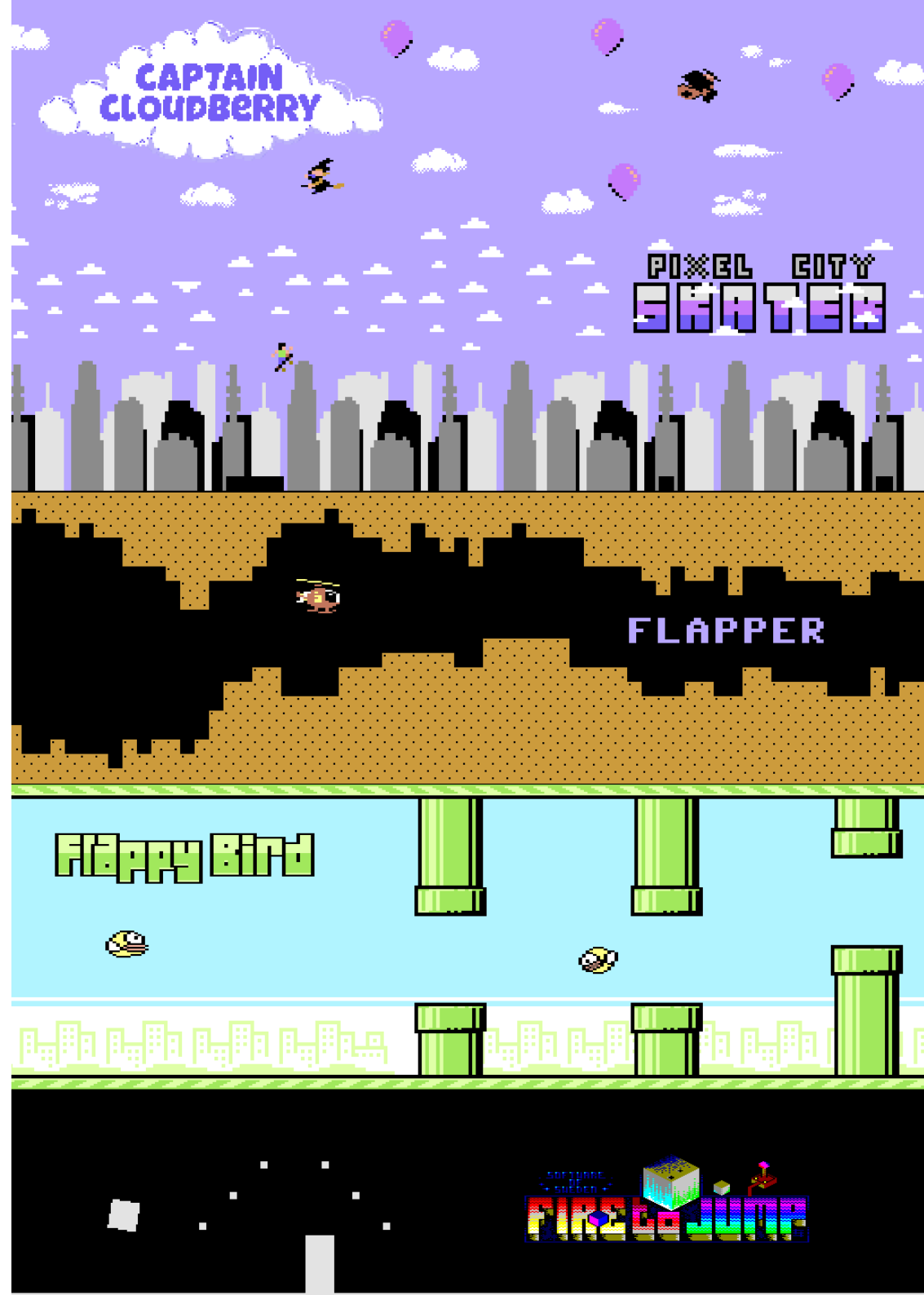
One of the first designs for the tape cover.

On the following pages you will find:

Page 7: Back cover of "Single Button Games Collection".

Page 8: Drawing by Jan Lorek for "Komoda & Amiga plus", issue 1.

Page 9: Cover art by Jan Lorek for "Single Button Games Collection".





JAN LOREK
22.02.2015



JAN LOREK
2018

Chapter II

Moving forward

After the successful initial release it was natural to move forward and prepare a second release. I knew that a lot of things can be made differently, what does not mean better. Biggest change, that eventually stayed for all future releases was the smaller size of the box. The original size was cut in half. The main benefit was easier storage (at least at my end), higher sturdiness with the same thickness of the cardboard and, of course, lower costs. A significant reason for the change was possible emptiness inside the big box. None of the gadgets that I had in mind at the time needed the big box and I felt that it's better to offer a box that is filled, than just release something that fills the space on a shelf. Since then, I also learned that publishing more than one release at once helps to keep the overall costs lower.

As I look back, I consider these two "second" releases to be among the most thoughtful ones. It is easily visible with "Valkyrie: a SEUCK Trilogy", a series of games where you fight against the nazis as a vampire. Eleanor Burns prepared an interesting backstory for each of the games, so it seemed natural to place them in print. With a lot of screens from each game we decided to release the 32 pages booklet as an artbook with a thicker cover coated with silk-touch film. A military patch and a vampiric badge were also inside the box.

"Fire Breath / Little Knight Arthur" contained a fun idea as well, with recipes related to each game: hot chilli and a cool drink

"Sweet Gwendolyn". I think you can match them with games. The box also contained a few stickers, a badge related to the Knight and a bottle opener with main character from "Fire Breath".

Around that time, I knew that I didn't want to stay with tapes forever and I was actively looking for the possibility of putting something into a cartridge. Unfortunately, the negotiations regarding production were not going as expected. I have always ended up with some kind of barrier between me and a person capable of creating the right hardware: no alignment regarding the budget, the time constrains or the overall idea of the release.

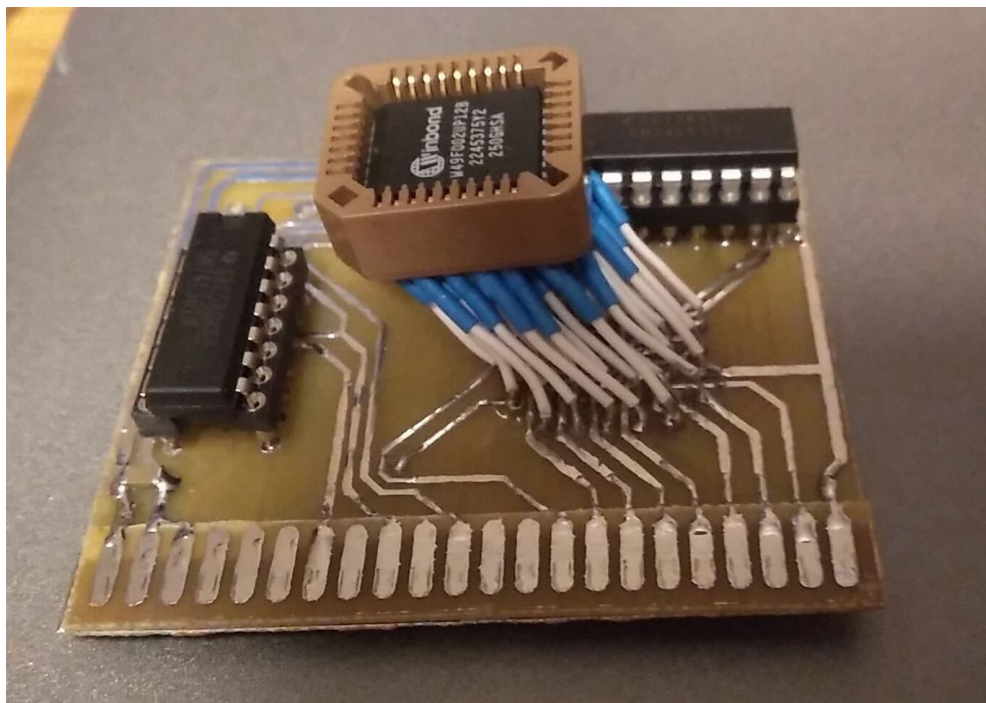
The final two tape releases were not as enthralling as their predecessors. I skipped the box and extra items totally focusing on games, that in my opinion deserved a physical release. I like the short story behind acquiring the right to release of "Digiloi". Tero Heikkinen mentioned that he received multiple requests for the physical release, but only I responded with a promptly assembled .tap file. Being proactive pays off.

Idea to release "Vortex Crystals" started with a graphic I came across on the internet. The design seemed so close to the atmosphere of the game that I reached out to both Richard Bayliss and the website administrator for permission to use their work. Richard helped me earlier with "Valkyrie", so I can say that this part was easy. On the other side it took quite a few weeks and emails to finally reach David who drew the crystal that I liked so much.

Close to that time, at some meeting with friends I was complaining about my issues with a transition from tape to cartridge. From one word to another a fellow Dawid agreed to share his electronics skills for my dream.

A change from tape to cartridge would not be possible without hardware schematics designed by Marko Šolajić and software by

Žarko Živanov that together allowed us to experiment and later start our publishing adventure. The PCBs were redesigned by Dawid to work with modern types of memory and a few other things that I did not understand.



As I look at the first unit that Dawid crafted I still wonder how this little monster could work?

On the following pages you will find:

Page 13: Cover art by Jan Lorek for "Fire Breath/Little Knight Arthur".

Pages 14-15: Photos by Dark Stars Photography used as covers for "Valkyrie Trilogy" tape, box and artbook.

Pages 16-17: Cover art by David for "Vortex Crystals".









Title screen from "Little Knight Arthur" by Pasi Hytönen.



Loading screen from "Night of the Valkyrie" by Igor Errazkin.



A screen from the introduction to "Fire Breath" by Erik Hooijmeijer.



Loading screen from "Valkyrie 2: The Templar" by Igor Errazkin, designed for the physical release.



Loading screen from "Valkyrie 3: The Night Witch" by Igor Errazkin, designed for the physical release.



Loading screen from "Fort Django" by Igor Errazkin.



"Skullbot" by Tero Heikkinen, partially used as a cover for the tape release of Digiloi.



Loading screen from "Digiloi" by Igor Errazkin.



Title screen from "Synthia in the Cyber Crypt" by Raffox, work in progress.



Title screen from "Synthia in the Cyber Crypt" by Raffox, work in progress.



Title screen from "Synthia in the Cyber Crypt" by Raffox, work in progress.



The final title screen from "Synthia in the Cyber Crypt" by Raffox.



*A very enjoyable time spent with my wife.
Each spouse indulges in his or her own hobby.*

On the following pages you will find:

Page 25: *An unused painting by Wioletta Mularz for "Mike Mech".*

Page 26: *Cover art by William McAusland & Tithi Luadthong for "The Nightland".*

Page 27: *Art by Giuseppe Mangini created for RetroMagazine World, issue 37 inspired by "The Nightland".*

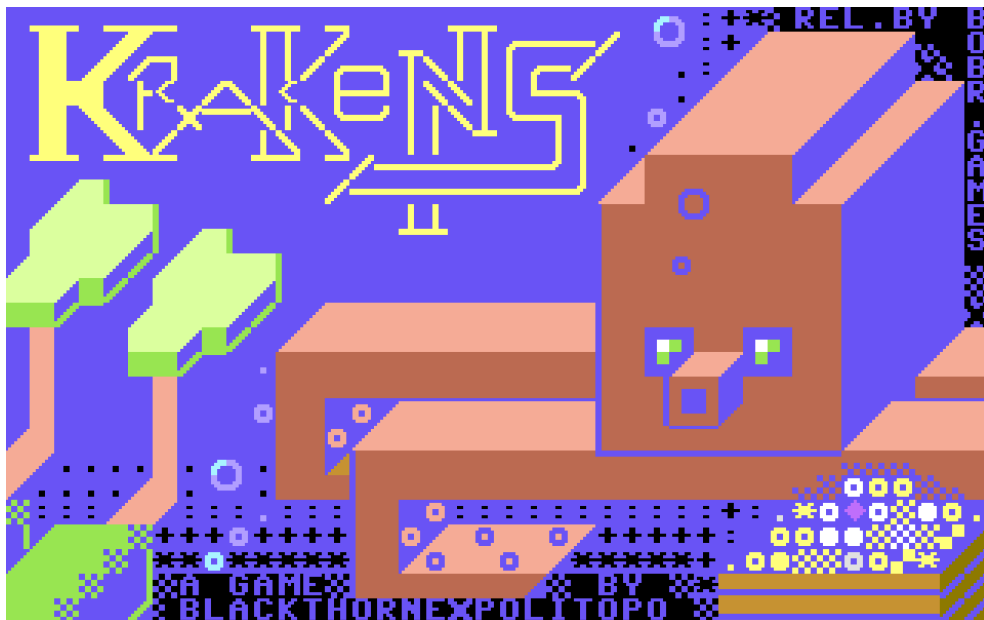
Page 28: *Cover art by Vanja Utne for "Lester".*

Page 29: *Cover art by Tomasz 'Carrion' Mielnik for "Robot Jet Action".*









PETSCII title screen from "Krakens" by Politopo.



A screen from introduction to "Knights and Slimes" by Monte Boyd, with special character - the Beaver.



A screen from the demo "PETSCII Aquarium" hidden on "Underwater Collection", designed by Martin Roscher.



Title screen from "Robot Jet Action" by Tomasz 'Carrion' Mielnik.

The Skilled Illustrator

Jan Lorek

From what I remember, one time Łukasz, also known as Bob8bit, wrote to me. He asked if I would draw a cover for a set of games he was planning to publish. As you can guess, I agreed. It was a cover that developed the theme of the player, which I had already done a sketch of. Later, I drew another cover, then an additional one... A bit of those have accumulated to this day.

I've been drawing almost all my life. I was most influenced by animated series and comic books. That's why my work is reminiscent of drawings we might know from picture stories, especially from the 1980s or 1990s. A big influence was what the TM-Semic publishing house from Poland was releasing. The artwork of Mark Bagley, Graham Nolan, Kelley Jones and others. I know I'm a world away from them, but I trust they wouldn't hold it against me to cite influence from the comics they drew.

Before I started working with Bobr Games, I drew for "Komoda & Amiga plus" and even before that for "Komoda", but I didn't do covers typically for games. It turned out to be quite enjoyable. The way I work on them is that I get information about a particular title or titles in the case of a collection, a few screenshots, a video... And I just draw. Sometimes I write about the resulting covers and publish them in "K&A+".

The most interesting work I had to do was the cover for the game "Tenebra". The way I usually draw is that I make a sketch in pencil, make a copy, apply ink and colour in the computer.

In the case of "Tenebra", I had a charcoal drawing to do. I prepared a sketch, printed out a copy and outlined it in charcoal. The whole thing had to contain a lot of black and I filled in these areas already on the computer. All in all, this is one of the covers I probably had the least work on, but it was exceptional.

I'll also reveal that my wife gave me the idea for the cover of this album. I asked her what I could draw and after a while she expressed her idea this and I sat down to draw. This is how the beaver at the computer came about. I would like to thank her sincerely and dedicate the work on this publication to my wife.

My covers

Single Button Games Collection (tape) - *Player 1*

By the sketch you can see the date of 2015. I made the drawing as an illustration for the text that appeared in the first issue of "Komoda & Amiga plus". If you see a pencil lying on the floor you will probably find a similar one on the album cover. I use one myself for sketching.

Fire Breath / Little Knight Artur - *Player 2*

The cover continues the idea from the first edition of the game set, that of the Player figure who appeared with an axe the first time. This time he has a sword. The sword can also be seen on another one of the series of covers in this style.

Single Button Games Collection (cart.) - *Player 3*

A parallel can be drawn here with the cover of the "Superman" comic, issue 48 (vol. 2), by Kerry Gammill and Bob McLeod. This drawing appeared on the front of the October 1992 Polish issue of "Superman" (published by TM-Semic). I mentioned this as well in the fifteenth issue of "Komoda & Amiga plus".

Space Collection - *Astronaut*

In the bottom left corner you can see the aliens in the flying ship. They are supposed to resemble the figures that allegedly appeared near Opole Lubelskie in the late 1970s. This refers to the so-called Emilcin Event, during which farmer Jan Wolski allegedly met aliens.

ScuttleButt / Kung Poo Fighter / Fart Escape - *Cleaner*

I drew a drawing for the cover without a... background. I added this later with the computer.

Bugs Inc.

For this cover Łukasz assumed a picture drawn without a human. Just insects and a flower. However, I saw it differently and my idea was accepted.

Underwater Collection - *Diver*

Note the date next to the caption. At some point I started crossing out the zero in the computer game-related orders. Interestingly, I similarly wrote down the date next to the sketch I used to prepare the cover for the first set of games.

Caim - *Computer scientist*

There is a bit to write about this cover. One of the interesting things about it is the letter 'W' that can be found in the background. It just so happens that both of my sons have names starting with that very letter. I would also add that I am happy with the red light effect (a coincidence, but I like the "Superman" comic with that title - "Red Glass") that I used here. It was a kind of experiment for me.

Jan Lorek, Kraków, October 2023.

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The Skilled Illustrator: Jan Lorek

The Electronics Wizard: Dawid Bączek

Magnificent Guest Artists:

Monte Boyd

Igor Errazkin

Wioletta Mularz

Appendix I: Secrets

Appendix II: Chronological list of releases

This publication collects the cover graphics, work in progress drawings and paintings, early sketches, 8-bit screenshots, and PCB designs that encouraged gamers to reach for their vintage Commodores over the course of five years.

Between the artwork-filled pages there is also a written history of Bobr Games. Finally, a number of the Artists who regularly contribute to our releases have shared interesting facts about their work and their artistic creativity process.

If you want to learn more about our inspirations, successes and slip-ups, just open this album.

