

# ZINE: THE NEXT GENERATION

BY FISHGUY876 OF BRAINSTORM



First I will answer the question on everyone's mind. "Where Is Zine?" The last issue was released back in February 2008, and without any word since that release a lot of people assume that it has died. I can assure you, that statement is very wrong.

## I GUESS I MUST START BY EXPLAINING HOW I GOT INTO THIS MESS!

I guess I must start by explaining how I got into this mess! Hehe! It was August/September 2009. I was busy working as the co-coder for the new Nectarine and trying to get CVGM.net off the ground, when BitArts and deathy kept trying to recruit me to Brainstorm to work on this project. I knew it was a big project, but to be asked to try my hand as the coder of Zine, by BitArts was a big deal for me. You see, my introduction to the scene happened in the UK (where I am originally from) around 1989. I was playing games on a friend's Amiga 500 when his older brother threw in a disk of the "Red Sector MegaDemo". I was hooked. And now BitArts, deathy, and Axel were asking me to

code Zine. The last disk magazine I had coded from scratch was back on the Amiga in 1996 and so I didn't think it would be too difficult to make a new one. So in October I caved in and said that I would try my best - but couldn't guarantee anything until I got into it to see what could be salvaged, and what had to be recreated!

I didn't start coding the new engine right away, as I was still working hard with Terresque on Nectarine and had a few other projects going on at home and work. One of the CNC machines, which I had just finished building a custom controller for, was being rolled out, so 90% of my time was spent tweaking that hardware and software. And to top it off, in early October, my wife and I brought home our 5th child! It wasn't until around February that I started to work on the project with any seriousness. I began polling various readers, finding out what they did/didn't like about the issue, and asking what they would like to see done differently. I also grilled the Brainstorm guys to find out what ideas they had and what changes they wanted to see. Previous issues of the mag were coded by Smash of Fairlight, and due to time restraints, he was unable to

continue working on the project. Naturally then, the time spent putting an issue together was of concern for them. They hoped that there was an easier way!



Next, I took my notebook full of ideas and suggestions and began pacing around the house and hacking out code. At first, I wanted to try and replicate the article system from the previous issue (using SVG files). I really didn't like the SVG system much, it seemed a little over complex for what was being achieved and I struggled with it for a while. When I did get the basics working, I determined that it wasn't very platform friendly due to dependencies on other libraries (that weren't very portable)

and dropped it in favour of another system that I would implement later. One that you could easily look at and know how it was built. I toyed around with a few different things, until I could find a system balance that worked well for what I wanted to achieve, as I had a pretty clear idea in my head of where I was going.



During the development stages, I was constantly testing the code on my Mac and Linux boxes to make sure everything ran up to speed and that no nasty bugs would creep in unexpectedly. There were a few times where I had to re-code large portions because they didn't work as desired on Linux. I even tested the engine on my PocketPC to make sure it would still work well on low end devices! The new Zine engine has been re-written 3 times, just to get it where I wanted it. Some days I would be working 12-16 hours at a time. The worst part of the project for me was the beginning, as I had so many features of the engine to implement right away. It was quite frustrating to work for almost 1 month straight with no visible output to

the screen. Once I could actually see the engine starting to work and do what I needed it to, then that frustration quickly changed to the need to hurry up and finish the project.

## SOME DAYS I WOULD BE WORKING 12-16 HOURS AT A TIME

Working on Zine while finding time to spend with my wife & 5 children was always a big challenge! Our family was never meant to be run by only one of us, so my wife and I worked together to make sure everyone got the time they needed. Some nights, I would wait until the kids went to bed and then code until the wee hours of the morning. On the mornings following my wife would let me sleep in a bit whilst she got up with the kids. Other nights, she would send me downstairs earlier while she managed to cook dinner, clean up, do bath time and story time and then the kids would march, single file, down the stairs to kiss me goodnight, before she put them up to bed. I know those nights were not easy, so to her, I say "THANK YOU". I love you!

The new engine is quite powerful in terms of what it can do. It's now possible for those who are piecing the issue together to make changes to the layout themselves using a simplified configuration system, and see in seconds just what their changes are going to do to the outcome of the magazine. The new design makes it possible to take an idea for a menu

or layout, add some quick scripting, and have it working in just a few minutes. Adding custom transition effect code is still required in some cases, but most of the commonly used ones were implemented right away and can be re-used at any time. I designed it so that every aspect can be completely configured very easily.

There is still a lot of work to be done on the engine itself, and over the next few issues I will activate more features that everyone should find useful in one way or another. For time reasons, not everything that we wanted could make it into this issue. I ask that you (the readers of Zine) get involved and give us feedback on how we are doing. You can always contact myself or Axel with your comments and questions. I hope that you enjoy the work we have put into this over the last few months!



## WHO IS FISHGUY876?

FishGuy876's real name is Andy Kellett. Born and raised in the United Kingdom (before moving to the US in 1997), he spent the early years of his childhood learning to program on the ZX Spectrum and Commodore C64 machines. After moving to the Amiga, he used AMOS and C/C++ before moving onto PC, Mac, Windows Mobile, and Linux machines.

He also owns F1 and 5th Dimension Licenseware, one of the largest Amiga licenseware companies at its popular time. It was acquired in August 2006 after a brief trip to the UK. He also owns F1-Software.com where he sells some of his older games. Fish has done many ports to various different platforms, and worked for almost 2 years for Epic Interactive (now known as Runesoft) taking big-name games such as Barkanoid 2, Metris, Northland, Software Tycoon and Robin Hood and porting them to various platforms including MorphOS (Amiga), Mac and Linux.

Current projects include CVGM.net and the revived Nectarine Radio (joint coder with Terrasque of the software that powers the site). He is also an administrator on both sites (he owns CVGM.net) where he can almost always be found.