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NEWSLETTER

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Loading Screen

Lunatix (the BBS door game I wrote) turned 30 years old in March. I forget the exact date, but I've been wanting to write a "history of" or "retrospective" of some sort about it, and now's finally the time.

Buckle up, because there's a lot here. Looking back on it all now, anybody seeing the sales and player count numbers I mention would probably say the entire fifteen-year run of the game's three iterations was a colossal failure. We're talking about a few hundred BBS game registrations, a few dozen MBBS/WG registrations, and a player base for *LOG/IC* that peaked at a bit over 300 paying members with a total player base in the low thousands. By today's standards, that's a big flop, but over the course of those years, and as a hobby side-project anyway, I've always considered it a success.



First up, though, some recent events. Then, following the big feature are five mini-reviews of games featuring characters with some form of psychosis or general mental unwellness.

Recent Events

My son is a big fan of the game *Subnautica*, and it was him of all unlikely sources where I first heard today about the drama going down with the game's developer (Unknown Worlds) and publisher (Krafton). There's an article all about this from Ethan Gach at [Kotaku](#), but the short of it is that Krafton (owners of PUBG) bought the studio in 2022 and recently fired their CEO and the two co-founders.

Worse, the early access for *Subnautica 2* has been delayed to 2026, guaranteeing that a \$250 million bonus to those three (with some of it going to the developers), agreed upon in the acquisition, might now be off the table.

Of course, Krafton has a different take on the whole ordeal, which is outlined in that Kotaku article. There's a "Do Not Buy *Subnautica 2*" campaign going on now as a result of it all.

The physical edition of *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver 1 & 2 Remastered* was just released, plus a deluxe edition that's only \$50. I never played these (or the *Blood Omen* games, or *Defiance*), but I've always wanted to.

I like the fact that so many of these older classics are being remade by various studios (ex: Nightdive). Many of them have been games I never played, but even for ones I did, it's cool to see them brought back for a new audience (if that audience will give them a shot). I also bought *The Thing - Remastered* recently.



On Thursday the 10th, PlayStation had a State of Play featuring twenty minutes of gameplay for *Ghost of Yōtei*. I didn't watch (yet), for three reasons. One, I was working at the time. Two, I don't like seeing too much about a big game before it releases, preferring to experience it all for myself when I play. Three, I'm not really all that hyped for the game, despite enjoying *Ghost of Tsushima* (best photo mode ever).

From the State of Play, as captured by a user on Reddit.



I should be hyped for it, and maybe I will be at some point, but I played *Tsushima*, I played *Rise of the Ronin*, and I played *Assassin's Creed: Shadows*; granted, all very different stories set in very different time periods, but on the surface they're all open world games in historical Japan. I guess I've just been in the mood for different sorts of settings.

Later this month, *Lunatic* releases on [Steam](#); but no, it's not mine. It was bound to happen eventually, but somebody else also thought it was a cool title for a game. It's described as a first-person horror game with puzzles.

The name has also been used for a text font (which, according to a copyright, predates my game by more than a year), then an online ticket-ordering site, and quite a few unrelated online communities, but never a video game, to my knowledge. Maybe I should have considered trademarking it at some point early on.



The Making of Lunatix 1.0

In late January of 1995, I started working on the game I'm probably best known for. Well, "known" in the sense that it (and its later iterations) must have reached many thousands players over the years. As a BBS door game, it's hard to know for sure.

I should set the stage, since there's more of a story in that, than in the actual programming that went into it.

I was 23 years old, and a college drop-out by necessity. I'd lost my financial aid in 1993, mostly because I didn't have my head on straight, had stopped going to some of my classes entirely, and failed to maintain the GPA needed for grants and loans. I mentioned in a prior issue that I grew up dirt poor (I kind of hate that phrasing, but it fits), which may help explain how I got myself into the mess I was in during the making of *Lunatix 1.0*.

An acquaintance from college, Rob (I'll refrain from including last names) and his wife had started a computer business. They operated a storefront selling PCs in the same Oklahoma town where we'd gone to college. In late 1993 or maybe early 1994, I'd moved to Kansas to live with my dad and his family. It was mid to late 1994 (I'm thinking maybe October) when Rob got in touch to ask if I'd be interested in moving back there to work for him.

It sounded like a great idea, and I jumped at the chance. Alarm bells should have been going off in my head, but when you've been raised with nothing, you come to expect nothing, and anything is better than nothing. To clarify, my dad was well off enough; but I was raised by my mom and only met my dad for the first time in the early 90's anyway, and he wasn't my biological dad, so I had a bit of imposter syndrome in being there.

Rob offered me minimum wage to work at his store. I wouldn't be selling anything, though. He needed help setting up networks for area businesses. Back then, we didn't have wi-fi. To network the computers in your business, you needed software like "Lantastic" (among others), and you needed network cables run through the ceiling and walls.

In addition to that, I would be doing custom programming for clients. So just imagine it. There I am being propped up as a network professional *and* a software developer, and I'm making minimum wage. Minimum wage was \$4.25 an hour. It's not much better today, but still. I got a raise a few months later. I was then making a whopping \$5 an hour.

Oh, I forgot to mention, Rob and his wife were crooks. That's important to know, as it explains a lot about what comes next. I don't think they *started out* as crooks, and I'm sure they had financial struggles just like I did. Well, not *just* like I did. I often couldn't pay rent, nor utilities (my electricity got shut off for a time, for instance), nor my car insurance, nor a car when mine broke down. Surprise. A person just can't live on minimum wage.

I had been making games for years, although there was never much money in it. Half the time, I did it just for fun anyway.

At some point, I'd really gotten into dial-up BBSs (Bulletin Board Systems). In 1995, the internet was barely a thing, but BBSs had been around for years. You'd dial up and have access to a text-based menu-driven front-end, where you could chat with other users, leave messages, download files (games, utilities, images, you name it), and of course, play online games. One of the best BBS door games ever was *Legend of the Red Dragon*.

Putting In the Work

Games made to run “online” on a BBS were called “doors” because the BBS software would basically launch an external program and pass modem control over to it for the duration, like opening a door. The BBS would drop a temporary file containing basic user information (so the “door” program could keep its own data, know if it was a returning or new user, and so forth).

Most games weren’t meant for simultaneous play. Heck, most hobby BBSs only had one incoming phone line, so it wouldn’t have made sense anyway. There probably *were* some multiplayer door games, but *LORD* wasn’t (short for *Legend of the Red Dragon*), and that’s what I patterned *Lunatix* after.

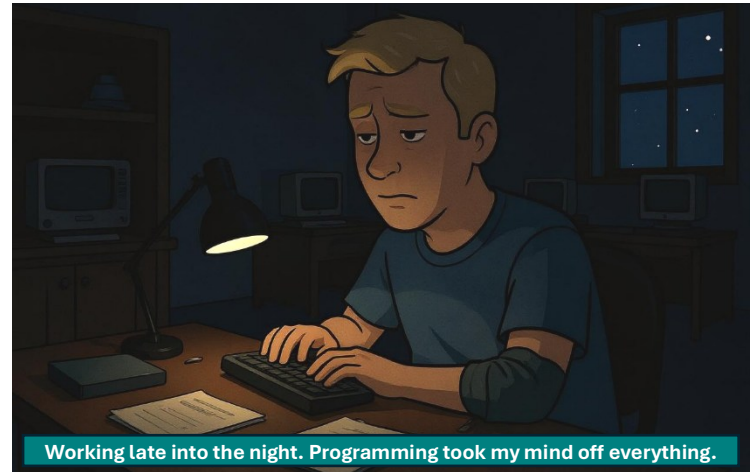
Players could log in and take a limited number of turns: fighting NPC enemies to level up RPG style, buying a better weapon or armor, and doing a few other miscellaneous tasks each day. The multiplayer aspect came from being able to battle other players while they were offline (they’d get a “you were killed by so-and-so” upon logging in the next time), with many of a player’s accomplishments appearing as in-game news for others to see.

Hoping to dig myself out of the financial hole I was in, I decided to write my own BBS game. I called it *Lunatix*, which was a title I’d had in my pocket for a while without knowing what kind of game it would be. The basic premise was that you were a mental patient in a “wacky insane asylum” (which would almost certainly not fly today). It’s an idea I had from playing (but never finishing) the text adventure *Bedlam* a few years prior.

The gameplay, though, was ripped right out of *LORD*: the turns to fight enemies, the number of levels (I think), flirting with a nurse (rather than the barmaid), and so forth. Everything.

Later, I had a lot of good conversations with Seth Robinson, the author of *LORD*. He was a good sport about the blatant rip-off, and I don’t think I was the only one to do it. We traded registration codes for later incarnations of both our games, and I got really involved in developing mods for one of his later games, *Dink Smallwood*. I digress, but you should [follow him](#) on Twitter.

To write *Lunatix*, I would go into the store way early and stay way late (often until after midnight, if I recall). I didn’t own a computer. I couldn’t *afford* a computer. I invested many, many hours over a few weeks to figure out how to write QuickBASIC code that could interact with a modem, and how to read the various drop file formats for different BBSs. I poured everything I had into the game, and I did it on my own time. That part’s important.



Throughout development, and into the months of updates and later releases, I was depressed. Part of it was financial woes, yet I was still young and naïve and probably felt like Rob had done me a favor by hiring me with no college degree, without even questioning the ridiculously low wages. I was also becoming less introverted, going from girlfriend to breakup to next girlfriend at a breakneck pace that had me reeling from one emotional extreme to the other. This all put me in a headspace where writing a game that poked fun or made light of mental illness probably seemed like a good idea at the time.

I don’t remember how Rob got involved, but it was probably the worst thing that could have happened. Did I mention he was a crook?

A Not-So-Great Deal

The fact is, he did get involved. Even though I kept a journal back then, I didn't write much about the specifics, apparently. I was too busy lamenting my latest break-up or trying to figure out how I was going to pay my bills. I may have just brought it up myself because I needed the resources to distribute the game.

He “decided” he should get half the profit from selling registrations for the game. Like most BBS games (and shareware in general), I would distribute a “free” version with only partial functionality or a cap on the maximum level a player could reach, with a one-time registration available to unlock the full game for just \$15. The SysOp (System Operator) of the BBS would register it, not each individual player. I *needed* this to succeed, because I owed money to friends and even living as modestly as possible wasn't sustainable on just \$5 an hour.

I agreed. I don't think he really gave me a choice though. I justified it to myself in several ways. One, I had used a store computer to do the development, even though it was done on my own time. Two, I'm sure there's electricity involved, and the store had to pay that. Three, to distribute the game, I'd need to upload it to other BBSs in other cities and states, and back then, long distance phone calls were a thing you had to pay for; and I'd be doing that at the store. Four, most registrations would be mail-in, and would require printing out the codes to mail back; more expenses for the store. So maybe “justify” isn't even the right word. It probably just felt fair to me.

Some part of the agreement must have gotten lost in the confusion. I had already put in hours of my own time, my own creativity, my own talent. I'd continue making updates to the game as well. That was my half of the bargain.

I'd also handle generating the registration codes, doing distribution, and so forth. Rob would handle... I don't even know. His half, I thought, was compensation for whatever expenses would be associated with that; the phone bill, whatever electricity I used while working early or late, and so forth. Even as registrations started coming in, I was still prohibited from using “work time” during the day for any of it.

Things went downhill quickly when I realized what the agreement *really* meant. Rob's half of each registration fee wasn't to pay the bills. Registrations came to the store with checks made out to the store (I felt that made it more professional), and whatever he and his wife deemed an “expense” came off the top. Our 50/50 split was only *after* those expenses.

It wasn't unusual for me to see very little of the money from those registrations. They came in at a trickle at first, but eventually added up to several hundred registrations and thousands of dollars. Over the course of the next few months, I added IGM support (In-Game Modules) and we sold additional add-ons for the game as well. I even worked on a second BBS game called *TimePort*, which *did* get a green light for some time during the workday (maybe one hour, with the rest being developed in my own time, off the clock).

I'm not sure how much of that money I ever saw. After I left – and I'm getting to that part soon – I added Rob to the game as the psycho janitor who was there only for comedic relief.



What Comes Around Goes

Tensions grew. At one point, Rob demanded I leave my store key when I left. I didn't know if I was being fired, or if he just didn't want me doing additional after-hours work, or what. I think he was probably just having a tantrum. I got it back the next day.

At another point, he made me give him copies of the source code, and even print out a hardcopy, which I later found out was so he could submit it to the Library of Congress in an attempt to copyright *Lunatix* as his own.

He wanted me to remove my name from the game and only show his company name. He even started claiming that my contract gave him complete ownership of every piece of software I wrote while employed there, even though it did no such thing aside from work done as *part* of my employment while on the clock, which this was certainly not.

Keep in mind, I was an hourly employee making *barely* above minimum wage. *Lunatix* was meant to be my ticket out, or at least a way to finally get my life and finances under control. It *should* have been that.

Two things happened later in 1995 that finally helped me get out of that situation. The first is that – according to Rob and his wife – they were victims of a prison-run scam in which \$50,000 worth of computers and peripherals had been purchased with stolen credit cards or via a check that bounced or something. The sales part of the business was never something I was involved in, but if all of that was true, it would have been a massive loss.

The second thing is – and I must preface this by saying *allegedly* even though the statute of limitations has long since expired – they decided to commit a bit of fraud of their own, enlisting the help of the hardware guy on staff.

They may have done this bit more than once, which *might* even be why they got caught, *allegedly*. They had him sprinkle water on the motherboards of open computers, power them on so they'd fry, and then file insurance claims saying it all happened by accident during a thunderstorm. Presumably the computers were insured for a lot more than they were worth.

It was the \$50k fraud *against* them, though, that gave me an out: no paychecks. I called my dad in Kansas, he invited me to move back, and so I did. Rob had bigger things to worry about than *Lunatix* at that point.

The first thing I did was remove his business name from the game, change the registration code scheme so that any registrations they might try selling themselves would only work on older versions, and then I released an update (and continued releasing them, from the "1.xx" versions all the way up to the final version, which was "4.3a" a year or two later).

The second thing I did was release the *TimePort* key generator for free. It had never become the hit that *Lunatix* had been, plus it was developed in partnership with them from the start, so I just wanted to be divested of it in a way that would also prevent them from profiting from it anymore.

At some point, some months later, I got a call from an insurance investigator asking what I knew about Rob, his wife, the store, and the goings-on there. I answered as best I could. To this day, I don't know if they got heavily fined, arrested, what became of them or the store, or really anything from after I left.

I do know that Rob called me before that (I must have given him my number) a few weeks after I left, because he wanted to reinstate the *Lunatix* agreement as a condition of giving me a good reference for a job I had applied for. He was just a slimeball to the bitter end.

The Making of Lunatix 5.0

After moving back here to Kansas that second time in October 1995, my luck began to change for the better. Heck, it could hardly have gotten worse, now that I think about it.

Another door game author, Nannette Thacker of Shining Star Software, lived here in Kansas and knew who I was from *Lunatix* and from the support I'd provided to SysOps whenever any issue would arise. She'd recently been hired as the lead programmer for a local-based software company specializing in point-of-sale software for K-12 school districts.

They needed to hire somebody to do customer support for their software, and to beta test new changes. She got in touch and asked me to apply and interview for the job. In retrospect, she may have single-handedly set me on my present course, which I'm still on nearly 30 years later.

I wouldn't be programming, and I'd still be an hourly employee, but if I recall, the pay was \$7.50 an hour, up from the \$5 I'd been making before. The main thing was it was a legitimate company. Not just a mom-and-pop computer store operated by crooks.

After two or three years of modest pay raises, Nannette herself left and went to work for a different company specializing in telephony software. They had contracts with AT&T, Sprint PCS (I don't think they're still around), and others. She poached me away for double the pay, and I worked there for a year, doing beta-testing, but some programming too.

Around the time that company was deciding to move their base of operations to Florida, my old boss from the prior company called saying that they really needed my talents after their current programmer didn't pan out.

This came with another pay bump. I probably didn't mention to him that I was considering a job change anyway, not wanting to move to Florida. At long last I was finally programming professionally, full-time.

In late 2008, that company got acquired by a much bigger one, and I'm still there today. I'm paid well by a company that seems to value my skills. I got married along the way (and divorced) with three kids. I was able to buy a home, and for the most part, life is good.

It hasn't always been smooth sailing (I found out, after a heart attack in 2010, that I have coronary artery disease which required a triple bypass), but it's tough to complain when so many other people are still stuck in their own nightmare like what I went through back when I made that first version of *Lunatix*.

It wasn't the only version of *Lunatix*. Upon moving back to Kansas and living with my dad for those first few months, I set up my own BBS and made connections with other local SysOps. One of those was literally called "CONNECTIONs" – one of two large-scale boards here. They ran WorldGroup (or maybe MajorBBS – I think one was just an evolution of the other). They had multiple phone lines, and WG/MBBS wasn't typically for hobbyists.

They charged a subscription (at least for parts of the BBS, or for more online time), and they ran the biggest, best games (which were all pricey). That was the thing with WG/MBBS. It was for commercial enterprises, and people making modules for it (or games) could charge a premium too.

A single copy of *Lunatix* the BBS door game was a modest \$15. A version of *Lunatix* for WG/MBBS could be priced 20 times higher.

A Modicum of Fame

Two of the SysOps of CONNECTIONs, LadyBug and Adar, came to me with a proposal. It was another 50/50 deal. Unlike the deal with Rob, which was less a deal and more of a demand, this one was all laid out plainly.

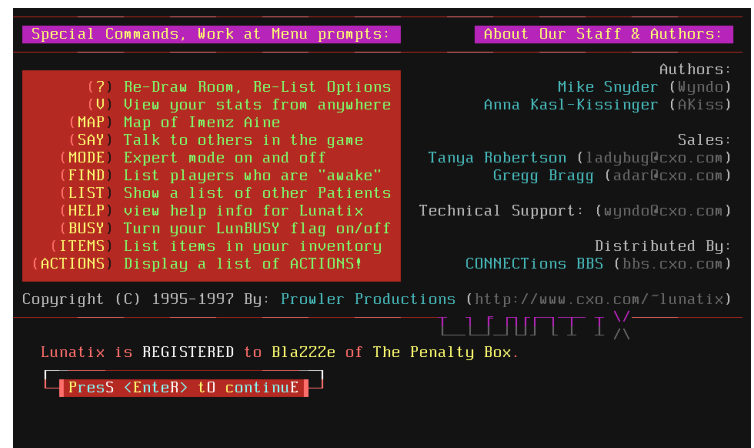
I would write *Lunatic* for WG/MBBS, based initially on my original. I couldn't port it though; modules for WG/MBBS had to be written in Borland C++ and *Lunatic* was written in QuickBASIC. I'd make updates, generate registration codes, and so forth.

For their part, they would provide the development system: a copy of WG/MBBS for development use, Borland C++, the physical documentation, and so forth. They would also help with distribution, and they didn't need or want any of the source code, the registration program, or any ownership of it whatsoever.

Unlike my time working on the first game, this was a far better experience. We didn't sell nearly as many copies as the BBS door game version sold, but even a few dozen at \$300 each (my half being \$150, no "expenses" off the top or any nonsense like that) added up. We also decided to release a half-priced version later, which would only allow 2 players into the game at the same time.

The cool thing about *Lunatic* 5.xx was that it had built-in chat, which made more sense on these larger BBSs that would often have 10, or 20, maybe 30 or more incoming phone lines to accommodate larger user bases. I made a chat room IGM (add-on) for the original *Lunatic* too, but I doubt it got much use.

At some point during development, I met Anna Kasl. She's credited as co-author on the *Lunatic* 5.xx start-up screen. She wasn't a programmer, but she helped with ANSI artwork and testing, among other things.



I had been marketing the original under the company name N-E-Ware, but partnering with Anna, we formed Prowler Productions. The name "Prowler" came from us realizing we both thought the Plymouth Prowler was an awesome-looking concept car, and we both wanted to get rich enough to buy one.



We came nowhere close to being able to afford or justify buying a Plymouth Prowler. I still kind of want one, though. They don't seem to be much more expensive now than the new Mazda CX-30 I bought four years ago, but I'm kind of getting sidetracked here.

Back on topic, *Lunatic* 5.0 was released in September of 1996 to a receptive market of commercial (for-pay) WG/MBBS systems, at \$300 per copy. The \$150 version came later.

Being the authors of *Lunatic* made us small-time celebrities, at least in certain BBS crowds. I met a lot of people by going to local weekly BBS "meet-ups" at parks, bowling alleys, and so forth. Anna and I even drove to Albuquerque New Mexico one summer for a *Lunatic* themed party; quite the experience.

Expanding The Game

Around the same time that I was releasing the WorldGroup/MajorBBS version of *Lunatic*, Seth of RTSoft was doing the same for *Legend of the Red Dragon*. This bigger and better version was dubbed the Tournament version (*T-LORD*). He and I traded registrations for our respective games.

With the original version of *Lunatic*, I had patterned IGM support after what Seth had done for *LORD*. To create an add-on, you needed to be a programmer, and you needed to know how to code for modems and fossil drivers (or use a library/utility to help). At some point, I added a script parser to the game, which was basically a way to script a short “story” as a text file and have the game list those as options. It was an “IGS” not an “IGM”, but it was a way fans and non-programmers could add their own content.

With version 5.xx for WG/MBBS, I wanted to expand on the idea so that more people could create their own add-ons. These would appear in-game as floors to visit in the elevator. I fleshed out the scripting language into a simple programming language and released it for free along with a utility to run and test these script-based IGM’s locally.

```

You step into the elevator and prepare to visit another floor of the
institution. You see several buttons beside the door of the elevator.

Elevator Trips used: 0 of 5    BONUS Trips used: 0 of 5.

-----
(1) The Magical B-BALL By Mike Snyder
(2) The Lunatic's After - Life! - By MARK nOWAK
(3) The Attic! Written by Brella (Barbara Marburger)
(4) The Wackey Billiard room -- By Mike Snyder --
(5) THE BASEMENT - A Lunatic IGM by GaRDaGe DuMP users Hawkeye & Skamps
(6) THE CRAZY bUCKS QUIZ -- A Lunatic IGM by Mike Snyder
(7) The DNA Research Experiment -- By David Kennedy
(8) The Gift Shop of Illusion IGM ----- Written by Mike Snyder -----
(9) Lunatic Hangman V.1b --- By Mike Snyder
(10) ...iNSaNe·BlakJak·Written by·Devin·Linsnbach...
(11) ...iNSaNe·Roulette·Written by·Devin·Linsnbach...
(12) KeNNY'S CRaZy CaSiNo 2.0a -- By Mike Snyder
(13) A Lunatic's DREAM! - By MARK nOWAK
(14) The Library IGM -- By Josh Kline
(15) ...Lost·Reality·Written by Devin·Linsnbach...
(16) [!!-- LunaTix Tac Toe --!] --- Written by Mike Snyder
Press <enter> for more options, <Q> to stop:

```

With a little creativity and effort, an IGM could be almost anything you wanted it to be. I even wrote an in-game text adventure as an IGM.

IGM authors could also provide in-game rewards, including “crazy bucks” (the in-game currency) and experience points. There was an approval process before we would add new IGM’s to our recommended list, but most authors didn’t abuse the system by making cheats or ways to boost characters unfairly.



T-LORD had IGM support, but it was a bit more involved than the BBS door version had been, since you needed the WG/MBBS development tools, and you needed to be an ISV (which stands for “Independent Software Vendor”). Fortunately, partnering with CONNECTIONS meant I was an ISV (or they were), and developing *Lunatic* (and a *Mystic Messages* graffiti wall module) meant I knew how to make modules for WG/MBBS.

From there, I created a *T-LORD* IGM called *Distant Places*. I adapted the “LunScript” programming language so it could offer *T-LORD* specific rewards (gems instead of crazy bucks, and so forth). It worked the same way it did in *Lunatic*, although players would need to visit “Distant Places” in-game first.

```

Distant Places... Version 1.2D...
-----
Through distant fields and forests you travel to a great crossroad...
It's the gateway to Distant Places! You search the signs for new places.
For information enter I. To EXIT enter X. For STATS enter U. Good Luck!
-----
You have already used 0 of your 10 trips into Distant Places!
-----
(1) [The CeMeTaRy v1.99] - By liQuid
(2) -- QUEST for the GOLDEN CONDOR -- The ADVENTURE begins here!!
    Version 1a - By Mike Snyder (c)1997 by Prowler Productions
(3) DRAGON'S DUNGEDn! -- Written by Mike Snyder
(4) DVB Night Club --- Written by: DJBrianxx
(5) iNSaNe BlakJak for T-LORD - Written by Devin Linsnbach/liQuid
(6) Realm of the Knightcrawlers -- T-LORD IGM by Mike Snyder
(7) Evansmite the Oracle written by Mike Snyder
(8) --The Stables-- -- T-LORD IGM by Interceptor
(9) The Temple Of Zolain! -- Written by Mike Snyder

Your Command, Wyndo? : _

```

The End of an Era

Even though my focus by then had shifted to *Lunatix* 5.xx, I still released an update once in a while for the 4.xx door version. After creating *Distant Places* for *T-LORD*, I thought, why stop there? I could retrofit the original *Lunatix* with an IGM (called *Ultra Floors*) that would serve as the gateway to LunScript IGM's, just as I had done (and sold) for *T-LORD*.

Version 5.xx of the game had additional options and features that made some of the things a LunScript IGM could do simply not work or apply to that older version, but I worked around those limitations in a way that allowed the same IGM's to function with it as well.

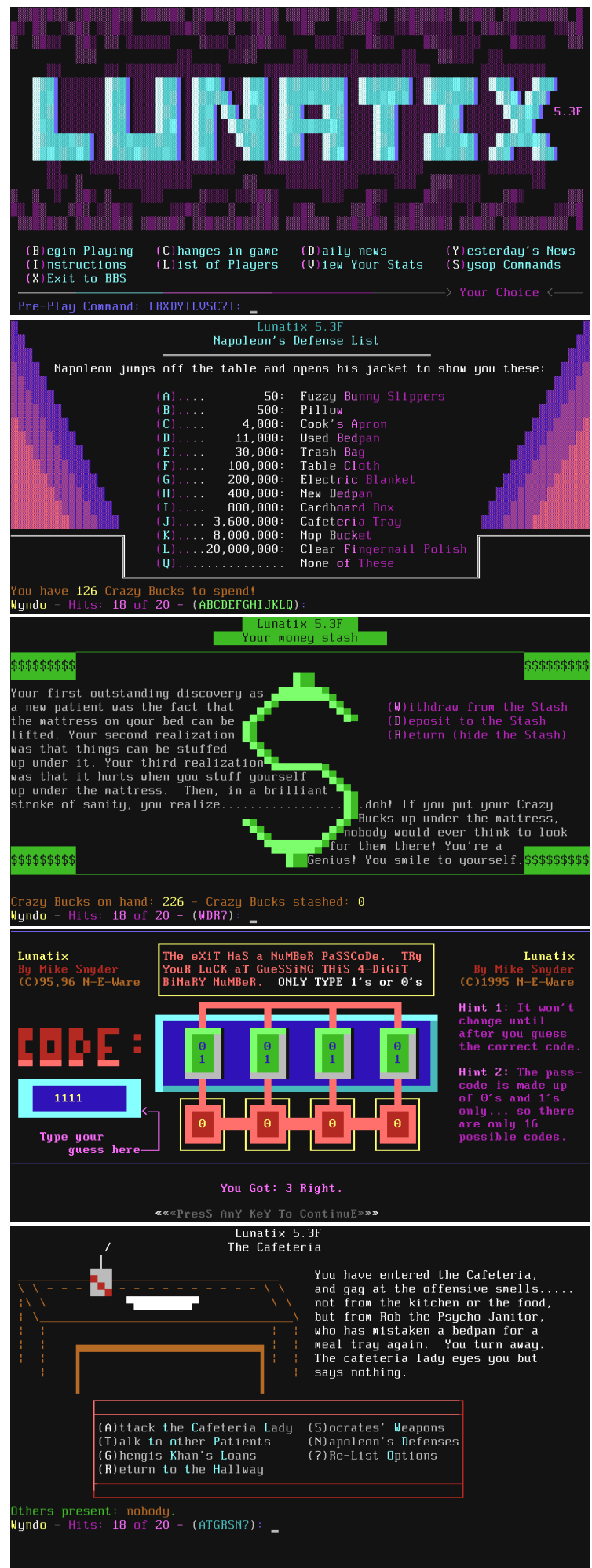
As the internet and the World Wide Web grew in popularity and public adoption, BBSs began to shrink and disappear. I feel like this shift came rapidly, although I'm sure it took years for the scene to all but disappear and for those subscription-based boards to lose enough paying members to finally shut down.

Almost everything you could do on a BBS, you could do on the web. There were websites to download files. There were browser-based games you could play. There were message boards and chat rooms. It wasn't always centralized or given a coherent all-in-one vision like a BBS, but most people didn't care.

It was a revolution in technology, changing the landscape of how we connect and interact, much the way "AI" (for good or for bad) has become the next big thing in tech recently.

By late 1997, Anna and I had begun to brainstorm what a browser-based version of *Lunatix* might be. I was learning HTML and JavaScript (new technologies at the time), and still updating the two BBS versions of *Lunatix*, but the seed was planted. It took us another year before we started work on *Lunatix Online*. I also needed to learn Perl, for the guts of the game itself.

Before I get into that, how about a few screenshots from the two BBS versions of *Lunatix*? I captured these recently from hobby BBSs that still operate today (more on those BBSs later in this issue).



The Making of Lunatix Online



Work on the browser-based version of the game started in early October 1998. Our plan and strategy to market and monetize it was vastly different, because it had to be.

There may have been a few BBSs that had made the jump, attempting to entice visitors with online games, files to download, message boards and so forth, but there wasn't a "market" to sell to; not the way there was when each online destination was a BBS island all to itself.

Lunatix 6.0 (which we called *Lunatix Online: Global Insanity Crisis*, or *LOGIC* for short) would be a "game as a service" before anything was ever called that.

We would host the game on our own server and charge a monthly subscription fee to play. Players would get a one-week free trial (which we soon increased to two weeks) but they needed to pay to continue playing after that (\$5 per month, or \$25 for six months). We'd eventually introduce a "free-to-play" concept, but it was based on getting fewer turns and less time per day in-game on the free tier.

For about three months, I worked on learning Perl and JavaScript and coding the game while Anna worked on graphics. We were far enough along by early November to start limited alpha testing, and then open beta testing in December. By January of 1999, the word "beta" was removed, even though we still had plenty more to do to add missing features, including the IGM add-on support. It was at least feature-complete *enough* by then.

Development progress and the various decisions we made in those first few months and the years that followed are chronicled in "news" at the official *LOGIC* website. It's all in reverse order, starting with the *LOGIC* home page. It gets a little sparse in the more recent years, because our focus shifted away from new development and into maintenance and moderation mode; more on that later.

November 1, 2008, to June 6, 2001:

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/logic/index.shtml>

February 2, 2001, to July 25, 1999:

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/logic/news0005.html>

July 17, 1999, to May 1, 1999:

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/logic/news0004.html>

April 28, 1999, to January 25, 1999:

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/logic/news0003.html>

January 20, 1999, to November 27, 1998:

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/logic/news0002.html>

November 23, 1998, to October 9, 1998:

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/logic/news0001.html>

Anna's Art

If the "Mean Li'l Birdie" looks like a baby Chocobo carrying a hammer, or if many of the other enemy images look like distorted halloween masks, it's because they are.

Rather than hand-make most of it, Anna opted to find stuff on the web, then make alterations and "morph" effects in whatever graphics program she was using. The images of nurses Todd and Kandi, for example, were photos of models given hats and a monochrome blur.



There Can Be Only One

An early frustration, and one that was a constant battle until the very end, was due to the subscription-based business model and the lengths people would go to avoid paying.

From sign-up, to the activation email, to the game's intro, to the rules page, it was clear that only one account per person was allowed. A big reason for this was to avoid cheating, because players could sign up, take a "loan" from Ghengis Khan, then transfer some of it to their main account.

Players were offered one free trial account, and then they could subscribe... or not. There weren't supposed to be multiple accounts per person, or the creation of a new character each time the free trial ended. Yes, it was a dumb business model, and nearly impossible to enforce with any reliability.

I tried, though. I might have ended up limiting what players could do during their free trial (I know I considered doing away with the "crazy bucks" transfer feature). I started logging IP addresses to make it easier to cross-reference different characters, ultimately leading to IP range bans when it was clear they were being used to cheat. I added a browser cookie so that people logging in from the same browser could be detected, and if the cookie was gone, there was some kind of counter that would lead to a ban if it continued happening. I blocked new player sign-ups from popular free email domains like Hotmail and Yahoo.

The excuses and denials when caught were as abundant as the methods to get around it all. Even though they would never actually make much in-game progress when constantly starting over, it had become as much a social/chat hub as a game, so many players didn't care and just wanted to continue those connections to the players they'd already met.

A Few Bad Apples

Not being able to reliably ban people became an even bigger issue when the player base grew big enough to start seeing conflicts among players. We had to enlist moderators, but that came with its own set of challenges.

I don't remember when that started becoming a problem, but I remember the constant drama and the stress it caused. It was probably made worse when we introduced the free-to-play and hourly models after a few years. Most of the long-time subscribers didn't like that at all. They were used to a close-knit community where everybody (mostly) got along, with troublemakers never gaining much traction because they'd tend to run afoul of the "free trial and then you're done" model.

By the time the game peaked, with a player base of several thousand free players and over 300 monthly paying members, there were multiple cliques and disputes among players almost daily. The more I tried to address it by introducing new rules, trying to figure out who was right and who was wrong, the more it just wedged a rift between players and admin.

I also stopped updating and adding new features in the game's later years. By the time I took it offline entirely on October 1, 2010, there were only a few dozen casual players and maybe ten paying members. From a technical standpoint, it was a 12-year-old HTML game that was never revamped to take advantage of Ajax (that would have helped a lot), responsive design, higher definition images, display customizations, or new JavaScript features.

Incidentally, that's right after my heart surgery and subsequent recovery. My memory of the decision to turn off the proverbial lights is a bit hazy now, but I probably just decided it was no longer worth the expense of running a server, or the headache of an occasional griefer.

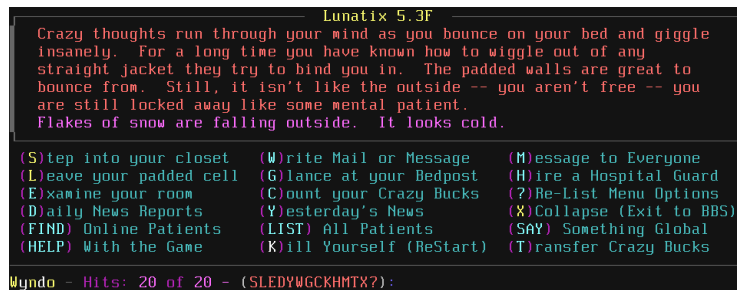
A Typical Day in the Asylum

Each version of the game introduced new features, whether it was new and different IGM add-ons, features like players being able to get married in-game, or quality of life improvements like building a friends list to send private messages to a group. *LOGIC* was of course the most complete version.

What did players do, though? What kind of game was this?

In the simplest terms, it was a menu-based RPG. In the two BBS versions, options were presented with a specified hotkey, which would carry out that action. This was used for most of the gameplay, including visiting other “rooms” in the game which had different purposes and different options.

In “your room” in *Lunatic 5.xx*, for instance, you would press **S** to step into your closet, **L** to go out into the hallway, and so forth.



In *Lunatic Online*, those were simply links. Each room had an image, and chat was always present.



BBS games were almost always designed so that players only needed a few minutes each day to take their turns. Then, it was on to the next game, or maybe they were out of time. Popular hobby BBSs might have only had one or two phone lines, and “dialing in” meant you were the *only* user online. Everybody else would get a busy signal. If you didn’t grow up in that era, it probably sounds made up.

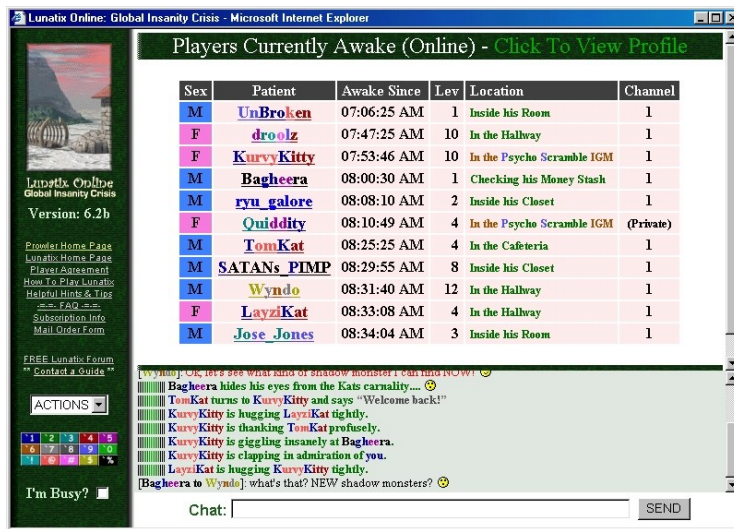
Many SysOps had to limit the amount of time players could be online each day – not just in individual games, but across the entire BBS – to make sure other people had a chance to dial in too. For WorldGroup/MajorBBS, this was less an issue because these were typically commercial endeavors with income from paying members, so they could set up what today might be called a data center with quite a few incoming phone lines.

Still, it was a good idea to keep the turn-based gameplay with turn limits, if only to make sure players didn’t simply marathon through an entire game in a matter of days, get an advantage over other players who didn’t have that kind of time to invest, or break the way the RPG elements had been balanced.

Turns in *Lunatic* consisted of attacking “shadow monsters” in your closet to gain experience and level up (typically 20 fights per day, and the combat was as simplistic as just deciding if you wanted to attack or run away to heal) and visiting the elevator to play IGM add-ons (typically 10 to 20 trips per day).

Players could also flirt with the nurse, try to guess a 4-digit binary code to escape (which would provide a PVP bonus called an “unfair advantage” when successful), break into other player’s “rooms” to attack them while they were offline or play a prank (selected from a list), and do a few other one-off actions each day. The ultimate goal was to reach level 12 and escape three times, to “win” the game.

The Content and the Tone



It was all meant to be wacky and funny. The asylum was called Imenz Aine. Get it? It's pronounced like "I'm Insane." NPCs included the head doctor, Armund Hammer, along with other "patients" who'd taken on the role of selling weapons (Napoleon) or defensive items (Socrates) or serving as a loan shark (Ghengis Khan). When starting the game, you were asked to pick your character class from three choices: **Homicidal Maniac** (the popular choice), **Manic Depressive**, or **Paranoid Schizophrenic**. I don't even remember what difference this choice made in the game.

The main text font was good old **Comic Sans** in the browser-based *Lunatix Online*. Every description was meant to be funny, even if it might have succeeded only on a juvenile level.



From the first game onward, I used the names or handles of people I knew for some of the characters. Nurse "Todd" was named for a married guy that had been pursuing a girl I knew. Nurse "Kandi" was named for a good friend and business partner of mine from my CoCo programming days in high school.

I mentioned earlier that Rob the Psycho Janitor ended up in *Lunatix*, but whenever I was really upset by somebody for some reason, they'd probably end up in the game doing something really foolish or bizarre because I guess that was my way of dealing with a situation I couldn't deal with any other way. This usually just meant a new line added to the random pool of "events" that would appear in the daily news at the start of each day, but it could also be a character in an IGM, or new random text for some existing option.

For instance, whenever you tried to "do something crazy" to impress the nurse, it picked something random from a list. During the development and updates of the first game, "Spartacus" was the SysOp of another local BBS who started dating a girl I'd been seeing until then, so I added these to the pool of potential results for "do something crazy":

You beat the living daylights out of Spartacus as he walks by.

You shove Spartacus down a stairway as he passes by.

A guy who went by "Magic" on CONNECTIONs had started some kind of beef with me – I don't even remember what, now – so I added these to the "do something crazy" pool:

You defend 'Magic' by saying he's not really a big freakin' jerk.

You play darts with a picture of 'Magic'.

In the daily news, this would sometimes appear:

A kid named Magic apologized to everyone for being such a loser.

It was petty of me, and only the players who knew me would know who I meant, but there were probably worse ways I could've coped.

In Retrospect

Looking back on the game, its setting, and the cavalier attitude I seemed to take towards mental illness, I don't think it's a game I would make today (if I was still making games). In fact, the subject matter is a big part of why I never made an effort to bring *Lunatic Online* back in some form or create a fourth version.

In the WG/MBBS version, for example, the way you reroll your character from scratch is by using an option to "kill yourself" – wording I regret horribly. Every part of the game is some trope or exaggerated mischaracterization of mental illness, written for laughs, like the NPCs who think they're famous historical figures, or the patients running amok through the asylum with very little supervision.

One day, a few years into the lifespan of *Lunatic Online*, I got an email from somebody from NAMI; that's the National Alliance on Mental Illness (<https://www.nami.org/>). I don't remember the specifics, but somebody or multiple somebodies had reported the game to them, saying that it was perpetuating harmful stereotypes. As it was told to me in the email, at least one woman was incredibly angry because her brother or son had stumbled onto the game thinking it was educational or supportive, only to find out it was, well, what it was.

After some back and forth, two things happened. One, I added a big disclaimer to the front of the game, explaining that it was parody, comedy, and not meant to be misconstrued as a real representation of mental illness. Two, the guy who'd been emailing me realized we were small potatoes, figuratively speaking, with a relatively small and insignificant reach that didn't need to be the target of negative publicity that probably would have just helped the game grow.

Miscellaneous Missives

For many years, we gave out prizes (*Lunatic* branded goodies, such as clocks, flashlights, and mouse pads) for anybody who beat the game (and for each time they did, in fact).

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/logic/prizes.html>

We had T-shirts made as well, but that may have been a special promotion. They're not listed on that prize page for some reason.



We held a few contests in the game's first year. One was to invent new "chat actions" for the game, with winners at different levels receiving days or weeks of free subscription time. Before that, we held an IGM authoring contest, with \$150 for first place, \$100 for second, \$50 for third, and \$10 for several runners-up. The entrants and winners can be found in [the old news](#).

Shout out and a big "thank you" to Robert Fogt of BlueSparks.net (who I lost touch with years ago and who will likely never see this) for doing a ton of volunteer work – creating the Windows-based IGM developer's kit, starting a *Lunatic* newsletter, providing IGM's of his own, and much more.

In 2000, we had some interest from former BBS SysOps in licensing a copy of *Lunatic Online* for their own websites. We almost ended up in a legal battle with one of them, though, for making modifications to the game against their license. They were also actively campaigning against our main site and coming to poach players away, so it was ultimately a thing we didn't do for very long.

The Lunatix Legacy

Unless one of the few copies of the game we licensed way back in 2000 is still out there in some playable form, *Lunatix Online* has been gone and unplayable for fifteen years. It's still possible to find web-accessible BBSs where the original version and the WG/MBBS version have been registered and are still playable.

Unlike the Good Old Days, you don't need a modem and a phone line to use a BBS. You don't even have to use Telnet (although that's typically an option) with web-based terminals that let you connect right from your browser.

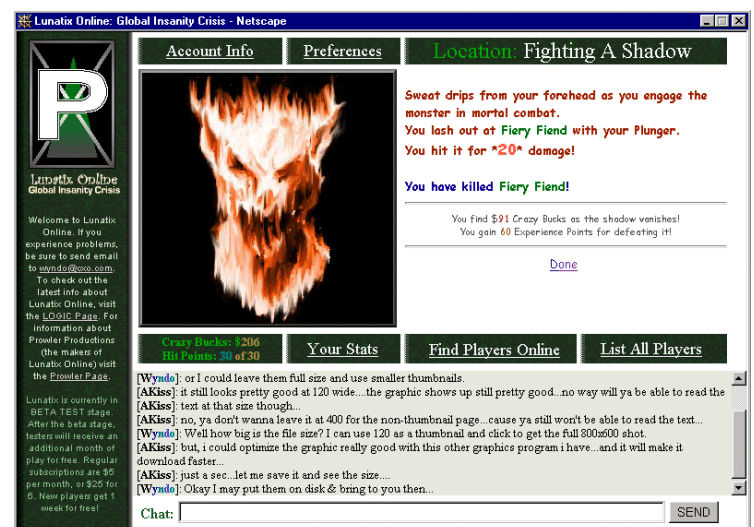
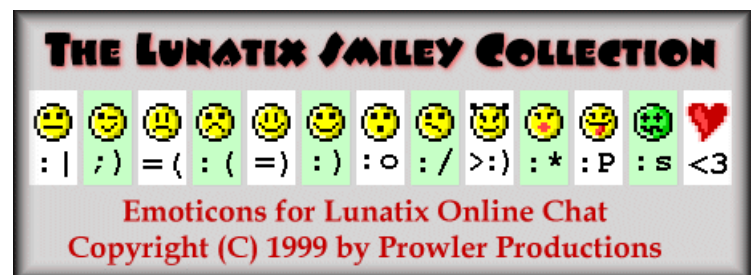
I still offer registrations for both BBS versions, but they're much cheaper now. It's \$10 for the 4.xx door game version (and it comes with all the add-ons at no extra cost). It's \$50 for the WG/MBBS version (was originally \$300) and it comes with *Distant Places* for *T-LORD*, or \$25 for the 2-user version (which, unsurprisingly, nobody ever chooses).

That's not a sales pitch. I still get a handful of registrations a year, if that, from old SysOps getting their board set up again after a wave of nostalgia, or new SysOps who find vintage tech like a "bulletin board system" intriguing.

I mention it because I reached out to everybody who registered over the past few years (a couple dozen people), asked five questions, and heard back from five of them.

1. What is the name of your BBS?
2. Is it kid-friendly, adults only, or what?
3. Is there a membership fee, or is it free?
4. How can new users get there (phone number to dial up, online via a web page, is telnet required, etc.)
5. A brief description (two to three sentence max, if possible) letting my readers know what your BBS is all about.

Before that, here are a few more of the only [screenshots](#) and images from *Lunatix Online*.



Boards Running Lunatix

ConstructiveChaos BBS

2. My board is not meant to be aimed at adults only, and I think it could pass as *mostly* kid-friendly. There are many aspects to consider though. If one considers messages posted in the networked echoes (e.g.: FidoNet or DOVE-Net) which are beyond the sysop's control, and/or oneliner walls that appear during logon containing coarse language, then you may disagree whether it could be kid-friendly at all. I do run games like Pimpwars, which some might understandably find objectionable, but that'd be the most risque of anything I run (i.e.: I don't run Studs or Bordello, which are explicitly more graphic). Worth noting also, I do have many current and classic ANSI art packs available to view on the board, which occasionally contain nudity. Just the nature of the scene. Long story short: I think of my board as the equivalent of a PG-13 movie rating.

3. Free, of course. 😊

4. <telnet://conchaos.synchro.net>, <ssh://conchaos.synchro.net>, or via the web at <https://conchaos.synchro.net>.

5. I describe my board as a chill, laid-back BBS built with retro-gaming in mind, with emphasis placed on classic door games such as *LORD*, *Usurper*, *Lunatix* (😊) and many others. I like to tinker and make my own mods, many of which can be demo'd on my board.

Editor's note: There is a web-based client here: <https://conchaos.synchro.net/connect.html>

Once you sign up, log in, and make it through quite a few intro menus, you'll arrive at the "MAIN" menu. To get to *Lunatix*, it's "X" for the door games menu, then "7" for alternative RPGs, then "16" for *Lunatix*. It's possible those options/numbers may change later. This is the original 4.xx door game version.



A-Net Online BBS

2. A mixture of both. On my door game server, there is an "adult" category, which I separated due to "mature only" games.

All other areas I would consider family-friendly.

3. FREE FREE FEE :)

4. I run (4) BBSes and (1) Door Game Server. I made a login matrix/front door for telnet, to access all four BBSes with one telnet address:

Telnet: [bbs.a-net.online](telnet://bbs.a-net.online) Port: 1337

Each BBS has its own address and port number for other connection types.(telnet/ssh/rlogin/browser)

My Main Synchronet BBS: TELNET: a-net.online port: 23, SSH: 22, RLOGIN: 513 and (1) dialup line: 470-632-1219

My Mystic BBS: TELNET: mystic-anet.online port: 23, SSH: 22, RLOGIN: 513

My Spitfire BBS: TELNET: sf.a-net.online port: 2323 (telnet only)

My Synchronet Linux BBS: TELNET: x.a-net.online port: 2323, RLOGIN: 5513

Browser: a-net.fyi

5. I operated a BBS and ISP in the 1990s. My BBSes were designed for fun and friendly communication, featuring gameplay, chat, message forums, and file areas.

I also run a door game server that is accessible to any Sysop who wishes to add it to their BBS: <https://a-net-online.lol/gameserver>. This server is dedicated to 90s BBS door games. While newer games are available, over 90% of the offerings are from the 1990s. Currently, I provide more than 300 games, and my goal by the end of the year is to reach 1,000 door games.

Editor's note: Web-based clients for all four of his BBSs are easily accessible from the main page: <https://a-net-online.lol/bbs/index.html>

I haven't checked all four of them, but for the first option (the main Synchronet BBS), after signing up and logging in you can get to *Lunatix* from the main menu by using option "X" for games/doors, "4" for the A-Net game server, then "1" for RPG games 1, then option "21" to launch into *Lunatix* 4.xx. This is routed to the door game server he mentions in the response above.

Boards - Continued

CJ's Place BBS

2. Kid friendly.
3. No membership fees, just need a valid email address to verify.
4. The telnet/ssh/https URL is cjsplace.thruhere.net.
5. BBS located in Orange City, FL. Offering multiple network echos and loads of games as well as a well stocked file base. Stop by and hang out, we're pretty relaxed around here.

Editor's Note: There is a web-based client here: <https://cjsplace.thruhere.net/>

The board runs Synchronet and it seems really streamlined, with the main menu coming up without too many additional post-login hoops. You can get to *Lunatic* 4.xx using "G" for games, then "13" for RPG strategy games, then "10" for the door version of *Lunatic*. As with any of them, I figure the exact menu options are subject to change as the SysOp adds or removes options in the future.

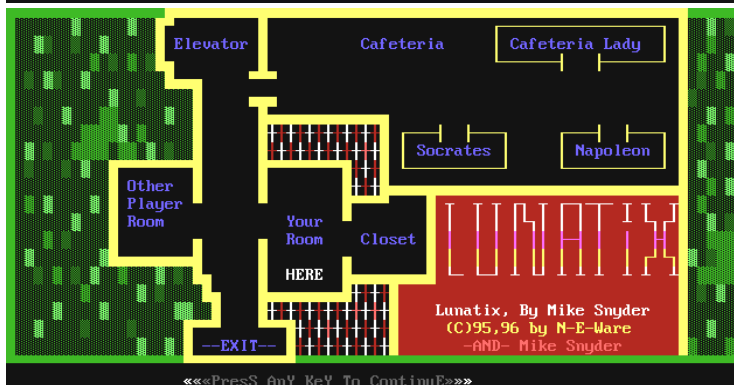


LUNATIX: Version 4.3a Dedicated to Paula Stout, for "Inspiration."
Written by Mike Snyder, (C)opyright 1995-97 by N-E-Ware
Lunatic is ShareWare. Upload it to other BBS's if you want.
For the latest vers. of Lunatic: <http://www.cxo.com/~wyndo>
Players are brought back to life every second day after death,
and deleted after 9 days of inactivity (not playing). Be sure to play!
Dead players can always play the following day and be alive once again.
To WIN the game, get to level 12 THREE times and escape.

Special Keys, work at menu prompts:
(F) Map of Imenz Aine
(U) View your Stats from anywhere
(Z) Change RIP/ANSI Mode Status
(R) Re-Draw Room or Re-List Options

This game is REGISTERED to Chris Johnson of CJ's Place BBS

<<<PresS AnY KeY To ContinuE>>>



Freeside BBS

2. Adults only on this board, I don't do porn but the conversations can get pretty ripe.
3. Always and forever free, you just need an email addy so you can reset your own password.
4. Currently telnet only to freeside.bbs.io:23
5. Freeside is about privacy, local interests (we're located in cincinnati woot!), lots of games and good old nostalgia.

The Penalty Box

2. I wouldn't recommend children try to connect. My users would likely behave around kids, but I can't make any promises.

3. Free...or you can buy me a beer.

4. Telnet: thepenaltybox.org

Web: <http://thepenaltybox.org>

5. Started in 1993 running Renegade. Switched to MajorBBS/Worldgroup in 2002. I wanted a cool BBS to call when the rest were disappearing.

I always loved the game *Lunatic*. The MBBS version I always found to be superior to the DOS version. Both though had hilarious text if you took the time to read it. I still play MBBS *Lunatic* daily. Unfortunately the new MBBS10 crashes when *Lunatic* is played on it. I lucked out and was able to run it on MBBS6/DOS running in DMA mode. So if someone is wanting to play the MBBS version, I might be the only one who has it working.

Login and type `/go lunatic` to play.

Editor's note: The link to the web-based client is right there in his answer to question 4, and as he says, just type `/go lunatic` once you're logged in. Easy peasey.

There have been other WG/MBBS *Lunatic* 5.xx registrations over the past few years, but none of them replied to my email. He may be right that The Penalty Box is the only place where the second version of *Lunatic* is still available to play today.

Despite your noble efforts at kicking and screaming, you are hauled, strapped to a stretcher, into the questionable facility known affectionately as Imenz Aine, land of the lunatic.

Speaking of questionable, as soon as you are wheeled inside, A large, bald man with thick spectacles approaches you with a pen and a pad of paper.

"I have questions... to assess your mental state..." the big man says. You can just see his name badge... Dr. Hammer! What is going on here??? Dr. Hammer begins asking you a series of questions:

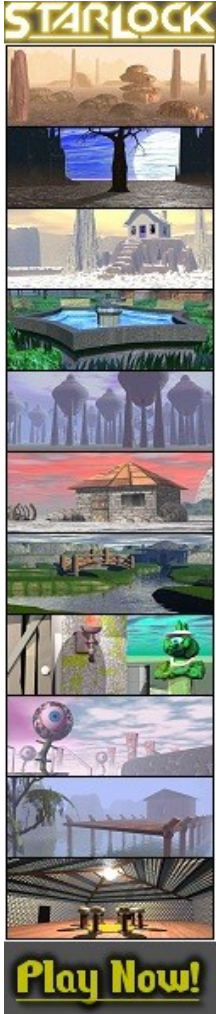
Name a SHAPE: (no more than 10 letters): trapezoid
Name a COLOR: (no more than 10 letters): clear
Name a THING: (no more than 10 letters): pencil
Name a PERSON: (no more than 20 letters): myself
Name an ADJECTIVE: (no more than 10 letters): rainy

Dr. Hammer looks over his notes and asks "Is this correct?"

trapezoid, clear, pencil, myself, and rainy?

He intently waits for your answer. Is this information correct? (Y/N):

The Making and Ambition of StarLock



Mere months after launching *Lunatic Online*, we started working on our next big browser-based multiplayer game, *StarLock*. Development would continue off and on for several years. The ambition of it was staggering, and I was essentially a solo dev after Anna (and her boyfriend Steven, who had been helping with art for a short time) kind of lost interest.

As best I can tell, I finally [opened the game](#) to the public on or around February 19, 2005. The core features were done, but it was intended to be a sprawling space and planetary exploration game with hundreds of unique quests and plenty of gameplay

systems. For core quest and story content, though, I had only completed around 20% of the total game in those six years.

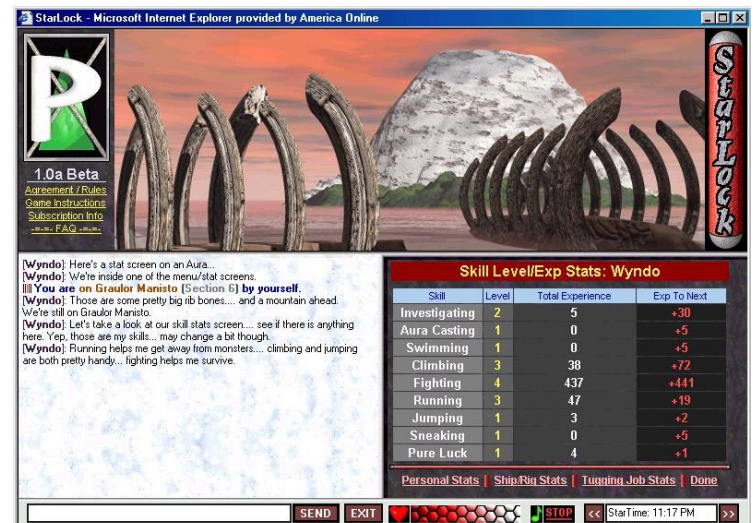
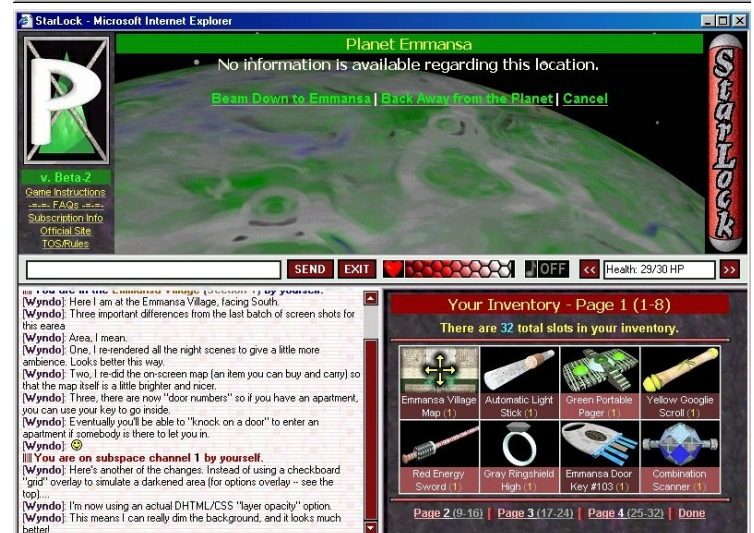
The result was that players could complete it all in a matter of days, and then there wasn't much to do. I ended up not even charging any money to play it. I was just happy to finally have some of the game available to play at all.

I can't overstate how ambitious this was. It wasn't a 3D action game, but the art was custom made and rendered in Bryce 3D. I'd often render the same scene from different angles and with different light and cloud coverage to simulate seasons and times of day. There were dozens of planets to visit, each with quest areas to explore. It was menu-driven, but pretty darned advanced. There was a built-in auction system, player-owned apartments... just tons and tons of stuff.

Here's a lengthy interview I gave about the game, which somehow ended up on IGN. The formatting seems a bit wonky, so I suspect it was imported from some other site they acquired, but I don't remember what site.

<https://www.ign.com/articles/2002/09/03/starlock-interview>

StarLock was finally shut down on or around February 7 of 2011. Later, I sold the starlock.com domain name to some company that kept hounding me about it, but you can still see the login page changed to a "Game Over" page at the internet archive's Wayback Machine [here](http://www.ign.com/articles/2002/09/03/starlock-interview).



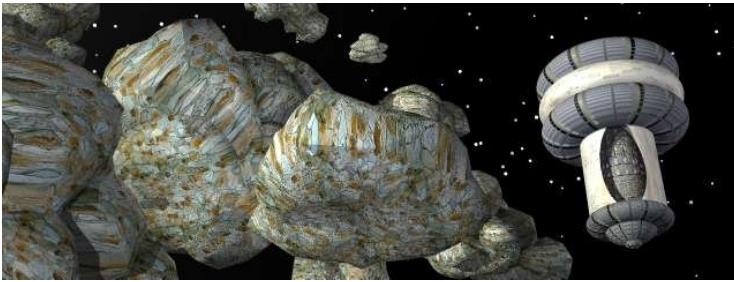
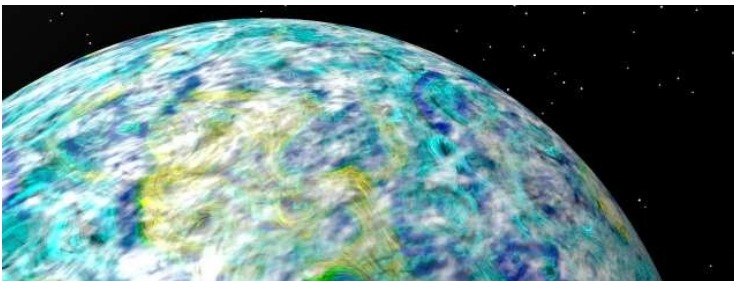
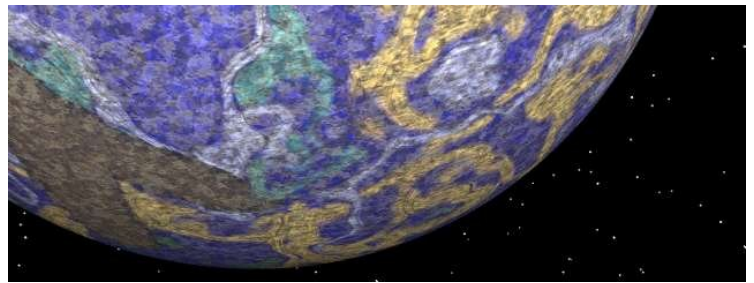
More screenshots can be found here:

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/starlock/screens.html>

Several pages of development news (in reverse order) that chronicle the game can still be found here:

<https://www.prowler-pro.com/starlock/news0006.html>

I have hundreds – maybe thousands – of scenes and images rendered for *StarLock* just sitting on a hard drive doing nothing. I'm going to include some of them here, just 'cuz. They may not look like much now, but for a browser-based game in the early 2000's... yeah.





Mini-Review: Football Game

It's not actually a football game. Rather, it's a retro-styled point-and-click adventure (complete with slightly softened CRT-like pixel art) in the style of a LucasArts or Sierra adventure (minus their complex command systems).

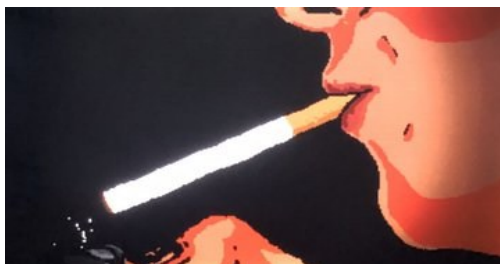
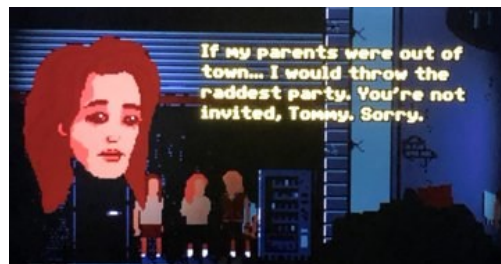
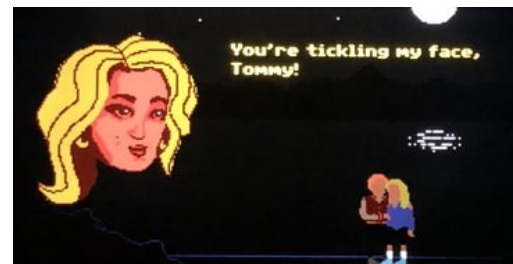
It's short but also cheap (and often on sale on PS4, Xbox, Switch, Steam) - two hours (or less, if you don't get stuck). The story is slice-of-life but interesting, with an ending that's open to interpretation.

It's at times dark, a bit surreal, and fascinating. Really well done.

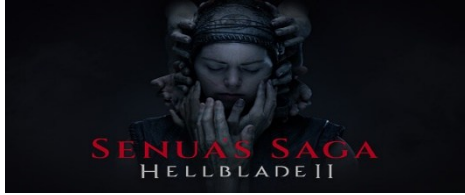
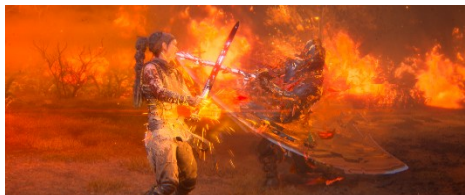
I recommend it.

Played on console: PS4.

Originally posted: 5/19/2021.



Mini-Review: Senua's Saga – Hellblade II



Ninja Theory seems to be moving away from the kind of action game that put them on my radar way back (*Enslaved*, *DmC*, *Heavenly Sword*) and toward more purely narrative experiences. That's not to say this game is just a walking sim with a few puzzles and off-the-path collectibles to find, but it leans in that direction.

The few instances of combat work more like puzzles too, playing out as a series of 1v1 battles that are all about blocking, timing, and building up for a time-slowng power move. These encounters are violent and visceral (if a bit similar after you've done a few of them).

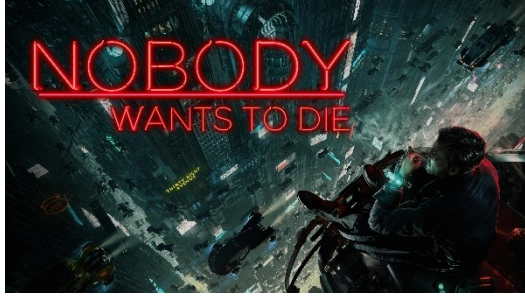
As a narrative experience though, this is top notch and immersive. I wish you could disable letterbox mode, but that's not an option. For the best experience, play with headphones in a dark room.

*Played on Xbox Series X via GamePass.
Posted to social media on 12/28/2024.*

Addendum

This game is also available on PS5 now.

Mini-Review: Nobody Wants to Die



It's a mixed bag, but the good far outweighs the bad. In fact, the bad is mostly centered on the writing; the dialogue in particular.



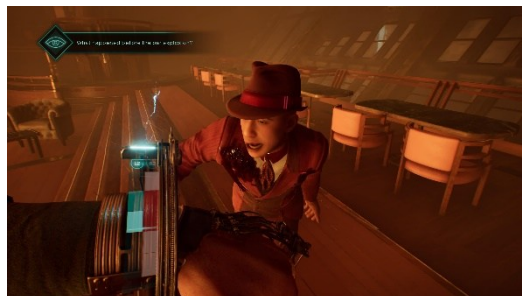
The story is good, with a premise that mixes the body-changing world of *Altered Carbon* with an aesthetic and vibe inspired by 1929-styled detective noir, but set in the far, far future of 2329.



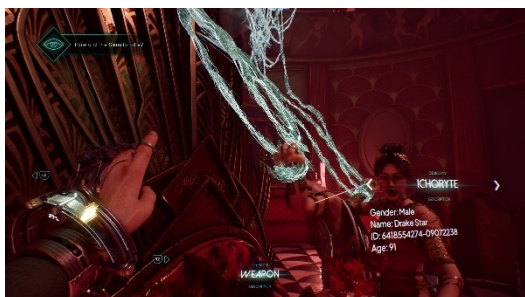
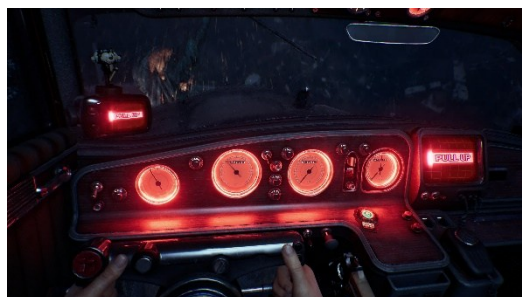
All of that speaks my language... until people actually start talking. I think the actors probably did their best with bad lines, but there's some truly cringe-inducing stuff here.



Beyond that though, you get a cool narrative adventure with evidence-connecting bits, investigation bits that have you using X-ray, black light, and a scene recreation/rewind tool, and various dialogue choices.



I came away really liking this game, but I'm a sucker for ambitious AA efforts.



Played on console: PS5.
Originally posted: 12/30/2024.

Mini-Review: Draugen



After playing Ragnar Tørnquist's *The Longest Journey* and *Dreamfall*, I'm sold on pretty much anything I see his name on.

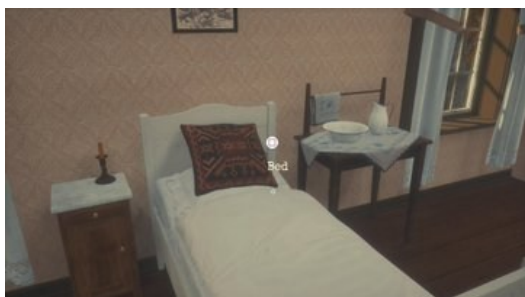
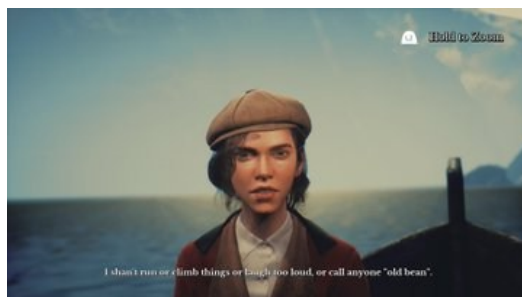
Draugen is a first-person narrative adventure; a "walking simulator" if you prefer. It's set in a 1920's Norwegian village called Graavik, where Edward (you) and his cheery friend Alice arrive with the hopes of finding Edward's missing sister.

What sets it apart from easy comparisons like *Gone Home* or *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* is the back-and-forth banter between the two, with Alice frequently calling him "old bean" or "old fruit" or offering unsolicited advice.

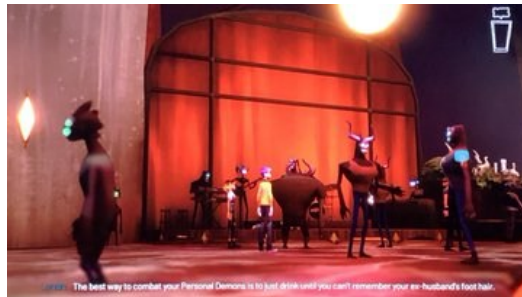
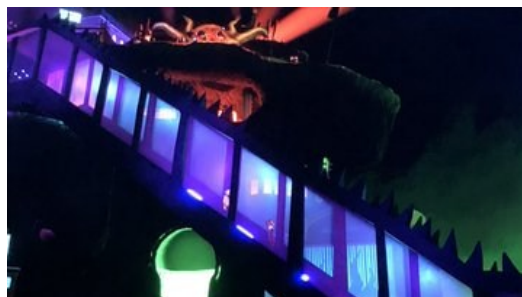
A game like this is all about the story. It's interesting enough through the few short hours it lasts, although some of it is predictable and some questions remain unanswered.

Worth playing, especially if you find it on sale.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 10/13/2023.



Mini-Review: Afterparty



I started out strongly disliking this game but came around on it by the end. It became more of a humorous series of misadventures.

I was initially cold on the concept of a game about excessive drinking, because I've seen what that can do to people and how it can ruin lives, but the game takes that into consideration late-game in a way I felt was really satisfying.

It's mostly narrative-driven. Rather than puzzles, you make decisions along the way that affect the story. There are also a few mini-games (beer pong and a Simon-like dance game, for instance) at key story points. Different drinks also give you unique choices in conversations.

The writing and voice cast are top-notch. I just wish it had a chapter select. Seeing how other choices might play out requires a new play-through.

PS4 game played on PS5.
Originally posted: 6/8/2021.

The Final Stage

Putting this issue together was nostalgic and bittersweet for me. It surprised me how most of the details about the original development of *Lunatix* had faded from my mind. Sure, it was thirty years ago, but it was still surprising.

It's probably good that I didn't wait even longer before doing it. Even with everything I was able to document here, it's just the broad strokes and the most important events of those years. I doubt anything more granular (if I could even remember those details) would interest anybody.

There may be a few loose ends, but hopefully I covered everything of importance. One thing I didn't mention previously is about the result of Rob's effort to file a *Lunatix* copyright. That must have failed or been rejected, because a quick search of those [public records](#) only returns seven entries, with six of them being unrelated and one of them being my own copyright of *Lunatix Online*. It's a shame that getting a trademark isn't as cheap and easy as filing for an official copyright.

I also didn't write about the ANSI artwork for the BBS versions of the game, which wasn't nearly as detailed as some other games (or even [ANSI BBS art](#) in general) but it's a very interesting topic.

Using ASCII characters and blocks with different colors and pixel patterns, artists were able to make great artwork for text-only displays. Google [ANSI Artwork](#) if in doubt, although much of what you'll find may be more modern and tool-assisted (or even just converted from hi-res images). The logo for the Constructive Chaos BBS on page 17, for example, is some top-notch ANSI artwork.

I didn't write about the enhanced graphics in *Lunatix* for RIPTerm BBS users, or the MIDI music I wrote and included in *StarLock*, or two other smaller web games I wrote (*Solitary Confinement* and *PipeLine*), or the trilogy of block-pushing puzzle games I wrote while learning JavaScript ([Lexter](#), [Lexette](#), and [Lex Junior](#), which are all still playable online for what that's worth; click the on-screen compass arrows to move the character and grab/push blocks), or the first JavaScript game I ever wrote, a silly hangman-style phrase guessing game called [Save The Freak](#).

For next week's feature, I'm thinking of maybe something less intense than this. I have plenty of ideas, but I'm leaning towards taking a look at games featuring the voice *and likeness* of actors normally associated with film and TV.

End Credits

The VGGN controller logo with three "X" buttons and some other artwork was made using generative AI at <https://openart.ai>.

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