

Homebrewing Beyond

Although Forhan didn't program the Jaguar games himself, he did dabble in homebrewing by writing new programs for the Atari handheld system, the Lynx. SFX, his first program, is a sound utility that gives Lynx users direct control over the system's four audio channels. Like other homebrewers, Forhan didn't start with the idea of creating a commercial program. He merely wanted a way to create sound effects in real time on the Lynx. When it was completed, he decided that it was good enough for others, and like many of the homebrewers before, he went to the Internet to see if there was any interest in it. Ponx, his first game for the Lynx, followed soon afterward. The third Lynx title that Forhan offers is Lexis, a title that had originally been developed by Shadowsoft but was never released.

Interestingly enough, another new homebrew Lynx game has recently entered the marketplace. Available exclusively through Video 61, Lynx Othello is the latest program from Harry Dodgson, the guy who started it all with his 7800/2600 Monitor Cartridge.

And what has become of the other pioneer in homebrewing, Ed Federmeyer? He's still around. After purchasing a Sony Net Yaroze, he began programming games for the PlayStation. One of his games, Haunted Maze, won a monthly contest sponsored by Sony of Europe for inclusion on the disc that accompanies the European edition of the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine. Federmeyer believes that he is the only American to have a Net Yaroze game included on the disc, and it gives him a cool feeling to know that his work has been distributed to more than 100,000 homes.



Lynx Othello (courtesy Video 61's web site)

After whetting his appetite on the PlayStation, will Federmeyer ever program for the 2600 again? It's doubtful. The newer systems, including the Game Boy and the Dreamcast VMU, offer programming opportunities, and these are avenues that Federmeyer hopes to explore. Even if Federmeyer never programs another 2600 game, there will be many others in his place who will gladly want to give it a try.

Why do they do it? What attracts them to write programs for systems that haven't been sold in nearly ten years? Federmeyer sums it up best: "I'd guess at least some of it is (as in my case) the desire to live the dream that many of us had growing up.... To program the Atari 2600 was at one time the coolest job you could ever have. Now you can at least have a taste of that dream by making your own homebrew game on a classic system."

Bob Colbert echoes Federmeyer's sentiments: "When I was a kid and the Atari was king, I always wanted to write a game for the system. Back then it was practically impossible, so doing it now is like making one of my dreams come true."

Here's to many more dreams coming true!