

One man's nearly 40-year, 8-bit quest to finish his teenage Commodore 64 RPG

Enlarge / The disks and diagrams Mike Brixius has to work with in finishing his 1984 CRPG project.

YouTube/RavenWolf Retro Tech

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There are stories that some of us, at a certain stage of adulthood, should never hear. Not if we value our time or our storage space. I regret to inform you that Mike Brixius, on his RavenWolf Retro Tech channel, offers just such a story about his quest to finish his own Commodore 64 CRPG from 1984. He will be able to do it, too, because he kept all the disks, tapes, notes, and hand-documented assembly code print-outs ever since his teenage project.

"It's one of those loose threads in my life that I deeply regret," Brixius says in his video. He hopes his Patreon supporters and YouTube community can give him the "moral support and accountability" he needs to complete his game after all these years.

[embedded content]

RavenWolf Retro Tech's video, launching his campaign to restore his 1984 C64 CRPG, *Digital Dungeon Master (DDM)*, to its proper glory.

Digital Dungeon Master (DDM) was based partly on the Avalon Hill tabletop games Brixius loved at the time, but more so on Avalon Hill's foray into dungeon-crawling RPGs, *Telengard*.

Brixius wanted to re-create *Telengard's* limited line of sight but add in a surface world, akin to that of another favorite of his, *Ultima IV*.

Brixius was working without an assembler back then, something he deeply regrets. He does not, however, regret his pack-rat tendencies, which have left him with these pieces to pull together:

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- Executable machine code, mostly from May 1985, but some from as late as 1989, with hand-written notes on it
- A printed-out memory dump of all 4K of RAM from the game at some point
- Cassettes and disks, some of which load, but none with an uncorrupted game running
- Listings of the code from 1986, used to test machine language routines
- Extensive handwritten and drawn notes, maps, and other explanations of the game's design.

So far, Brixius has, by hand-typing in his old code, gotten a facsimile of a simple overworld and dungeon working. He has already figured out one memory-saving fix, setting a single bit to define each wall space (wall, open door, closed door, secret door) rather than the two-bit system he originally

devised. The game takes up 12K of RAM, split roughly evenly between code and data. Brixius figures his dungeons can be about 64×64 squares before he hits the C64's limits.

Enlarge / A hand-drawn map that Brixius is relying on to help him finish his C64-era CRPG.

YouTube/RavenWolf Retro Tech

Patrons and YouTube followers can help Brixius decide which projects and game aspects to tackle next in each of his planned quarterly sprints. At the moment, he has—with nearly 40 years' hindsight—decided to make source control his first priority, followed by completing his map code and fixing the color scheme in dungeons. He cautions that he intends to keep the project true to its early days CRPG roots; it “won't be as elaborate as something like *The Bard's Tale*.”

We first saw Brixius' quest at Hackaday, and we'll keep an eye on his progress. He plans to finish it by 2024, but let's all cut him some slack on that.

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