8-bit Dice

(a cross platform vintage computer amusement)

It began when my daughter and I found an old board game and the dice were missing, so I thought I'd cook up something and maybe get her interested in (retro)coding. Inevitably, the chosen language was BASIC and the chosen platform was the Commodore 64. I included support for a joystick, so that we would be able to play on our TheC64 Mini hooked to our living room TV set. The Commodore 128 version was a simple exercise, taking some advantage of the substantially more evolved BASIC v7. I just had to add a Commodore VIC-20 version, if anything just to feature it on Denial (which in turn granted a mention in Commodore News). I thought "I'm done with my little pet project... wait a second, PET project!". That's how the Commodore PET 2001 version came to be.

At this point I realised that I had never written anything for Sinclairs, despite my lifelong admiration for Sir Clive's whimsical genius. The Sinclair ZX81 version made me experience the challenge of making anything fit into the standard memory (theoretically 1 KB, but it's actually far less than that). I had to learn a few tricks (so much for the old saying that you can't teach them to an old dog). The 4 KB version came much easier. Then I addressed the Sinclair ZX Spectrum, and that was comparatively a breeze. That machine has a hell of a BASIC. Wrapping the lot was the most primitive of them all (this side of the Altair 8800 at least), the Sinclair ZX80 which, despite the similarities, could not be more different from the '81. The code had to be rewritten from scratch, and I had to do without the animations because of the video signal generation limitations (this little fella either computes or displays, not both), but I had fun in the process. You can't get much cruder than integer BASIC!

Originally the idea was to wrap it up at this point. But I have a working Apple IIc on display in my office... so there came the integer BASIC Apple II "Woz" version (he's a kind of hero of mine), the floating point BASIC Apple II/II+ version and the Apple IIc/IIe "enhanced" "mousegraphic" 80 column version.

Later I remembered that I also own a Texas Instruments TI-99/4a. This is the oddball of the pack, because while the rest of the system is 8 bit, the CPU is actually 16 bit. I chose not to target the stock interpreter (TI BASIC) in this case and I opted for Extended BASIC, which is what many users did at the time I reckon. This version required a bit more effort: the way this machine handles colour is peculiar (this is partly counterbalanced by the ability to define custom characters on the fly: neat!).

The Atari 400/800 version came almost as an afterthought and was a bit awkward to pull off; the Atari BASIC dialect seems to make hard things easy and easy things hard somehow and disk management is not built in BASIC and requires a DOS.

Finally, the TRS80 Model I and the BBC Micro versions were a tribute to two cornerstones of the microcomputer revolution in the U.S. and in the U.K respectively.

So here they are for your board game enjoyment, all rolled up into one ZIP package, fifteen 8-bit versions of basically the same basic, BASIC good old dice game.

It never gets old...

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