The Making of GRAVITY FORCE

Ten years ago, an Amiga game was released that seemed insignificant at first glance - but it quickly became a cult game. We're talking about Gravity Force - a two-player chase through narrow labyrinths, with gliders that only had an anti-grav drive... and a nice laser cannon.
Even today, people still like to pull it out every now and then, because who knows: Maybe they can achieve an even better time with even more breakneck flying? ... We tracked down the programmer of this game, and he tells us how the game came about.

Many will still remember this screen well...

by Stephan Wenzler

The year was 1988. PCs still performed their monotonous duties in gray offices, "GDR" was an insignificant acronym, and I was a 17-year-old dilettante with a big vision: I wanted to program a game for the Amiga that would make people happy, me rich, and that humanity would still be talking about 10 years from now. I had had an Amiga 500 since October '87, and this was the one I wanted to program now.

DID YOU KNOW?

By the way, there is a relatively unknown cheat code (password) for Gravity Force that Stephan has revealed to us for you: RND. This takes you to a randomly selected level!

At the beginning, it was quite a confusing affair if you had only done a bit of programming on the C64 before.
For a moment, I even seriously considered abandoning the whole thing (unthinkable) and doing something sensible and simpler instead.
At some point, however, all the confusion subsided (bless Amiga Intern), and armed with the Seka assembler, I saw myself in a position to tackle my major task.

A good game... but what kind?

I was still missing something important: a usable game concept. I started thinking about it, and it quickly became clear to me that I wanted to make something like Thrust. Inspiration from other games can't always be avoided. Thrust was, incidentally, inspired by Gravitar, which I hadn't heard of at the time. The thing with the ball hanging from the ship in Thrust seemed too complicated to me from the start, and besides, I wanted a different game principle anyway: you were supposed to rescue little men (a la Choplifter).
At some point, however, I realized that collecting crates would actually do the trick. Besides, this was a simpler programming, after all, crates don't run around. Incidentally, the only enemies planned at the time were these green tanks. Thus, the original concept was established. It was the beginning of 1988. Shortly afterward, I was able to do my first laps with my rocket ship. I had designed the ship dynamics to be a bit more maneuverable than Thrust, and I saw that it was good.

GRAVITY FORCE

FOR EVERYONE!

The author of Gravity Force, Stephan Wenzler, has secured that the game is no longer under copyright with Kingsoft. He has created an adapted version of the original game that now runs on all Amigas (not just the A500). This is available for all Amiga Fever readers to download for free from our homepage!
(http://www.amigafever.com)
This Gravity Force version even runs on a 68060; if you experience problems, the cache should be disabled in the Early Startup Menu. Have fun playing, and a special thanks to Stephan Wenzier for making this possible.

The cult game is born

For the level structure, I was inspired by the C64's character mode: Each level was composed of 8x8 pixel, beautifully drawn blocks for the background graphics, and (in-game) invisible blocks for control purposes. Some of the control characters, for example, caused a certain cannon to start firing when the ship was above it. I thought that was an elegant method. There were 256 characters in total, which gave the graphics a certain simplicity, but that didn't bother me. I continued to focus on good gameplay. Little by little, more elements were added, such as the aforementioned firing cannons. Nevertheless, collecting crates in a brown cave slowly but surely became boring, and I thought about what else I could do with my rocket ship. Finally, I came up with the idea of racing through numbered gates.

It must have been around this time that a far more dramatic upheaval began to take shape on the horizon.

Insane races in 2-player mode!
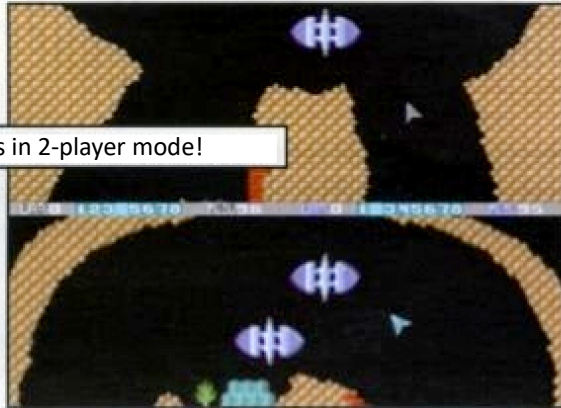
An idea that would influence generations of game programmers for years to come, but I had no idea at the time. The race against the clock wasn't bad, but how about competing live against a second player, I thought. A two-player mode was needed with a brotherly shared screen. Implementing the split screen wasn't all that complicated, which I naturally welcomed. The result was astonishing: Now you could race against each other and shoot each other down? That would be the keyword for the next expansion. I couldn't stand these orgies of senseless violence in two-player races any longer. I had something more ambitious in mind: I wanted to create an orderly framework for a man-to-man fight, down to the last ship. The "Dogfight" mode was born. This, I thought, would be a nice little addition.

Where will the game be released?

My little game was now 90% finished. It was slowly time to check commercial viability.

Kingsoft had a request for new software in their advertisements at the time, so a demo went to Kingsoft, and just to be on the safe side, to two other publishers at the same time. To my great surprise, two of them spontaneously agreed, including Kingsoft. After tough negotiations, the contract went to Kingsoft. The name "Gravity Force" was, by the way, Kingsoft's idea, but otherwise they had no further influence on the game, and I was able to complete the remaining 10% unhindered. Gravity Force was released in early 1989 ... the rest is probably history.

The Gravity Force loading pic - it's about to start

Who could have guessed?

If anyone could accuse me of anything, it was that I underestimated the importance of the 2-player mode and focused too much on the traditional part. But great innovations take time, and I wanted to finish at some point. Incidentally, I saw the many imitations as the best compliments I could get, considering I hadn't gotten really rich. Maybe there will be an official (really good) sequel soon.

Things really get serious at higher levels