Song of the Weekend

By Lee Jackson

From the Lee Jackson Audio Community Discussion Group
(https://www.facebook.com/groups/ljackaudiodiscgroup)

Entry: 20200530 -- E1 L4-6, Stargunner

_____

This week's "Song of the Weekend" is actually a suite of songs: Episode 1, Level 4-6, from the Apogee Software game, "Stargunner."

My work for Stargunner is different from all my other work in that it was not done using my MIDI sequencer, Cakewalk. Instead, it was composed using a "tracker" program called Fasttracker 2 (but saving in an enhanced MOD format instead of FT2's native XM format). Tracker programs are different in many ways: they work with columns of data, they use numbered "patterns" that can be reordered to suit your needs, and they require samples of sounds in order to produce music. Those are just a few of the differences - there's quite a steep learning curve as well, since documentation is sketchy (and since Google didn't exist back in those days).

I didn't have the time nor the resources to do much of my own sampling back then, and I was learning how to use FT2 away from work. (I was not yet the Music and Sound Director, if memory serves.) What I wound up doing was either using samples from BBS sites or, heaven forgive me, ripping samples from other songs. I had no other choice.

FT2 was not even the first tracker program I'd messed with. Multitracker was my first: my song, Night Storm on a Texas Road, was composed using it. In fact, I believe it was that song that got me the job doing Stargunner.

We worked on the shareware version of the game first. What you know as Episode 1, Level 4-6 of the Registered version was in fact the first song I wrote for the shareware version, making it Episode 1, Level 1-3 of the shareware version.

Here's how the songs worked: an episode consisted of three levels, in this case levels 4 through 6. Each level began with a basic level song, which played until you reached the end of the level. At that point, a new song would kick in. For levels 4 and 5, a Stage Guardian boss song would play, whereas for level 6, a Zone Guardian song would play for the more fierce boss. After you defeated each boss, a Victory song would play.

The fun part about all of the above is that, because of the numbered pattern nature of MOD files, everything for all four songs was contained in a single file. Nice, neat, and tidy. Only the composer and the programmer (and the code) knew where things were going to jump.

(con't)

I am not going to attempt a musical analysis of the songs this week, since to do so would result in a post long enough to require its own page. Instead, please allow me to leave you with links to each part of the overall suite (please forgive the gaps - they were the only files of the songs I could find on YouTube). Thank you for reading, and thank you for voting for your "Song of the Weekend"!

Level Music - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rdUWDgfppg

Stage Guardian - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ysdRhob9gM

Zone Guardian - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LAWZc3-HPA

Victory - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcrPUzeRt1A