

Crazy Old Tim Plays All the D-Mods

(Maybe come up with a better title?)

Tim Maurer

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1999

ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.

Preface

(Seth, SabreTrout, Snyder, Hertel, me, someone else?)

Introduction

I'm getting back into Dink Smallwood. It's fun to revisit it, and the new frontend sure is convenient. Back when I first played it, you had to use command line arguments to play or make D-Mods. I'm going to reminisce about the "old days," and I'm sorry if you already know about this stuff. If you're interested, though, I have managed to track down copies of my legendarily bad D-Mods from the beginning, and I'll have a link in this post.

I believe I first encountered Dink in 1998, when it was still pretty new. I had a subscription to PC Gamer Magazine, which came with a disc of demos (and occasionally some full games) each month. By the way, Coconut Monkey was the mascot of PC Gamer back in the day, in case you were wondering where my username and other references come from.

The demo of Dink really grabbed me, even though neither the gameplay nor the graphics were anything special even for the time. What grabbed me was the unique sense of humor and the way the game was open to the player doing almost anything. I've played quite a few games that were funny, but I've never seen a sense of humor like the one in Dink before or sense. I could go on with my feelings on the game, but I'm getting off-topic.

I ordered the game (\$14.95 + 4.95 S&H) and played through it pretty quickly. I still have my pressed disc. I don't think it was the first release (1.02?) I think it was 1.03 or 1.04. Early versions had some weird bugs - I think at one point the Herb Boots simply didn't work.

RTSoft's website led me to what was then the place to go for Dink news - Mike Snyder's Dink Smallweb. Snyder (who often went by Wyndo) was totally crucial to the game's early success and there being a Dink community at all. Of course the main draw of the game (the initial adventure being quite short) was the incredible degree to which it could be modified, but making D-Mods was at first a nearly incomprehensible mess. Mike made the skeleton, which made it much easier to create a D-Mod (Actually, I believe he even came up with the term "D-Mod" in a conversation with Seth Robinson). It was directly to his website that I submitted my early D-Mods - he'd accept anything.

I was 12 years old, had no idea what I was doing, and was making the D-Mods for the wrong reasons: I thought just getting something - anything - out there to get some recognition was a good idea. Of course, as incompetent as I was then, it's amazing I managed to make anything at all; remember, making D-Mods was HARD back then, using the clunky original DOS map editor and having to do scripts in an ordinary text editor completely separately.

Anyway, sometime around 2001 I had them removed from the Dink Network; this was a good move. However, a few people on the forums were upset, claiming either that they had liked them, that they had historical value, or that reducing the amount of available D-Mods was always bad. Well, I managed to find copies of all four on an old archived copy of Snyder's site on archive.org, which saves copies of every website its crawler bots can reach.

The D-Mods are the Dink Smallwood Forever Trilogy (Forever, Infinite, and Unlimited) and 2001: A Dink Odyssey. Fair warning: Don't download them if you want to have a good time, an acceptable time or even a non-aggravating time - I cannot stress enough how bad they are. I'm posting them only as items of historical interest because I've seen people around here searching for "lost" D-Mods before.

Unfortunately, a lot of really old D-Mods don't work correctly in V1.08 Aural+ for some reason. The main problem (I observed this even in Search for Milli Vanilli) is that control will sometimes mess up and you'll either freeze for a while or be unable to stop walking in the same direction. In addition, these particular D-Mods sometimes load the wrong graphics, and will crash whenever you punch anything (I swear, when I released them they weren't THAT broken). Amusingly (this should tell you how bad they are), three out of the four D-Mods can be completed without ever doing this. The one that can't is Unlimited, which is just a series of fights.

Back to general Dink history: Snyder had an in-universe "Timeline"¹ of the D-Mods going at one point.

One thing I find amusing about that list is that, unless I'm mistaken, every single D-Mod on it that wasn't complete at the time was never released at all. I bet most of them were never even in development. One of them had the same name as a totally different D-Mod redink1 would later make, however.

Mike bowed out of the scene relatively early and made a browser-based game called Lunatix Online (it was a little bit like Kingdom of Loathing, if you're familiar with that). There were a lot of Dink sites back then - Gary Hertel's Dink Darkwoods was a significant one - but my favorite quickly became Dan "redink1" Walma's, which became the Dink Network, which went through several incarnations and domains before ending up here. Dan and Talmadge are to thank for the "Dink community" exploding like it did for a while, and I think it's pretty dang impressive that it still exists after fifteen years.

BY THE WAY: Since there isn't a lot going on in the Dink community these days, and since I'm taking to going back and playing this game with a greater fervor even than I had back in the day, I had a kind of crazy idea: I'd play all - yes, ALL - of the D-Mods available about as thoroughly as I could and write about them at some length, first writing about the core game itself. I'm a fairly experienced writer and I think I could make it interesting.

Tim 'CocoMonkey' Maurer, August 14th, 2013

¹ <http://www.prowler-pro.com/dmods/chron.html>

1998

Having gotten into Dink near the beginning, I left the community for good by 2002. Even when I paid a nostalgia visit in 2006, I played only World of DinkC and The Green Voice in My Head: Hangover and Agony. *As of this writing, these are still the only D-Mods I've ever played that were released after FIAT*, so I have no clue how far D-Mod development has come in that time.

Come with me, the author of quite possibly the worst D-Mods ever, on a journey through fifteen years of Dink. I will go on many quests, punch virtually everything in sight even if it makes no sense to do so, and deliver great justice to these many created worlds as well as this website.

How many ducks can one man stand the sight of? How much time can one spend punching pillbugs before they fill one's dreams? Why would this Tim guy devote so much effort to such a silly project, particularly for a community in which he is known mainly for sucking incredibly hard at basically everything? These are, indeed, rhetorical questions.

You may ask how I have time for this. Simply put, I'm a loser with no job and not much else to do. All I've got is time (well, and a great fiancée who doesn't mind how much time I spend hunched over this laptop). Let's rock.

Part 1: RTSoft

Dink Smallwood

Author: RTSoft

Original release date: Late 1997



Feed the pigs. That's all you're told to do. It's one of the shortest game intros ever. YES NOW. It really sets the tone - Dink Smallwood is not like other games. It's considerably weirder.

Incidentally, have any of you guys ever seen the intro movie that came on the disc? It is the most bizarre inclusion ever. It has absolutely nothing to do with Dink Smallwood at all. It's just stunning how irrelevant it is - the only thing it has in common with the game is that there are dragons in it, and they look nothing like the ones in Dink. It starts in space, zooms in on a planet, and there are hordes of flying dragons, a crystal fountain, and other things you absolutely will not encounter in this game. I'd think it was included by mistake if it weren't for the logo at the end. I had also forgotten about Swedish publisher Iridon Interactive (which is still around under the name "Legendo," believe it or not).

Coming back to the game was a shock to the system, I'll admit. Did it really look this awkward, with a hero who boldly walks smack into doors which then decide that they had better open before he hurts himself some more? Were the MIDIs really THIS annoying? Still, it's not long before the game has sucked me back in and things like explosions happening on top of things instead of to things seem perfectly normal. Things.

This game is damn funny, and in just such an odd way that I can't think of any parallels. The humor is as dark as it is silly. Our hero is a pig farmer who is prone to punching inanimate objects and wild swings of his moral compass for no apparent reason. I was in tears laughing the first time I saw the wizard scene: "You're so cute and tiny!" "I am nothing of the sort!" "I just have to pet you!" Even as the corpses pile up, this game never takes itself too seriously.

The other thing I enjoyed about Dink that sets it apart from other games is how much it respects the player's agency. You can do pretty much anything you want most of the time, and oddly enough, you usually get away with it. Most games would just have you save the old woman's duck and be done with it, but here you can choose to do that, kill it and have her forever wonder where her Quackers is, or (and this still slays me) return the duck and then kill it in front of

her. "You little bastard!" I knew I was dealing with a unique game when she had a special line after the fire scene depending on what you had done to her duck. Yes, they put thought into this option. And you can kill castle guards because of course you can. It's kind of jarring when you experience actual consequences for your actions upon killing Jack (which isn't required). I don't really feel like much of a hero saving Dink's aunt from her abusive husband by showing up and immediately beating him to death. What sort of person Dink is depends a lot on what you decide to do - you can even kill the gossipy girl in Stonebrook and Dink just quips "She won't be bothering anyone anymore." I had a crisis of conscience playing this game as a kid. I actually thought, *Oh no, I shouldn't have done that.* Sure, I can load a save, but she still seems dead to me.

The game itself is good fun, amusing throughout and has solid, rewarding map design, but is even shorter than I remembered it being. I somehow managed to take twelve hours to complete the quest back in the day, but even remembering it as poorly as I do now, I finished it in five hours flat, and that's with all three optional areas explored and, if I'm not mistaken, every last powerup collected. I'm a lot better at strategy than I was then, as I quickly realized that herb boots and magic was superior to anything you could do with weapons in most situations. I didn't bother buying either the Massive or Flame Bow. I remember believing one of these was required to defeat Seth, but I got to him with only half my health at level 10 and beat him just fine with Hellfire and the Light Sword on my second try. It helps that I had put all my points into

magic, which figures into resisting the "harm" attacks.

Actually, after I wrote that I was going through the release notes for Dink Smallwood and found, to my disappointment, that Seth had made several tweaks to make the game easier by version 1.07. I don't mean to second-guess his ideas on game balance, and the game still felt like a reasonable challenge, but it's not really the same game I played so long ago. Here I thought it was easy because I'd gotten so great at it!



The quest feels incomplete, and that's probably because it is. Clearly they were rushed. All sorts of plot threads are left dangling, and in the source scripts you can find a quest that doesn't happen and quite a few references to a "Port Town" that doesn't exist. As it is, just when the game feels like it's really getting going, it comes to a pretty abrupt end. You know, it helps if I think of this as being the first D-Mod. It isn't, of course, but it's so similar to them in structure that it's not hard to think of it that way, and by that standard it wouldn't be topped for a long time.



The Search for Milli Vanilli

Author: Seth Robinson

Original release date: Shortly after Dink, I imagine

This is the first D-Mod. It's shorter than Milli Vanilli's career following the revelation that they weren't actually singing. There's no combat, or there shouldn't be - there are Slayers wandering around, but fighting them would be stupid and pointless. Sure, it's a one-joke D-Mod, but I think it's a pretty funny joke. It's hard to imagine anyone caring enough to reunite Milli Vanilli, but Dink and exactly one fan (this feels so right) believe in the image. Can't you see, you dear sweet boy, it doesn't matter - Girl, you know it's true, even if it isn't. When the legend becomes truth, print the legend. Ten out of ten, I played it five times in a row while crying tears of joy and lip-synching my heart out. Recommended.

Mystery Island

Author: RTSoft

Original release date: July 1, 1998

"Over five megabytes, they have to be kidding!" I remember saying. I counted percentage points as all of those bits trod their sullen march down the narrow corridor that was my phone line. Still, this was gonna be great. They even called it "Dink Smallwood Part III!"



Well, that may have been a bit much for them to say, as I completed this in about forty minutes without really remembering what I was supposed to do at first. Still, it was pretty awesome of RTSoft to make one more contribution to Dink lore, including those lovely bitmaps and those crazy robot graphics. The ship segment, composed of minigames, was a cool idea that showed off how much you could do with the scripting, but I really can't beat the vomit game. I don't know if the speed is machine-dependent or if I just suck, but I lose every time. Fortunately, you can reload your save and keep beating the very easy frogger-but-with-sharks minigame.

I've got to say, this story is an even deeper trip into Dink's twisted psyche, from the mental torture of the kid on the boat to straight up mating with a duck. Hats off, RTSoft, I'm not sure anybody has ever topped this very early D-Mod (A few others existed already, but I think they might all have been by Mike Snyder) in terms of the sheer level of messed-up crap you are required to do. As for the gameplay, the biggest challenge is definitely when you have to hit a bunch of cameras under a strict time limit, but if you plan your route ahead of time and are efficient it's totally doable.



The story is something gruesome but very silly about robots that were supposedly meant for farming ("You planted DEATH, old man!") being programmed to do evil. It's simultaneously a huge departure from the original story and totally classic Dink. There are two endings, and personally, I like the "bad" one where Dink completely wigs out a bit more. "Nooo, this trip sucked ass," he explains. Well put.

Part 2: Wyndo's `98: The D-Mods of Mike Snyder

Mike "Wyndo" Snyder was the first person other than Seth Robinson to make a D-Mod. In fact, I think he might be the author of the first three D-Mods that weren't about searching for faded lip-syncing pop stars. Furthermore, all six of his D-Mods came out in 1998, so it makes sense to consider them all together. I'd like to say first that I have a lot of respect for Mike and the projects he was able to complete despite already being very busy. I, by contrast, have got nothing but time and *this* is probably the most productive thing I've done recently.

The Scar of David

Author: Mike Snyder

Original release date: March 22, 1998!

This is the first independent D-Mod by such a long length of time that I really can't account for it. I could be wrong, but I can't find any evidence of another D-Mod released until June, and I can't find evidence of a D-Mod released by somebody other than Snyder until July. Crazy, right? I wonder if he got an early copy of Dink. Anyway, big credit to the guy for being able to pick up DinkC so quickly despite its official documentation being, well, let's say extremely limited.

This D-Mod is a weird sort of thing, though. It doesn't make much sense and is almost totally unsatisfying, but hey, it's really more of a proof of concept than anything else, and it succeeds at that with flying colors. Anyway, it's sure better than my first four or five D-Mods.

You meet this guy named David who seeks revenge on a pizza chef. You offer to go rough him up. You meet said pizza chef (in the best thing in the entire D-Mod, he speaks in a painfully rendered terrible stereotypical Italian accent) and have to (quite counterintuitively) hit him and then leave, as

he's got thousands of hitpoints (I confirmed this by cheating; nothing special happens if you manage to beat him). You must then lie to David and claim you kicked the guy's ass, whereupon you'll get a plot item, go fight some pillbugs, and then talk to somebody to end the D-Mod. I'm sorry if that sounds like a walkthrough, but I really don't know what else to say about this bizarre little module.



Here's a spoiler about the nature of the "scar."

That ending is as satisfying to experience as it looks. It's actually kind of amusing that the whole premise turns out to have been a sham. Here's a game that mocks you for winning.

Actually, there are two other things worth mentioning. David mentions a "Zolan War," establishing a plotline that runs through all of Mike's D-Mods; it kind of blows my mind that he was already planning this. There is also a secret of sorts in this D-Mod. During the ending, if you managed to control your urges enough to not kill the duck on the main screen, he tells you to "punch the dead head three times and then talk to him." Well, it's too late, but you restart and go do this to a skull in the bar, and he gives you something you can use to access a secret screen.

Oh boy, right? Now we'll see the real ending. Going this far out of our way has got to pay off.

Actually, what you find is a knight who says, "You found the secret, whoop de doo." "Now what?" queries Dink. "*shrug*"

...I'm not going to lie. This was the first D-Mod I ever played, and at this point I began to wonder if I'd been ripped off for my \$20.

Actually, if you beat the game again there's some different text congratulating you. Dink says he can't wait until more adventures are made for him; with this, the ribbon is cut on Dink development for the masses. It's a start that promises much more. You could do a lot worse.



Community Response

This thread is awesome.

That is all.

..No wait, there's more - This thread wins on every possible level, it owns everyone until their faces melt, and all that is left is a mutilated skull, and yet they still manage to sit there and read this thread, even with their eyes burned out, instead of going to the emergency department at the hospital, because this thread is so bonca-loving awesome. Following this, Skull is not even upset that his DN identity doesn't mean much since everyone on the forum is now a skull, due to this thread melting their faces off, simply because the overflowing ebullience of this thread counters any possible negative thoughts.

Also, have a cookie.

Robj, August 21st, 2013

Dink's Doppelganger

Author: Mike Snyder

Original release date: June 6, 1998

Yes, "doppelganger" is misspelled. Mike indicated on his website that he'd learned this fact during development, but I guess he didn't end up bothering to fix it, probably for reasons I'll cover below.

This is very impressive for a second effort from somebody who had to pretty much invent the wheel. It's a big mod - Snyder's biggest, I think - that took me well over an hour to finish. It's got some original graphics, some MIDI files that Snyder composed himself, a real story told with cutscenes and quite a bit of text, solid map design without hardness errors, and was definitely quite fun at times. In its scope, it wouldn't be matched for some time. Despite this, Dink's Doppelganger as released is just one-third of what Mike Snyder had planned.



Some of Mike's flying saucers.

As he told on his website² (which is, impressively, still up), Mike had planned D's

²<http://www.prowler-pro.com/dmods/smallweb.html>

D, as he liked to abbreviate it, as an epic that would be sold for a nominal fee (He actually sold a couple of pre-orders, which he had to refund). However, he gave up on it due to an argument with his fiancée, who ended up leaving him because he spent so much time on D-Mods. At the time, he blamed himself. I wasn't there, of course, but it seems to me that she didn't respect his hobby or his creative drive. I mean, I used to chat with Mike sometimes while playing his browser-based game Lunatix Online, and he seemed like a cool guy. At any rate, Mike is currently married with kids, so he's well past this, but Dink's Doppelganger remains a somewhat awkward and troubling reminder of the tensions between different sides of a man's life that can tear them both apart.

Speaking of opposing sides, the plot of this D-Mod concerns a parallel universe where people occupy the opposite side of the moral axis (between good and evil) from the one they do in Dink's universe; Dink being a hero, his counterpart is a villain. You know, like in Star Trek. An evil wizard named Hembar makes the two Dinks switch places in order to prevent Dink from interfering with his evil plans. In the other universe, Dink encounters Hembar's good counterpart and a bunch of peace-loving aliens called Zolans (the implications of which for Dink Prime's universe should be obvious).

This D-Mod focuses much more on puzzles than the Action-RPG gameplay that dominated the original Dink Smallwood. Snyder scaled the enemies' Health Points

and Experience Points way back - Slimes give 2, Goblins give 3, Slayers give 5 exp. I was still level 3 by the end of it. You start the game (after a fairly lengthy intro cutscene in which an acquaintance of Dink proves himself to be a jerk by plainly announcing his intentions to get a girl drunk so she'll sleep with him, among other events) in a fence maze filled with enemies who are for the most part too powerful for you to fight yet. Once you get out, however, you'll find a +10 sword you can use to generally kill everything in this D-Mod in one or at most two hits.

At first, the puzzles are reasonable enough, but I ended up becoming quite frustrated with this D-Mod in the end due to "how the frig was I supposed to figure that out" puzzles that impeded my enjoyment and drove me to repeatedly reference a walkthrough. I mean, I'm sure I could have got them eventually, but there's no reason I should have to flounder for half an hour before finally stumbling upon the one completely unimportant-looking pot that I was supposed to check for a hint, for example. There were several puzzles of this variety, and they drag down what's otherwise a good D-Mod.

At one point there's a picture of a woman in a certain room. The man there talks about having lost the love of his life. The picture is clearly of Snyder's fiancée (I know this for sure because she appeared as a villain in a Lunatix Online In-Game Module (IGM) that Snyder made. You'll be unsurprised to learn that I coded a few IGMs myself and sucked hard at that too).

One thing I found unique and amusing about this D-Mod was the way you're made to take a quiz after reading a series of bitmaps about the good Hembar's backstory to make sure you paid attention. He went to the effort of writing the story, so damn it; you're going to read it! The best part is that, if you get all of the questions wrong, Hembar calls you an idiot and kills you. I always found this to be surprising and pretty hilarious.

After you solve quite a few puzzles and end up transported back to Dink's universe, the game suddenly stops happening. Things that clearly ought to have scripts attached to them do not. Then you encounter a sign. Viewing it displays this image:



And that's the end. Beyond that there's quite a bit of map to explore, hinting at what might have been, but there's nothing to find out there but one shiny gold coin, a token for your efforts. It's a strange and disorienting feeling - you're in the middle of a story and it's yanked out from under you. I guess Mike Snyder must have felt something similar.



The Quest for Arithia Part 1: The Ninth Lock

Author: Mike Snyder

Original release date: June 14, 1998

The Quest for Arithia trilogy is set several months before Dink's Doppelganger; Mike's timeline says so, and all the events in the D-Mods support this pretty well.

This is a much simpler mod. Dink and a friend set out to find a girl named Arithia, who's in trouble because she possesses the Rozarus, which Hembar could use to control time. I'm sure not all of that is actually revealed in this installment, but hey, that's the plot.

All you really do here is kill a bunch of goblins (like in Doppelganger, they give greatly reduced experience) in order to disengage a bunch of giant locks. Once you do, you can find Arithia's father, who doesn't have a lot of answers for you. It's a simple brawler, but it's fun enough and sets up the trilogy.

The Quest for Arithia Part 2: The Rozarus

Author: Mike Snyder

Original release date: July 5, 1998

The Rozarus is a longer and more involved installment, and it's my favorite of the three parts. Dink and his pal visit a sort of bar/cafe, where the pitiless Goblin who runs the place won't let you leave without paying 810 coins for a couple of meals. There's some pretty amusing stuff in here, including an old woman (?) who demands you bring her pepper, promising you 800 gold in return. When you get back to her, though, she turns you away, saying she already found some pepper. Poor Dink! If you press her, she asks if you're deaf. Ouch. Of course, you find 800 coins on your way to the pepper anyway, so it doesn't really matter.



I feel that the beginning of this D-Mod has an unfair level of difficulty. Since you only get 800 gold from the pepper quest, you're forced to go to the basement to make up the missing 10 by fighting boncas you're totally unprepared to fight. All you've got at this point is your fist, and the fast, 20 HP boncas can take you out usually in one hit and always in two. To make matters worse, there

is no save point in the pub, so you have to start from the intro every time you die. You've got to fight a bonca without making any mistakes until you've hit it about ten times, and if you're lucky (not always!) it will drop at least 10 gold. Oh, and don't think you're smart by making the boncas hit each other - in this game, that causes them to GAIN HP. I'm not sure there was any good reason to change this mechanic from the original game.

At this point you can leave, buy the meals (they're health restoratives) and go out and get a much-needed large health capacity boost and SAVE. Now you have to fight your way through the basement of boncas, which is tough but no longer ridiculous. After this, you get out into a large area where you can find a shop that sells "potions" (instant stat boosts), which is your replacement for leveling up since, once again, experience earned is scaled back to almost nothing. There are some more powerups to find and then a VERY tough cave full of slayers, which is a very confusing maze. I was nearly pulling my hair out, but this felt like a good challenge to me instead of an unfair one, and I managed to finish without cheating or even using a walkthrough.

At the end of the D-Mod, you reach the place where Hembar and Arithia are, only to get caught by a guard. This is a problem...

The Quest for Arithia Part 3: Elemental Peace

Author: Mike Snyder

Original release date: August 2, 1998

...except not really, because the guard is a total moron who falls for a "look behind you!" type move, and you're free to explore.

Although this D-Mod has quite a few things going for it, I don't like it nearly as much as Rozarus. First, the positives: the snowy world is well mapped out and looks good, your main task is to bribe a couple of guards, which I love - you've got to appreciate guys who are willing to conduct simple, straightforward business - and there's an interesting concept introduced in the Time Council, a trio of knights who know all about the past, present, and future respectively.



Despite those high points, this D-Mod is plagued by fixable design problems that forced me to use a guide and made the game unfun for me, though I did gut my way through it and finish without cheating at any point (Incidentally, this D-Mod features an early anti-cheat script that's unlikely to prevent Ultimate Cheat, which didn't exist at

the time, from working). First, the map is almost completely empty. I hate walking around screens with nothing of importance on them, accomplishing nothing. Sure, the original game had some screens with nothing on them, but I never felt like I was wandering aimlessly like this. This problem was present to some degree in both Doppleganger and Rozarus, but it while it wasn't bad enough in those D-Mods to really detract from the experience, it's much worse here.



Mike even made fun of this tendency back in Dink's Doppleganger.

That alone wouldn't hurt the D-Mod too much, but the main problem is that it seems, at first, to present an impossible situation. After you spend your time exploring the fairly big, empty map, you find that these things exist:

- 1) A guard who wants a bribe of gold to access a passage.

- 2) The time council, who tell you to come back later.
- 3) A guard who refuses to let you into a castle under any circumstances.
- 4) A hidden path over water (it's not too hard to find) that leads to 500 gold, but this isn't enough to bribe the first guard.

and, damningly...

- 5) A path that leads to a screenlocked screen with three fast, 20 HP, no-friendly-fire boncas.

Now, I ask you: wouldn't you assume that 5 is the way to proceed? Doesn't that seem like a big heaping steaming pile of total BS, considering that you're back to the fist and 10 health again? Well, I gutted it out and eventually beat the three boncas without making a single mistake. This led to another screenlocked screen with five of them. There's another one past it with SEVEN. And God help you, if you managed to beat them all in a perfect run, you still would have no clue what to do afterwards. Oh, and you'll notice I didn't mention a save point.

Here is what you have to do: As the castle wall in the southeast slopes down, you have to hug it to reach a screen where you (not Dink) can see over the wall to a very interesting character who helps you despite clearly being evil. The problem is that no one would do this. The mind's eye sees the little corner you can shove yourself into to reach this screen as a solid wall, I guarantee it. I mean, really: You see a castle wall going to the very lower left corner. You go left a screen, you go down, and you see a castle wall going up into the upper right corner. Solid wall, right? Ugh.

Anyway, this opens up an area with a health expansion, a healing fountain, and a save point. This makes the boncas something you can handle, since after each screen you can return to heal and save. There's more, including a guard who enjoys receiving flowers, a very funny bit with a talking duck (Dink: "Eh, a talking duck is nothing special. I even mated with a duck once." Duck: "You keep your hands off me, you sick freak.") elemental-themed rooms and a fairly satisfying resolution, but by that point I was too frustrated to enjoy it much.

I know I just eviscerated that D-Mod, but I don't think it isn't worth playing. There's quite a bit to it, and to be clear, it's better than anything I ever made. However, it really goes to show how a couple of simple things can make a fun D-Mod into a frustrating one. For example, why do you allow the player to access the boncas when they're not ready to fight them? This makes them think it's what they're supposed to do. D-Mod authors and indeed game designers in general should take this particular lesson to heart and listen to testers.





Dinkanoid

Author: Mike Snyder

Original release date: August 30, 1998

Between the release of the previous D-Mod and this one, my "skills" had hit the Dink community with a dull thud and I was stinking up the community with my immaturity like certain people I won't name seem to be doing now. Ah, well.

Anyway, this was amazing. Mike left D-Mod production with a bang by recreating the arcade classic Arkanoid in the Dink engine, complete with powerups. We all had so little idea at the time just how extensible the engine was, just how much DinkC was capable of, and Mike blew it wide open so early in the game. You really could do just about anything. Sadly, at the time I left there had still been little of this kind of programming around.

At the time, there was a contest with small cash prizes to be awarded to those with the highest scores. I played my hardest and didn't cheat; however, some people did, and the contest was abruptly cancelled. Oh well.

Part 3: The Dink Smallweb D-Mod Competition and more

The first four D-Mods released on Snyder's site (which is pretty much the only record I can find of D-Mod releases in 1998) that weren't by either Seth or Mike were all released on July 3rd as part of a competition Mike hosted. There were cash prizes (half of the cash was donated by Seth), but since Dink's popularity hadn't picked up much yet (I think it was that very month that the demo was featured in PC Gamer Magazine, which is how I and many others found the game), there were just four entries and only eleven people voted. I'll cover these D-Mods in ascending order of how they placed in the contest.

Dinkopolis

Author: Kevin Bugin

Original release date: July 3, 1998

There isn't a lot to recommend this D-Mod, and it might even have been the worst one available for a little while, but I've got to say a few things to be fair to the author. First, they hadn't had much time to learn D-Mod authoring - this came out at a time when resources were so few that making a D-Mod that was at all functional was a bit impressive. Second, it was made for Mike's contest, which had a strict deadline that wasn't long after it was announced. Finally, even this is so much better than my early stuff that you'd pretty much have to be a moron not to recognize it. You'll hear this a lot out of me; sorry to be repetitive, but I'd be remiss not to point it out. In fact, go ahead and assume that I think every D-Mod is better than everything I made in 1998 unless I say otherwise. If I'm significantly praising the D-Mod, odds are good you can go ahead and also assume I think it's better than anything I made period.

There's a thin story here about Dink being put in a place called "Dinkopolis" by an evil Wizard who looks like Martridge but turns out to be his twin brother. The place itself

turns out to be a dream, which is a somewhat cool concept. However, while you're told that you can't escape, the truth is that nothing could be easier. You don't have to fight the monsters, except if you happen to end up on a certain screen that locks, and you can actually just walk right out.



Ideally, you'd walk left at the start into town and talk to the people (and pig) there to learn about what there is of the story, then go southeast and encounter a trapped girl, fight Milder and escape the dream, but there's nothing to force you to do any of this, and you can easily miss everything except

the fight against Milder, which you're free to ignore and walk past.

Dinkopolis isn't just simple; it's also full of problems. Hardness problems are everywhere, lots of the map doesn't make sense, the weapons have odd HUD graphics that don't fill the boxes, and the author sometimes used "say" for exchanges instead of "say_stop," resulting in conversations that fly by without any control. Trees turn into pillbugs, although that could be explained by the fact that you're in a dream - I was going to say it was clearly unintentional, but there's actually a character who refers to the phenomenon. There's one rather frenetic MIDI and you're given the throwing axe (3000 gold in the original, and only unlockable by fighting a pair of dragons) from the start, making fighting everything very easy.

I think the author was learning as he went along, because the D-Mod improves a lot after you get out of "Dinkopolis." The second area has a map that, while it's nothing special, makes sense, and has few of the odd hardness errors that were all over the first part. Furthermore, you're actually required to go fight the wizard boss by a bombable rock that works exactly as designed. You'd be advised to pick up the stat-boosting potion, life upgrades (which leave hardness behind, a bug that was also in my D-Mod), and Hellfire spell that you find, too, because if you just go straight to "Wildridge" he will kill you almost immediately with Seth's "greater harm" attack that directly subtracts life points from Dink.

Being responsible for some of the worst D-Mods ever actually gives me an interesting perspective. Most people would just call this mod crap, and they aren't wrong. However, I

know from personal experience what you get when you're a kid who doesn't know how anything works and applies almost no effort before rushing something out with very little testing, and it's something a lot less than this. The map here is a decent size, it has a beginning and an end, and quite a few things work correctly. There are well-defined edges to prevent you from just walking to the edge of the screen and being stopped by nothing. It might seem bizarre to give out such faint praise for such basic things, but doing something like correctly awarding the Hellfire spell or making a bombable rock that works were totally out of my league in 1998.



I guess it's true that reality is largely subjective, because everything depends on your viewpoint. When you're lying in an excrement-filled ditch, even the people trudging waist-deep through the nasty mud just above you inspire a certain amount of envy.

Pointless

Author: Thom C. Vedder

Original release date: July 3, 1998

You've got to admire a game that wears its pointlessness on its sleeve like that. Indeed, you're thrust into a weird situation without any explanation at all.

In some ways, this mod is very poor. The map design, while making basic sense and lacking major hardness errors, is very restrictive and sparse. You're given 100 attack and 70 defense at the start (Is this intentional? Who knows?), so fighting things is trivial. Some things are broken - a sign has no script attached to it, a bed and a girl have the same script attached, some conversation choices don't work, and there's one house you can enter but not leave because leaving warps you to a spot where you warp back in no matter which way you walk.

Worst of all, though, is the fact that most people probably never see the part of "Pointless" that has a point because it requires you to walk south through what looks like a solid fence without any hint you should do this. This is obviously awful design, and a far, far worse version of the problem I complained about in Elemental Peace, which is a much better mod than this one.

Despite all its problems, though, I actually have to recommend Pointless to the obsessive Dink fan. As I said above, there's really no reason to download Dinkopolis today, but that's ironically untrue of Pointless. The reason is that despite its myriad faults, Pointless is quite clever and

has some seriously funny jokes that made me laugh out loud several times - that by itself is enough reason to download and play one of these silly things.

The jokes are kind of crude, but quick, sharp and effective. "What do you sell here?" asks Dink. "We sell swords. Would you like one?" "Why are there two guys and just one bed?" "Uh... well..." "Do your parents know yet?" Dink's got a surprisingly quick wit here.



Dink plays it safe

Pointless also has a very interesting ending if you manage to find it, which isn't easy. After going through the fence you have to fight some dragons, and the screen will never unlock unless you defeat the one in the middle last. After that and another area, though, you're sent back to just outside Stonebrook from the original Dink Smallwood... just before the game starts.

This is fantastic. I'm serious, this is a brilliant idea and well executed, and even as broken as it is, Pointless is badly underrated when it

contains this section. Dink asks the characters he encounters all the questions you'd expect him to ask, and it all makes sense and seems in character. Why did Dink never see Martridge again after defeating the bonca? What caused the fire in Dink's house? Dink demands answers about the things that never got resolved and didn't make sense. He doesn't really get them, but it's still compelling.

Of course, even this segment of the game is quite broken. The screens were ported directly from the original and still contain their original scripts when they shouldn't, which causes you to get stuck if you go to Stonebrook and talk to Dink's mom. Even so, what a neat idea.

In the end, Dink tries to save his mother only to lose her again, and he learns that the cause was a simple accident after all. As silly as the rest of the mod is, this had me getting pretty emotional and thinking about the meaning of the title. Maybe "Pointless" refers to the essential pointlessness of all things in this random and uncaring universe. We search so hard for meaning in everything, but terrible things can happen to us and it often really is just a coincidence.

Or maybe it just means not to take a silly little D-Mod too seriously.

The Sword of Paranor: Forgotten Realms

Author: Black Oaks (Silencer)

Original release date: July 3, 1998

It seems to me like this D-Mod had a lot of ambition behind it, but it's ambition that goes unrealized. I say this because it acts like it wants to be an epic, with its grand-sounding MIDI, text bitmap intro and ending, and large world map that you visit little of, but it's actually very short and one of the more linear D-Mods I've seen. There's really not much you can do in this D-Mod, and you do it all in a specific order.

Sword of Paranor also has a fair amount of problems. You start with a longsword, but you aren't told so and it isn't equipped. There are some strange hardness areas out of nowhere, map transitions that look strange, invisible walls (this is what I'm going to call screens with nothing blocking an edge that don't let you walk that way from now on, for convenience), things that ought to have scripts attached but don't, and hearts that leave behind hardness. This last problem was so common at the time that I think you have to go ahead and forgive authors for it, since the editor had practically no documentation at the time. It's making me appreciate Dink's Doppleganger and the Arithia series more for just getting everything right; Mike Snyder was head and shoulders above everybody else early on.

There are some original graphics in this D-Mod, which was a bit notable at the time, but other than that there's nothing interesting at all. You kill some goblins ("orcs" here; fair enough), trigger an event, kill some more goblins, find Dink's uncle, and you're done in four or five minutes, much less if you knew where you were going. I'd say pass on this one.



Some of the graphics here are pretty cool, though.



The Slaughterhouse

Author: Kevin Kazimir

Original release date: July 3, 1998

This was the winner of the contest, so Kevin made off with quite a bit of cash. Nice going, Kevin.

This is another short one, but at least there's only one quite minor bug (if you stick around for several seconds after reading a sign, a debug line "value of passport is 0/1" is left in). Some cultists worship a leader simply known as HIM. There are some pillbugs and slimes around, but you've got no real reason to fight them. All you have to do is find a few items by examining objects (which you'll learn to do since just about everything has a script attached to it, a nice touch), deliver them to some guy and "fight" HIM. I say "fight" like that because HIM is just a duck who taunts you for a while, claiming you're no match for him, until you punch the stupid bugger's head off. Amusingly, you can go back and tell the guy who helped you who HIM was, but he won't believe you.

It was good for chuckle, I suppose, which was good enough at the time to win the contest considering that I'll bet all the judges (who didn't have much time to vote) thought it was impossible to finish Pointless, which probably made them think it deserved a low score by default.

The Scar of David 2: Search for the Scarf

Author: Thom C. Vedder

Original release date: July 12, 1998

The author of Pointless managed to get another one in under the wire before I came along and stole the Dink community's innocence by making the first truly worthless D-Mods. (Yes... Guess what I'm doing next time.) Like Pointless, it has a few lines that made me laugh a bit. Unlike Pointless, it ended up feeling completely and utterly... well, pointless.

It's a bit of an odd phenomenon, making a sequel to somebody else's D-Mod, but Mike Snyder was apparently OK with it. Anyway, this seems to have happened at least a couple more times in the crazy world of Dinkerdome.

There's a fairly long intro that has Dink walking around and talking to people, which was a bit advanced for the time. Dink has to look for the Scarf of David, which has been stolen and... look, who am I kidding? This D-Mod isn't really a quest so much as a practical joke played on the player, way more so even than the original Scar of David. Dink searches for the scarf, all right, but he doesn't find it. After a bit of busy work (navigate a dungeon filled with pillbugs you don't have to fight, navigate a labyrinth filled with Slayers you really shouldn't fight) and talking to a few people, you'll come to the guy who supposedly has the Scarf...



You can pretend to be his dad... awkward

...and he will (assuming you don't pick the wrong choice statement and cause the game to hang, which you can do TWICE in this D-Mod) tell you there isn't one.

"This is only a demo, Dink."

Wha?

"Actually, I lied. I like messing with your head."

Grrrr! That bastard! But it's called "The Search for the Scarf!"

"Well, did you look for a scarf?"

GRRRR! You win this round, Thom C. Vedder! I'll get you next time, Thom. Next time... *strokes cat*

Moorack and the Pillbugs

Author: Layne Phillips, Phil Triolo

Original release date: Release date: August 2, 1998

Layne reviewed this D-Mod himself on TDN in 2002. He said that he knows it was bad, but that at the time there were "about 3" D-Mods. There were actually 11 by my count when this was released, but the point is well taken: it was early on. He also says "I do not suggest anyone to download this unless you are learning to D-Mod or are trying to play every last D-Mod ever created." He knew. He KNEW.

This D-Mod is, as Layne helpfully informs us, bad. Tiling looks like crap, there isn't much to do, and the hardness errors are so bad that you can't really count on a wall being a wall. There is also some unusual English.



A specimen of unusual English

By far the biggest problem with this D-Mod is that it's quite frustrating and there's no payoff. Even though I complained about some things in some of Snyder's mods that made them frustrating to me, they had some nice visuals and story elements waiting for

you to make it worth your while. But hey, the authors were 13 at the time and didn't crap the metaphorical bed with D-Mod authoring like I did at age 12, so they deserve a bit of credit.

As an aside, these D-Mods are already starting to blend together for me. Things start to seem the same after a while, and aside from the frustration the only impression I got here was "oh, it's another D-Mod." One unusual thing this D-Mod does is to display the surroundings of a house when you're in it:



That can't be good for the foundation.

I think this looks awkward (it's supposed to be kind of from Dink's perspective, right?) but your opinion may vary.

The plot concerns an evil wizard named Moorack (although one NPC calls him "Moordack") turning people into pillbugs. The village you start in (all there is to the D-Mod is the village and a short dungeon) is surrounded by pillbugs, and I guarantee

you'll be beating up a lot of them. The implications of this are kind of harrowing, but hey, Dink has always taken "Don't murder" as more of a guideline, right?

A "vixen" (old hag) in town tells you not to go after Murdock until you have high stats and lots of life, but the game really doesn't give you much opportunity to acquire these things. You can find one standard megapotion in town as well as a golden heart that you have to walk right through an ordinary-looking cave wall to get (to be fair, the farmer in the house above does say that he hid something "somewhere"); these two things in no way prepare you for the dungeon.

In the dungeon, most screens are filled with strong, fast, tough pillbugs that target you by default, so staying alive is tough. At least nothing but the boss area is screenlocked, so I recommend not fighting anything. Two rooms are filled with slayers and contain another megapotion (though you never get magic) and another golden heart; you should get these, but you'll still be pretty underpowered.

Though you don't have to fight the enemies in the dungeon, the last boss is actually pretty damn tough. It's tough to win, and here is how I did it without cheating:

- 1) First of all, I was desperate enough to grind to level 3 (500 total exp) using the standard original-game pillbugs around town. I don't think you have to do this, but I was hurting for an edge in life points.
- 2) Go to the slayer room in the dungeon and incite a slayer meleé. When they're done killing each other, pocket the gold. DON'T ATTACK THE LAST SLAYER.

- 3) If you survived step 2, return to town, beat up pillbugs until you're healed, and save. You should be able to buy the longsword (400 gold) after one or two trips; keep doing steps 2 and 3 until you've got 2000 for the clawsword. Use any extra gold to buy as many elixirs as you can. If you can't afford any, maybe you should do an extra trip just in case.
- 4) With the clawsword in hand, rush your way to the boss.

This took me over an hour. Arrrgh. Actually, having to "grind" reminded me a tiny bit of playing Dragon Warrior as a kid, and it got me to thinking that a D-Mod based around that could be pretty cool. You'd have to have more of a story, a big world that you couldn't venture too far out in without leveling up or it'd be too dangerous, and a payoff that'd make it feel worth it, but it's a concept worth exploring.

One thing that's a bit neat is that there are two boss rooms. In the first, there are three giant pillbugs and a harmless, slow-walking wizard (is THIS Muurock?). All you need to do is kill one pillbug to unlock the screen. In the second you'll find a much tougher giant pillbug who talks to you - this is the real Mawdrack. Do your best to strike from a distance, stay sharp on elixirs and he'll go down, pointlessly awarding 1500 experience.

Now that you've beaten Merduck, you might think that you can go back to town and see how the spell has been broken; you can't. Instead, you should pay attention to the way Mowrook mentioned a secret exit every time you hit him. Check the wall for a path to the ending, in which Dink apparently saved some woman's son.



The ending. Huzzah!

She says she'll do anything to repay him, and it is strongly implied that Dink will use the opportunity to get laid, and not in a nice way. Yuck.

I will say that I got a chuckle out of some of that good old-fashioned fourth wall humor that always gets me. Arguing with a standard-young-lady sprite who keeps an inn, Dink demonstrates his knowledge of the graphics library: "You don't even have a base attack, you can't hurt me." Tee hee!

Part 4: My own incredibly crappy mods

You know, I'm glad that for the first time ever I'm contributing something positive to this community, because I've had more than my share of swings at it before and come up shorter than a particularly short elf in a community of elves that is known even among elves for having lower than average height. Imagine that the other elves pick on this particular elf and call him "Shorty." But actually they're being kind of nice by pretending that he's even worthy of their ridicule and oh God I can't do this.

You know what? Even listening to me talk about how bad my D-Mods are wouldn't be worth your time. We're better off pretending they don't exist - yeah, that's the ticket. I mean, it's not like they were ever relevant anyway. So why don't we just move on and...

As I typed, I thought I heard a slight tapping at the door. Leaning back, I craned my head to look out the window, but there didn't seem to be anyone there. I shrugged, thinking it must have been my imagination. As soon as I returned my attention to my writing, however, the tapping continued, louder - a pounding now. It sounded familiar somehow. Groaning (I hate being interrupted), I got up and opened my door. I still didn't see anybody. Swearing oaths to various deities combined with various breakfast items ("Jesus H. Christ nailed to a crucifix-shaped Belgian Waffle with Blueberry Syrup"), I returned to my computer. The pounding began anew almost immediately.

I began to feel ill; an unease boiled nervously around the walls of my stomach. I'd never been the sanest guy around. Had I finally lost what few marbles I'd had? "There's nothing out there," I told myself, and I set resolutely to ignoring the strangely-familiar pounding even as it became louder and louder. My head started swimming laps around the room, and it wasn't making good time, either.

I was just about to start writing about Dinkzilla when the door burst open. A stranger barged into my room.

I looked up and did a double take just like a cartoon character. I had several failed attempts at speaking, then finally managed a weak, "Who are you?" The intruder didn't dignify that with a reply. He knew that I knew.

It was Dink Smallwood. This was, of course, impossible, but there it was. It took me a moment to recognize him with an actual face, but there was no mistaking it. He was even wearing that same dumb red cloth tied inexplicably to his shoulder.

"Okay," I thought to myself, "Obviously you're dreaming. We're way past the bounds of hallucination at this point." My brain was not buying it. I began to whimper.

Dink stood in the door and looked at me, swept a quick look around the room, checked a scroll of paper that he was carrying, and looked at me again. I swallowed what felt like a baseball filled with razor blades.

"Maurer? Timothy William Maurer?" he said.

"Yes?" I squeaked. Maybe if I was lucky I'd just have a fatal aneurysm right at this very moment.

"Well, it's about time I found you," he growled. I backed into the wall and immediately broke out into a fit of sobbing and wailing like the wuss that I am. It wasn't even a little bit dignified. Snot ran down my face. He took a step back.

"Good grief, man," Dink said to me, "Get ahold of yourself. This is just embarrassing."

I closed my eyes, breathed heavily, and with all I was worth, summoned back most of my composure. "You're right," I said, "I'm sorry."

"Good," he said, and kicked me very hard in the kneecap. I went down like a sack of potatoes with the bottom cut out.

As I lay on the floor moaning (I was pretty sure something was broken), I saw him look at what I'd written. "Trying to weasel your way out of it, huh? I thought so. That's why I came here." He picked me up and put me in front of my computer. "Do you have any idea how much it sucked being put into your crappy mods, or how bad you made me look? Play them, and don't you dare hold back. It's the least you can do."

The above didn't happen, obviously, but it might as well have, because doing this is like pulling teeth. Let's get it out of the way: **All of the D-Mods I ever made sucked**³. "Terrible" is frankly too good of a word for the ones I made in 1998; only the later ones rise to the level of "terrible," because you really aren't doing something like Dink Forever any justice unless you break out the hyperbole. "Abysmal" and "worst D-Mods of all time" are a good start.

By the way, I'm going to cover all of my stuff at once. I'm not ordinarily going to jump around chronologically like this, but I need to get this out of the way like ripping off a bandage and express my regrets so I can move on and talk about real D-Mods.

If you want to play any of my D-Mods, here is some advice: Don't. If you still want to, then play Zink, be stunned by how bad it is, and don't be thrown off if you enjoy parts of it a little. Remember: it's only downhill from there. Don't say I didn't warn you. If you're determined anyway, I have made these first four "lost" mods available for you, you masochist.

³ This was written before Tim created *Malachi the Jerk* and *Dinkgon Warrior*, both of which are quite good.

Dink Smallwood Forever

Author: Tim Maurer

Original release date: August 6, 1998

The good news is that these D-Mods simply don't work. Anytime you hit anything, they crash.

The bad news is that I figured out how to fix them. Want to hear something funny? It isn't my fault, it's Mike Snyder's! I used his D-Mod skeleton to make my first four (if you twist my arm, five, but I'll get to that) D-Mods. It was not Skeleton B, which came out about a month afterward. Skeleton B fixed a problem with the skeleton's main.c - it was missing the global variable `&missile_source` (misspelled just like that). For some reason, this didn't cause a crash on hit back then, but it does in 1.07, 1.08, FreeDink, and Dink Smallwood HD. Some other D-Mods from back then have been patched to fix this already, and I think even these would have been if they weren't "lost" D-Mods. All you have to do to fix this problem is add that variable or simply copy the main.c from Skeleton B and paste it into the story folder. Don't do this!

I am completely serious and not even a little bit joking, people: you won't get ironic enjoyment out of these. I'll break format and tell you that I just played the first four D-Mods here in a row, and it was such an unpleasant experience that it caused me physical pain, emotional distress, and other things you could sue somebody for. If Dink really were getting his revenge by making me play these, he'd have enjoyed a hearty laugh as I stumbled madly through my own

creations, crying out "Why?" and sweating profusely.

All right, let's get down to business: Dink Smallwood Forever is an atrocity. Being 12 was no excuse for this. Some people were nice to me back then, and after playing these, I really don't know how they managed it. I, for my part, acted like a whiny, entitled brat who screamed about the slightest criticism.

Ugh, I keep getting side-tracked. You've got to understand, it's so hard for me to talk about these. Fine: Dink Smallwood Forever starts like this:



Not to imply this is some kind of intro. You have to TALK to that rock.

...which is actually quite appropriate. You'll notice there are no walls on this screen, but the only way you can go is down. You can enter a house, which contains Dink's "wife" Dot and his pet pig Oinky, the latter of whom is the one with plot significance here (at least as much as there is a plot, which isn't much at all). You can get a bunch of

powerups you don't need, including hearts that leave hardness behind. There are some enemies you don't have to fight. Eventually you may find Oinky again. He talks to you, telling you utter nonsense that I suppose I thought passed as a plot, and then is killed by someone unseen. This is our plot hook, everybody! Alternatively, you can walk all the way past all of this and straight to the end, since there's nothing to stop you. Even better, a little ways after the start there's a screen that's supposed to be inaccessible but isn't (I didn't place obstacles correctly) that warps you right to the finish! I recommend this route.

Amazingly, this is the second version of Dink Forever. I'm sure the first one was somehow worse. The only thing I specifically remember is that in this version, the savebots work. In the original, talking to them just had Dink say "that is a nice save," and the savebot would say "thankyou, human." Sic.

Oh, and here's something I forgot: I used to confuse left with right and east with west. Therefore, directions of that kind in this D-Mod and others after it all the way up through End of the World have those kind of directions reversed whenever they're referred to; this was also true of walkthroughs I made of my own mods, some of which are still on Dink Solutions. You might think I was an exceptionally stupid child, but I got good grades. Don't ask me.

If you think my writing chops and sense of humor might have saved this from being a totally dismal time, let me assure you that neither of these traits existed back then.



Here is an example of my idea of humor at the time. Kill me.

There are only a handful of screens, hardness errors are everywhere, tiling is ugly as sin, the map makes no sense, I used "say" instead of "say_stop" just about everywhere, so you'll have to just stand and wait if you want to see the conversations, some scripts are attached to the wrong things, there's no music except for the scene in which Oinky is killed, and everything is generally irrepressibly bad and a rotten waste of your time. Here are some better ways to use your time than playing Dink Forever:

- Play Solitaire with a deck that's missing random cards.
- Draw a picture with the wrong end of a pencil.
- Get a real pet pig and name it Oinky.
- Get drunk.
- Masturbate.
- Play any D-Mod with a rating of over 1.0 on Dink Network.
- Sing off-key.
- Have a philosophical debate with your cat.
- Sit completely motionless just to see how long you can.
- Read the worst book I've ever seen in my life, "Fifty Shades of Gray."

Think about how glad you are you're not playing Dink Forever.

And so on. I guess my favorite part was how Dink says "Let's wrestle!" if you punch Oinky, sort of like my favorite part of getting beaten up is the feeling of relief when they stop. You get no such relief, however, because I kept going.

By the way, it ends like this:



Don't be sad, Dink! Look, I managed to learn to tile grass correctly!

...which, again, feels strangely appropriate. You have to quit manually, though; this is, I'd say, the only way to win. You can win faster by not playing.

Dink Smallwood Unlimited

Author: Tim Maurer

Original release date: August 15, 1998

Part two of the riveting Dink Smallwood Forever trilogy! I assure you I did not spend the majority of the intervening days working on this. In fact, odds are I knocked it out in a single afternoon.

You know what another good fantasy is? Imagining going back in time, slapping my younger self, and physically preventing him from uploading these D-Mods. This gave me a pleasant fuzzy sensation that got me through the hard times.

This one definitely isn't better than the original. It starts out on a screen that is supposed to be an intro, but really isn't because I couldn't figure out how to script anything. The dragons "threatening" you are basically statues, you can walk off-screen any time you like, and the text makes no sense anyway. I wrote this stuff and I can't even figure out what I was trying to get at.

After leaving the first screen, you find yourself in "heaven" (That is, the Windows 95 clouds background). There you can go around and talk to various dead characters, including Oinky, who doesn't talk anymore. Again, my favorite part is that punching him makes Dink say "(Sob) We used to wrestle..." This should give you an idea of how enjoyable an experience the mod is in general.

Soon you'll blunder into "heck", which looks like this:



"Seriously, no. I only remember killing YOU."

...but bear in mind that that flame background does not animate. Also, Jack there is the only one of the three figures with a script attached. You'll go past a number of giant monsters who can't move out of their own map-placed hardness; this is, one assumes, their eternal punishment. You can show mercy on them and kill them, or cruelly ignore them and walk past. You'll inexplicably "return to life," and the D-Mod ends. Next.

Infinite Dink Smallwood

Author: Tim Maurer

Original release date: August 19, 1998

I can't imagine what I hoped to gain by continuing to submit these to the Smallweb. I guess I probably hoped that people would admire and praise me. I really must not have understood how those things worked.

Here's the only part of the Dink Smallwood Forever trilogy where you have to do anything. I don't think this stops it from being by far the worst of the three, though. The map is the worst yet - you can only go straight up, and it's the tiniest map so far. You fight some more giant enemies; they still can't move, but some of them **can** attack you, and this makes advancing pretty much impossible because they're too strong. If you do manage to get past them, however, you reach a screen with a savebot and some numbers.

I don't know how I expected you to be able to tell, but these numbers are warps. The wrong ones lead to a strange copy of the inventory screen where you instantly die, but one leads to a "boss." He's Oinky's killer, a farmer. He makes some evil quips at you ("I'LL HAVE DINK STEAKS COME MORNIN, YUM") and nothing happens because Dink says a few things that I guess he thinks are magic spells (Dink's clearly mentally unstable) and the farmer "dies," or at least says that he does, which was good enough for me at the time. Ugggh. Next.

All Out Brawl

Author: Tim Maurer

Original release date: August 19, 1998

I made this between the Dink Forever series and the following D-Mod. I didn't play it now because it really isn't a D-Mod. A D-Mod has to have scripts, right? Well, this one just has a handful of terribly designed screens with enemies that you don't have to fight wandering (correctly, wonder of wonders) around. At the end, there's a thing to examine that says "The end" or something like that. That's all there is.

Even at the time, I wasn't deluded enough to think that this was acceptable. I even included a text file saying, I think, that this wasn't supposed to be good. Why did I release it, then? Frankly, I can't even begin to guess at my motives. If you want to call this a D-Mod, then it's the worst one ever. Actually, there was a D-Mod on the old Dink Network briefly that just booted up, said, "Bye," and exited, but you might even find that better than this by virtue of being slightly amusing.

2001: A Dink Odyssey

Author: Tim Maurer

Original release date: August 23, 1998

While I was playing this one, I took a break to watch some ants crawl up my wall. This was an altogether more entertaining experience.

This D-Mod comes with a text file that calls it "my best work." I literally wanted to cry when I read this. It also contains this song parody of the theme from "The Beverly Hillbillies," a show that I'm pretty sure I never watched:

*well, once upon a time there was a man named
dink,
always feedin' pigs, then he starts to think,
"yep, an adventurer, that's what i want to be",
so he packed up all his bags
and he moved to terris. see?
next thing you know there's this real evil guy,
name's bishop nelson had a face that made you cry
dink kicked his butt.....crap.
uh
uh
uh
uh
uh
nevermind.
questions? comments? keep them to yourself.*

That song parody doesn't scan, isn't funny, and is the best thing included with this D-Mod. What's sad is that you probably think I'm kidding.

So, if you haven't left your house to find and murder me yet, let's talk about the title. I have, to this day, never read 2001: A Space Odyssey or seen the movie based on it. I just liked the title, though apparently not enough to spell it correctly. I think I got the spelling from Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee, which is spelled like I just spelled it there - still not the way I spelled the title of this D-Mod.

I'm suffering so that you don't have to, folks. Heed my warning.

There's more text in this one, but it just results in an even worse and less compelling story than "Dink has a pet pig, it dies, and he looks for its killer." If you sit around and wait for the "say" statements, as everything I said about Dink Forever's problems is still true here, you'll find that it's about how the human race nearly died out in a nuclear war. Aliens put the brains of the survivors into "eyebots," which are represented by a single, terrible MSPaint bitmap I made, which I don't think is loaded properly. It gets even dumber from there, but I zoned out. Can you believe this drivel? Even back then, I'm certain I was capable of writing better than this.

Monsters you don't have to fight, boss you don't have to fight, ending. At least this one actually exits the program. I still say that, like nuclear war, the only way to win is not to play.

The End of the World

Author: Tim Maurer

Original release date: March 29, 1999

Yes, I've skipped ahead to next year. Might as well get all of this crap over with.

After releasing "2001," the sense finally penetrated my brain that I was not doing a good thing by releasing these terrible D-Mods. I finally came to the realization that I was earning the scorn heaped upon me by making things that sucked. Therefore, I stopped making D-Mods for a while and, when I started again, put some actual effort into the next one. I intended it to be my redemption for what had come before. If you've ever played "End of the World," that ought to give you pause, because this is a very bad D-Mod. Excepting the four above and *maybe* Dinkopolis, this is the worst of the 18 D-Mods I've looked at so far.

My 1998 "efforts" may be explained (though not excused) by the fact that I really wasn't trying very hard, but that doesn't apply here. I really cared about getting this right so that my reputation would improve. This is where my actual lack of skill became so apparent. Here are the facts:

1) I'd never coded anything in my life. Want to have a good laugh? At the time I went around telling people at school that I "programmed video games" in reference to these D-Mods. In fact I had no idea what I was doing in regards to scripting or the editor, and it showed. I've noticed that for the most part, the D-Mods that are very good are by real programmers (Snyder, Walma, Hertel,

etc.). I was not a programmer by any stretch of the term.

2) I had no design sense. I still don't. I've been diagnosed with severe visual learning disabilities. I can't remember faces even when I see them often, I can't memorize my way around the town I've lived in all my life, I can't draw so much as a stick figure, and I can't design levels. Even though I have played so many great video games in my life and know exactly how great level/map design works, I can't design things that make any visual sense at all. This has stymied me every time I've tried to make games (Klik 'n' Play, LittleBigPlanet, you name it).

3) I had no patience and no critical eye. I was always in a rush to see things done and released. I allowed bugs to exist, failed to think things through, and decided I was done far too soon.

Of those three factors, I'm afraid that the third is the only one that has improved in the past fifteen years, and while I could probably improve at programming if I gave it an awful lot of time and effort, I don't think there's anything at all I can do about point 2. If I may be completely sincere for a moment, I want everybody to know how much this frustrates me. I wanted so badly to release something good. Even now, I'd love to close the door on my regrets by making a really spiffy D-Mod that makes everybody say "hey, that Tim guy actually released a good

D-Mod in the end, even if it did take him fifteen years," but I'm not sure I can. It kills me inside. I don't expect you to feel sorry for me, mind you; I'm just trying to make you understand where I'm coming from.

End of the World is much, much better than my prior D-Mods, but it still doesn't reach the point where all the pejoratives you can direct at it aren't pretty much fair. It's terrible, boring, and not worth your time. What's worse, by the time I came out with it the standards had gotten higher. Maybe if I'd released this instead of Dink Forever, it wouldn't have looked so bad, but by this point Prophecy of the Ancients existed.

Speaking of that, Gary Hertel ran one of the prominent Dink sites at the time. On his news page, he said regarding my announcement of EotW that it was "supposed to be better than his other mods, but I wouldn't hold my breath." This was certainly fair to say, but at the time I got mad and sent an angry email to him. He responded and told me that he had changed the post just to be nice, but warned me that I had a lot to learn about life and that I couldn't expect people to bend over backwards for me all the time. Uncharacteristically - and let's give the kid a big hand, folks, he was finally starting to figure out just how much of his crappy life had been his own fault - I realized immediately that he was right and felt sorry for what I'd said. Remember that the next time you think you won't bother trying to tell some kid what they're doing wrong because they won't listen.

When I was almost done with EotW, I sent an early version to Gary first, telling him I was sorry and that I really wanted his opinion. He exploded at me, saying that he

couldn't believe I would even consider releasing something so buggy and poorly designed. I apologized further and asked for more advice, but he just said that he was sorry for getting mad, no doubt realizing that there was no hope of getting through to me in a way that would make me actually get good at this. I think that probably the nicest thing he could have done would be to tell me not to release it, emphasizing that it wouldn't help my reputation in the long run and that I just wasn't good at this and ought to move on. I probably wouldn't have taken that advice at the time, though.

Now that I'm mired in my past and feel like crap (if I ought to suffer for what I made, it's happening right now), I guess I should actually discuss End of the World. Unlike the D-Mods above, this one actually functions. It has a story-variable based push rock that works, a bomb rock that works, and a series of battles that are challenging but not unreasonably so and that you actually must win to advance, and this can actually be kind of fun thanks mostly to a good combat system made by RTSsoft. It has a "jukebox" item that lets you pick which MIDI you want to listen to, which is a neat idea, though something similar had appeared in "Pointless." It has a story that, while it still doesn't make sense (The world will end thanks to giant tree roots. This turns out to be a dream that Dink's been trapped in by an evil wizard, kind of like Dinkopolis), is at least coherent, which is a big improvement. I put borders on the screens so that you don't walk right into the edge of them, even if the borders look terrible. The concept of a village populated by signs, though terribly executed here, is slightly amusing given Dink's propensity for hitting them. And would you look at that, I am out of positive things to

say. I probably went farther than I should have, to be honest.

Let's beat the crap out of this thing. It has stunningly bad map design that is ugly, makes no sense, and is riddled with hardness errors. An item that you're told not to use is supposed to turn Dink into a duck, and the line I wrote ("I guess curiosity killed the QUACK. Quack? Quack!") might have been worth a smile if he actually had, but he turns into an arrow instead. Instead of shrinking Dink when the plot calls for it, there's a fourth-wall breaking note telling you I couldn't get that to work. The pillbugs

early on are impossible to fight unless you talk to the giant woman. I still hadn't learned to make NPCs move around. Milder says he'll only raise your stats once, but does it as many times as you like. The original graphics suck. The bombs you buy after the first one don't work. The final area has literally everything cause you touch damage, which was intentional but makes no sense. Finally, I made myself the final boss in a derivative and lame way and gave myself way too many (1000!) hit points. Another effort squandered.

On July 14, 1999, I announced that I was leaving the Dink community. If I were smart, I'd have stuck to this, but I came back on June 7, 2000 and announced "The Tragic Death of Link Smallwood," which became Zink Smallwood because of a conflict with something made by Jveenhof.

The Tragic Death of Zink Smallwood

Author: Tim Maurer

Original release date: June 15, 2000

I enjoyed myself a little bit while playing this one. It's a still an execrable D-Mod with countless problems; the difference is that when I tried to be funny here, I actually kind of was. While I wouldn't recommend that you play this one either, doing so might not be a TOTAL waste of your time.

If you've played this, you've probably wondered why the hell you start with 100 in every stat. Sadly, this was unintentional. When I updated this mod to fix spelling and 1.08 compatibility on May 13, 2006, at which point I was 20 and should have known better, I left a few lines in start.c that I used for testing. If you want a better experience, you should remove them (leaving yourself some magic points because you need to use Hellfire), but it's almost just as well since the actual gameplay here is dull as dishwater and not even as fun as parts of End of the World.

The story picks up at the end of the last mod and involves a twin brother of Dink's who dies in a cutscene with actual moving parts that actually worked properly, a big step for me. I always had to hide Dink behind something, though, which is bizarre, as I found `dink_can_walk_off_screen` in just a few minutes of browsing the DinkC reference before I started this project. Anyway, it turns out to be a plot by an evil wizard. Sic 'im, but you'll have to solve a few more people's problems first.

Well, I guess it's time for some more faint praise. This was in many ways my best D-Mod. The map design is as good as it ever got from me, as the maps make basic visual sense and look kind of like a Dink sort of world. They have some hardness errors, but not constantly all over the place like even End of the World. It is a fairly witty mod, poking fun at RPG conventions (Dink complains about how everyone wants him to do something before they'll help him - "WHAT DO I LOOK LIKE, AN ERRAND BOY?" before quickly agreeing to do his assigned task anyway) and my own tired plot contrivances (if you punch a good wizard, Dink explains, "I'm having so much trouble with wizards lately, I figure, why not just kill 'em all?"), among other things. It's a fairly innocuous little romp that is unlikely to make you hate me for making it.

And now, to bring the hammer down. The whole map is laid out on a horizontal line and is almost never taller than three screens - even for me, this is embarrassing map design and it feels terrible. The one new graphic is more MSPaint crap from me. The plot is utter nonsense. The quests are extremely simplistic and uninteresting. I STILL hadn't figured out that NPCs should move around a bit. The latest version comes with a save file, something I never did pay any attention to. Do I need to go on? My limitations, including number three from the End of the World discussion, were still in place, and as a comeback it was wholly inadequate, which I realized even at the time.

Crossroads (Unfinished)

Author: Tim Maurer

Original release date: July 13, 2000

I announced on June 20th that I would be making a D-Mod called Crossroads and made a website promoting it with several pages talking about its planned features.

On July 13th, I released an interactive trailer for Crossroads. I would like to repeat that: I called it a trailer, not a demo. It consisted entirely of a long intro cutscene (like 8 minutes!) with a little insult-swordfighting minigame in it based on Monkey Island. As a trailer, it was the only thing I released to ever be totally adequate. It won Download of the Month against actual competition. It was definitely the high point of my Dink hobby. Almost immediately afterward, I ran into my old limitations, crumbled in the face of the first real expectations I'd ever earned, and gave up.

On June 28, 2001, almost a year after releasing the trailer, I sent what little I had of Crossroads to redink1. I titled it "Crossroads Mess," explaining that I had given up and that this was a jumbled mess that should in no way be considered a complete D-Mod. This was, I now realize, a big mistake. The "Mess" version contains VERY little new content over the trailer. It's still essentially an intro movie and not much else, and what is there even I considered to be unfinished; I had planned to clean it up before I gave up on the project. At least the trailer ended in a pretty cool and promising little commercial for the full D-Mod I had planned, whereas the version now on TDN just sort of stops happening in a buggy unfinished area.

This was my first really ambitious project. I planned minigames, areas, quests, you name it. I received a lot of positive feedback and people actually got kind of excited.

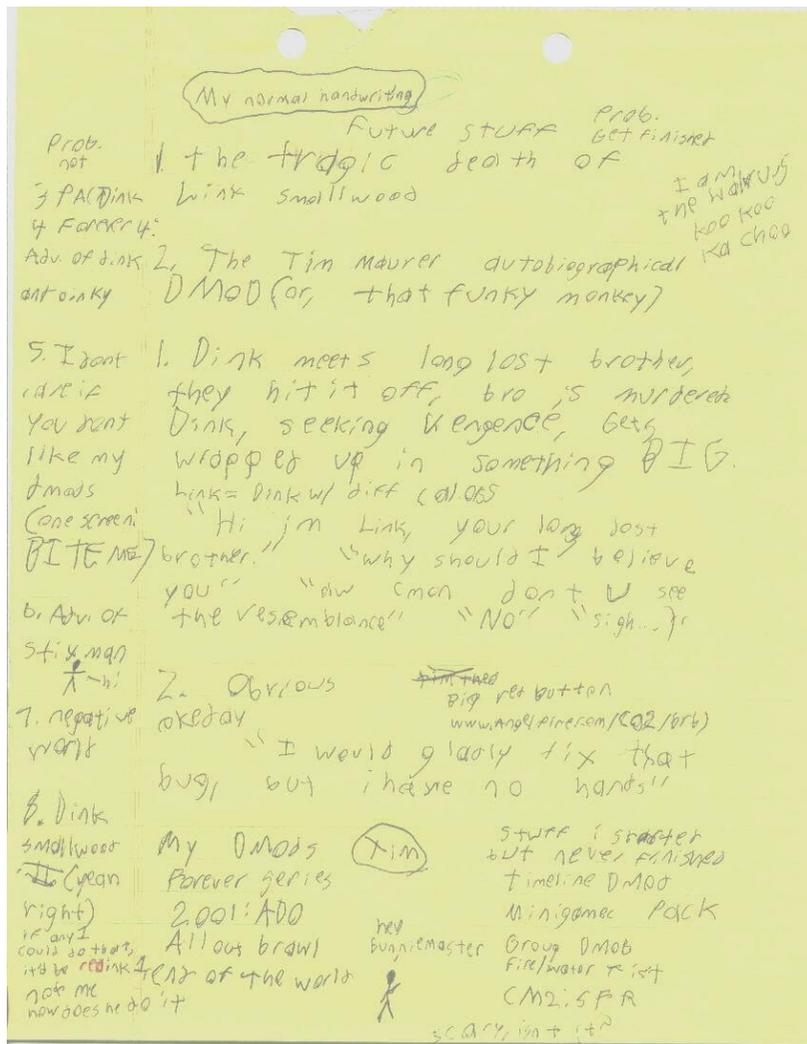
Furthermore, it lacks my explanation that it's just an "I give up" sort of mess, so people expect it to be a real D-Mod. I feel regret about this. People should be saying "it's a shame this was never finished" instead of "this D-Mod sucks." Oh well.

The intro movie is kind of entertaining the first time you watch it, telling a rambling crazy story about Dink defeating the "Idol of No Hands" (PC Gamer's Coconut Monkey, also a way of me indirectly acknowledging that I'd tormented the character with bad D-Mods) with the help of Oinky II, who first appeared in Zink, and then deciding to go on vacation. It also has some decent-looking "Dink riding a bonca" graphics that I made in a very simple way (I had planned to use them for a bonca-riding minigame).

Unfortunately, even before you get to the buggy ending, there are problems with the intro movie. The insult swordfighting doesn't quite work correctly - I thought I remembered it doing so in the trailer version. Also, I have a really awful-looking pig carrying a sword walk animation that jitters and slides. At any rate, it was unnecessary; I could have had a script call the ordinary pig sprite and a still sword sprite and had them move together and it would have looked fine. Ah, my regrets...

On January 1st, 2001, I asked for my 1998 D-Mods to be removed, making them "lost" D-Mods. It actually succeeded in keeping most of the community from ever finding them, oddly enough.

On April 1st, 2004, redink1 re-uploaded a crazy old scan I made of my mad ravings on some legal pad as an April Fool's joke:



In mid-2006 I stopped by on a nostalgia trip. I reviewed a couple of D-Mods and had a fairly clever idea for one of my own. I even wrote a little script, but when I got into the editor I realized I couldn't make a good map even knowing how my maps had been bad, and decided to let sleeping dogs lie.

So there you have it. After being a snot-nosed punk who made crap almost on purpose, I tried three well-meaning times but never came close to making a good D-Mod. At any rate, if I have ever offended, I am sorry, and I hope these articles make up for it. Cheers.

Part 5: Meanwhile...

During the month of August 1998, while I spammed the Smallweb with the Dink Forever series and its follow-up, several other D-Mods were made. None of them were nearly as bad as mine.

Dinkzilla

Author: Jeff Speed

Original release date: August 6, 1998

Out of all of the D-Mods, I think that this one probably has the widest gulf between how it was received at the time and how it's regarded now. It's totally reviled on The Dink Network judging from its review scores, but I distinctly remember that when it came out, although nobody went nuts praising it, reactions were actually fairly positive.

Objectively, this definitely isn't a good D-Mod. You walk around a pretty clumsy map surrounded by fences (at least it only has one "invisible wall"), punching tiny enemies with your mighty stats of 200 attack and 500 defense (not that you have to - there's no real reason not to just walk right by). Pretty soon, you run into a giant farmer who turns in less than half a second into a giant Milder; he doesn't pose any challenge either, although unlike everything else, you do have to hit him several times. At any rate, you're not required to fight him, as although the screen locks, a crack that functions as a warp is present on screen. There are hardly any scripts (even the ducks just have the "Giant duck of Koka Island" script attached), so this is a D-Mod all about fighting where you don't ever have to fight a single thing! The low scores are justified.

However, I also understand the initial reaction. Dinkzilla was released the same day as Dink Forever, and although it contains even fewer scripts, it's definitely better than that mod. People found the "Dink is a giant and destroys all who dare get in his

way" concept novel even if this mod didn't really do anything with it, and found it to be a stress reliever. One thing that slightly amused me is that you can get more experience and gold than in practically any other mod despite how incredibly short the game is. I guarantee you'll never make them this quickly anywhere else, and it's at least a unique experience.



Here's a shot of the ending.

I got all that exp and gold from killing each enemy just once. I also pressed space to reveal where Dink was hiding. Heh.

Considering that D-Mod authoring had only really been around for a little over a month and that it was Jeff's first D-Mod, this isn't that bad. I think the concept could be reused in a bigger D-Mod to very satisfying effect.

Legend of Smallwood: A Dink to the Past

Author: Kevin Bugin, David Goode

Original release date: August 6, 1998

Would you look at that, it's the first alternative hero D-Mod! Who would have guessed it came so soon? If you're keeping track, this is even before Dinkanoid.

In this D-Mod, you play as the wizard Martridge from the original game. You're told that you're Dink's uncle (!) and that you have to save the kidnapped Dink from an evil Goblin ten years before the original game. The game acts like Dink is an infant or something, but there is just no way Dink is younger in the original than 16 or so - he'd remember this.

On the plus side, the conversion of the hero to Martridge is done pretty well. He comes with his own weapon, a staff that swings at enemies like a sword (although the graphic for the item doesn't display on the HUD when armed for some reason). He never turns into Dink at any point, and has his own death... well, not animation, but frame. The biggest problem with the hero graphics is that if you try to push something (which is not required in this mod), Martridge warps back a few steps and turns a different color while you're "pushing." This isn't bad at all for the first attempt at making the hero somebody other than Dink.



It does bear noting, though, that it's a damn weird choice to make the player a wizard and never give them any magic.

Unfortunately, this mod is pretty seriously broken and the design isn't great either. The maps look weird due to bad tiling and there are random spots of hardness where there shouldn't be (and this can get really bad - sometimes you're warped into hardness spots and can't escape. I had to use Ultimate Cheat to get out). This game also suffers quite a bit from Big Empty Map syndrome.

The author seems to assume you'll visit the town in front of you first, which is something I've seen a few times already and is something you shouldn't do. If you want the player to go somewhere first, you should force them to, tell them to, or at least give them some strong incentive to. As it is, I ended up solving some quests before they were given. There's a building you can't enter; somebody somewhere else will tell you that it's locked, but you don't know this when you see and try to enter it. More than once you'll get "I shouldn't be here yet"

messages even when it's the right time to be somewhere. I could go on, but let me be blunt: You can't finish this mod. The furthest you can get is this screen:



Tantalus had it easy.

The only way to proceed is by cheating your way to the other side of the wall. Doing so will soon bring you to a screen where you're told you've reached the end, having resolved nothing, and that you should bug the author to finish the story.

Another weird problem is that every time you equip Martridge's staff, you lose a few points of attack. I know this is intentional because at one point you're told to beware using a healing amulet you're given, as each time it will weaken you. However, you aren't told this until you've already had the amulet for some time, and anyway, pressing equip on the staff reduces your attack whether you have the amulet or not, and does so progressively. After it goes down to 1, if you keep equipping it your strength will start to go up (this is because the engine interprets negative numbers in these stats by their absolute value), but this crashed the game for me.

If you don't run into the staff problem, you'll find the game very easy, as your stats are

pretty good from the start and most monsters fail to target you, meaning that slayers will never swipe at you or even chase you, for example.

It was neat being Martridge and the mod had some great classic rock MIDIs, but overall the experience is frustrating and you've got to cheat to win.

Dink Smallwood in the Valley of the Talking Trees

Author: Dukie

Original release date: August 12, 1998

This is the only D-Mod by Dukie, a community fixture who started the "Dink Smallwood Solutions" site for D-Mod walkthroughs. Sadly, he died on June 25, 2011 at the age of just 29. Man, that sucks.

What doesn't suck, happily, is this D-Mod. While there isn't much to it, it's one of the funniest mods I've seen. Dukie did not hold back at all on the surreal humor, much of it fourth wall-breaking. Dink complains about having to be in another D-Mod, and he has an argument with the author about obeying the commands of the player.



"Oh yeah? Well, you're just some text at the bottom of the screen!"

It's hard for me to convey the humor by writing about it, but I laughed out loud quite a bit during this one.

Another cool thing about this D-Mod is that it uses several new .wav sounds to great effect. You don't see this too often.

With "Valley of the Talking Trees," it's important to remember the title. The game itself doesn't make a particular point of informing you that the trees talk, but they do and you'll have to talk to several of them to proceed.

The story in this mod has to be the silliest that I've encountered so far. Not far from where you start is the estate of the duck from NBC's popular sitcom Friends. Dink shall conspire with a tree to take care of that annoying duck (sure, why not), but he's well-guarded by progressively stronger pillbugs and other monsters. Once you get to the bonca, you'll find that you really can't get past it. Its defense is higher than your attack, so you'll only occasionally do 1 damage if you hit it. Instead, you have to find an autograph of the ducks (oddly hidden in a treasure chest) and deliver it to a certain fanatic tree.

After you've given a tree an autograph, you gain access to a most impressive cache of powerups.



Awwwww yis.

Now you're ready.

It's kind of strange that when you get to the duck you can just kill him and this has no effect on anything - he'll just come back. To win, what you have to do is go back and spread rumors that the duck is a murderer of other ducks, inciting an angry mob to march to his house in a lovely cutscene that takes place with the status bar blacked out (this is a good idea, makes it look more cinematic). The duck gets away, but you win regardless.

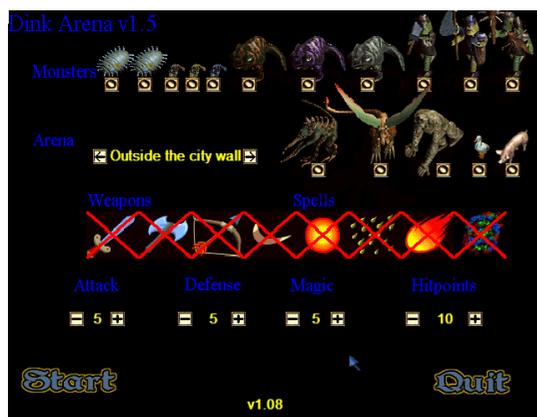
Like I said, there may not be much to it, but if you like to laugh at your D-Mods, you should give this one a try. Incidentally, while I didn't know Dukie well, I do remember him from my days around the Dink community. He was a swell guy and he's sorely missed.

Dink Arena - GUI

Author: Mike Kanter, Kevin "Bunniemaster" Zettler, Dan Walma

Original release date: August 19, 1998

Dink Arena is a D-Mod that lets you choose Dink's stats, weapons and magic, one of several arenas to fight in, and what monsters he fights, and lets you have at 'em. This is all you do - there's no story or way to win anything other than an individual fight you've set up.



This mod was originally released in 1998 by Mike Kanter, later improved with some new features by my old pal Bunniemaster, and finally had a GUI added for setting up the fights on June 8, 1999 by redink1. Before the GUI, you had to set everything with choice statements, which got hard to keep track of, so this is a really great addition.

You can add any monster from the original game except Seth, and in addition to standard weapons and magic, there's also the boomerang (functionally, this is nearly identical to the throwing axe) and some weird radiation cloud spell that I could never seem to get to work. Some of the arenas had interesting concepts, like one

where you're supposed to shoot the enemies from afar and another with hazardous constantly-striking knights.

You could use this to test and improve your fighting skills at Dink, and you could create some tough challenges for yourself, but I got bored with it almost immediately with nothing to work toward. Playing this makes me wish there were a Dink Arena game with progressively tougher levels. You could let the player pick what kind of stat bonus they want between rounds, maybe hide some secrets in the arenas themselves, maybe even have a little story. I'd enjoy a mod like that a lot.



While this wasn't really my bag, it did achieve some very interesting things with scripting, and I've got major respect for the authors for that.

Labyrinth (Demo)

Author: Jeff Speed

Original release date: August 21, 1998

This is the first D-Mod that had a demo, beta or preview release that was not followed by a full release at any point. This would become common later, but didn't happen again for well over a year.

In the dmod.diz file that comes with this mod, Jeff says that it's "different than any other mods out there," and I think that was certainly true, at least at the time. There's nothing at all here except a huge, complicated, confusing maze of fences on grass with some monsters in it.

I was able to find two powerup caches (one of which was huge and made fighting the monsters very easy) and a save point, but not the exit. I got frustrated - there's big open areas in the maze for no good reason, and you can easily loop around on yourself - and gave up, cheating my way to the end. There just wasn't enough to keep me interested - no decoration, no text, just fences. There were some well-done popular music MIDIs, though, so if you love mazes you may have some fun.

There's no story except for a wizard telling you that you have to go through the maze to be recognized as a hero. Dink is a very angry young man in this D-Mod, and he curses and

threatens the wizard in a very crude way. Instead of the wizard poofing away or something, though, he simply can't be interacted with further, and if you walk off the screen to the left instead of warping into the maze (which takes you to a starfield, oddly), you can walk back and hear the same spiel again.

After you get out of the fence maze, you arrive at the "underground, where there's a warp right in front of you. This is where a second maze would have gone if Jeff had ever finished his D-Mod, but I get the feeling it just would have been pretty much more of the same - some might have enjoyed it, but I don't find it especially fun.

There's an ending where the very angry and foul-mouthed Dink wreaks his vengeance on the smug wizard. I have to admit I laughed a bit when it faded down and the wizard made his many protestations ("My wand doesn't go there!"), but that's mainly because it's late and I'm not terribly mature in the first place. This was followed up by some odd .wav files, the first of which was totally incomprehensible. I can't say that I recommend this one much.

Part 6: Everything after August - D-Mods get serious

Up until this point, aside from some neat mods by Mike Snyder and RTSoft's own Mystery Island showing the potential of the Dink engine, the D-Mod was a pretty simple thing. At the end of August, D-Mods as a whole were an extra, a bit of additional fun to have after playing the real game. At the tail end of 1998, that started changing quickly as D-Mods became more ambitious and some of the big names began to arrive.

Revenge of the Cast

Author: Layne Phillips, Phil Triolo

Original release date: Release date: October 4, 1998

The authors of Moorack showed a major improvement with their next work over two months later.

I've got to give the authors a big hand. This isn't a great D-Mod that you've gotta play or anything, but it's such a huge improvement over their initial effort that it's in an entirely different category. These guys were only a year older than me, and it took them just one dud release to learn lessons that I couldn't seem to learn no matter how many times I ought to have.

The tiles look fine. The maps aren't good, exactly, but they definitely get the job done. There's a bit more of a story (Dink is kidnapped and imprisoned by the Cast and must foil their plans, but there are smaller elements along the way), the hardness errors that absolutely riddled Moorack are all but eliminated, and everything generally works and feels right. Cutscenes happen with plenty of moving parts. This D-Mod has some real polish; for example, when you have to go get a certain item because you've been told to, you don't have to walk back - the game just skips ahead to Dink returning the item. Great stuff!

Like Moorack, this D-Mod takes a long time to play because of all the grinding required, but the grinding here is much more

satisfying - as I said above, I tend to enjoy a good grind (*chortle*). I have just one major bone to pick: You're going to have to fight some boncas with screenlock before your attack is as high as their defense - there's no practical way around this. Now, because of how the Dink engine works, you always have the chance to do one damage with a blow to anything regardless of how weak you are compared to it, so this isn't impossible, but it's still ridiculous and you should never require the player to do this. Once you've upped your stats with a couple of levels and potions, however, the way you grind to become strong and win in this mod becomes rather satisfying.

The later section where you're going from one cast member to the next to exchange progressively higher-level passes is well-implemented, but a tad tedious. The cutscene at the end of it is quite impressive for the time, though, with two sides with several fighters each lining up for a battle. I almost expected it to break out, but of course that would have been WAY too complicated.

The final boss is a Cast member who presents a pretty good challenge and hides a secret. Because it is so damn silly, I will spoil it: He's Dink's father. They do the Star Wars music and everything.



It couldn't get any more obvious.

Overall, I am impressed with the improvement here despite the problems this mod still has. I'm killing myself over this - if they could improve so much, why couldn't I?

Lost in Dink

Author: Dan "redink1" Walma

Original release date: Release date: October 4, 1998

Whoa, this one talks to you. "Welcome to Lost in Dink." This must have been how players of Gauntlet and Sinistar felt back in the day. "Beware, I live."

And now King Daniel (redink1) arrives on the scene. In addition to being responsible for the creation of The Dink Network, he holds the distinction of being responsible for more D-Mods (16) than anybody else. Honestly, I didn't bother counting everybody's D-Mods, but if anyone else has released more than 16 you can color me shocked. That's not even to mention his work on Dink 1.08 and other very useful projects. I think he edges out Mike Snyder for "most important person to Dink outside of RTSoft." From my own dealings with him, he's also an extremely chill and witty guy. He was nicer to my D-Mods than most people. But enough of bathing Dan in the golden rays of my shining praise, let's talk about this D-Mod.

The release date above is for version 2.0 of Lost in Dink, which obviously wasn't the first, but I can't find any date for an earlier release (if by some bizarre long shot you read this, Dan, let me know). The version I actually played was 3.0, released on January 28, 1999. This D-Mod actually consists of four games: Lost in Dink, Kill the Ducks, Dinkcraft II and Coconut Monkey Island. You can select any one you want from the title screen. This is actually a neat bit of scripting - each one loads like a totally separate D-Mod. In pre-2.0 versions, the

latter two segments could only be accessed as secrets. It only makes sense to talk about the segments individually.

Lost in Dink: This one should probably be played first. It's a short (say, 15 minutes, maybe 20 if you like punching every baddie you see) and silly romp. Oddly enough, the intro cutscene picks up the plot from the end of Kevin Bugin's Dinkopolis! This is an artifact of the time when Mike Snyder sought to keep all of the D-Mods in one grand continuity in a consistent timeline, which was an interesting idea that provided a bit of cohesion early on. I recall a version of the "Dink Timeline" being maintained on the Dink Network for quite some time. Ultimately, however, it became impossible and at any rate too restrictive to consider all of the D-Mods to be in continuity with one another.

It's irrelevant anyway, because there really isn't much of a plot here. Dink gets transported to a land that contains a tiny town called Boot that contains a bar. You'll have to beat up some pillbugs to get a key, and although you'll travel to a town called Jight that's menaced by some slimes, those pillbugs are the only enemies you have to fight before the final area. You might think that this would leave you underpowered, but as there's a "supermegapotion" there that adds 10 to all stats, you really don't need to worry about it. Don't forget to talk to the not-quite-a-corpse on that screen to get Hellfire, which oddly has the Fireball graphic. The

last area actually has some neat ideas for enemies, including aggressive little girls with a crush on Dink and increasingly powerful evil ducks. Ultimately, you have to beat a "really evil bonca," and this segment ends.



So evil!

There are a few amusing conversations to be had here (I like that hardly anybody takes Dink's claim that he saved the world seriously), but nothing that stuck out to me in a huge way. One thing I really like is a secret in the bar: walk through a wall upstairs to find goblin statues that house a longsword and the HERB BOOTS! Oh my god, I missed you guys! Do you realize that we are 28 D-Mods in and this is the first time I have encountered them? They were the best item in the original and are sorely underused. I found this secret because one of the NPCs walked over the non-hard wall; if you REALLY want to keep something secret, you should keep in mind that this can happen. The herb boots are perfect for fighting everything in Lost in Dink except for the really evil bonca, against whom you're probably better off using the sword because of its defense and range.

The map is kind of small in most parts and plain, but it definitely doesn't look bad as a lot of early D-Mods do, and while big worlds

full of stuff to do are the best, I like this sort of map a lot more than the dreaded Big Empty Map Syndrome (BEMS). It's pretty well put-together overall, but there are a few little problems. One is that there's a bridge you're supposed to fix like the one to Windermere in the original; when you fix it, it becomes possible to cross, but it still looks as broken as ever. (Here's a fun change of pace: rather than being grateful, the residents on the other side hate you for fixing the bridge they intentionally broke to keep out the drunks. You can kill them for their ingratitude if that's your bag.) Another niggle is that the doors don't quite work the way they should (you have to find the right angle to walk into them, and one castle door can be missed allowing you to walk into the middle of the wall). Some doors are placed where doors don't really belong, but that's a very minor gripe. Overall, it's short and pretty fun, I'd say go for it.

Kill the Ducks: Hello, it's a direct sequel to Lost in Dink. Sequel on demand, how neat is that? Dink returns to Jight to find that it's been taken over by evil ducks, who take Dink hostage as well. I'll give you three guesses what you do after that, and the first two don't count.

Yes, I would like to nominate Kill the Ducks for most accurately-named D-Mod (let's pretend it's a D-Mod) of all time. You are absolutely required to kill many, MANY ducks. Evil ducks that fight back. I am not going to go back and count them, but you tend to get 100 experience points for beating one and I was level 5 and over halfway to level 6 before getting to the boss series. You do the math. I have got to say, this gets kind of tedious.



But if you like killing ducks, this is the place to be.

Due to all the duck-killing, this game is a little bigger and a lot longer than Lost in Dink.

I got a good laugh out of the scene where the evil ducks, Red, Ged, Fred and Charlie, argue about their nefarious plans. The ducks' tone toward one another is really more like how one would address an incompetent coworker than a villainous comrade, and seeing ducks talk like this is very funny to me for some reason. I remember there being a study once indicating that ducks were the funniest animal. Lucky for D-Mod authors, right?

Another good thing about this segment is that it is about as close to bug-free as you can get. The only bug worth mentioning is one that affects the whole D-Mod, where Dink sometimes cycles a bunch of unrelated sprites when he dies instead of playing his death animation. Let's take a moment to appreciate this; it's hard to make anything in Dink truly bugless.

In addition to ducks, you fight a few boncas and one pillbug that assures you it is "very EVIL." Judging from the bonca in LID and this, I have determined that having a lot of hit points is just about the most evil thing

you can do. I guess being evil gives you a big CON bonus; I don't remember seeing that in the D&D player's guide.

The only "magic" you get is the ability to turn into a duck and back. You have to be a duck when entering certain screens or "&life = 0;" happens, killing the stuffing out of you. This is annoying because you'll automatically turn back into Dink on these screens, only to have the exact same requirement repeated afterward.

Far more annoying are the final ducks. Keep in mind that you have no magic, and just a longsword with at most 21 attack. Red has 500 HP (more than Seth in 1.08), Ged has 750, and Fred has the what-in-the-name-of-the-Dead-Dragon-Carcass-was-Dan-thinking sum of one thousand five hundred hit points. **THIS IS COMPLETE BULLSHIT.**

Fighting more and more powerful ducks loses its shine after a while. They don't have a base attack, they don't... Let's cut to the chase here, they are PILLBUGS. And these don't move fast, either. The strategy for fighting a duck, no matter how high its stats get, remains the same: stand in its path, hit it from a safe distance, retreat, repeat. That doesn't mean it's easy, though, because eventually you will lose focus and you will pay.

You know, about 15 minutes into hitting the same bitch-ass duck with a sword, its blood spattered everywhere, you get way too reflective. I mean, there's nothing else to do. This isn't what I meant to do with my life, you know. I wanted to be a proper writer once upon a time. Even after that dream faded, I thought I'd be a librarian. Nothing wrong with that. Perfectly dignified job, librarian. I was real close to getting my

Master's in Library Science, too. And here I am cutting up a duck because my life has no point. Wa-hey!

Anyway, because I am a sad, sad nerd, I killed the ducks without cheating. The ending leads right into Mystery Island, so you know exactly where to place these important events when writing your biography of Dink Smallwood, even though they're totally unconnected to one another.

Kill the Ducks isn't bad, but really, I recommend a bit of cheating. Don't be like me, kids. Winners don't do Ducks.

DinkCraft II: Practically all of the graphics in this segment, including the hero, are taken from Warcraft II, which was a fun real-time strategy game that I played back in the day with friends. I was rotten at it, though. I much preferred turn-based strategy games, like the unbelievably superb *Heroes of Might and Magic* series. Hey, if ever make another D-Mod maybe I'll put some HOMM3 graphics in there, class things up a bit.



No, you're not the building, you're sort of hiding behind it in this shot. Er, sorry.

Anyway, this is the first time anyone had bothered to replace so many graphics, and they look good and have hardboxes that make sense. It's a lot harder to do those

things with new graphics in Dink than one might think, so this is a worthwhile curiosity for that alone. That's about it, though, as there's only one quest to do here: get a key to a dungeon, find the end, and kill a "boss" pig. Combat is very easy due to having a throwing axe, which always has 15 strength unless Dink's strength stat is over 25 (I found this out by browsing the original source just now).

There are some truly impressive script bugs here: one guy says he'll give you a stronger axe for 400 gold, but he actually GIVES you 400 gold when you ask regardless of how much you have, and the axe is not stronger. You can repeat this, but doing so more than a couple of times crashed the game for me. Similarly, the guy who gives you a key will keep giving you keys and fill up your inventory with them. Most bizarre of all are the piles of gold that SUBTRACT gold from your total somehow. Actually, this is because the axe seller will "take" gold from you whether you have it or not, and the engine displays -400 gold as 400. Therefore, adding gold just takes you closer to zero. The Dink engine also acts like this with the primary stats, which is why you could reduce your attack until it increased in Legend of Smallwood. In both cases, doing this repeatedly made the game crash, so you should never, ever make the game do this sort of thing on purpose.

In a section that's supposed to be required but isn't, you fight Dink Smallwood, who admonishes you to "get out of [his] game." There's a certain satisfaction to laying into that overblown pig farmer. Other than that, there is a "secret" to find, but it just tells you that you found a secret.

While DinkCraft is almost totally non-functional as a game, you should really just think of it as a neat little extra, and it is neat. At that point, Dinkers were still exploring the ways in which the envelope could be pushed.

Coconut Monkey Island: Owwww. OWWWWW. This is bad. It's so bad that I almost typed something stupid - that it's as bad as Dink Forever. It's not THAT bad - it has maps that make sense, a coherent NPC or two, etc. - but it's the worst non-me thing I've played so far, and it's much worse than anything I made after 1998. Let's, um, have a look.



Uh?

Again we encounter the PC Gamer mascot, who bounced around in the surprisingly nice and immersive virtual offices that came for a time on that magazine's demo discs, telling you that he'd gladly assist you, but he has no hands. I loved Coconut Monkey as a kid (obviously, right?) but this experience is so unpleasant that my opinion of LID would be improved by simply removing it and doing nothing else. You could even leave a blank corner of the title screen if you wanted.

There's an island. There isn't much on it but some buildings that don't have much in

them with a couple of exceptions. There is one building you simply can't enter, and you can walk right through where the entrance warp ought to be. In one building, objects cycle through sets of furniture sprites, appearing to do mad pirouettes as they transmogrify as fast as they can. I imagine these as joyful, mindless shapeshifters, frantically doing the only thing they know how to do and never stopping. I envy them.

You may gather, if you care to, that a bunch of Coconut Monkeys have slain the population of an island. The CMs are like pillbugs but move around in a slightly less predictable way. You can find a way to enter their hideout, if you like having a terrible time. You'll find yourself in a thin maze with dozens of the buggers on every screen. You've got no room to dodge them and they'll quickly wear down your HP. At this point, I cheated. Now, there may be an anti-cheat script or something here, because when you mess with Dink's three main stats, every object on the map disappears and you can't do anything anymore. I'll bet this applies to all four sections of Lost in Dink. Giving Dink extra life didn't seem to be a problem, so I did that and walked through everything (lots of hardness errors here, which are probably your only hope for winning if you won't cheat) until I got to the boss, seen in the third screenshot above. When you beat him, Dink says "I won the game!" Nothing else happens.

Overall, Lost in Dink is worth a play. It won't take you too long, you'll have some fun, and there are some interesting things in it that you don't see a lot. Even DinkCraft is something worth seeing - just stay away from those fruity monkeys. They are bad for you, man.

The Quest for Cheese

Author: Jamie Boettger

Original release date: Release date: October 25, 1998

REPUTATION NOTE: This D-Mod is one of the select group to have a score of 9.0 or better (9.0) on The Dink Network.

You know what kills me? The Quest for Cheese is the D-Mod that I ought to have made.

At the time it came out, QFC was extremely well-received, and it is currently the oldest D-Mod in the rarefied "Exceptional" (9.0+) category on The Dink Network. It earns this acclaim on the strength of just a few things: humor, a satisfying amount of content, and an understanding of basic game design hooks. That's it.

We've discussed my serious limitations when it comes to game design, but QFC falls within them. Nothing fancy is ever done with scripting here, the maps are basic, boxy, kind of sparse and unnatural, and possess quite a few hardness errors. You can walk to places you aren't supposed to. Furthermore, there are screens with "invisible walls," which was the biggest complaint I heard about my early D-Mods. There are no original graphics except a very MSPaint title screen. Hell, there's an area where there are no backgrounds at all - just a blank white backdrop. And there's certainly no great story here - Jamie even said that it wasn't his intention to make one. Even with all my shortcomings, if I had been cleverer and taken my time, a D-Mod like this could have been my ceiling; I'm sure of it. There's an alternate universe where I was the one who

showed up, made one D-Mod that people loved despite its lack of technical prowess, and dropped the proverbial mic forever. Hey, I can dream.

So what makes QFC work? It's the way that everything is taken without an ounce of seriousness, yet at the same time, a world that feels real and complete is presented. It's the sheer number of things you get to do. It's the oddball humor that just keeps on coming, making this the first D-Mod (and I've only ever played one more as far as I can remember) to equal the original's unique comedy style. And my goodness, is it ever the pixy poop.

Let's put this cheese wheel in reverse and start at the beginning. King Daniel needs cheese and there's none in the kitchen. Dink has to go fetch him some, which ends up being a rather involved task that's pretty certain to take you well over an hour. QFC consists of a number of distinct and imaginative areas, including the rather moist land of the fairies, a bar filled with a dazzling array of characters from talking inanimate objects and a bonca on break to Death himself, who has a gauntlet for you (though admission ain't free), a "ninja training dojo" and the dastardly farm that holds the fabled cheese itself.



This mod never misses an opportunity to sling a joke at you, and although not all of it holds up as well as I'd remembered (Dink shouting 'random' things like "I floss my teeth with beef jerky." doesn't do it for me anymore, although I still crack a grin at the deadpan responses this sort of behavior gets), there are way more hits than misses. Here are just a few:

Dink: King Daniel, I will courageously pursue this quest of cheese you ask of me.

I will leave no stone unturned, and no duck unpunched.

King: Yeah whatever, just get it.

Death: I shall reward you with the magic of fire.

Dink: Didn't I get that in the original Dink Smallwood?

Death: Yes.

Dink: So..shouldn't I have already known it?

Death: No. You forgot.

Dink: Ah.

And my favorite...

Dink: Ya know, ducks are really getting overused in dmod's.

Duck: Hey lay off me man, it's not my fault that the author of this game is too lazy to make new graphics.

Dink: Haha. Yes that author sure is lazy. That is humorous.

That is the best. The BEST. This mod makes fun of itself, the usual game tropes, and even the usual mod jokes! It's like when Homestar Runner decided to simultaneously make fun of themselves and their often-uncomprehending audience. It works on multiple levels at once.

Practically everything has a script attached to it, which is something I'm a huge fan of, and everything has some kind of response for being punched, a trait with which I am so enamored that it's honestly kind of nauseating. Not enough D-Mods do this stuff.

There are quite a few neat mechanics in this mod, although none of them involve particularly complicated scripting. One guy will keep track of how many pillbugs you've killed and pay you per bug every time you come back to him. There's a device that trades coins for experience points. There are a number of bog-standard fetch/trade sequence quests, but the objects you trade are often quite interesting. Death's gauntlet includes a memory game. You get a "new" magic that is just Hellfire with a duck instead of a fireball, which never gets old.

The real clincher for QFC's status as a great D-Mod, though, is the fact that there are two quests here, and the one in the title isn't the real one. When you finally retrieve the cheese, the King will simply chide you for taking a simple request so seriously and give you less than a hundred each of gold and experience points. The real quest is to find all of the hidden pixie poops. There are twenty of them and they're well-hidden, but in case

you have trouble a hint can be found somewhere for each one.

You know, we gamers are so easy to manipulate that it's actually kind of funny. My friend and I like to call the things a game spreads around for you to collect "gubbins," which is a real English word meaning objects of little importance. They're the gems in Spyro, the stars in Mario 64, the gems in Crash Bandicoot. Maybe you have to get some of them, maybe you don't, but that carrot on that stick is right there in front of you and you're fooling yourself if you think you can resist it. I mean, you have to get 100%, right? How can you say you've completed the game otherwise? You might have seen an ending sequence, but the gubbins are still there, shaming you for not getting them. It's a kind of hypnosis, a dirty little secret that the likes of Activision-Blizzard, Square-Enix and Zynga have discovered can be used to make people do pretty much anything they want. I think it's hardwired into our monkey brains, that little shiver of satisfaction when we pick up something we desired and had to work for. We did good, we got our pellet and it motivates us to keep spinning that hamster wheel. Achievement unlocked. It's surprising that it took even this long for somebody to weave this dark magic into a D-Mod.

Incidentally, one thing gubbins tend to have in common is that they are shiny. This makes them easy to spot and desirable to collect. The pixy poops are no exception, but they are also literally poop. Do I even need to comment on how this speaks to the gamer's addiction to collecting crap? Jamie, do you have any idea how hard your D-Mod is kicking my mind's butt right now? Why didn't you stay and make us a whole series? No -- you don't have to answer, you

handsome beast. I already know that you're way too cool for us, and that you decided to stop for a moment in between banging a staggeringly beautiful woman who is also a brilliant scientist and correctly calling a coin flip "edge" seven times in a row to entertain us nerds before ditching us to resume your life of awesomeness. And though for that glittering moment we knew true bliss, we are left with the everlasting pain of withdrawal. "Come back, Jamie," we softly weep, "come back and make our lives worth living again," but you're already long gone, and we're left to endure our plain existence, pretending we can't remember what that cruel glimpse of heaven was like.



...Okay, so the mod isn't actually THAT great. But it is good fun, and getting the poops is worth it. I found 19 of 20 before checking a guide, but even the one I missed has a hint that spells out its location somewhere in the mod. Your reward is an enormously fun area where you get to kill everything, including characters who may have annoyed you, the band Hanson and their fans, and even inanimate objects. Play this one, guys.

Dink Smallwood Goes Trick-Or-Treating

Author: Dan Walma

Original release date: October 31, 1998

Here's a fun Halloween minigame that redink1 managed to whip out in a day, and a productive day it must have been. Sometime before the original game, Dink goes Trick-or-Treating. You first have to pick out a pumpkin (this only affects the size of the jack-o-lantern graphic). Then, a two-minute timer starts and you must go put on a costume (you can change Dink's graphics to a wide variety of other characters,



including a bonca, which is pretty neat,

and visit houses to get candy. Getting a good score depends upon figuring out which houses like which costumes - some will even be scared of or hate certain costumes and give you nothing. You should also note that while a house won't give you candy twice while wearing the same costume, they WILL give you candy again if you return wearing a different one. This required quite a bit of variable juggling!

Some of the comments you get are funny, especially if you try trick-or-treating as Dink

- each house will give just one candy and comment on your "scary costume" with its "nasty mask." Dink is ugly, ha ha! Stupid ugly pig farmer.

When time is up, you'll get one of five comments depending on how many pieces of candy you collected. The best comment is awarded for getting over 200 candy, but this is nigh-impossible if it's possible at all. The best I ever did is 143:



No way I could have beaten this by 57. No WAY.

This is definitively the first non-combat D-Mod, as you can't punch anything at any point (even Dinkanoid could be called a sort of combat). Pressing control displays a comment on your current costume, even if you're Dink. This was thinking way out of the box at the time, and there's even some replay value. This was a nice Halloween treat for the Dink community.

Prophecy of the Ancients

Author: Gary & Tony Hertel

Original release date: Release date: December 8, 1998

REPUTATION NOTE: This D-Mod is one of the select group to have a score of 9.0 or better (9.2) on The Dink Network.

Robinson Technologies released a fairly unheralded little independent PC game called Dink Smallwood sometime in late 1997, though it's difficult to pin down exactly when (I could ask Seth Robinson, but I figure he's a pretty busy guy, and it isn't that important). In the months that followed, over twenty-five add-on modules were released. Some of them were fun, others sucked, and a few (Mike Snyder's, mostly) showed a surprising amount of talent and ambition, but even taken all together, they felt to me at the time like a nice extra - a way to get your money's worth out of the title by having some additional content to play with. The idea of making a proper game with the Dink engine had come up (again, Mike Snyder), but I'm not sure how likely it felt to come to fruition. Dink wasn't such a unique phenomenon just yet - lots of games have early mod support, some fun releases, the ANNOUNCEMENT of some very ambitious projects, and then fizzle out after a year or so. Then came Gary Hertel and Prophecy of the Ancients, and you couldn't look at Dink the same way again. The point was driven home for good that RTSofT had done something special in making the ability to modify the game as broad as it was. You could pour your heart into a project of massive proportions, and in the year after the game was released, *somebody actually did*.

It would be a mistake to portray PotA as something that blindsided the community, of course. We knew it was coming; Gary talked about it on his website and there was a demo, which I had played. Even so, it's hard to overstate how much of a wake-up slap this mod was to Dink fans upon its release. A well-thought-out epic with innovative new features had been proven feasible, so what was stopping you? In my case, it was talent and patience.

Like Mike Snyder, Gary was an Actual Programmer, and you can tell when you play PotA. A fixture in early Dinkdom, Mr. Hertel was responsible for the tremendously useful Ultimate Cheat (a boon to developers and cheaters alike) and eventually for WinDinkEdit, which I wasn't around for, but I'd have been glad to have anything replace the tedium of moving your cursor around with the arrow keys in the original editor. This was his only D-Mod, but Hell, after making this you don't really have to go on, do you?

Prophecy was the first mod to be larger than the actual game. It took me five hours flat to beat Dink Smallwood and 5:20 for POTA. Equally notable is its innovative magic system, which stores up to seven spells (only one of which is from the original) in just two "magic-items." You can change between spells by pressing M and cycling through sprites with the arrow keys, causing them to circle around Dink:



How cool is THIS?

Mind you, I played this mod back in the day, but I didn't remember it so well, and when I saw this my jaw dropped. I'm poring over the source right now and I still don't understand how it works. Actual Programmers, guys. I bow my head in deference.

Enough about notability. POTA is good. It is a fun game and if you're playing D-Mods at all you have to play it. It was the undisputed gold standard for nearly two years, and remains in the prized 9.0+ category today for good reason. Aside from the fact that you play as Dink and nearly all of the graphics and sound effects are reused, it doesn't feel like an add-on. It has a large world with distinct sections that make sense and feel right, something that no D-Mod author other than Mike Snyder had managed yet, and unlike Mike's D-Mods, there is no Big Empty Map Syndrome to be found. The game is packed with content, and that content is varied, creative, and often quite funny. The new Magic is just genius work. First of all, you can turn into four monsters - a bonca,



Check out the sweet gfx for that magic rune.

which is good for some extra punch early on, a slime, which moves at Herb Boots speed and is useful throughout the mod for moving around, a goblin, a form in which you have to remain for a certain segment, and eventually a stone giant, which is pretty much the "haha I win" button, adding 14 to your attack AND defense. The second rune can be used to cast your standard hellfire, an iceball spell that freezes enemies (the frozen enemy graphics are pretty cool), and a "spark" spell that is only useful in a couple of spots. Oh, and while I'm at it, the music choices are many and excellent. There's a ska MIDI in this D-Mod! Yes, please!

Some of the tasks you have to perform are quite clever, and there's a lot of great stuff going on with environmental changes. For example, there's a river that blocks your path, so you push a rock into it and it becomes a path. Is that great game design or what? That's like Metroid or Zelda or something. At any rate, for most of the mod there's something new and interesting to do almost everywhere you go.

I can't go too overboard praising the mod, however, as I did notice some glaring flaws, and what's worse, in the last hour or so I got kind of bored. Most of the flaws could be

fixed with a bit of simple polish, like spelling and grammatical errors ("butt" is repeatedly spelled as "but" right at the start of the intro - not a good first impression), signs with no scripts attached, objects with no hardness, tiling that doesn't match up, and doors that don't operate and offer no explanation as to why. I really don't want to give the impression that these errors are all over the place, because they aren't, but they're there enough to be noticeable and it detracts from what otherwise feels like a professional-level experience. More concerning is the difficulty problem. Early on, the bosses are pretty tough, but at a certain point not too far in you start to get seriously overpowered, and the game is not likely to present you much challenge from there. Experience points shower you like the curbside spray of a passing minivan on a wet road, and powerups are so common that it kind of takes the joy that the original game had out of finding them. If you don't believe me, have a look at my ending stats:



Dinkzilla, is that you?

Furthermore, you get the throwing axe early on, and D-Mod authors really need to learn (and hey, maybe they did) that the thing is seriously a game breaker. Once you have that axe, combat with almost anything that doesn't have a very high defense or a magic

attack is a complete joke. I think that RTSoft at least partially understood this, since in the original game it's behind an optional quest and costs a significant amount of gold. And then there are the new spells - Iceball is an instant kill for everything it works on, as hitting a frozen monster results in its immediate demise. It works on most of the difficult monsters you encounter. Then, when you get that stone giant morph, the game is just plain over. Even in the extremely unlikely event that you take enough damage to worry about, you're still fine, as you regenerate a health point every seven seconds while in this form!

Furthermore, you can tell that development on this mod began when nobody really knew anything about making D-Mods. When Dink examines a sign in the first part of the mod, the text attaches to Dink, which is unusual but not wrong per se. However, when he examines inanimate objects they often seem to talk, which is definitely wrong. These problems, the tiling errors, and other problems like them tend to vanish as you get further into the mod, suggesting the author(s) learned as it progressed.

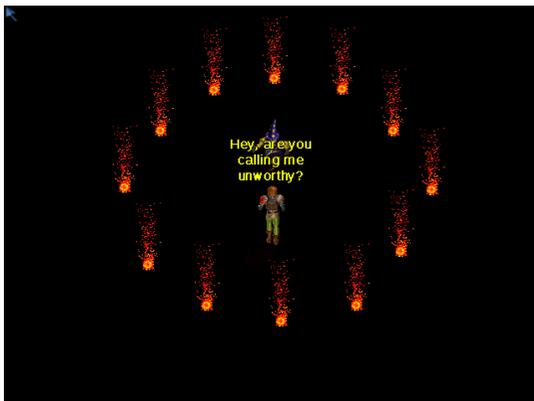
Those flaws don't prevent PotA from being an essential D-Mod, though. Let's walk around it a bit, admire the decor, raid its medicine cabinet, eat some chips on its sofa, steal some of its silverware. I am rapidly losing track of this analogy.

This mod is set in an alternate timeline, which is a great idea, as all the original game's baggage can be thrown straight out. In this timeline Dink is makin' it with Libby and Milder is the pig farmer, resulting in an uproarious role reversal of that familiar scene:



Actually, Dink says right after this that he's just kidding and invites Milder for a beer.

Then, Armageddon starts happening. Oh no! This won't be explained until the very end of the game, so all Dink and Milder can do is run for it in the intro sequence, which works very well aside from a moment where they both run straight through a church wall instead of using the door like sensible beings who are made of solid matter. The intro contains some interesting visual moments that don't just feel like a part of the game where you lack control (there's also a "skip intro" button, which was first seen in Dink's Doppelganger and is a feature I admire because it seems like it wouldn't be that easy to code).



"Actually, I was thinking that mouse pointer over there might make a better hero than you."

Actually, the cutscenes throughout the entire mod are impressive and frequently involve a great number of moving sprites, Dink properly walking off screen, and other excellent touches. Anyway, Dink has to back in time to prevent the Prophecy of the Ancients (it involves lots of doom) from coming to pass.

This game is rather witty. Here are some examples:



Dink displays his dominance over a lowly sign.



NPCs are morons.



Does Dink Smallwood look like a bitch? Then why you trying to fuck him like one?

I mean, I laughed. Big-time jerks get their comeuppance and then some, Dink Smallwood fails to put up with all varieties of typical NPC guff, and goblins are immensely, hilariously, pants-wettingly dumb to the point where they can often simply be talked into killing one another, which is a running gag. Early on, there is a lot of script interaction with objects and a truly impressive amount of different texts for Dink to say when he examines or hits things, but this becomes less true pretty rapidly and the second half of the game is pretty much devoid of this kind of thing, sadly. There's still plenty of humor in the dialogue, though, until the last section.

The last section is where I got bored, and the game seems to peter out a bit. I don't want to overstate this; the maps are still quite good, there are still cool graphics that were made for the final sections, and so forth. It's just that when you compare the last part to what came before, it doesn't feel quite as good. There are a couple of dungeons that just feel totally aimless to me - although they are still well-designed, they compare poorly to the rest of the game where there was constantly something new to do. It doesn't help that by this point the game is deliriously easy - even

the final boss is pretty much a pushover. By the way, I figured out how to sequence break the "force field" section and skip the Darklands portion entirely. Just equip an elixir from the beginning of the game (they were only 50 gold), walk through the field blocking the next area that sets your life to 0, and use your elixir. Tada, you're fine! Cheeky.

Anyway, when you win you're treated to a long ending sequence where Dink goes around kicking ass while all the villains barely have time to wonder what's going on.



Also, somebody presses the Continuity Reset Button.

Then, there is an actual scrolling credit roll. Wow.

I think the most impressive thing about PotA is that it came out as early as it did. What a tough act to follow.

And with that, I have played and written about all of the D-Mods of 1998! A roaring start to the Dink scene, and big thanks go out once again to Mike Snyder for making it happen. I bet you didn't think I'd even make it this far, huh? Well, I will be back to cover 1999, in which a "mere" twenty D-Mods were released (one of which I have already covered). See you then.

1999

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