

**Shareware**

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	<i>TITLE :</i> Shareware		
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WRITTEN BY		October 23, 2022	

**REVISION HISTORY**

<i>NUMBER</i>	<i>DATE</i>	<i>DESCRIPTION</i>	<i>NAME</i>

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# Chapter 1

## Shareware

### 1.1 ASSASSINS CD3 - SHAREWARE

This text was written by Jeff Minter  
(Good old YAK)

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SHAREWARE: WHAT, HOW, WHY....

All commercial games are designed for a theoretical entity known as Darren. Darren is a spotty 14-year-old male who doesn't get on that well with people, so he spends all his time in his bedroom playing games on his computer. Darren is easily impressed by graphics and music, and he doesn't really want to learn anything really tricky - as long as it has Ninja Hampsters in and works with a Kempston, that's OK. Somehow he can persuade his Dad to fork out 25 quid once every few weeks for the latest version of R-Type with different graphics on his Amiga, don't ask me how. Either that or he waits and hits up his mate Wayne for a pirate version in a couple of weeks' time.

Consequently, it has become much harder for programmers to retain their creative integrity and earn a living too. It is virtually impossible for a small independent developer to get games out to the people without first hooking in to one of the larger companies for distribution and advertising, and those larger companies tend to want stuff that's very normal, spaceship-and-alien stuff, no llamas please and not too weird.

However, with popular disk-based machines, the idea of Public Domain programs has really come into its own. PD libraries give access to a large amount of free software. PD is usually sub-commercial stuff, often good utilities but without the 'polish' of commercial versions.

It would be nice to use the existing PD libraries to distribute software to anyone who is interested, and make a bit of money too - and that is where Shareware comes in.

The principle of Shareware is simple. The game is distributed by the PD libraries, by uploading onto BBSES and giving copies away. Users can get a complete version of the game just for the price of the media, and then take it home and play it. If the user likes the game, he sends the author a

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Shareware fee. Usually, the author will send back a few goodies (as an incentive to register) and, if enough people send in the dosh to make it worthwhile, he may do more Shareware stuff.

Naturally you don't have to pay anything if you don't like the game. Of course a lot of people might like the game and decide not to pay, but if too many people do that then nobody will ever bother doing any decent Shareware at all, and it's back to Darren's 25 quid games. So, it's down to the users - if they're honest, then programmers will be more inclined to work hard on Shareware releases.

The idea of Shareware is very idealistic, perhaps impracticably so, but the advantages over the conventional videogame market are so enormous that I thought it had to be tried, at least once. The response from this experiment will determine whether or not I will release any more shareware.

Advantages of Shareware:

1- It is a totally honest way of selling. All users can try the game and only those who get hooked are morally obliged to pay the fee. Nobody is disappointed or feels ripped-off.

2- There are no constraints on creativity. No-one says 'we cannot publish this because it ain't mainstream'. Programmers do what the hell they like and the users vote with their Shareware fees.

3- Anyone can play. The mechanism of distribution is already in place in the form of PD libraries. All the originator has to provide is a disk to each of the PD libraries with game and documentation. So if you have good stuff it doesn't matter if you aren't signed to a major label - if it's good, it'll get passed around the PD scene; if it's bad nobody will bother with it. The author could be working for a company or coding in his bedroom; the potential for distribution is the same. Forget spending thousands on adverts trying to convince people to spend lots of money on a game they haven't even played yet...

4- The concept of piracy becomes null. All that business of hacking and cracking doesn't apply to software which is both free and unprotected. Shareware authors WANT their software to be spread and copied. If it gets onto a BB in America and spreads all over the US, well and groovy! Good Shareware exports itself!

5- Prices can be way low. Since the authors have no overheads in terms of production and advertising, they don't need to ask as much in payment. And the users pay the programmers directly - nobody else takes a cut. 100% of five pounds is better than 5% of twenty pounds.

The advantages of Shareware as a democratic, honest way of publishing software are pretty obvious, but it does have to go both ways. If a programmer puts a lot of time and effort into his code and releases it as Shareware, he's trusting you, the users, to be honest and pay him if you like his program. If you all just skive off and take the stuff for free, he won't bother to do any more stuff. If you support the author, he'll be inclined to do much better next time - and you'll be the ones to benefit!

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--- I hope old YAK won't mind the use of this text, but the text was so good  
that I just had to use it.

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