eXoDOS Version 4

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE STORY SO FAR...

EXoDOS started as an Adventure game collection that I had begun to build for myself in 2007. At around 250 titles, I thought I had just about found them all. I decided to add RPG games as a second volume, which then slowly began to turn into a full DOS set. I'm glad I didn't know then how far off I was in terms of "being done".

I wanted to find a way to play through my game collection without spending an entire evening trying to get a game to run. Between the installation, configuration, cracking, and special tweaks needed to get many games playable it was clear that these challenges would negatively impact the preservation of the titles. eXoDOS was created to help preserve these games by making them easily accessible.

Unfortunately, there is no universal list of DOS compatible games. The games included have been identified using a variety of online sources, suggestions, and personal experience. As physical media deteriorates, it becomes more difficult to locate missing titles. It doesn't help that the internet is flooded with poor quality rips distributed by scene groups at a time when bandwidth was severely limited, which led to key aspects of games (such as video, music, and speech) being left out.

Thanks to the popularity of the collection, other like-minded people have been drawn to the project which has made the 4.0 release the best one yet. Countless hours have been put in to the project to ensure the best version of each game is available and that the games look and sound as they were intended. Thank you for downloading. If you grew up with these games, then I hope the collection brings back memories. If it's all new to you, then have fun discovering a pivotal era in computer gaming.

Getting Started

Setting up eXoDOS is designed to be as simple as possible. Once you have downloaded the collection, run the "setup.bat" file. This will extract all of the necessary files needed to run the collection. If you did not download the entire collection, you might run into problems. To ensure the games you did download are playable, please ensure you downloaded the following files:

.\eXoDOS\util\util.zip
.\eXoDOS\util\unzip.exe
.\eXoDOS\games\!metadata.zip
LaunchBox.zip
XOMetadata.zip
setup.bat

Installation will take quite some time, depending on your machine. Once it is finished extracting files you will be asked if you would like to turn Aspect Ratio on for each game. If set to 'YES', it will put black bars on the side of games to preserve their original format (only in fullscreen mode). If you choose 'NO', they will be stretched to fit your monitor. You will also be asked if you want to keep Adult games. Selecting 'NO' does not remove the games from your system, it simply removes them from the front end. So if you don't want Larry hanging around, this is your chance to banish him from your front end.

Importing into an Existing Setup

To merge your eXoDOS launchbox files into an existing LaunchBox installation, you will need to follow these steps:

Run SETUP.BAT **and let the process complete.**

Move the following files from your eXoDOS folder to the same folder in your existing LaunchBox folder
.\data\platforms\MS-DOS.xml
.\Manuals\MS-DOS*.*
.\images\MS-DOS*.*

Finally, move the entire .\eXoDOS\ **folder to your existing LaunchBox directory.**

If you already have the MS-DOS platform setup in your copy of LaunchBox, this will overwrite it.

Using the Front End

LaunchBox is very easy to use, however this section will cover the basics you need to know to get started.

Right clicking on any game will bring up the context menu. From here you can:
Play
Configure
View any extra documentation (maps, hint books, etc)
View Manual
View Images (Shows all image metadata for the game)
Flip Box
Or several other options

Hitting ENTER on any game will also launch it. If the game has not been installed, you will be prompted to install the game. Clicking Configure on the context menu will also do this. After install you will be asked if you would like to enable Aspect Ratio, if you would like Fullscreen or Windowed, and if you would like to modify the filter / scaler.

If you select Configure after a game has been installed, it will ask if you would like to uninstall the game. Selecting 'NO' then gives you the opportunity to reconfigure the options originally presented to you during installation.

Games in LaunchBox are linked to the LaunchBox Games Database. If you choose to update your collection or would like to scan for missing data, it is *VERY* important to not allow the wizard to replace existing metadata. eXoDOS tracks several genre and series types that are not tracked in the games database. Replacing your existing metadata could cause a loss of these details. If this does happen, and you have your original setup files, you can run the SETUP.BAT file again, which will reset your launchbox XML to it's original state.

MEAGRE is also included for those who prefer to use the original front end that eXoDOS was first released with. MEAGRE can be found in the eXoDOS sub-folder within the folder you started LaunchBox from. When the SETUP.BAT file is run, it creates the necessary files for MEAGRE to run properly. MEAGRE is no longer developed or supported.

Choose a Music Device

One major improvement to eXoDOS v4.0 is the ability to choose between supported sound cards at launch. This section explains the different sound types in the order they were released. While later sound cards do generally sound better, it is subjective as to which one will sound best to you.

PC Speaker (1981) - A noise emitter capable of one sound at a time.

Tandy 3-Voice / PCjr (1984) - Both of these had 3 tone as well as white noise (useful for synthesizing percussion). The Tandy was slightly more advanced.

MPU-401 (1984) - This was the first MIDI box.

Covox (1987) - The first DAC [digital-to-analog converter], which allowed primitive sampled speech and effects. The Disney Sound Source and Intersound MDO are related devices.

AdLib (1987) - A 6-voice FM synth with 5 percussion instruments. It did not support digital audio.

Roland MT-32 (1987) - A quite expensive external MIDI box that was originally marketed towards high-end consumers. The quality is astounding for the time, however the MT-32 was not capable of digital sounds and early games were unable to make use of two cards.

Creative Music System (1987) - Essentially a 12 channel Tandy chip on steroids. Also released at Radio Shack as the Game Blaster.

Sound Blaster (1989) - The most prolific sound card of the DOS era. It combined an 11-voice FM synth with a DAC.

Roland Sound Canvas (1991) - a 24 voice external device which supported the General MIDI standard. It had a sound bank of 128 instruments.

AdLib Gold (1992) - A short lived sound card that very few games took advantage of. Dune is the best example of the card's capabilities.

Sound Blaster 16 (1992) - The SB16 combined a 16bit CD quality digital sampling, MPU-401 compatability, and the ability to connect a WaveBlaster daughter-board

Gravis Ultrasound (1992) - The GUS allowed custom sound banks to be loaded to it as well as the use of wave-tables to mimic real-life instruments.

Later DOS compatible soundcards such as the Sound Blaster AWE32 and AWE64 are not supported by DOSBox.

Video Modes

DOS era games went through a wide variety of video types, from monochrome adapters to 3D accelerated cards that combined polygons, textures, and millions of colors. This covers the most common as emulated by this collection.

CGA (1981) - IBM's first graphics card and first color display. Generally supported a fixed 4 color palette from a the available 16 color palette at 320x200.

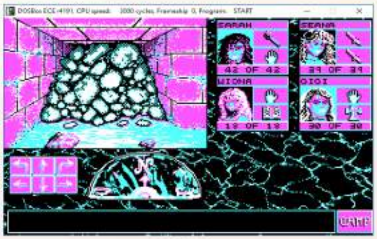
PCjr (1984) - This used a slightly upgraded CGA card which allowed custom palettes to be loaded, expanding the available colors beyond 16.

EGA (1987) - The Enhanced Graphics Adapter allowed 16 simultaneous colors from a palette of 64 up to a resolution of 640x350.

VGA (1987) - Video Graphics Array could output 256 colors in 320x200 or 16 colors in 640x480 from a redefinable 18-bit RGB palette.

SVGA (1987) - A non-standard format, most often emulated by the S3 chip in DOSBox. SVGA continued to be developed well beyond the DOS era.

3DFX (1996) - 3D accelerated cards were released near the end of the DOS era and support for hardware acceleration found its way into a handful of titles. It smoothed out polygons, allowed high resolutions, and better quality textures.

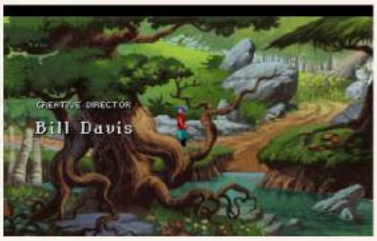


CGA

CGA

PCjr

EGA



VGA

SVGA

3DFX Comparison

Controls

DOS games were, unfortunately, not very standardized when it came to controls. For games which have extremely obtuse control schemes, I have tried to insert a note upon launch.

For games that were originally released as joystick only, keymaps have been created that translate movement to the arrow keys with Z and X mapped to the buttons.

In general it is best to try the mouse and arrow keys first. Other commonly used control schemes are listed below. If you still have trouble, it doesn't hurt to check and see if there is a manual for the game in question.

WASD (up, left, down, right)
O/P for left & right with A/Z for up & down
</> for left right with Q/A for up & down
NumPad movement (sometimes requires NumLock On)

Save Game Transferring

A few DOS games had the ability to read files from previous games in their series, or even from other games from the same publisher. This allowed you to continue your journey with your previous character(s). In some cases your stats would carry over as well.

EXoDOS supports this by giving you the option to bring your save files over to your next game. Since each game handled this a bit differently, clear instructions are given for each game.

The following series supported this feature*:

Bard's Tale
Breach / Rules of Engagement
Buck Rogers
Dark Design
Dark Sun
Eye of the Beholder
Ishar
Krynn Trilogy
Magic Candle
Might and Magic
Paladin
Pool of Radiance
Quest for Glory
Ravenloft
Realms of Arkania
Roadwar
Trazere
Ultima
Wing Commander
Wizardry

* Not every game in each series was designed with save transfer in mind. Games which do support it will tell you on launch.

Copy Protection

Copy protection was quite common before the CD-ROM was introduced. Generally it manifested itself in a form of asking the user to type in some code, number, or word from the included documentation. To thwart copy machines, publishers began to use dark ink on dark paper or even elaborate code wheels.

Most of the included games in eXoDOS have been cracked, which means that you will either not be asked for a code, or if you are, you can type just about anything to bypass it. Not every game has been (or can be) cracked though. For those that still have copy protection, you will be able to find the needed manual or code sheet by right clicking the game in the front end.

Many games that have been cracked still include the original code sheets, documentation, and working HTML code wheels simply because they are fun to play with.

Emulation

How do all of these ancient games run on your modern computer? Emulation! eXoDOS uses a combination of several different versions of DOSBox in order to virtually re-create the hardware and software that a DOS game expects to see. DOSBox itself relies on a CONF file to define the machine including ram, video card, sound, cpu type/speed, and hundreds of other variables. It requires several versions of DOSBox to make the wide variety of games in the collection run, including 0.74, ECE, SVN Daum, and DOSBox-X. Luckily you don't need to know how to edit CONF files, setup hardware, or install the games as this has all been done for you.

Common DOSBox Keys:

Ctrl+F9	-	Exit
Ctrl+F10	-	Capture or Release the Mouse
Ctrl+F11	-	Decrease Cycles (Slow Game Down)
Ctrl+F12	-	Increase Cycles (Speed Game Up)
Alt+Enter	-	Switch between Window & Fullscreen

ScummVM is also included and available for use with games it supports. Unlike DOSBox, ScummVM is an interpreter. Instead of recreating an environment for the game, it uses the game's data files and plays them natively on your current computer. This process requires a game's engine to be reverse engineered, which means a relatively small number of games are supported.

Support

The quickest place to get help is the eXoDOS Discord channel. Scan the QR code to join or type the following link into your browser:
https://discord.gg/KNV4BFS

Contact

If Discord isn't your thing you can reach me at
retroexo@gmail.com

Thanks

Several people have helped the project over the past decade that are not directly involved with the project. Each of the following people and websites have contributed to the success of eXoDOS.

The eXoSquad

Jason Carr @ LaunchBox

ripsaw8080

Trixter, hargle, and everyone involved with the TDC project

pleasuredome.org.uk

the-eye.eu

archive.org

gamehistorian

And everyone who has helped improve the collection in the eXoDOS Discord server. This release has been improved exponentially thanks to your help.

NOTES