

HalfOfAKebab

Hi. I don't think that many folks know who I am, but some of you know me as the one who archives the ancient software. Over the course of this rather long eulogy, I am going to tell how Kebab's Omniarchive project directly resulted in me starting this quest.

It was late 2018. I was just sitting around, bored as a plank, looking for things to do. All of a sudden, it hit me. I could play Minecraft! But... what should I do? This choice paralysis resulted in me getting up, going into my server room, and looking at some of the junk that I had lying around in there. I took a look at a stack of old hard drives that used to be in a server that I had in 2011. Realizing that I would not be playing Minecraft most likely, I took that stack of drives, and plugged them up, one by one, to my desktop. I looked through them, and after struggling to even remember what filesystem and OS the drives were from (I eventually realize they were from when I ran Solaris on that old server), I took to looking through them. On there, I found some things that I had completely forgotten about. I found a collection of old Minecraft installations, but nothing that I couldn't just find online. Eventually, I stumbled across the world saves from some old Minecraft servers I ran. Lo and behold, there it was. My old Beta 1.7.3 server. I quickly copied it out, but noticed that there wasn't any server JARs to even run. I eventually did acquire a server JAR, thanks to this weird archive.org page that I stumbled upon. I found this webpage for something called "Omniarchive", but thought it was some kind of secretive thing that I would never get accepted into, after all, all I had to offer were a few old rare game mods.

Time would continue to tick, and I would eventually find myself acquiring a large amount of old 1980s large-systems computing stuff, from the likes of IBM and DEC. As I sat in my living room, looking at this mass of tape reels, tape cartridges, disk packs, and rolled-up paper tapes, I realized that I had to do something. For some unknown reason, I thought to myself "dang, I've got everything now, I ought to archive this stuff for good, else it'll just fade into nothingness." I had just walked into there, after getting off of YouTube. I was watching a video from AntVenom, talking about lost Minecraft versions. I had a bit of an epiphany: maybe I should archive this old software,

I kicked that can down the road for way too long, though. It wouldn't be until 2020 when I would get around to doing that, though. When I did archive that ancient stuff, I felt so relieved. Unfortunately, almost none of it will ever see the light of day in the public sense. A certain company has absolutely decimated the archival efforts of its software, despite their software (at least one of their products) being the most displayed screen on terminals around the world (hint hint -- PROFS).

I was just sitting around one day when I decided to check what was on this old hard drive I had picked up at a garage sale. I was just about to stick it in an old PC and format over it with a fresh Windows NT install, but I decided to check it beforehand. On it, I found something that I can best describe as "impossibly rare." I did not think that I would ever get it. I told my friends what they had found, and they were shocked. They then told me that some random person managed to find Minecraft Alpha 1.1.1!

As I stood there, on the phone, I asked to myself, "Alpha 1.1.1? Huh?" One of them chimed in and said it was out for only 2 hours. I was needless to say, shocked. He then told me that I could get it from some place called Omniarchive. The name rung a bell, so I got out my list of things that I needed to knock out someday and wrote on there, "Join Omniarchive, locate first. "Eventually, I would stumble upon their Discord link. I was surfing archive.org for old Minecraft worlds, and I found that same page I had found so long ago that provided me with those old Indev versions.

I was still on the phone with my friends. I eventually said, "Hmm, an omni-archive? Well, I've got everything -- HP, SGI, Sun, DEC, IBM, CDC, Apple, Microsoft; I should put on... the... omnisystem! Nah, that name sounds stupid. Okay, I'll come up with a name later. I'm gonna shove this junk onto my web server for now, and we'll see what happens from there."

I actually joined Omniarchive for a rather strange reason, though. It was early August of 2021, and I was playing around with an old OS/2 VM that I managed to reconstitute from a hard drive dump of an old OS/2 workstation I got once, and I had a "terrible idea" -- why not try to run a Minecraft server on this bad boy? I got stuck, so I checked my resources list to see if I had any possible people I could contact. All that was on there that was even remotely relevant was that invite code. So, I puched it in, and joined. I didn't have time to talk, I had to go cook dinner. When I came back, it dawned on me what the issue actually was that was holding me back from an OS/2 Minecraft server. OS/2 itself! So,

obviously, Windows NT 4 would be the better option. So, I strolled on in, I asked if anyone knew how to get a MC server to work on NT4. Some folks on there provided some useful tips, and I got it to work! I eventually followed this up with an OS/2 Minecraft server later that day. Normally, I'd leave the group at this point, but I had been putting off joining this group for at least a year now; I might as well just stay. So, I stayed.

I would get back to archiving some old software myself in late August. I was digging through a box of old hard drives, and found one with a rather odd masking tape label stuck to it. I plugged it in, and after taking an image of it and getting the Linux HPFS driver to work, I examined the contents on there. I found some software that was once one of the most popular program packages in the world, yet so extinct today. I looked at the files on there. "VM RELEASE 2 VERS 4", "NCP VTAM REL 4", "OV/VM REL 3", so on and so forth. I instantly realized that these were things I had been searching for for at least 2 years! I finally found it, a copy of OfficeVision! This was a massive find! However, there was a hurdle. I could never properly archive it, for fear of retaliation from the software's creator. So, it sat there on my own private server for a very long time. I couldn't just let it sit there, but I had to.

Unlike in the world of Minecraft, the world of ancient software archival is a very troubled one. Communities have sprung up around each old computer manufacturer's equipment, but some of them have fallen. The CDC (Control Data) archive is gone. The IBM archivists are living in the shadows. The SGI community is split into two. This is why I absolutely cannot believe that Kebab managed to put this effort on. Not only did he get the unofficial blessing, but he took it and ran with it. His community has performed some of the most amazing software revivals I have ever seen. I can only hope the other vintage computing archival communities that I am a part of can do the same.

Thank you, Lewis. You have inspired me to not only archive "old junk", but to try to start a community around it. Rest in peace, wonderful archivist!

Author's note: I had originally composed this on 2021/11/21 at 8:59 PM, and posted it to the OmniArchive Discord a short while later. What I didn't know is that this would send me down a path of preserving history for countless years to come, and the influence of Lewis (not to mention the current way that Omniarchive works) was pivotal in that whole journey.

For all those years ago, you were a real one, Lewis. I hope your family is doing well and everyone's alright.