

Interview with Garry Marsh re: *Beatle Quest*

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Preamble

This is an interview with Garry Marsh, conducted via email on December 2–5, 2017. He created the text adventure game *Beatle Quest*, using *The Quill*. The game was released in 1985 for the ZX Spectrum and the Commodore 64 via his own publishing label, Number 9 Software.

This work received ethics approval from the University of Calgary’s Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board, file REB16-1235. Both interviewer and interviewee have agreed to release this interview under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.¹

Background

(Interview questions appear in *italics*.)

What was your first computer?

A Commodore 64.

Did you have any exposure to computers through school?

Yes, back in about 1967 we visited one of our local universities, where we were introduced to computers. I had a printout that told me how old I was, how long I had slept, etc., and when I could retire! I still have it somewhere!



Image courtesy Garry Marsh

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Besides Beatle Quest, did you do other programming? If so, what sort of programs did you write, and in what languages?

I dabbled in BASIC, played around, but used *The Quill* in the end.

Did you have any education or formal training in programming?

No, self taught, for the little I know.



Image courtesy Garry Marsh

The Quill

Was The Quill easy to learn for you?

Yes, very easy to use and understand.

Had you used similar adventure game creation tools? If so, which one(s), and how did The Quill compare to them?

No, I only used *The Quill*, others seemed too complicated.

How did you discover and acquire The Quill in the first place?

I read reviews, and played some games written with it.

How did creating games with The Quill make you feel?

Very satisfied, mainly because it worked!

What was the part of The Quill that gave you the most difficulty working with it?

Graphics with the Spectrum version.

Did you ever find what appeared to be bugs in The Quill? What were they?

I didn't, but apparently others did!

If you could've changed one thing about The Quill, what would it be?

Nothing. It was easy to use, and depended on how clever you were with what you did with it. Of course these days you could write something MASSIVE!

Did you play other games made with The Quill, and if so, what was the game made with it you saw that impressed you the most?

Yes. Let me think: *Bored of the Rings!*

I played most of the Level 9 games, but they weren't written with *The Quill*.

Beatle Quest

Which came first, the Commodore 64 or the ZX Spectrum version of Beatle Quest? Were you the person responsible for both or was someone else involved?

I did both, the CBM [Commodore] came first.

Looking back, what would you have done to improve your game?

If it had had more memory, lots of descriptive passages woven with Beatles lyrics, etc.

Walk me through your game development process

– how did you get your ideas, design, develop, and test your game?

Ideas from Beatles lyrics and the stories therein. I had wanted to write a play based on the Beatles double White album (1968), back in 1973, and had a few ideas for



Beatle Quest screen image courtesy Garry Marsh

characters, etc. I drew it out, mapped it, and then added lyrical clues as I went along. Testing as I went.

Do the design/development notes or other materials for Beatle Quest still exist in any form?

Yes, I have some scribbles, printouts, etc.

For the game graphics, did you sketch them out beforehand, or were they created directly on the computer?

A quick sketch then onto the screen work. Very primitive.

Tell me a story about Beatle Quest's development.

I've been a Beatles fan since the age of 9, in 1963. When I saw *The Hobbit* game, and Level 9 games, it was obvious that a Beatles related game was needed!

One of the game messages includes 'GARRY LOVES JOAN,xxx'. What was her reaction to seeing this in the game?

Even I can't remember where that was/is? Joan is my wife, the mother of our two sons. we have been together now for 47 years, since the age of 17 (Joan) and 16. She still puts up with me and we still love one another.

(The message is part of some graffiti in the bathroom.)

How old were you when you published Beatle Quest?

In 1985, I was coming up to 32.

How were the sales of Beatle Quest? Did this exceed your expectations?

I only had 500 copies made! They all sold eventually. I was very pleased.

Did you have unfinished or unpublished games? What were they about, and why did they not appear? In particular, there's mention in Beatle Quest of 'A Day in the Life, part 2', and also that Beatle Quest was one game of a trilogy.

As John Lennon once said, 'Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans!' We had a family, I was a teacher, 'life goes on... bra!' It should have been a trilogy, but Part 2 got started, some bits exist, and Part 3 is still in my head!

In Beatle Quest, you encounter a banker who 'offers financial help for your Adventure game'. Is there a story behind this, and if so, what is it?

Yeah, I borrowed £500 from the bank; our bank manager was very supportive. Thank you, and of course it's a reference to Penny Lane too.

Did you ever hear from anyone who played Beatle Quest, and what feedback did they give you?

It got some good reviews, only one bad one from funnily enough a Simon Marsh (not OUR Simon Marsh!), who wasn't a fan of The Beatles.

People who completed the game could contact you for a Beatle Quest badge. What did they look like and how many did you give away?

No one asked for one! Never got that far with a design.

Did anyone use the included form to ask for a clue?

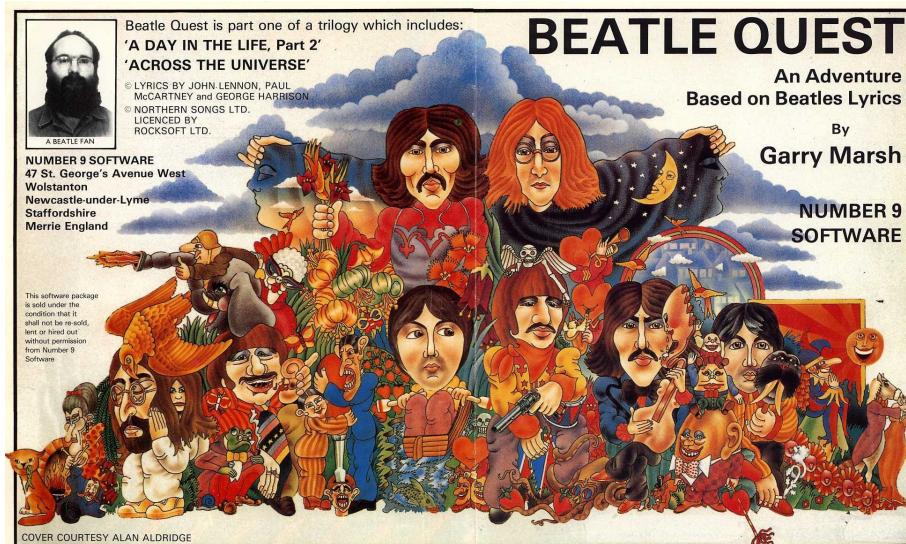
No, never.

Apparently a bug in Beatle Quest could prevent its solution. How did you find out about it, and was it ever fixed in later copies? Was that limited to only one platform, or did it affect both C64 and Spectrum versions?

I heard about it. I have no idea if it's in both. Sorry.

Did you ever hear from anyone connected with the Beatles about your game?

Yes, their solicitors, acting on behalf of Ringo, telling me to 'stop it'.



Beatle Quest cover image courtesy Garry Marsh

Number 9 Software

I assume that you were also the publisher, Number 9 Software. How did that come about, and why did you decide to do that as opposed to going with an existing pub-

lisher?

I like doing things on my own: I published a few things: Baby, You can Drive My car!, The Beatles Christmas Book, Warp and Woof! (all Beatles). Lots of ideas still, but...

How did you duplicate the tapes for Beatle Quest?

Had them done professionally.

Where and how did you advertise Beatle Quest?

FREE reviews in computer magazines.

Did you receive any game submissions at Number 9?

Yes, based on Magical Mystery Tour, but life got in the way!

At what point did Number 9 Software become Number 9 Books? Why did you make that decision?

Time. It's easier to write like this, and technology moved on, and left me behind somewhat on games, etc. I never got hooked on games, but our youngest son collects old computer stuff and games.