

Interview with Andy Remic re: *Graphic Adventure Creator Games*

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TR 2016-1089-08, October 2016

Preamble

This is an interview with Andy Remic, conducted via email on September 18, 2016. He created a number of games using *Graphic Adventure Creator*: *Green Sonja* (1991), *King* (1991), *Moon Magic* (1989), *Not the Lord of the Rings* (1991), *Saga of a Mad Barbarian* (1991), *A Shadow on Glass* (1989), *Sponge* (1989), along with the co-authored *Manic Badger* (1991). He returned to *Graphic Adventure Creator* development temporarily in 2009 to create *Biohell*, a book tie-in.

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

Interview

Interview questions appear in *italics*.

What was your first computer?

A 48K ZX Spectrum.

Did you have any exposure to computers through school?

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Yes, BBC Micros, but I thought they weren't very good.

Besides your GAC games, did you do other programming? If so, what sort of programs did you write, and in what languages?

I also wrote games in BASIC, moved on to compiled BASIC, then started writing Z80 code. I tended to write various routines in Z80 but cobble it all together with compiled BASIC.

Did you have any education or formal training in programming?

Nope.

Was the GAC language easy to learn for you?

Yes. It was daunting at first (I was about 13 or 14 years old) but once you got into the rhythm of how it worked, it was good. The instruction booklet was also very good.

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

I remember looking at QUILL and PAW, but it was after I'd used GAC and they felt counter-intuitive.

How did you discover and acquire GAC in the first place?

I saw an advert in CRASH magazine (I think). I wanted a slice of that.

How did creating games with GAC make you feel?

I was also writing stories, so it gave me the same kind of rush – the rush of creation. I simply enjoy telling stories, and GAC allowed me to do that in a different way than words on a page.

What are your thoughts on the GAC interface, particularly when it came to editing code and images?

I thought it was pretty slick for the time. Intuitive, as I said earlier.

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

I didn't like how the graphics were restricted to only a third of the screen. I found that quite limiting. And the graphics drawing tools took a while to get the hang of.

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

I don't believe I ever found bugs, and I tweaked it a bit to allow music on load-up, etc.

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

Full screen graphics.

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

I don't recall ever playing any, but I'm sure I did. I did play some QUILL home-grown software that was brilliant, and Fergus McNeill was always a benchmark for home-grown authors who made it big.

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

Learnt to code full games in Z80. It would have helped if I'd been a little older – just a couple of years. I was a kid trying to create games in an adult world.

Walk me through your game development process – how did you get your ideas, design, develop, and test your games?

Ideas, like when I'm writing novels, can come from anywhere. Dreams, a conversation, a novel, a movie. I'd always start with concept, game map, developing the game, and finally testing it.

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

Yes. I have lots.

For the game graphics, did you sketch them out beforehand, or were they just created directly in GAC?

Created straight into GAC. If they turned out rubbish, I'd delete and start again.

Tell me a story about game development.

I remember designing game maps whilst watching The A Team on TV. I remember it also being a catharsis – an escape from the drudgery of school and the real world. When I created a game, I became GOD. I could do what I wanted.

How old were you when you began to publish your games?

I think maybe 14 or 15. I was a little older when I started selling them to CRASH and Sinclair User. Then I just wanted the money to help me finish my A levels.

How were the sales of your published games? Did this exceed your expectations?

Sales from adverts in magazines were always poor – they barely covered the cost of advertising. Sales of CRASH cover cassettes obviously mimicked the magazines – so 100,000.

Did you have unfinished or unpublished GAC games? What were they about, and why did they not appear?

Not the Lord of the Rings wasn't published, because the main character had a rude name and the magazines wanted to be family friendly.

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

I had occasional letters and was even stopped in the street a few times. Ahhh, fame.

You had some hidden text in SPONGE inviting people to contact you if they found the message – did anyone ever spot it?

No, I don't believe they did. Ha ha.

You've published many novels. Do you think that creating games in GAC helped in some way in developing your writing style, and if so, how?

I was writing novels and games concurrently, so both fed into one another. I loved both processes, but in the end realised my math skills weren't good enough for mainstream coding, so I veered towards the written word. I still believe they were very similar processes.

You created another GAC game relatively recently, Biohell, in 2009. What was it like returning to GAC development after so long, and what had you forgotten about or found surprising, in retrospect?

It was absolutely brilliant. A lot of fun, although I had to re-learn how to do it. It was just a great, fun, novel experience.

What challenges, if any, did you have making the temporary transition from traditional novel writing back to an interactive fiction style?

Branching storylines, and the creation of puzzles for the player. I found the puzzles hard to create, especially when I was younger.

You're currently creating a film about the ZX Spectrum, called Memoirs of a Spectrum Addict. Was that inspired by writing games?

It was inspired by writing games and playing games! It has been a true honour to interview so many of the game veterans from the Spectrum days, from Steve Turner, Jon Ritman, Clive Townsend and Rick Dickinson – the engineer who designed the Spectrum itself. You can check it out at www.spectrumaddict.co.uk.