104 In Focus: Magnar of The Black Lotus

Magic, Sun 26 Dec 2010

In Focus: Magnar of The Black Lotus

Interviewed by Magic of Nah-Kolor

Introduction

Magic:
Hi Lizard... erm, sorry, Magnar, please be so kind to introduce yourself to our readers. What's your real life story?

Magnar:
The short story would be that I'm a very creative person. I have always been like that since I was a kid, and I love to organize and fix things. Besides my interest in technology and computers, I also love to work-out and exercise in different sports. Right now, I regularly play indoor Bandy on Fridays, and take judo classes twice a week. Besides that I love swimming and walking long distances with the dog each day. Previously, I've been doing mountain climbing and fencing, and I hope to take up on that again when my kids grows a bit older. As a person, I try my best to be always honest and help others. At present, I live in Sweden together with my wife and 2 kids, a son and daughter. We moved away from the busy life in the capital city of Norway to a small town called Ronneby, which reminds me a lot of my home town Randaberg where I grew up as little: close to the ocean with lots of small islands to travel out to with boat during summertime, a lot of nice sand beaches nearby (closest is 500 m from my house) and just 20 minutes away on the highway to

some bigger cities.

One of the big bonuses of moving to Sweden from Norway, with the currency and price level differences, was that I and my wife could afford to buy a house with plenty of space to launch my plans of having my own music studio in a separated building next to our house. The studio today also acts as my home office for the IT consulting full time work I do. It is just great to be able to work about 10 meters from home and not waste time in commuting every day. Right now, I am producing a lot of new tracks, and I hope to soon be able to compile a CD for (digital) release to make a lasting impression to listeners around the world with my music.

Magic:
What made you start making music on computers all those years ago?

Magnar:

My mother was an active classic music piano player in her youth, and my sister was playing a bit on the guitar. Myself, I started fooling around with the piano at a very early age, but it wasn't before a sweet girl next door came and taught me to play a 4-handed piano song I really got addicted. I gradually found it very easy to play new songs on the piano. Playing by ear also contributed greatly to my creativity and ways of experiencing with new songs and melodies all the time. In my teens, I tried mastering controlling synthesizers through midi sequence programming by using Music-X and OctaMed. The word got out,

and soon I was rehearsing with some local bands. All of that was great fun and I learned a lot from the other band members by just watching how each individual was playing his/her instrument and using different techniques I would never have thought of myself. We all aimed very big, but fell harder. After 4 years of being part of bands rehearsing with very little to show for, I gradually got tired and moved away to focused on making my own music on my terms.

Magic:

What is the origin of the nickname Lizard? Why and when did you change it to Magnar?

Magnar:

The nickname Lizard came by a coincidence when I looked in an English-Norwegian translation book in search for something similar to the word Wizard, which being a 10-year-old kid sounded extremely cool as a demoscene handle - but unfortunately was taken by a lot of others. So, in my search for something that was still unique but resembled Wizard, I eventually ended up with Lizard - a dark, poisonous, mystical creature and still very close spelling to my first choice handle. I gave it a go, and it stuck for quite a few years.

As of today, I would rather have people associate my music and other productions with my real name and toward me as a person instead. As my real name is not a very common name, it still sticks out. Which in the end sums up to why use a handle? It just adds to the confusion when I meet other people, and I

rather use my real name instead. That is why I nowadays release through my real name, Magnar.

Magnar's history on the demoscene

Magic:

In retrospective, could you please tell our readers all demoscene groups you have been a member of?

Magnar:

These are the demo groups I was part of during my most active years (in alphabetic order): Anarchy, Andromeda, Cavalry, Irongods, Legion, Lemon., Megastyle Inc. (MSI), Noiseless, Offence (Software), Reflex, Scoopex, Spaceballs, The Black Lotus (TBL), The Pornos, The Road busters and The Silents.

Magic:
Those are a lot of groups, Magnar. What were your first steps on the scene? What's your history?

Magnar:
My demo scene history started out as being a programmer on the Commodore 64 in the late 1980's. I created small intros/demos for different purposes, and even started creating a few games. None that ever reached the computer stores shelves, though. But with the productions, my interest also turned into making music as I didn't want to use ripped music. By chance, I got hold of Chris Huelsbeck's Soundmonitor editor, and then the joy started. Later, I got to know Geir Tjelta, and he was kind to give me a copy of his own music editors, based on the Rob Hubbard music player, which steadily increased quality and possibilities.

Summer 1989, I bought myself an Amiga 500. This really turned my interest for composing music up a notch, as I got hold of the Soundmonitor editor and the famous collection of ST-disks it came with. I soon abandoned the 3 channel SID-chip on the Commodore 64 for the new grown interest of more CPU power, graphic abilities and 4-channel music composed with 8-bit mono samples in the usual 44 kHz. But - since most programmers started doing fancy 3D-routines etc. and I had a hard time keeping up with all of that, I found creating music was a much better way for me to contribute to productions. So I started focusing my efforts on only composing music for a few years. That resulted in a lot of Amiga modules released in over 50 different Amiga productions during 1990-1995. After that, I left everything to do with the demo scene, and focused on girls, partying, getting drunk and doing a career in the IT business. I moved to Oslo during 1996, and it was not before 2005 I got back into tracking music again after registering myself as a user of MadTracker. What I found out then was that I had a lot of catch up to do, and learn everything about how to use VST effects and instruments instead of good old fashion hardware (midi) solutions. I enjoyed the challenge, and still as of today I am constantly learning and trying out new things. It's great to have a full software based platform to create music within   so much easier to reach the finalized product.

Magic:
What can you remember from your time on the demoscene in the 90's and which sceners are you in contact with anno domini 2010?

Magnar:
Some memories I could share are the time when I was being part of Andromeda and we released the music-disk "Mirror" during TP 1992. That was a real special moment for me. I just loved how "Mirror" turned out, with great design and nice music from co-musicians (Interphace and Mr.Man). It was also rather special to be part of Lemon. when Dan and Nuke came to TG93 and won the 40k intro

compo with a just amazing production within those limitations! I also remember being member of Spaceballs as 9 fingers (1993) was released at TP93, and all the nice chats I had with Yoghurt & co. When I at 1996 became part of TBL, I had the pleasure to meet everyone at the Hamar Vikingship and experience both the release of Tint (1997) and Capture Dreams (1997) + Astral Blur (1997). The team efforts in TBL were great, as most of the production was actually put together at the party itself. I was also honored to contribute with music to the TBL releases of Darkside (1996) and Panacea (1997), as well as the Assembly 98 PC-invitation.

All in all, I had a tremendously great time during all these years. I've also stated in other interviews that I never actually felt like I left any of the groups, I just broadened my horizon with a open mind to new projects. And by doing that, I was lucky to be able to work with so many incredibly talented people.

Nowadays, I would say that I have most contact still with The Black Lotus members. But I also have regular contact with members of Legion (Jack, Adept and Raz), Offence (Perplex, Pal), Scoopex (Photon & co), Andromeda (Archmage, Mr.Hyde) and Megastyle Inc. (RotteRoy, Sparkler, Marco and Scroll). Facebook and Bitfellas are really a great hang-out to socialize and keep in touch with old scene friends.

Magic:
When and how did your interest in the demoscene fade away?

Magnar:
Something did change half-way around 1997-1998, and I just lost interest in the demoscene totally. Mostly it was because of all IRC chatters and gamer players conquering the bigger parties, and by doing so changing the focus away from the excitement of new releases. Somehow hard to admit, I also turned to games. I got totally addicted to playing Counterstrike very heavily, and my [b]clan made it to the spot #1 in international Clanbase ladders for Scandinavian active CS clans around 1999-2001. After admitting to myself that I needed to stop wasting 5-6 hours a day playing CS, I got instead involved in playing RPG games. Dark Age of Camelot became my poison for the next 5 years. Again, I had to force myself to stop playing several hours a day, and the process of helping myself doing that was by turning back to being creative with computers again. My first choice today would always be to produce something instead of sitting down and playing a game. However, I am still a gamer person deep within, and I also made a lot of good friends in the game community, which was great fun. It was not only bad. I even got invited and attended two of my guild's (male+female) real wedding party in the city of Kongsberg. That must have been one of the most crazy things I've ever done in my entire life. Just imagine how extremely weird it was to meet their family and relatives in such circumstances, and to tell them that my relation to the couple was that we had been talking a lot through Ventrilo for the past years, but never actually met outside the virtual world of the DAoC game ever before.

When I stopped playing DAoC, I also realized that all the time spent with improving my characters in that particular game was totally gone. It was like it never had happened. There was no real trace of the years of playing left. That was a real eye opener to me. And by comparing that feeling to composing music and releasing new productions to the scene, that are being collected and reviewed over

and over again. Well... It just cannot be compared, really. It was just overwhelming to recognize and accept that fact.

Magic:
You returned to the demoscene not so long ago by joining Scoopex. What can we expect from your new group? And why aren't you part of the late Andromeda revival?

Magnar:
When I turned to composing music again in around 2005-2006, I started off with a long-term plan of producing music tracks for vocal artists that wanted to distribute songs through commercial channels. I got shortly involved with a singer in Gothenburg that had potential of just nailing that, and there was also a French music writer team that caught interest for my tracks I composed with Madtracker. Now, all of that was typical Rock/Pop background music arrangement stuff that was very commercially twisted. I even got myself a membership in STIM to ensure income. But it turned out to be very little money back in the pocket. One late night of creative frustration, I found demoscene.tv and started viewing all the great demos I'd missed out on for the past 10 years. At that moment, it came very clear to me that I actually missed the demo scene; and wanted to release more music for its productions again.

The introduction back happened through Gloom, who surprisingly got in touch with me through Facebook (I believe it was). I had no idea Gloom had become such a skilled music composer(!), and was totally mind blown when I got to listen to his latest tracks. He then revealed that he was working on a track for a forthcoming demo by Andromeda, and later introduced me to Bitfellas   apparently the best hang out to get in touch with old demo sceners again. I had lost all contact with the Andromeda group members after we all met at The Party in Denmark, December 1994, where Nexus 7 was released. And there you go, 14 years later I got in touch with Mr. Hyde, Archmage and lots of others through Bitfellas! After watching Stargazer (released in August 2008) with Gloom's nicely done track and Mr. Hyde's big 3D cubes spinning on my big screen, I kept in touch with them both through MSN Messenger. Archmage and I also met through LCP 2009 and Datastorm 2010. I didn't knew he was such a huge collector of Commodore 64 accessories, which was very surprising to me as I only knew him from his talented graphical work on the Amiga back in the early 90's. My thoughts about Andromeda, is that I would love to be involved if any new projects are started. And I also hope to meet and booze again at future parties!

Shortly after joining Bitfellas, I got inquired by Sir to make an intro jingle for Scoopex' up-coming release of Showtime #18 (September 2008). That led to daily chats with Sir, and he finally pursued me into joining the Scoopex production team more officially. Unfortunately, everything that was planned and hoped for by Sir didn't really happen. The forecasted musicdisk and demo release never got finished, and there was no real work left for me to do with the remaining team members since the release of ShowTime. Sir even left the group in disappointment. My stand today about Scoopex, is that I will support any realistic project of releasing a new production, but until the activity level rises considerably I'll keep focusing my efforts elsewhere. The big exception is Photon. I have established a nice contact with him, mainly because we met at both LCP and Datastorm recently. I know he is working on a release of some intros, but I do not see any big full-scaled demo releases coming from Scoopex any time soon.

Magic:

What is your connection with today's Commodore 64 scene?

Magnar:

The Commodore 64 machine has always been a computer I felt mastering quite well. Both in assembly programming, creating graphics and composing music on. The Commodore 64 community has also become very active at the moment, and lots of former old Commodore 64 friends are returning to produce new things. The CSDB and Facebook C64 communities are outstanding. And I also think parties like Little Computer People, Datastorm and X 2010 have added to the recent commodore 64 hype. Bottom-line, it is more fun to make a production with the limits the C64 gives today than it is on the PC. Just because you need to put more cleverness in to it.

Scandinavia - Land of dreams

Magic:

What's it like growing up and living in Scandinavia?

Magnar:

I think living in Scandinavia in my youth has been very profitable for me. The Commodore computers C64 and Amiga were basically in every kid's home. Also the demo scene grew very strong in the Scandinavian region. I was lucky to have my best friend as a hyper-active swapper, providing me access to the newest productions at all time. It was of course a lot of Scandinavian computer groups that contributed the most to that experience, either as demo makers or crackers of different games. But also the demo parties grew really big in our region - and some still are: for example Assembly, The Gathering, Dreamhack, The Party, Kindergarden etc.

Magic:

On a personal level, what are the biggest differences between Norway and Sweden?

Magnar:

To be honest, I don't see that many differences between Sweden and Norway. The language is pretty much the same, and the living styles and people too. There might be more blonde women and cheaper booze in Sweden, and due to my weakness for both, that might be the strongest reason why I left Norway in the first place. If you don't know where to attend a great party, take a look at this.

Magic:

What can you tell us about the nature in Scandinavia? What makes it so unique?

Magnar:

I lived in Norway close to the ocean side of the 'oil-city' Stavanger during my youth, and what I remember the most was the huge Troll drill platform being pulled out into the North Sea. It was enormous! During summertime, the sandy beaches were always crowded with people sunbathing and diving into the water, and we could go by boat to visit the many islands outside Stavanger, or into the many long fjords stretching into the country with the extremely high mountainsides. Early springtime, the mountaintops close to Stavanger still had lots of snow, while it was green grass and flower fields blossoming closer to the

ocean just an hour car drive away. I would say Norway is a country that has a very nice nature and great sightseeing spots. The over 1600 ice glaciers provide a challenge for mountain climbers. The northern light dancing in the sky of northern parts gives a spectacular show, you can even see polar bears on arranged trips at Svalbard, or you can just enjoy the many summer festivals and nice clubbing in the bigger cities such as Oslo, Trondheim, Bergen, Kristiansand or Stavanger.

Epilogue

Magic:

What can you tell us about your upcoming CD?

Magnar:

Releasing a CD album has been a milestone for me since 1992-93, but I have never had the sufficient time nor content for it. But at current, I have at least 4 tracks ready that I think fit a CD quite well, and I aim to have 5-6 more tracks ready by end of 2010. The financial scope of a digital CD release is no worries these days, and I actually did a test release through different online music stores last October (2009) just to see how "easy" it was. However, even if releasing digitally is quite simple, it still requires heavy PR marketing actions to attract listeners to purchasing your product. Therefore, I've started dialogues with a couple of interesting music labels to support my music when the time of the CD album deployment is ready.

My test digital CD release can be viewed and listened to here (or at iTunes and a few other commercial sites like Napster etc).

Magic:

How do you see your future on the demoscene? Want to air some last words?

Magnar:

My thoughts about the demo scene are that it is having a real boost right now, but probably that will be reduced over the years to come. As the final Breakpoint party is coming up, and possibly even the last X(2010)-party. But   Wouldn't it be funny if we still attended computer parties at age of 60?   If anyone reading this article is in need of music/sfx for anything (non commercial or commercial)   please don't hesitate to contact me!

Please visit my Facebook and/or Myspace page.

Amiga releases with Magnar's music

Andromeda (1992) - Mirror [amiga musicdisk]
Spaceballs (1995) - Jobbo [amiga 64kb intro]
The Black Lotus (1996) - Darkside [amiga demo]
The Black Lotus (1997) - Panacea [amiga demo]

Magic