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Xerud (Pyrotechnics, BBC, Automation) (26.05.2003) coder, graphician, cracker

Xerud, Wed 16 Apr 2008

Interview (D-Bug) with Xerud of Pyrotechnics / BBC / Automation 26th May 2003.

Hi Mike,

To kick off tell me about your computer history , e.g. first computer etc ?

My dad came home one day in 1982 with a ZX81 & wobbly RAM pack. I did a little bit of BASIC coding but not much else. Totally hooked on computers after that though. The next year I got a C64 and the games were far too good for the time and so I didn't do much else. Got an ST in 1986 and again despite good intentions did very little but play games until a few chance encounters led me astray I'm onto yet another self built PC. Athlon XP2000 and half a gig of ram. The scary thing is its not even top of the range.

How and when did enter the ST scene ?

I discovered by chance that Dack used to live near my parents in the wild North of Scotland. From there I had a chance encounter with someone who knew EGB in a computer shop in Edinburgh. I think everyone involved in Edinburgh sort of knew each other.

I'm slightly confused with Sub Humans in Turkey and the Pyrotechnics, were they the same crew ? A member list would be useful....

We ate curry together... But from memory:-

S.H.I.T. were E.G.B. who did everything. ARN who came up with the jokes and BISC who was doing other things by the time I encountered the guys. Pyrotechnics was The Igniter + me. I think I got to do gfx as he couldn't get anyone better.

An early Pyrotechnics/Sub Humans intro for Automation with GFX by Xerud.

Was there much comaraderie or rivalry with fellow Scottish crews ? e.g. TMB, Birdy ?

Zippy (or clogg or whatever he called himself that day) was a really decent guy. He's still around if you know where to look.



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You seem to have a wide range of talents, graphics, coding, music ripping (shock!) and hacking, can you explain a bit about each ?

Graphics started off during my 1st summer after starting uni when I was sitting around bored and just picked up degas elite & started drawing. I got the pictures to Law via Dack and he amazingly used them. I only had a portable telly so they looked a bit weird on a monitor.

Music ripping followed. I cant remember how I got into this. Possibly I wanted to get involved. Once started though it was a natural progression onto hacking and from there ASM coding.

Which do you prefer ?

I don't draw anymore although I had a few unfinished works on the ST that were way better than anything else I'd done. Music ripping was a stepping stone and I was crap at hacking so it'd have to be coding.

Are you a self taught hacker ? or did other members assist you in the early days ?

I sat & learned. Watched Andy, Law & EGB, all of whom usually offered advice, even Law. I started off hacking music and understanding how programs were put together and went on from there.

Replicant / Fuzion buster!

Do you remember your first crack ?

First game was probably California games. I did some demos before that though.

What was the hardest game to hack and why ?

I was never much of a hacker to be honest, EGB helped with anything remotely technical. I remember making a real hash of Nigel Mansells GP, took ages to get working as I'd left an interrupt turned on when I exited my intro.... The intro was my favourite one I'd coded, I've seen it on a compilation disk somewhere.

800 Lemmings in a frame, who needs hardware sprites ?

Who in your opinion was the best hacker on the Atari ST ?

Another obvious answer of course, has to be RobC / Was (Not Was) / Vapour etc. When you see the tool he used (SID) which was primitive in comparison to the stuff everyone else used you really have to admire his talent.

How did you end up joining Automation ?



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EGB knew Vapour and asked I think.

Did you meet most of the other members ? Any stories ?

There was the well known meet at the CES show which was a laugh. I remember a stand refused to serve one of us as they had the Automation T-shirt on.

The other meetings I remember were at Apollo's house in Middlesborough (round the corner from the Sulphuric Acid factory no less) Vaps just seemed to sleep a lot. EGB's infamous chunk loader was cooked up at one of these with Dack.

The H.Q. of Automation ?

Did you play any part in the Automation

No, I think that was mostly Vaps & Law. Luckily for Law word never got out about him liking Duran Duran as things could have turned out different! Alien phoned up EGB once and they were perfectly civil with each other.

Why did you leave the Pyrotechnics and join the BBC ? (at least I think you did) ?

I think I did too although the Igniter being what he was I generally just hung about EGB and annoyed him instead. Law asked me to join the BBC, I think even after he'd met me the fool!

Were you ever on the verge of been nabbed by F.A.S.T. or the cops ?

I was a very small cog in a very busy scene in Scotland. They hit the Barras market in Glasgow now and then but I doubt I was even noticed.

Were you one of the members wearing the Automation T-Shirts at the C.E.S show ?

Oh yes Complete with end of term hangover.

You joined Cynix late on, whose idea was it ?

EGB & Zippy cooked it up. I kind of tagged on for the ride.

Do you still have any Atari hardware, if so do you still crank up your ST ?

I still have my original 520STM with 2meg upgrade + an STE with no floppy drive.

What are your favourite ST games ?

Populous, Civilisation and Rainbow Islands



The "god" father ?

AND worse ?

There was so much it'd be hard to choose.

What are your favourite ST demos ?

Cuddly demos naturally. Oxygenes stuff is very nice (his pc stuff is worth checking out too)

I remember a disk mag called E.G.B's smelly sock... are they really that smelly ? and did you have anything to do with this mag ? I think it got made just after the big meet in bradford in the summer of 92. Lots of beer got drunk and someone had a digitizer. My recollection of events is rather hazy, cold kebabs & pizzas spring to mind and I wrote an awful version of the snakes game nokia bundles with their mobiles.

Which coders (demo and commercial) did you admire ?

I have to admit that Andy was pretty good and probably never quite got the credit he deserved. However we both suffered from a fondness of the pub, hence the Total Apathy demo. SO lazy it never got finished.

Nic (TCB) is another obvious contender, what is he doing nowadays?

I'm sure there were good commercial coders, Andrew Braybrook springs to mind. Another is Doug from the Pixel Twins who went on to do some nice stuff on the Falcon and let me beta test his morphing s/w.

However, there is an interesting story of a certain commercial coder asking a well known hacker to rip the scrolling routines out of the cuddly demos.... make of that what you will.

Have you seen any of the more recent ST demo releases which utilise the chunky yo planar techniques (e.g. EIL3 releases eil.atari.org) , what's your impression ?

You'll have to enlighten me. I saw a few things that looked like a 2600 doing texture mapping...

Are you still intouch with the ST scene ?

I look around from time to time.

Have you used any of the ST emulators ?

All of them. Pacifist was a great 1st attempt with very modest hardware requirements, what is the author up to now? The others all have rather quirky GUI's which could use improving.



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You were one of the first persons with an Atari Falcon , were did Atari go wrong ?

Hmm, how do you know all this...It was underpowered & overpriced right at a time when the PC platform was beginning to look really good. I kept mine for a year, cut my losses and got a 486 dx-50 system with the cash.

Did you ever slag off anyone you wish you hadn't ?

Plenty but we were young and foolish if you consider 20something young.

What's the most innovating thing you ever saw on the ST ?

Dull answer but it has to be the sync scrolling in the Cuddly Demos. It really set a standard at the time.

Hardware scrolling on an ST ? Only TCB makes it possible!

What's the best ST crack you've ever seen ?

I was there when Vaps cracked Anarchy. So I guess it must be that one.

Fave TV show ?

At this very moment its ER. The child in me likes Jackass however.

And fave music ?

I got converted to Detroit style techno in the mid 90's. Used to go clubbing a lot. Derrik May, Juan Atkins etc...

New Order are my favourites out of music that people might have heard of.

If you could travel back to 1988 would you do anything different ?

Nothing really, I started uni that year and barely touched the ST as it stayed at my parents.

Do you know what the other members of Cynix, SHIT, Pyrotechnics are doing now ?

EGB is living in America and Zippy is doing neat stuff with DVD's. The Law to my knowledge still likes Duran Duran.

What handles did you use and why Xerud ?

Mostly Xerud, sometimes MikeW. All Cynix stuff as Supernova was me. XC-99 in Quakeworld and more recently 313ktr0 for those rare gaming excursions online... the old reflexes arent quite what they used to be.

Why Xerud?



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Its really lame thinking back but it seemed a good joke at the time.

Fave software house ?

iD produce consistantly good engines but patchy games. Valve showed what you could do with it and the previews of HL2 look stunning.

What do you think of the current Computer/Console market ?

I have a decent array of consoles (Saturn, ps1, Dreamcast & Xbox). Some games grab me like Halo, Crazy Taxi and Tony Hawkes but there is still so much rubbish coming out that I haven't bought any new games for months now.

What are you upto now ?

I work as a DBA for a large financial institution. I get to play with a myriad of DBMS's and OS's. It pays the mortgage and allows me to take enough holidays to keep me happy. I'm an incredibly bad snowboarder too, 2 broken bones and counting!

Anything else to add , final message ?

Its nice to see some of my other projects still being used. I sometimes wish not losing the code to them as it would be nice to make the odd contribution to the scene now and again.