

Interview with Jamie Woodhouse - author of such games as "Qwak"

Sebastian Rosa

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At the beginning, could you introduce yourself and say a few words about yourself?

My name is Jamie Woodhouse, I've been developing games for almost 25 years. Most notably, "Nitro", published by Psygnosis, and "ATR" and "Qwak" published by Team17. In recent times, I've developed versions of "Qwak" for the GBA, and also for the PC.

How did your adventure with Amiga begin and what caused that you put your interest into games development?

Well, I was just really in to playing games as a kid. I used to skip class and go down the arcade and play "Guantlet", "Star Force", "Krull", "Star Wars", you name it!

I actually started out on the BBC micro, before progressing to 8-bit Atari, then Atari ST, then Amiga! Amiga was such a great machine to make games for too..

Do you remember your first program or game which you wrote? What was it and why did you write it? On what platform was it?

Depends how far you want to go back! I remember creating "Space Invaders" on the BBC. It was very poor, and only had the one space invader to shoot! But, it was a start! And the learning process had begun! Everyone has to start somewhere...

I can't say why I wrote it, there's no reason really, it's like asking why does the sun shine? It doesn't do it for a reason, it's just what it is. :)

I made a few game for the BBC, most of which never saw the light of day. I'm trying to get the released in to the Public Domain though, just for fun.

Correct me if I am wrong, but I think "Nitro" is the first of your games published. It was under the wings of Psygnosis. How did you manage to get in touch with them? How do you remember cooperation with them?

Nitro was actually my 3rd published game. Before that I had 2 games published on the BBC and Electron: "Dead or Alive", which was a budget cowboy game; and "Qwak", which was my own idea and I'd developed on my own initiative. It was just about complete when I signed up with Superior Software, who published the game, on a compilation pack.

"Nitro", was my own game too. It was about 70% complete when I took it to Psygnosis. I don't think it's good manners to say negative things about people or companies, we've had dealings with in the past. So I won't say anything about Psygnosis.

Both "Nitro" and "Qwak" were your original ideas. What was the inspiration? Why did you decide to create them? Is "All Terrain Racing" also your concept?

I think with "Nitro", I was inspired by similar games in the arcades, "Super-sprint", "Hot-rod" etc. Games I loved playing myself. With "Qwak", I'd also played platform games, mostly on home computers. But with both games, I guess I was just following my own creative impulse, what my heart tells me, trying to make the best game I could. With "All Terrain Racing", it started out more like "Nitro", viewed from above. It became more isometric, because the artist had already produced graphics for it, at the point when I took it to Team 17.

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You joined Team17 rather after its years of glory. Their biggest productions were already released, the team shrank (or at least its Amiga part). After publishing "Overdrive" what do you think made them to go to the market with another racer?

Well, firstly I'd say things were pretty much in boom around the time I took "Qwak" to Team 17. Around the time of "ATR", interest in the Amiga was on a decline. As to why they took on "ATR", well, I guess they just saw a lot of potential in the game!

Do you have any knowledge about the scale of the sell of your games?

I don't remember exact numbers, it's a long time ago! I remember "Qwak" did better than "ATR" though; but then, that could be down to the start of the Amiga market at that time.

Do you have any knowledge was "Qwak" better sold than other Team 17 productions? I asked about it because, although I like "Qwak" and "All Terrain Racing" very much (in fact, the latter is one of my favourite games), in my opinion they were a bit out of Team 17's track. Team 17 created games with very recognisable style. "Qwak" broke that rule but still remained a very good game, though a bit for a younger audience. If the sales of "Qwak" were any way worse than any other Team 17 production, do you think it could have been the style which should be blamed? Do you share that point of view?

Well, lots of different developers made games for Team 17, and I'm pretty sure there was no in-house development until quite later on in their history. I don't think of "Qwak" as a Team17 production. It's something I made, and Team 17 had some involvement creatively; but to call it a Team 17 production, is maybe mis-leading.

Not sure how it did in comparison to other games published by Team 17. It's not something I give much thought to; it's all in the past now; and I'm more focussed on the future..

Did Team 17 or Psygnosis have any influence on your work? Did they have any objections about some ideas or proposed some solutions you did not like? How will you remember Team 17 guys?

Team 17 were great. They genuinely cared about the game, and chipped in suggestions here and there, and there was a great vibe back then.

I don't have anything to say about Psygnosis.

Let's go back to the game development. Why the games were delivered on NDOS disks (eg. "All Terrain Racing")? It makes them unable to be installed on hard disk (apart from magnificent tool which is WHDLoad) and run on SVGA monitors. What was the reason of this?

I have no idea why! It wasn't my decision.

You were programmer and graphician. What was your favourite tools?

For creating graphics, I think D-Paint was excellent but I also created my own tools for editing map data etc.

And what about programming language the games were written? Assembler, C or maybe something else?

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All my Amiga games were coded in pure Assembler. I didn't learn c/c++ until some years after "Qwak" and "ATR".

Did you have any influence on the matter of CD32 version of "Qwak" and "All Terrain Racing"? They were more or less the very same games as the floppy versions. Why there was no audio tracks or some cut scene movies? Was it even considered?

Nah, there were very little changes to either of these games - just the bare minimum to get them working on CD32.

Why do you think it was so? Lack of funds? Pressure of time?

I could only guess ... that the guys making the decision felt that it wasn't a wise investment of time and effort vs potential returns.

Game development in Poland was not a thing that could let you leave your day-to-day job. How did it look like for you in the past, when you handled Amiga game development? If you were to leave you ordinary job would you make ends meet committing yourself to game development?

It's tough. It is very hard to make anything like a living for yourself as an indie game developer. You learn to live quite cheap and eat beans. But that's perhaps the price to pay for making quality games that you want to make, rather than the licensed garbage that the main-stream games industry pass off as games.

What is your attitude towards game you created? Are you proud of them or you hate them? Would like to change anything in them? If you were going to make them once again, what would they be look like?

I see it all as a great big learning process, that's what life is, and whatever a man (or a woman) chooses to do in life, it's all learning, doing stuff wrong, learning and improving on past mistakes. I feel a lot of love and affection for all the games I've made. I tried to do my best, and sometimes it's a great struggle. I don't feel proud in the sense that I own the games, I feel more like the games were there, waiting to be born, and I was just the channel for their birth. It's very much a genuine, creative, artistic, self-expression process for me; and I'm very much guided by my intuition and my heart. Sometimes, having that artistic integrity, means you have to go without (money, or success), for a long time; and I have, but I'm grateful, because all my experiences have made me a better person... and I feel like I have more in me to give.

If I was going to make them again; well, I guess I'd have the benefit of all the experiences I've had; so of course they'd be better, but that's what it's all about, doing your best, with what you've got, making mistakes, and learning from it. Isn't that what life is all about? ;)

So maybe it would good time to try making some mobile version of your games? Have you thought about it?

Yeah, I'm looking at other platforms and ideas I have ... and feeling very positive about it all right now.

Do you still own Amiga? Do you use it for some purposes?

Yes! I have an A500, which comes out to play very rarely. I've had it out recently though, and played "Qwak", "ATR" and "Nitro" on it! Ah the memories! ;)

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So why not creating sequels on Amiga?

Oh right, you mean on the Amiga itself? Well, it all comes down to potential profit for the time and energy you invest in making a game. We all need to eat! I've not touched the Amiga for a long time (to make games on it), but even back then, it was getting to be not profitable for game developer, I have no idea what the situation is now though, but I can't see it being any better than what it was back then.

Thank you for your time spent answering all the questions. At the end, would like to say something to our readers and players of your games?

Thank you also for interviewing me Sebastian, and for the coverage of "Qwak" on your site. To your readers and players of my games - be who you are ... and ... buy all my games!

More about Qwak can be found on Jamie's [website](#).

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