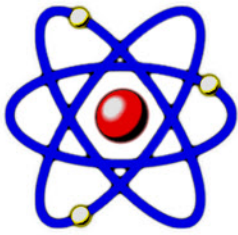


# COMMODORE FREE INTERVIEW WITH THE PROTOVISION TEAM



## PROTOVISION Creating the Future.



Protovision is a German based label dedicated to development and distribution of C64 games and hardware.

**Q- Please introduce yourself and PROTOVISION to the Commodore Free Readers**

JTR: Hi everyone, I'm Tim Jakob aka Jak T Rip aka JTR and I salute to all Commodore Free users! I'm currently active as a coder in Protovision. A

long time ago I started working on my 4 Player Pac Man game "Pac It" and it's still work in progress - that needs to change! But I was also involved in our current release, Jim Slim in Dragonland.

Poison: Hi and my name is Oliver Foerster aka Poison. I'm the main webmaster and I'm also in the orga-team. And I made three trailer videos for our games so far.

MacGyver: My name is Milo aka MacGyver. I am the main organizer: I do public relations and manage news. I also manage game projects, e. g. who needs what for which project, and who could help out. Furthermore, I'm helping Poison with the website. Last but not least, I inform the press about our new releases.

**Q- So what is your fascination with Commodore Machines?**

JTR: Lots of things. First of all, I love both the graphics and the sound more than those of any other computer. RGB isn't my thing. And did you know that the C64 creates real sound waves directly while a usual PC sound card does not and has to go through a digital-analogue conversion process?

Second: quickness / reaction times. This might come as a surprise as the good old commies have a relatively slow processor, but what I mean is this: I turn on the computer and it is there instantly. I hit a couple of buttons and a program is loaded in no time (I use a fast loader cartridge). No modern computer can keep up with this performance! As well as this, there is nev-

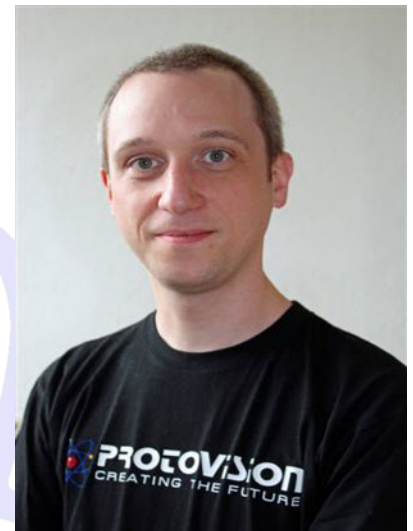
er a time where my Commodore is hijacked by some other process and gives me a waiting sign. Never. I am always the master of the system and I always know what it does. Third: sleekness. I will never understand that people understand how today's computers, no matter how fast, hang at times. Maybe only for a split second, but there's always an unpredictable delay no matter what you are presenting. This definitely lacks style. Watch the C64 demo Good Vibrations / The Coders on a real machine and you will know what "sleek" means.

Poison: I think it is hard to describe the fascination for this machine. For myself: I'm addicted to C64 demos, SID Music and (of course) games. I remember when "Deus Ex Machina" by Crest was released, I took my C64 to my workplace and showed my colleagues what this 1 MHz machine is able to do. Not all my colleagues were fascinated, but most of them liked the music and what this retro machine is able to perform.

MacGyver: I love both demos and games. The C64 graphics and music have a unique style which make me coming back over and over again. While the system seems to be rather limited at first sight, the C64 has the most power by MHz, KByte, colours and voices. And there are still new tricks even after 28 years. The C64 is the VW Beetle of the computers: It gets you where you want to go, not overloaded with features, but with a lot of charm.

**Q- When did protovision start and what was the main reason for the Business**

MacGyver: Protovision was founded in 1997, first as a pure game development label by Malte Mundt aka ThunderBlade and Stefan Gutsch aka Big User. I was in the background for the first couple of years. The idea was to produce games on a very high quality level, for both standard C64 and also for an



enhanced C64. The first Protovision game released was Stroke World, published on GO64! magazine cover disk. Also, there were a couple of freelance game developers also from Germany who distributed their games themselves, such as Chester Kollschen (Ice Guys) and André Zschiegner (It's Magic). We offered to distribute their games, too, in order to reach a wider public by having one organization people could games easier; rather than have several small labels run by one private person.

JTR started to distribute the games. When the Retro Replay came up, we included it into our catalogue, too, as it was a great hardware. More hardware was added over time, such as the 4 Player Interface and earlier version of the Micromys PS/2 mouse adapter. When JTR had to move several times due to his studies, Poison took over distribution in 2003. He also created the first Online Shop for us. Poison ran the distribution from until 2009. Afterwards, Stefan aka Doc of Desire took over.

**Q- How many people are involved in PROTOVISION and what do they do**

MacGyver: We currently have 9 members. But there are quite some friends and fixed partners and freelancers cooperating with us.

**Q- What does PROTOVISION stand for**

Poison: no, the letters PROTOVISION weren't an abbreviation for something. It just was simple: A company that produces



games that are so fascinating that you want to hack that company to get your hands on their games. And the fact that the word "VISION" is inside, is shown in our slogan "Creating the Future". But no relevance in the sense of a literal translation into German (or in another language).

JTR: Our slogan "Creating the Future" says it all. We're innovating, we create, and there's no future without Commodore com-



puters. However, you might also like to judge for yourself what Protovision means.

Poison: I think it is easier to describe what Protovision is. Protovision is a group of enthusiasts, who sacrifice their free time to give other enthusiasts new products for their hobby. However, as JTR said "Creating the Future" - says it all.

MacGyver: Protovision stands for a modern C64 label from which you can get a lot from one hand.

**Q- Is the business making a profit or is it more an intention to break even, if you do make a profit where do the funds go**

JTR: We do make a lot of profit, but not of the financial kind. No really, this is a hobby and there's no point in trying to "break even" on games you work on for 4-5 years on a Commodore. We want to cover material and shipping costs, and sometimes we make a few bucks extra, sometimes also we loose. Extra bucks will be used to pay for advertisements, trade fair events or for buying copyrights to unfinished C64 games, as was the case with Jim Slim.

• • • **PROTOVISION**  
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are really well organized, but they do not write programs. The coders are more the mad professor type.

MacGyver: Indeed, most games have their own unique way they get developed. Typical only is that we try to make our games compatible to alternative devices.

**Q- You make hardware and software and sell the items in the PROTOVISION shop can you list some of the products available for sale, also is all the hardware made by PROTOVISION or are you mainly a distributor**

JTR: We are mainly focussed on producing games more than anything else, but we also distribute third party products if we feel they deserve support. For hardware, we are mainly a distributor, although we sometimes also support its development. Here's some of our most loved items for sale:

- 4 Player Interface

This hardware has been developed by Chester Kollschchen. With this interface, you can plug in 4 joysticks to your C64.

Poison: For example: whenever we release a new game, we give out many free boxes for magazines to review or just people who supported us in the one or other way. These free boxes means losses of sales, It takes some time to catch up these losses and sometimes we spend our private money to restock our storage.

MacGyver: As for most of our games, the major part of the profit made after we covered our costs is going to the developers.

**Q- Is all testing done "in house" or do you have Beta testers in different countries**

JTR: We're dependent on friends for testing, they are from different countries.

**Q- Do you still copy protect disks or do you feel there is no point now**

JTR: We don't do copy protections, but we do crack protec-



- Bomba Mania, Tanks 3000, Team Patrol  
These are games for the 4 player adaptor. Bomb

Mania is our best selling game since ever, it is a bomberman clone with funny additions and extra features.

- Newcomer

The most extensive game experience ever developed for the C64. It is a mixture between an adventure and a role playing game and is so huge that you will need half a week to complete it, even if you know the shortest way where you need to click and say what. The texts alone take about 3.5MB of space. As well, it does not require tasks to be completed in any particular order, and many things can be achieved through different ways. As it also has multiple possible endings, playing it many times can result in very different game play each time. We did



tions. A lot of our games have been cracked and do not play right or have limited functionality afterwards.

**Q- How is a "typical" game developed what is the "usual" development plan from idea to finished product**

JTR: What? You are asking for a planned, organized approach? No, no. We do have people like Milo and Oli and Stefan who



not develop Newcomer, but are good friends with the team behind it, and did some support.

#### - Metal Dust

We are particularly proud of this brilliant Katakis or R-Type space shooter as it is the first game using the power of a Super-CPU to boast effects. A SuperCPU is an enhancement to the c64 that gives 20Mhz and up to 16MB of RAM. We not only developed Metal Dust itself, but also the development tools around it (assembler, graphics and level editors) and also use these tools for other projects.



unit is practically unavailable. Also other hardware like the 1541 Ultimate (an ingenious disk drive replacement, freezer cartridge and RAM expansion cartridge replacement) are things we want to support by distributing them, but in 2005 a law was passed in the EU that disallows selling hardware without a costly registration, which renders most C64 hardware activities illegal.

Poison: Yes, I also think that this EU law block the homebrew scene. As Jakob told before, we want to support so

many cool projects but it is too costly.

#### Q- Can you list the games structure for example some are free some mid price and some full price

JTR: One of our principles is that we only sell what we think deserves a price tag. We sometimes give games out for free if they do not deserve being paid for or we think it was sold enough. Ranking a game as mid price or full price is a discus-



sion between us and the developer (if it is not us). The developer gets more or less money depending on the price in the end, while we always only take the same amount for covering our costs.

#### Q- What products would you like to sell and what are you doing to get these products to market

JTR: The first question is easy: all C64 games and hardware that is worth it! The second one is tougher to answer and even tougher to execute.

Sometimes we do a lot of work behind the scenes, work out contracts, bring people together, help specifying hardware or getting software to a releasable state. All of these activities are not visible to the outside world and only sometimes we are successful and get something released. For example we tried hard to get the SuperCPU produced again, we found producers and all, but in the end we did not get permission - and now the

MacGyver: We send out a newsletter, monthly based. We also send our news to various C64/8 bit/Retro magazines. Sometimes mainstream magazines like Micro Mart in the UK or GamePro and M! Games in Germany. What is the use of a great new game or a cool new hardware if only a few insiders know about it? With our productions we can prove the C64 is living to people who would not know otherwise.

#### Q- If a reader has a game they would like you to produce how they would contact you and what royalties do you pay

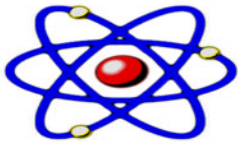
JTR: If someone has a game that we think is worth being published for money, we offer taking over the initial costs for printing manuals, labels, boxes and keep 3-4 Euros of every order to reimburse the costs. The rest goes to the developer. We do not produce on demand.

MacGyver: They would email to [contact@protovision-online.de](mailto:contact@protovision-online.de) or use the contact form in our online shop, then we see if and what we can workout together.

#### Q- If a reader has a part completed project hardware or software could you help put forward funding or would you rather take over the project and finish it yourselves

JTR: We prefer helping others finish their stuff themselves. It is





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produce things that run on NTSC the way they run on PAL as the timing is very different. We never stop a project due to this, but it keeps being an issue.

MacGyver: If an NTSC user has a TV set/monitor which can handle PAL, I'd recommend they get a PAL C64 e.g. over on ebay.co.uk. This will open a new universe of C64 software to you! Our cool game Jim Slim has problems on a few C64s which can not handle AGSP, due to too weak RAM or VIC. A few of our SIDs may sound a little different on 6581 compared to 8580, but that has never been an issue.

**Q- Would you consider supporting other Commodore machines like the 264 range (c16 and +4)**

JTR: They are cool machines, too. But as our time is too limited even for the open C64 projects we have, we don't plan to extend.

**Q- What is your best selling product and also what is the most requested product (this maybe a product you don't sell)**

JTR: Bomb Mania is the best selling game, Newcomer the most requested. Newcomer is appreciation ware. Many people download Newcomer, but do not pay the appreciation fee that is included in our price.

Poison: Our 4 Player games sell all very well. This is cool, because nowadays people don't come together to play. They sit alone in front of their PCs or consoles and use team speak to talk. It seems that the usual C64 gamer is more chummy.

**Q- How much life do you think is left in the Commodore brand**

JTR: A lot. You see people go crazy for commodore logos everywhere, t-shirts, computers, whatever.

MacGyver: I believe the old Commodore computers are very much alive, especially the C64. To quote from a C64 demo regarding Commodore/the Commodore sign: "It was a brand, it became a symbol!". That hits the nail on the head. The brand went through a lot of hands they didn't do much with it. I have mixed feelings about devices like Commodore 64 web it and C64 DTV, as they rather try to emulate the original while being pretty bad at it, compared to today's emulators. C64 DTV native programs are pretty cool one the one hand, but those hardly have to do anything with a real C64. Let's see how things develop with the Commodore 64 X.

**Q- You have given away free 2 games "Stroke World" and "It's Magic" why was it decided these games were freeware**

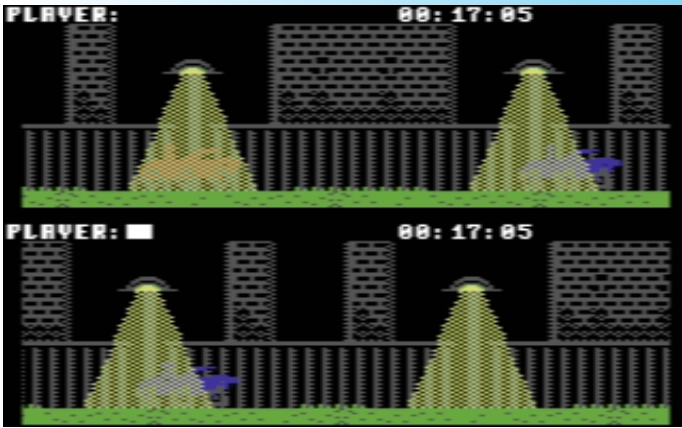
JTR: Well they were always free, like Snacks 4 Snakes or Quadris? We just felt like giving them away I guess :)

MacGyver: Not everybody got Stroke World when it was published as not everybody subscribed GO64!. When the It's Magic 2 was released, we thought it was time to make part one free - to offer a nice game for free to the gamers, and also to tease people for part two ;) The were other small games released for free such as More.Gore's Space Battle Deluxe (predecessor of Advanced Space Battle). Cascade is also a nice but small game by The Blue Ninja, which is on our free games/previews disk which game customers receive in addition. Then there is also Quadtron and Zynax III which are rather old and would not be worthy to sell/buy.

**Q- Do you plan to support as much hardware as possible from the basic games design for example ensuring the game will run on as many machines as possible and will run from CMD hardware and ultimate 1541 cartridges and UIEC devices etc**

JTR: We try to, yes.





MacGyver: There have been many new alternative devices in the last few years. While this is great, it gets harder to stay compatible to all of them.

**Q- Do you always test beta versions on Real hardware or is this really only important on later "builds" of the software**

JTR: Ha! You are assuming that we'd develop on PCs and only "test" the code on real hardware...? That is true for most developers, yes, but we do not go down this road, usually. We mostly develop on the real machine, for the real machine.

MacGyver: I know that our friends in Ultimate Newcomer Crew as well as DJ Gruby/Oxyron use PCs for development and also test a lot on emulators. Still things get tested on the real thing even in rather early stages of development.

**Q- Do you have any games that have been scrapped in early stages of testing and why were they scrapped**

JTR: Sure. The biggest projects that were scrapped are Turrigan 3 and Reel Fishing (a fishing simulator). T3 was cancelled due to legal hassle and RF was cancelled, because we got a lot of negative feedback claiming we would be "commercial", which is a slap in the face when you spend so much time unpaid for your hobby. Such attacks have demotivated us a lot and has cost us a few members.

MacGyver: Mike The Magic Dragon by ThunderBlade has been scrapped as well. The coder's time was small with his GO64! Activities, his studies, the Amiga Fever magazine project and later his full time job at QNX. The future of Enforcer 2 and Wor Wizards are somewhat uncertain.

**Q- Feel free to promote PROTOVISION, what new projects are in the Pipeline**

JTR: Our 4 player Pac Man game "Pac It" where you have to play in a team of up to 4 Pac Men to solve the levels with wit and action is in the pipe and you can download a preview on our website. We also have an almost finished game called Outrage from Cosmos Designs and desperately need a coder who would like to get his hands on it to finish it, and we have Enforcer 2 that has some stunning preview videos at YouTube.

However, all of these will still take time to complete - as we are doing this aside our real jobs and life, we cannot promote

or commit to any fixed deadlines, but you can expect them somewhere in the next one or two decades.

MacGyver: Pieces II by Oxyron is a nice little puzzler. While development was rather slow since the release of its preview, it is going to speed up again soon. Also, the Spanish based Los Burros del Soft are going to get the English versions of their games MK II and La Carretera (aka The Road) distributed over us.

**Q- How would a reader join PROTOVISION**

JTR: We always need reliable helpers! There are manuals to proofread, translate or layout. There is website work to do, emails to answer, and of course music to compose and graph-



ics to pixel. But above all we currently lack coders. Anyone can contact us and offer help, we'll try out how it feels working together and if that fits, we'll let him or her join. we are spread around the globe!

MacGyver: Most of the PROTOVISION members are in Germany, including all core members.

**Q- Do you have any other comments for the Readers**

JTR: Thank you for your interest in Commodore computers! You seem to have an eye for cool things!

Poison: Keep the spirit alive. And share this spirit with your friends.

MacGyver: Get involved! Support what you like.

