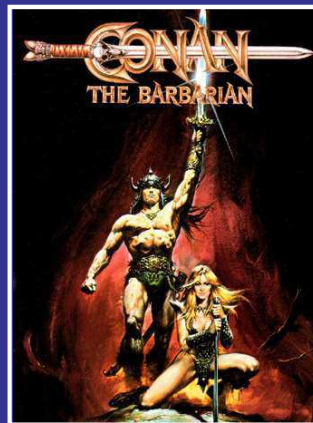# AMTIX CPC

Interview With

ERIC CUBIZOLLE

AKA TITAN

For most, if not all our readers, the name Eric Cubizolle will require no introduction. Or perhaps you know him better by his pseudonym, TITAN. Either way, Eric has been an active and integral part of the CPC scene for a number of years now, showcasing some of the greatest CPC artwork, graphics, and loading screens ever seen. So we at AMTIXCPC towers thought it was about high time we caught up with Eric to learn about his love and passion for the Amstrad CPC.

Colin Bell: Eric, thank you so much for taking the time today to join us here at AMTIXCPC Towers.

Eric Cubizolle: Thank you! Especially for your interest in me.

CB: Before we get into the CPC and your graphics, tell us, where does the pseudonym TITAN come from?

EC: Like many children of my age at that time, I was fascinated by mythology and the wonderful world of Heroic Fantasy which was booming during the 1980s. Given that it was customary in my computer science class to sign your work with a pseudonym, I naturally wanted to find something cool. The idea for the TITAN nickname came to me after watching the film "Conan the Barbarian" on TV. I was already a big fan of Schwarzenegger, and this film only reinforced my desire to opt for a "muscular" nickname (perhaps also to compensate for the abs that I didn't have, lol!). This is how, at the age of eleven, I chose "TITAN", never to part with it again.

CB: When did you first come across the Amstrad CPC, and what systems, if any, did you have before it?

EC: The first time I came across the Amstrad CPC was when a school friend invited me to his home to show me his monochrome CPC6128 that he had received for Christmas. At that time, I had a Philips VG5000 that was a little sluggish (but which I still really liked). Needless to say, compared to those of my frail machine, the capabilities of the CPC completely dazzled me! After playing a whole bunch of games that day I was already considering a whole load of creative possibilities, in addition to the fantastic hours of entertainment that this machine promised! In short, at the end of this day, forever anchored in my memory, it was an Amstrad CPC that I needed! In the process, I sold my VG5000, saved some money, and treated myself to a colour CPC6128 that following Christmas!
The acquisition of this wonderful machine was not without difficulty, however.
The end of year holidays were approaching, and I was rather sick with a nasty flu. But nothing, and no one, could stop me, for

Right: The Phillips VG5000

Interview by Colin Bell

this was the day I had planned to go to the computer store early in the morning to purchase my new colour CPC6128, the one I had been dreaming about for so long. However, seeing my feverish state, my parents insisted that I consult the doctor first. Resigned to the fact, I headed towards his office with the ardent hope that the visit would not drag on. It was around 9:30 am when I was finally able to get back on the road that led to the computer store. As I entered the store, I encountered the blissful smile of a young boy who was holding in his hands the imposing box of a brand-new CPC that his father had just bought him. I was convinced that I would wear this smile in a few minutes until the next sentence out of the store assistant's mouth fell like an axe! 'I'm afraid that was the last CPC, we're now out of stock throughout the region'. I couldn't believe it, the very last CPC had left right before my eyes. Damn flu! I then had to wait another fifteen days while the restocking took place, so that I could finally get my hands on the system I had longed for!

CB: Goodness Eric, that's horrendous! What were some of the first games that you ever played on the CPC? Did they inspire you to write your own games?

EC: The very first games I discovered during that infamous afternoon at my friend's house were *Batman*, *Cauldron*, and *Roland in Time*. I was particularly captivated by the atmosphere emanating from *Batman* and *Cauldron*. *Batman*'s isometric perspective graphics looked so realistic to me! I loved the Halloween atmosphere of *Cauldron* and being able to twirl
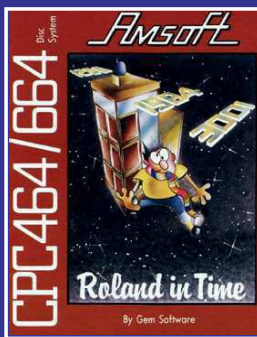
in the air with the witch's broom, as well as exploring all the underground caves. Furthermore, the number of screens in Roland in Time, which seemed endless, gave me a feeling of freedom like I had

never experienced in a video game. In my eyes, it was like an open-world experience!
I can't say for sure if these three specific games inspired me for my own creations, but ultimately I think they must have. In fact, I think it was the whole Amstrad software library that influenced me. For example, when I created the graphics for "*Vengeur*", it is undeniable that I had those of *After the War* in mind.

CB: During the late 80s and early 90s you created your own CPC demos, applications, and even some games. Was this achieved utilising the CPC's own Locomotive BASIC, or did you use any specialist programming tools?

EC: I have always used BASIC for programming. This is actually something I had already adopted on the VG5000. It must be said that, like many kids at the time, I was completely self-taught when it came to computers. In fact, I wasn't very good at programming, I mostly learned on the job. And the only programming book I owned was the Amstrad CPC6128 user manual. It was therefore quite natural that I turned to
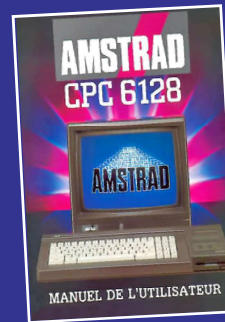
this language, which was very complete for the CPC. Truth be told, I think I wasn't even aware that other languages existed!
If the Amstrad user manual had covered assembly or machine language rather than BASIC then I probably would have programmed in those languages.
On the other hand, I also really liked using third-party tools which allowed me to improve or enrich my projects. For example, I used *OCP Art Studio* for graphics, *Echosoft* for speech synthesis, *Discology* for file manipulation, and even RSX commands copied from magazines, which made my task easier.
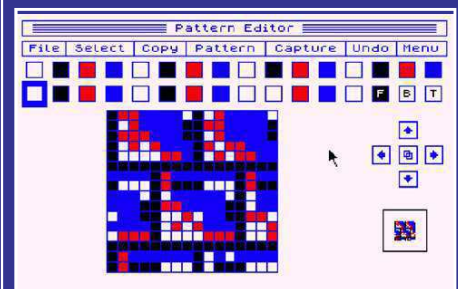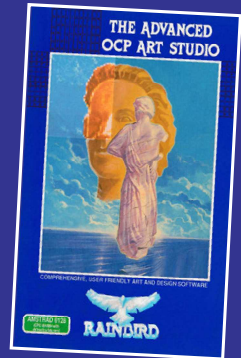
Above: Playing with power. The fantastic OCP Art Studio.

CB: Would I be right in saying you also created a disk-based CPC Fanzine called CPC-Mag?

EC: Yes ! The fashion for fanzines was very strong at that time and, as an eternally hyperactive creative person, I obviously wanted to follow suit. So, via OCP Art Studio (I knew absolutely nothing about DTP, lol!), I created the pages for the five issues of CPC-MAG that I distributed on floppy disk. I also sometimes used the DART scanner for certain illustrations. From No. 5,

the fanzine moved to paper format. Looking back, I realize that his content was actually VERY naive, lol!

Above: Eric's disk based fanzine - CPC-MAG.

CB: With the emergence of 16-bit technologies, like many of us you left the CPC behind and purchased a Commodore Amiga. Did you continue to program and develop games and demos on this system?

EC: The Amiga was a true revolution in terms of capabilities and performance, at every level. And it quickly managed to turn me away from CPC. But even with the likes of Deluxe Paint for graphics and Protracker for music, it didn't have any BASIC integrated. There was, of course, Amiga BASIC, which was supplied on the Workbench floppy disks, but it wasn't very good. Consequently, the graphics and countless musical modules that I created

on the Amiga remained mostly orphaned on my floppy disks and of no real use since I no longer programmed. The games for the Amiga, however, offered a more attractive video game experience, and I have to admit that I spent a lot of time playing them! *Shadow of the Beast*, *Unreal*, *Agony*, *Another World*, *Turrican II*, *Monkey Island*, *Worms*, *Jim Power*, *Battle Squadron*, *Moonstone*, and many other titles quickly captured my attention. Despite this, I actually managed to create a Point'n Click type game on the 16-bit Commodore: *Atlantis Machine*. This would not have been possible without the help of Sylvain Martinez, a talented programmer on AMOS. I really enjoyed working on *Atlantis Machine*, I took care of the graphics, music, sound effects, and part of the storyline. The story takes the player across the world to the lost city of Atlantis, in search of his uncle, an intrepid explorer who has gone missing. For the record, this game was an opportunity for me to digitize and integrate the faces of some of my family members into the adventure. I also made a few small, insignificant Amiga demos, but I

have no idea what happened to them.

CB: What inspired you to enter back into the CPC scene during the late 2010s?

EC: The answer can be summed up in one word: *Multipaint*! Developed by the brilliant Tero Heikkinen, *Multipaint* is graphics software allowing you to draw with the exact resolutions, palettes, and constraints of 8 and 16-bit machines of the time. The icing on the cake is that the results can be used on the actual machines themselves. Mode 0, Mode 1, Overscan, and even the extended palette of Amstrad Plus / GX4000 are catered for! So I started timidly aligning a few pixels, just to see if I still had the knack all these years later, and then I just couldn't stop! This then allowed me to generate various illustrations, followed by title screens, sceneries, and finally sprites and their animations. After a while, I was able to provide all the graphic material for the creation of a CPC game! So I started


Right: Inspiring - The awesome Multipaint!
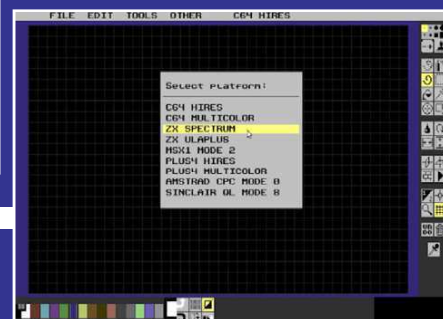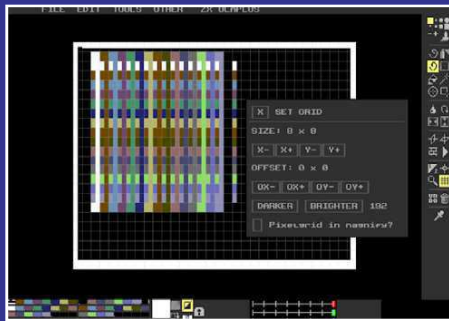
opening web pages where I offered this graphic material in order to attract programmers and musicians. Over time, some people responded to the call, including the ingenious programmer Kukulcan from CPC-Power, the incredible coder Zisquier, and the talented musician Pulsphonic. From these collaborations were born some Amstrad projects, demo's and games such as *Space Race, Octopus, Goldorak, CPC Bullet, Missile Command*, etc.

So, to answer the question more precisely, it was this possibility of creating and offering real Amstrad games to the community, while enjoying the user-friendliness and intuitiveness of contemporary software, which really pushed me to come back into the CPC scene. Because, thanks to *Multipaint* combined with the talent of the team members, I could finally live my childhood dream, namely creating video games!

CB: Looking back over the years at many of the Amstrad CPC games you have been involved with it's clear that your graphics have a unique visual style that has become instantly recognisable. What is your creative process when designing and implementing graphics on the CPC?
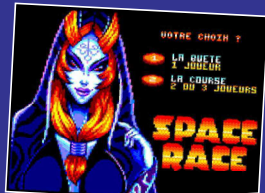
EC: I have to admit that I have always been extremely admiring of the work accomplished by Spanish artists in CPC games. The flashy colours and the quality of the execution of their graphics are, for me, as much a visual pleasure as a nostalgic dive into my childhood. I also have a lot of respect for the incredible work of Mark K. Jones on titles such as *Gryzor* and *Renegade*. He is a real inspiration to me. Even if it doesn't measure up to them, I'd say my style has been directly influenced by all these artists. For example, I really like colour gradients and playing with brightness and darkness, and in this domain, the Amstrad CPC is an inexhaustible source of possibilities! I love placing the pixels which, in the right place, will give volume, shading, shine, or even relief to a subject. This results in compositions that are generally very colourful, with focused lighting, where each subject stands out from the others. I am sometimes criticized for doing graphics from another age, but it is what I love, and it corresponds to my passion for the CPC.

I don't really have a specific creative process because I often operate on instinct and I also tend to experiment a lot. I sometimes create illustrations following a request from a programmer (the title screens of Mananuk's games for example), for the remake of

a title screen, to support a personal game project, or again for no real reason other than just for the fun and pleasure of creating a new CPC screen. Generally speaking, I need a starting point that will be my source of inspiration. Because without that, I can't imagine myself in the creative process and it inevitably leads to blank page syndrome, or in my case to a black screen, lol! It could be something like an image found on an internet page, or as abstract as a simple idea that sprouted in my head during the night. Then I try to give substance to this inspiration on *Multipaint* (with more or less success, lol!). When the first lines give me satisfaction, I then continue with the creation.

CB: Is there a particular creative vision you have in mind when creating games, and what do you consider your external influences to be?

EC: It tends to be different depending on the game and what its theme is. From a graphical point of view, I believe that a CPC game should have a title screen, an animated intro (if possible), a victory screen, a defeat screen, and tiles and sprites sufficiently worked so that it is possible to generate different visuals with as little graphic material as possible. This last aspect is probably the most restrictive because you always have to be careful to preserve the memory of
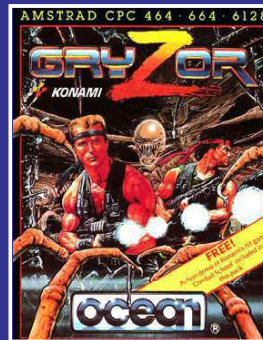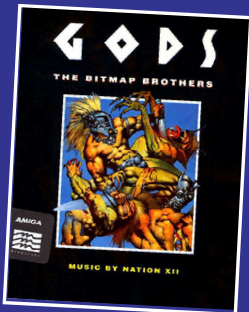
the machine, but it is also a very motivating challenge.

My influences are also

diverse and varied. For example, for *DEVILRY III*, my latest action game project to date, it was only after finishing the superb *Assassin's Creed Odyssey* on PS4 that I had the irrepressible desire to create a new game on the theme of Ancient Greece. I then came across several sources of inspiration, including the game *GODS* on the Amiga and *Roland of Sherwood* by Carnivius, before launching into

Above: GODS for Amiga - The inspiration for Eric's new project Devilry III

the design of my own graphics. As for *Space Race*, it was born

Above: GODS for Amiga - The inspiration for Eric's new project Devilry III

from my desire to combine the board games Trivial Pursuit and Snakes and Ladders in the world of retro gaming.

CB: As well as *Multipaint,* what other software tools, if any, do you use to create your graphics?

EC: I mainly use *Multipaint* for drawing, but I also use other tools, such as *Adobe Photoshop* for the composition of certain screens, or *ConvImgCPC* from Demoniak to generate a new working base. Finally, I use the rather antiquated but still useful *Microsoft Paint*.

CB: Do you have a piece of CPC graphic artwork that you are particularly proud of?

EC: Proud is a big word, hehe! That said, there are two achievements which, to my eyes, stand out a little from the rest. Not because I find them more successful than the others, but because they really mean something to me. Thus, "Hackman" (2021) is witness to a certain shift in my style: it is from this screen that I decided

to no longer use the dithering technique excessively. The next would be "Journey to the Centre of the Earth" (2022), which is the remake of the title screen of the eponymous game. It represents what I appreciate most in terms of fantasy adventure novels and imagination.

CB: Tell us a bit about some of your upcoming CPC projects that we have to look forward to?

EC: I am currently carrying out several projects at the same time. For each project, I take care of creating all of the graphic

Above: Masterpieces! Hackman (2021) & Journey to the Centre of the Earth (2022)

material. One I'm working on at the moment is *Goldorak* for the GX4000, a technically impressive shoot'em up, but whose development has been

put on hold for a while to allow programmer Zisquier to succeed in his professional reconversion. There is also *Frogger Junior*, a remake of the famous arcade

game, *Frogger*, that programmer Redbug decided to undertake. And then there are also two projects for which I have not yet found a programmer (advisory to those interested!). This is *Roland*

Ahoy 2, the sequel to the pirate game and, above all, *Devilry III*, an action game in which the player plays an Athlete whose mission is to collect the treasures of ancient Greece in order to bring them back to the Gods. I put a lot of care into developing the graphics for the latter, and one day seeing

this game materialize would be a sort of consecration for me! Finally, I also have two other game projects with Kukulcan and Pulsophonic which, unfortunately, I cannot reveal anything about yet, but which I hope will see the light of day in 2024.

CB: Teasing there, Eric! We can't wait to see what these two secret projects are. To finish, we generally ask our interviewee their favourite three Amstrad CPC games and why. What would be your three?

EC: To name only three is really torturous, lol! So I would have to say: *Barbarian, Target: Renegade, Fruity Frank, Pirates!, Arkanoid 2, Ikari Warriors,* and *North & South*. What? What do you mean I mentioned seven?!?!? No really? Are you sure? Ha… sorry, I never knew how to count… otherwise I would have become a programmer instead of a graphic designer, lol!

CB: Not a problem Eric, it's a tough question! Finally, where can people find out more about you, the games you're involved with, and your stunning graphic artwork?
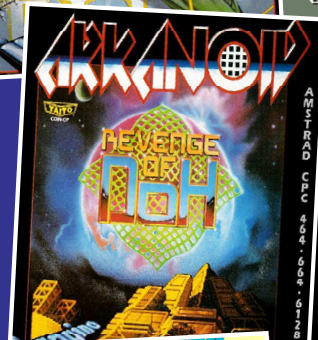
EC: I invite you to come and stroll

through my website: https://amstradmuseum.emu-france.info You can find all of my Amstrad projects there, as well as various articles and files about the world of this fabulous 8-bit micro!

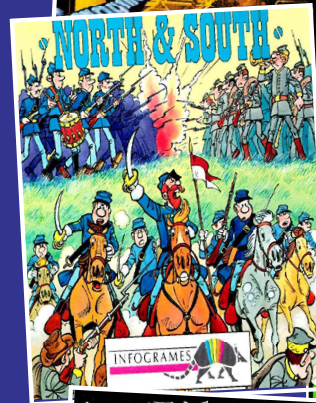**CB:** Thanks for sharing your fantastic and insightful CPC journey, Eric!

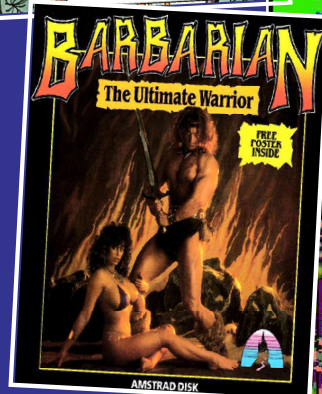**EC:** Thank you, and long life to AMTIXCPC!

Target: Renegade


Arkanoid 2

North & South

Barbarian

AMSTRAD Art
by Zöe Kirk Robinson

TITAN SPECIAL !

1 - Amstrad Eterno : TITAN (2021)

To kick things off here's an electric blue offering that uses very cold colours to depict the main figure. This is an interesting mix of styles that shouldn't work, but somehow does. We're torn between the 1950s space helmet and overall pose of the woman, and the 1980s cyberpunk influences of the mechanism she's attached to. The two styles are further visually differentiated by the colour choices: cold blues and whites for the 1950s, then warm reds and oranges for the 1980s. Very stylish, very slick, and perfectly balanced out with the depiction of the planet and comet in the background.
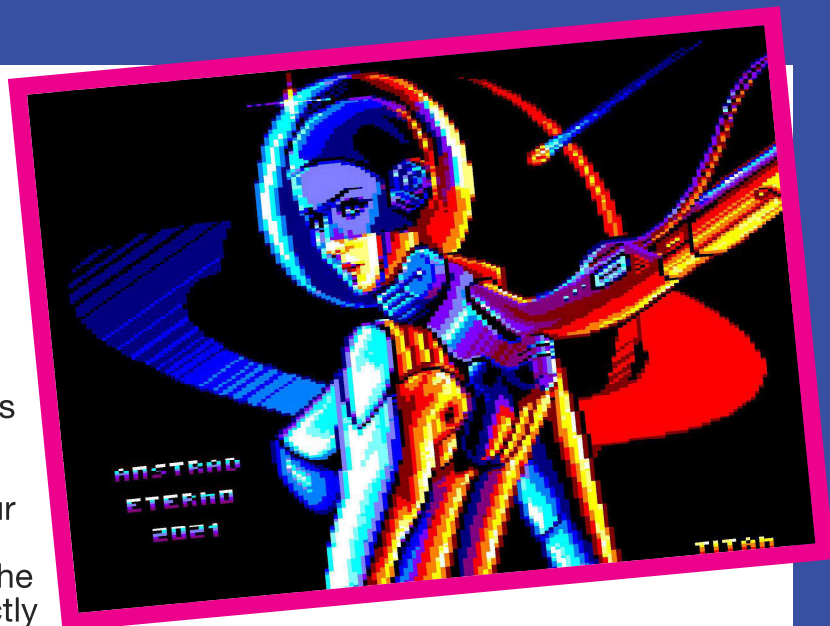
2 - Girl Power : TITAN (2021)

Continuing with the comic art theme, here's Rogue from the X-Men, in a rather stylised pose that helps to balance out the frame. The character herself is left-aligned, but the 3/4 view and flowing hair help to fill out the centre of the image just nicely. In contrast, the right of the image is balanced by the use of violet and purple jagged lines, which admittedly do pull the eye a little. Meanwhile, Rogue herself is depicted in warmer tones that help to tone down the vibrant green and blue of her costume, rendering a balance to the image that could otherwise have been missing. This is an excellent demonstration of both form and composition. Very impressive.

3 - Kong Strikes Back : TITAN (2022)

This has to be one of TITAN's most striking pieces: a close-up image of a scowling beast in pizks and purples. The CPC does comic or pop art incredibly well, thanks to its vibrant palette, and TITAN is showing that off to great effect. The face of Kong is depicted with blocks of bold colour, which makes it pop out of the screen in contrast to the deeper blacks, blues, and purples that are dithered together to give a blended, more natural feel to the fur. It's incredibly effective, as is the use of a subtle white outline around Kong, which TITAN uses grades of lighter colours to blend into. The bold red background helps weight the upper quadrants of the frame against the darker foreground figure, giving the whole piece quite a foreboding feeling. Fantastic!

4 - Bionic Commando : TITAN (2023)

Our final piece for this issue is another demonstration of fine comic art. Here, instead of the stylised female form, we have the stylised male in "action man" guise. The warm greens and oranges used for the man and his jacket balance the cold blues of his mechanical arm - it's balance he probably needs because that arm is ridiculously oversized. Notice how the reds and oranges on the arm itself stand out so much - our commando is practically overloading with power and it literally shines through in his wiring - but his cocky grin tells us he's perfectly in control, nevertheless. Very impressive visual storytelling. As always, the piece is perfectly balanced by the use of huge lettering in vibrant colours on the left of the frame. An excellent composition.