

M3: MINI MANIA MAGAZINE

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Interview with Luca "_MADrigal_" Antignano

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Logoff - Tell us something about yourself, like your hobbies, age, ecc.

MADrigal - Of course. I have lots of fun presenting myself to other people. :-) So, I live in Sassari and I'm currently attending the 5th year of "Architectural Engineering" in Cagliari. Last month it was my 26th birthday and I have an historic passion for videogames. I first played PACMAN when I was 7 in a bar: it was love at first sight (you can also understand that from my simulators: 2 games out of 5 are about that lovely yellow-man) ;-P

I had my glorious C64 when I was 10 and I worked on it, doing a bit of everything, up to the age of 20; then my dad bought me my first PC (a 486), and the year after I had to learn Turbo Pascal for my exams. But I stopped programming till last October '99. It wasn't easy to remember all that I lost.

Something more about me: I have an older brother, a normal family and a girlfriend, Valentina, (whom I say hello!).

A part from these hobbies I'm an ordinary guy, though I cannot stay still without doing anything!

Logoff - Tell us the main differences between an "emulator" and a "simulator"?

MADrigal - Well, it may seem strange but one of the first things I thought of, was what I was exactly doing.

I'll explain myself better. You can understand the main difference between a simulator and an emulator by simply thinking about the final result; first of all, the emulator is a perfect recreation of the original, a simulator is a very good copy that is much similar to the original, but still far from being the same. And it will never be.

The best example I can give of the differences are the routines of randomness, (eg: random monsters); of course the random engines of a x86 cpu are different from the routines of the electronic game.

Last December, when I made the restyling of my site and moved it from a free provider to Retrogames, I took care of explaining with a few pages the concept of simulator:

after 2 months I finally understood the essential difference between "simulator" and "emulator". An "emulator" reproduces the hardware of a machine, where you can run any software for that machine (I'm talking about consoles here, but also about computers and arcades)

On the other hand, a "simulator" does not worry about the original hardware, but all it has to do is to "mimic" the original software based on the final product. To make it easy, while programming an "emulator" you have to worry about recreating the hardware, with a "simulator", the software only. I hope I was clear: to create a "simulator" you just have to play a game for a few hours, and then recreate it through the software, write down some important facts, and then recreate it with software, using directly programming and not passing through an emulator.

Of course, if you do not own the actual game, the simulator will be very poor. Anyway for major details I invite you to read my tutorial (in English!) about how to make a simulator, that should be ready on my site within a few days in the "tutorial" section.

Logoff - What made you start in the beginning?

MADrigal - Luck. Last year I bought a cheap electronic game in a shop; when I brought it home I understood that it was not possible to dump the chip like for console cartridges and arcades, that's because all the information was on the same integrated circuit, of an unknown make and model. So then I understood why the games I downloaded off internet were called "simulators" and not "emulators".

Then I informed myself better, and I understood that the only way of putting those games to PC was recreating them on the PC through a "simulation". So then I started programming them because I realised that I was able and it was fun and challenging.

Logoff - Often I'm amazed of the fidelity of sound and graphics, can you tell me the secrets of this "reality" effect?

MADrigal - Yes, well this is very technical. The procedure can be very simple or extremely complex.

All you usually need is a good scanner and a 3\$ microphone. This may seem easy, but sometimes it can get complex; when I was working on GrabMan and Las Vegas I had to send the game in crash to scan some sprites that were still on-screen.

Other times (eg: Motor Cross), you just have to press the button ACL that turns all the sprites on at once, and scan the game.

Until now, the most suffering simulation was the one of Donkey Kong Circus. It took me 4 hours to get a decent scan of sprites, and over a week to clean the pictures. I use Borland Delphi 4.0, Paint Shop pro 5.0 (to reorganize the pics), Goldwave 3.02 (to clean the sound samples) and Microangelo 2.0 (to create the icons). The rest is all small and useless stuff :-).

Logoff - When you have to assemble everything, what language do you use and why?

MADrigal - I use Pascal as a language, I work in Borland Delphi 4.0, that is like Visual Basic or C++ Builder, but it uses Pascal as the internal language.

I made this choice because when I was in university, I was forced to learn Pascal to pass a test. At the beginning it was traumatic to pass from Basic V2 to Pascal, but then I realised of the big enhance. I am the only programmer that uses Delphi to program simulators, while other people use C++ Builder or Visual Basic. Principally the final result is the same, but Delphi has some advantages on the others.

For example my simulators aren't afflicted by the "big fonts" problem, even if you have the desktop set with very big or very small fonts the aspect of the simulator stands unchanged. People that program in Visual Basic have this problem. Also, a very good thing is that Delphi does not need any external runtime dlls, while Visual Basic does. Oops, I don't want to get anyone that Uses Visual Basic angry ;-)

I'm not going to mention the differences between Delphi and C++ Builder because I don't know C++ Builder that well.

Logoff - What are your future projects? are you working on any emulator/simulator that you want M3 readers to know about? :-)

MADrigal - Umm, well many project, but no time at all! But I still think that 5 simulator since October '99 till now is no bad at all.

Some news... I have some Gakken, Tomy, Epoch and Polistil/VTL games. I still have to decide which one will be my next "victim" ;-), no anticipation for now... I'd like to know it myself!

Recently I helped Roberto Ventura out, author of the emulator "Just for Fun"; he made my dreams come true when he emulated an old arcade from Tecfri, named Hole Land, very good! The emulator will be ready within a few days, but my part was tiny respect to what he had to do!

I also took some interest in dumping ROMs of an old console from Philips, named "VideoPac" (known as "Odyssey 2" in the USA). Well... I can say I'm quite busy.

Logoff - Which are your favourite computer/console/emulator and obviously Game & Watch?

MADrigal - My favourite computer is the C64, because I think that no other computer could have passed itself with software that went over hardware limitations; also it was a very long-lasting computer, born in the 1983 and "dead" in the 1992. I still keep it jealously.

Favourite console... from the first generation, the Atari 2600; then the SuperNES of the 2nd generation and the N64 of the new ones; I'm not an expert of consoles, even if I have some old ones (all were given to me or bought during the last year... what a nostalgia!)

Favourite emulator, well, here the choice is very hard. I loved MAME when it worked decently on any computer, I also love RAINE, emulators from Bloodlust Software (Callus, Genecyst, Nesticle), ZSnes, and of course UltraHLE. Retrocade also has a very nice GUI.

Favourite Game & Watch... well if we say that "Game & Watch"s are the electronic games made by Nintendo while the others are called "handheld" or "tabletops", choosing from Nintendo G&W's I think that Mario's Cement Factory is very good (simulated by David Calandra); within handhelds my favourite has always been PuckMan from Tomy, which I had the honour of simulating.

In an emulator I mainly appreciate its speed; so I prefer the ones coded in pure x86 ASM, though being less "portable" on other OSes and CPUs. From that point of view, Just For Fun and HiVE are great.

I think that Emu-DX by Mike Green opened a new frontier to emulation: new graphics and sound for the true arcade classics, emulating the original CPU core! I think that year 2000 will bring us many surprises ;-)

Logoff - Did you ever try games of the "G&W Gallery" series for GBC? If so, what do you think of them?

MADrigal - Yes I think I did try the first one; quite good, but the main thing about G&Ws is the plastic support they have and all the relative drawings. The Gameboy cannot do this and the atmosphere is not the same.

I think that Nintendo realised the "philosophy" of colours just by making GBC. I saw lots of coloured GBC on bids. Those are very cute.

Logoff - Last question, then I'll let you go. If someone would give you a GBC + NGPC and all the software OR a complete series of G&W, what would you choose? (without thinking about the prices)

MADrigal - I have to specify that I only know the NGP by name, even if I'd like to try it personally. For GBC instead most of it can be found on the net... Umm... for the interest I have in the electronic games I could say:

"I'll take the G&Ws so that I'll simulate them all, one by one"; I'd probably choose the G&Ws because now I have more fun programming and dismantling the games than playing them, but mainly because they are nice to keep on the desk.

Logoff - Thank you very much for your availability and good luck!

MADrigal - No, I ought to thank you for sparing some of your time and space on M3 for me, and I'd like to take the occasion to remind readers of M3 that my web address is: <http://madrigal.retrogames.com/> And I'll also tell everyone that I'm always looking for electronic games to simulate!

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English translation by Spy161616, published on M3 on 2nd March, 2000.

Both versions were moved to Emuita.it after the closure of M3, in 2002.

As of 2014, the Italian version has been made available on the new Emuita.it website, at this url: <http://www.emuita.it/forum/topic/2342-madrigal-italiano-a-cura-di-logoff/>, whereas the English version is currently unavailable.

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