

CONSULTING THE FIRST NON-LONDON COMPANY - HEWSON

by Richard Karsmakers

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09:00

We awake, and are again confronted with the general difficulties of life and similar difficulties attached to the bringing into gear of the metabolic system

Today we will leave London for the rest of this holiday. We will leave the oppressive heat, the damp smog and the filthy smell of traffic.

We will visit Hewson Consultants and after that we will go and visit the man who we all admire: Steve Bak.

Richard

09:20

Stefan is in the shower and I have difficulty getting myself in a vertical position.

I don't want to get up. I want to stay here and sleep the whole day.

I am sick and tired of all this travelling...

Richard

10:45

We just left Stuart's, where we parted with lots of emotions ("glad you went" and stuff like that). We are at the moment in the Tube from Caledonian Road to King's Cross/St. Pancras, where we will have to switch and take the Metropolitan line to Paddington Railway Station.

Richard

12:25

Sitting in the train at Paddington Station. I have no reason whatsoever to complain about the quality of the British trains. The second class actually looks like the Dutch first class: And there's also this neat little table that now functions to support the Z88 on which I am typing. It really is nice to be able to type comfortably again after all that chatting in the real time tape that I have been doing quite a lot in recent days.

This train trip should take about 1-1.5 hours, after which we will get out to visit Hewson (getting out at Didcot Parkway).

That heavy backpack actually seems to have a way of blocking some veins in one of my shoulders so that I fear that the left part of my brain now has an oxygen deficiency - which establishes itself through a little headache that will probably be gone in a couple of minutes.

Boy - am I glad we could dump those packs in the luggage compartment!

We arrived at King's Cross/St. Pancras at 10:55, and we didn't

have to wait long for the Tube to Paddington. We arrived there not much later, so that we could have our breakfast (again, some sandwiches) at 11:10.

After that, we started questing for a place where we could withdraw money from the bank - for that we would surely need. We found a Post Office at 11:25, which occasion we both used extensively to fill our wallets, whereas I also bought some 19 P stamps.

At 11:47 we got back at Paddington, supplied with four cans of Coke as well. Waiting for the train to arrive.

Richard

13:06

Thank God....we're out of London. I look outside and all I see is cosy little farms, wide fields with long grass and wheat, flocks of sheep peacefully grazing. The countryside slopes in various directions to various heights and lowths.

When I look to where the train is coming from, I see a distant grey haze that is slowly diminishing into the blue of the summer sky.

Out of London. Fresh air. Great.

Richard

13:27

We've arrived at Didcot Station.

It's a very small Railway Station - hardly any different from any other railway stop in a 5,000 people's village. Maybe the fact that the major westbound line meets the line to Oxford here has something to do with the fact that the Intercity train bothered to stop here at all.

Anyway.

Richard

13:35

In a Taxi towards Hewson.

Ms. Toni Waknell of Hewson had told me to contact her by phone, and that's precisely what we did.

"She's not in," a secretary told us, "but you can take a cab on our expense."

So that's precisely what we did.

Didcot is hardly the place where you'd expect a software company, nor is Milton, where we're heading for now.

Richard

At approximately a quarter to two, we arrived at the place where Hewson resides. It turned out to be a flat building with just one floor, and it didn't look much like a software company's office. It looked kinda like the kind of buildings you see where people live whose houses just burned down - only a bit better and more sturdy.

A somewhat corpulent receptionist told us to sit down and wait

while she fetched us some Orange Squash - which we drank with the usual eagerness.

She told us that Toni and 'the programmers' were out for lunch and that we shouldn't be surprised if we would have to wait to a bit beyond two o'clock.

So we weren't surprised when they indeed turned up at a quarter past two - thereby almost wrecking the building by hitting it with the bumper of their car (no casualties nor damaged done, fortunately).

Out of the car stepped Toni Waknell, John Phillips and Tony Cooper. Toni was a rather tiny girl wearing high heels (maybe to compensate her size), who had long curling hair; John was a very long dude indeed (at least, so I remember), with large eyes and an overdose of shyness (which would disappear later) - the man responsible for e.g. "Nebulus". Tony was a cosy type of guy one'd like to get drunk with - with lots of humour in his voice and manners. He's done both "Cybernoid" versions, and has a massively solid handshake. He collects bootsectors - though I haven't received a disk filled with some of 'em, which he promised me to do (hint, hint, Tony!).

Quite a nice bunch, one'd have to admit.

Toni led us to the interview room of Hewson's. We sat down and plugged our walkman into a main socket; Toni sat down with a notebook and both programmers sat down bashfully, talking softly. The initial uneasiness of their ways led me to believe they hadn't been interviewed much - maybe they were plain nervous?

Within a minute, we were ready. So we aimed carefully and shot our questions at them with awesome, relentless precision.

Let's start with your dates and places of birth, shall we?

John: Seventeenth of October 1962, London.

Tony: Seventeenth of the third, 1966 - in Worthing, in Sussex.

How did you get into computers?

Tony: From school, really. From school. Programming the Commodore PET. And I'm still around. I wandered around for a while and then went to Hewson.

John: I started about fifteen years ago, when the hobbyist thing was supposed to be starting.

What are your other interests besides computers?

John: Music. Playing music - all sorts.

Tony: Track racing; building cars; listening to music very loud; and satellite TV.

What do you dislike most about the software industry?

John: Programs that are hyped up, I guess.

Tony: Yeah....yeah...

What do you consider to be the best game on the ST?

John: Excluding our stuff....(laughs)...."Virus".

Tony: I don't know, really. There hasn't been much that sort of blew my mind away as it were. Your thing was quite nice (looking at John). What was it called? The thing you're working on now?

John: Oh, that one. "Scavenger".

Tony: That's pretty nice. It's looking good.

What's the lousiest game?

Tony: "Chuckie Egg".

John takes a very long time to think. Tony remarks that, if he mentions "Cybernoid", he'll kill him.

John: I don't know.

What's your best achievement on the ST?

John: My best achievement is the one that I will show you in a moment: "Scavenger"; I've got 8-channel digitized music on the ST - not using samples.

Tony: "Cybernoid II" is better than "Cybernoid", but my greatest achievement was getting "Cybernoid" to run.

What do you think of ST NEWS?

Tony: I've never seen it.

John: I did. I liked it. I thought it covered many areas. I have seen some other disk magazines but they tend to stick to demos, not much else. The occasional demo isn't bad.

Please tell us a nice joke?

Tony: Something clean, for a magazine? That's a difficult one, isn't it?

John: How large is your circulation?

About thirty-thousand, plus some tens of thousands for the other magazines we're working for now.

Tony: Oh. How many folk singers does it take to change a light bulb? Twenty - one to change the light bulb and the others to sing about how good the previous one was. That's about the cleanest one I know.

John: I don't know a joke.

What car do you drive?

John: I don't.

Tony: I've got two; one I'm building and one I use just to drive around in. That's a 1600 Escort estate - of all things. The one I'm building is another Escort, Mark I, with 3.5 litre turbo-charged engine.

Which tools do you use to program?

John: Well, I am currently changing over to a new system. For "Nebulus" and "Eliminator" I just used an ordinary ST - I am just switching over to "Devpac Professional", so that you can up-and-download programs to another machine. I've got a MEGA 4 and a 60 Meg hard drive.

Tony: "PDS" (Program Development System on MS-DOS machines, ED.) - I write everything on the PC and then upload it to another machine and run it.

John: Also, I use Rainbird's "OCP Art Studio", since I do my own graphics as well. I also wrote some tools myself.

OK. Favourite book.

John: "Stranger in a Strange Land", by Robert Heinlein.

Tony: The "Dragonlance" series, I must admit, written by Tracy Hickman and someone else (Margaret Weis, ED.). Those are about four books, I think.

Favourite film?

John: "Brazil".

Tony: "Aliens", because of the pretty wicked stereo sound in it. When you put it on a HiFi it blows your head off.

Favourite food?

Tony: It used to be McDonalds, but I stopped with that. Anything edible, now.

Favourite drink?

John: Water. And black coffee.

Tony: Anything with soda stream.

Favourite band?

John: The The.

Tony: (Stefan: "Don't say 'anything that makes music'!") I

haven't got one, really, but I did like "War of the Worlds" of Jeff Wayne.

Who do you consider to be the most interesting person in the software industry?

John: Difficult question.

Tony: No particular persons I know.

John: No.

What are your main sources of inspiration?

Tony: Living. Just everyday life. You see something and think of how you can build that in a computer...and off you go. Another idea springs to life.

John: You've got some really difficult questions, you know that?

I suppose it's books.

What program are you working on at the moment?

John: "Scavenger". Only on the ST.

Tony: A game called "Veux" for ST and Amiga. It's for a French company called LMA.

What do you think of software piracy?

John: I suppose in some countries it's justified because of high prices - also because it might be the only way to get it. It could be prevented by breaking the visual circle, which the software houses can do - and the distributors. The latter can have a smaller cut - their cut is now enormous.

Tony: There's so much crap around on the market.

Have you ever seen some of the hacker's demos?

John: I actually see quite a few. Especially the "Union Demo".

Tony: I haven't seen it. I want to see it.

What's your worst habit?

Tony: Smoking. And getting up.

John: Working too many hours every day.

After the interview, we went to have a look at some of the forthcoming Hewson stuff - a habit that we had caught at the other software houses and that we were pretty pleased with. John also showed us his new game, "Scavenger", for the first time ever to the press. It looked just as promising and original as "Nebulus" - at the least. Toni, although clearly not the most experienced game player around, succeeded in demonstrating some of the other forthcoming games as well.

John had also brought some of his recent programming experiments with him, that we could also have a look at. There was a game he provisionally called "Nebulus II", for example: A horizontal version of "Nebulus" that also rotated smoothly. There was also a playable demo of "Enigma" - a shoot-'em-up around a cylinder

(EXCLUSIVE COPY OF THIS PLAYABLE PRE-BETA-FLØPPØ-DEMO ON THIS VERY ST NEWS DISK!). John had also experimented a bit with opening the left and right border, and he displayed us a small scrolling demo with that as well. Finally, he also made an exclusive version of his four-voice synthesiser that you will also find elsewhere in this issue of ST NEWS (ANOTHER EXCLUSIVE COPY OF A SPLENDID DEMO!!). He did that on 15:25.

John is surely a very talented programmer - but, then again, people who'd seen "Nebulus" probably already knew that.

In the game testing room where we beheld all this amazing stuff, soon the smell of smoke hung like a penetrating layer of clouds. John is heavily into Benson & Hedges (more programmers smoke that), and Tony generally smokes everything he can p