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8 BIT ANNUAL 2019

LOBO 2018

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FAB
85 - 89%

MEGA
90 - 94%

EPIC
95 - 100%

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Douglas McGregor
Paul Monopoli
Neil Reive
Andy O'Flaherty
Nathan Sands

INTERVIEWS

DISCLAIMER

We allow our reviewers to write in their own words, write their own style and for them to make their own judgments with respect to a game's overall ratings. None of our reviewers are professional journalists and we like it that way as we don't discriminate and we feel it gives a much more fan based look with the game reviews. Our writers / contributors of game reviews write how they feel about a game and decide for themselves if they liked playing a game or not, letting them discover for themselves if a game is of high merit or not. We do not seek to give preferential favour to any games, any developers or any groups.

THE 8-BIT ANNUAL TEAM

We like to keep things informal and entertaining as possible down at 8-bit Annual HQ. The review team are experts in their own man caves having played every 8-bit game ever released but what they love more is to be frolicking in lush green gardens of ye old castles of Scotland (what's this got to do with 8-bit gaming? - Ed). Errr, I've been working so hard on the 2019 Annual, I was wandering away there for a bit. To the point, gaming is our life (I thought you had no life? - Ed). "Arrgh", I am not going to get a word in, so here you go - our FAB, MEGA and EPIC, 8-bit gaming review team, in no particular order:

George Bachaelor (Australia)

I love 8-bit retro gaming to 8-bits! With my 27 shades of coloured eyes though, I am biased towards the Amstrad CPC / Plus games. However, Nixy The Glade Sprite, by Andy Johns for the Speccy is a sight to behold. It wasn't reviewed in another nameless publication but it gets the royal treatment in 8-bit ANNUAL 2019! You'll see me all over Facebook and twitter, but everyone knows me as....Batman! So my true identity remains only known to Roland, er that's not right, my apologies as my CPC influences take over me at most times, I meant, my true identity remains only known to Alfred, my butler. The image above is from Batman Forever Demo released in 2011 on Amstrad CPC. One of the greatest, if not the greatest ever 8-bit demo you will ever see from the awesome 8-bit coding geniuses, the Batman Group!
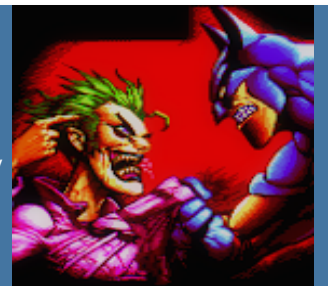
Merman (Andrew Fisher, United Kingdom)

I have been playing games for 36 years - with rest breaks - and reviewing them since the days of Commodore Format. The C64 is my first love, only surpassed by my love for my fiancee Alison (the wedding is in June 2019 - congrats from all of us at 8-bit Annual to you both - Ed). I have written music for C64 games and acted as playtester on several games. And if I ever find time I will program a game of my own...(Photo created with the Retrospecs app).

Jim Brown (United Kingdom)

I don't have the real hardware so have to emulate constantly on my old bone of a laptop. An old bone that has no battery, dodgy RAM and has something different wrong with it every time I switch it on. Other than that everything is rosy, just like the glasses I wear when I play my old games.

Andy O'Flaherty (United Kingdom)

My hobbies include buying games I will probably never play and researching obscure and rare titles so I can pretend I knew about them all along at a later date. Wait… you're not writing this down are you? (yes we are - Ed).

John Davies (Indonesia)

The ZX Spectrum is my first and only true love since Christmas 1982 as far as 8-bit home computers are concerned. It's the only machine I owned and I was always fascinated at how developers got the best out of it despite it's obvious limitations. I enjoy playing almost any genre of game from any era, designing simple 2D games and most recently writing about games too. Handy that last one.

Paul Monopoli (Australia)

I was brought up on a healthy diet of Amstrad CPC gaming, and it continues to be my favourite 8-bit micro of all time. Feeling I had explored all there was to explore in the West I have recently turned my attention to the hidden wonders of Japanese computing and gaming. With each trip I take to the land of the rising sun, my collection ends up increasing, much to my wife's chagrin!

John Kavanagh (Ireland)

One of my earliest memories of playing video games was at the arcades of a little seaside town. What's more enjoyable after a few hours at the beach than heading into town and playing the latest and greatest games. My Atari 2600 could never get anywhere close to that arcade experience, although I still loved playing it. It would be until the Sega Megadrive (Genesis) a few years later that I finally get to experience (near) arcade-quality in the home. In between the desires of a home arcade came the Amstrad CPC 464, my first computer. From there it was flight simulators and other more cerebral games that you don't see at the arcades that piqued my interest, as well as the odd arcade-type games of course. Not only that but I got into programming and formed a lifelong interest in computers, not just for the gaming capabilities but what they can do on a hardware level. I ended up with a love for all things arcade, consoles, computers, and everything else in between. With all that, my thirst for more knowledge led me to computer and console magazines and later on the desire to create my own. First with an online fanzine, CPC Oxygen, then Eight Bit magazine and the 8-bit Annuals. Writing for these have been a thrill ride and more, and it only has begun.

Kieren Hawken (United Kingdom)

Kieren has been writing about video games for over 15 years working for many different publications, but is probably best known for his work on the award-winning Retro Gamer magazine. Other previously published works include his popular A-Z series of digital books, his print-based games compendiums and he was also a contributing author on Let's Go Dizzy: The Story of the Oliver Twins as well as The Story of the Commodore Amiga in Pixels. He has also appeared on the prime-time UK technology show Sky News Swipe as well numerous podcasts as both a guest and co-host. His YouTube channel, The Laird's Lair features a wide range of different videos focused on the wide world of retro gaming.
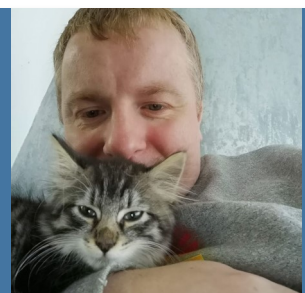
Nathan Sands (United Kingdom)

I am studying at Coventry University so I guess I am considered the youngest out of the lot but I'm crazy about 8-bit gaming just as if I was a middle-aged nerd like the rest of the games reviewers around here. It sounds funny but 8-bit gaming has always been in my childhood and I still enjoy it today (you're not that old - Ed). I mainly enjoy the Sega Master System alongside a solid good pint.
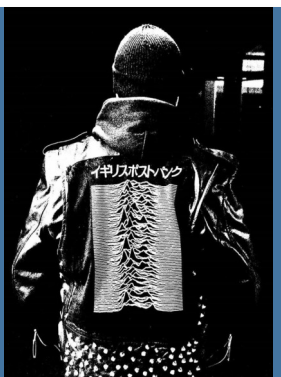
Douglas McGregor (Dougie McG, Scotland)

Since my early **Skool Daze** I have been **Head Over Heels** for gaming. In class I'd often be planning a **Great Escape** through a secret **Trap Door** like **Batman** or the **Last Ninja** to get home and play more, unless it was a day when I could play **Granny's Garden** on the BBC Micros in class. Strap on your **Jetpac** like a **Lunar Jetman** and Fast forward 30 years and I still have a particular passion for the Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum which I consider to be the **Elite** 8 bit home computers. I still play these avidly today when I need to **Rescue** myself from the **Chaos** of life. (See what I did there? ... I'll get my coat... Hang it back up! We need you writing more 8-bit game reviews - Ed).
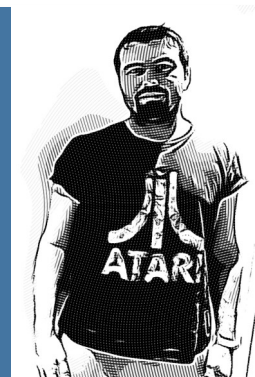
Louie Dimovski (Australia)

My first home video gaming experience was with a Hanimex HMG 2650 hooked up to a black and white TV that did not have an RF connection on it (try getting any sort of video signal out with that setup). By my early teens, I became one of the 'cool' kids with a Commodore 64 and have been smitten with the system ever since. Now in my late 40s, I appreciate the nostalgic feelings that can be re-lived by looking back at all of the great titles from the 1980's but my passion lies in the current generation of games released for the old bread bin (that's the brown C64 for the uninformed) and supporting current day programmers with their part-time hobby via my RetroGamerNation on YouTube. Looking forward to 2019 and beyond, I will be jumping onto the darkside of 8-bit current gen gaming to cover other systems such as the Amstrad, MSX, Atari and ZX Spectrum to see what the fuss is all about (what's taken you so long to get over the dark side, trust me you will love it - Ed)

Carlos PineApple Linares (Spain)

When I was a little tiny shy kid in the south of Spain, my parents invested more money than they earn in a month to bring home to me a magnificent English computer with a colour monitor, which was, they imagined would help me to study and get good grades in school - suckers! Well it did, but, I spent so much of my time playing games in reality. That machine became the one that gave me more happy feelings and memories in my youth than anything else, those memories and that awesome machine still remains in my heart even today at 38 years old. Did you guess the computer yet? No? This machine was and is an AMSTRAD CPC 6128. The CPC is my 'pretty girl'. Even after spending thousands of euros on a proud retro gaming collection of many different systems, I just love to play games on my CPC the most. So let me say thanks a lot to George and John for letting me contribute on this marvellous project. THANKS and GRACIAS to all retro gaming freaks out there!

RICK DICKINSON TRIBUTE

By Neil Reive

There were some very iconic computer case designs in the early to mid 1980's and none more so than the ZX Spectrum. The famous sleek black case was just one of many designs from the mind of the late Rick Dickinson.

As a child, Dickinson had a keen interest in Lego, and he would come to use his inventiveness in using the square blocks to build anything from bridges to spaceships. This interest in architecture and design would later lead to an industrial design course at Newcastle Polytechnic. It was during the course when Dickinson managed to get a placement with Sinclair Research, the Cambridge-based electronics company founded by inventor Sir Clive Sinclair.

After graduating from Newcastle Polytechnic in 1979, Dickinson was earmarked for the vacant post of industrial designer at Sinclair Research. His first assignment was to oversee his predecessor's design of the Sinclair ZX80 through to production and release in 1980. The ZX80 was a huge success thanks to its £99.95 price mark for

the ready-built package and £79.95 for the kit form package — the latter for users who are handy with a soldering iron. With the release and success of the ZX80, Dickinson went on to design his first product for the computer: a memory expansion module.

Never one to rest on their laurels, Sinclair Research were already thinking of their next computer, and Dickinson himself would be in charge of the design. Just like its predecessor, the new Sinclair ZX81 computer was to be small, uncomplicated, and affordable. While its design requirements were similar to its predecessor, the ZX81 was far from a mere update. Gone was the bright white look of the case to be replaced with a black look. Although the new ZX81 computer featured a similar touch-sensitive membrane keyboard to its predecessor, the overall design of the case was more streamlined, and clearly a forerunner for what lay ahead.

The ZX81 was released to the public in 1981, available in kit form (£49.95) and ready-built form (£69.95). Being priced considerably cheaper than its rivals, the ZX81 proved to be

even more popular than its predecessor, selling 1.5 million units in total. The design of the ZX81 case also brought Dickinson more success with the Design Council award.

With the ZX Spectrum, Dickinson stripped the size of the case down even further than its predecessors. With its jet black case, rubber keyboard, and rainbow stripe motif on the bottom right corner, the Spectrum would become a computing icon to many. Released in 1982, the Spectrum was released in 16 KB and 48 KB versions, retailing at £125 and £175 respectively, and became a massive commercial success in the UK.

After the success of the ZX Spectrum, Sinclair and Dickinson moved their attention to the Sinclair QL, a more business style computer. Planned as a 32-bit computer for professionals, the QL was plagued by delays in the development of the hardware and software. The case itself was a world away from the small compact design of the Spectrum and more in line with the 16-bit computers and IBM PCs of the time. Unfortunately, a rushed release in 1984

Sinclair ZX Spectrum + (1984)

meant that the QL had many hardware and software issues, resulting in the computer gaining a poor reputation from the outset.

The ZX Spectrum+ was released late in 1984 with Dickinson's redesigned case being in the style of the QL. The internals of the case would still house the exact same Spectrum board, but the main difference was the introduction of the QL's more ergonomically moulded keyboard. The ZX Spectrum+ came in ready-built form, although a conversion-kit, which allowed users to insert their current Spectrum board into the new case, was also made available.

With Spain introducing a tax levy on companies releasing computers with 64 KB or less into its country, Sinclair decided to produce a 128 KB Spectrum. Dickinson re-visited the design of the Spectrum+ for the new case with only a minor adjustment made for an external heatsink to the right side of the keyboard. The upgraded ZX Spectrum 128 was released in Spain towards the end of 1985, with a UK release early the following year.

It was 1986 when Dickinson left Sinclair Research (which had then sold off its computer range and brand name to Amstrad) to form Dickinson Associates. During this time he worked on the design for an early portable style computer, the Cambridge Z88, for Cambridge Computer Ltd, a spin-off company from Sinclair Research. He also went on to work with Amstrad the following year, helping out with designs for their portable line of computer products.
Dickinson moved into other non-computing markets, working on designs for the MacArthur field microscope and the Lensman microscope — the latter winning numerous design awards. He also worked in the communication field with designs for the first broadband phone.

Returning to computing, Dickinson designed the case for the Gizmondo hand-held games console for electronics company Tiger Telematics. The Gizmondo was released in 2005 to take on the hand-held giants of Nintendo and Sony, but one disaster after the other hampered the machine's commercial fortunes.

Dickinson helped the Retro Computers group to draw up designs for their crowd-funded Sinclair ZX Spectrum Vega+ hand-held computer, which is based on the original ZX Spectrum hardware. While the concept designs displayed a sleek black hand-held gaming console, the final product that was sent out to the project backers in 2018 seemed to be merely prototypes, a far cry from the design images.

Some of Dickinson's final work was to come up with a design and drawings for another crowd-funded Spectrum computer, the ZX Spectrum Next. This project is based on an updated ZX Spectrum with a new look and new hardware. Dickinson's final designs displayed a jet black keyboard casing with the distinctive rainbow lines going round one edge. The case would house a relatively normal QWERTY keyboard with enhanced Spectrum internal hardware.

Dickinson was diagnosed with cancer in 2015 and recovered after receiving treatment. Unfortunately, the disease returned, persuading him to move to the US in 2017 to undergo further treatment. Sadly, he passed away between doses of treatment on 24th April 2018.

In an interview with Sinclair User in 1982, Dickinson was described as being

"modest about his achievements". He had commented on how "there always seems to be room for improvement". We're sure that Sinclair users could sum up their own thoughts of the designer: pioneering, humble, ZX81, Spectrum, iconic, prodigy, modest, award-winner, unforgettable….

Sinclair ZX81 (1981)

Image Credits

Sinclair ZX81 (Sinclair-ZX81.png) - Evan-Amos - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=18300824

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ZX Spectrum+ (ZX_Spectrum+.jpg) - Bill Bertram - Own work, CC BY-SA 2.5, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1080473

ZX Spectrum 128 (ZX_Spectrum128K.jpg) - Bill Bertram - Own work, CC BY-SA 2.5, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1077588

Gizmondo (Gizmondo.jpg)- By Evan-Amos - Own work, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12391181

All other images: Rick Dickinson https://www.flickr.com/people/9574086@N02/

The Cambridge Z88

Sinclair QL

Sinclair ZX 82 prototype

The finished product, the iconic Sinclair ZX Spectrum

Another Sinclair ZX 82 prototype

The beautiful Sinclair ZX Spectrum 128

Spectrum NEXT prototype

The Gizmondo

The majesty of game loading screens

Since my ZX Spectrum days, I've always been fascinated by the revealing of a picture while waiting patiently for a game to load, that's if it had one. Some early games simply had "Loading... please wait" or words to that effect. Over the years, there has been some tremendous loading screens by recognised names in the industry. Of course, not all necessarily represented the quality of the games but to me, those screens were pure memorable pixel art. So I had to have a go myself.

First adventures with pixel art

In 1985 I started dabbling with OCP Art Studio and The Artist creating random doodles and trying to come up with something half-decent although my attempts nowhere near matched those loading screens at the time but I certainly had a lot of fun trying. Alas, being young and naïve, I was more into playing the latest games to even consider submitting my work to a software company. Sadly, those I had saved to cassette are long

gone so you'll have to take my word for it!

The retro gaming era

Fast-forward several years (well, decades!) to the World Wide Web and I discover that the retro gaming community is enormous. Many still owning their original home computers and software. Even more amazing is games still being made for them. And then of course, being able to re-live my youth with those classic games via emulators is a huge nostalgic bonus.

Andy Green

Pixel art love reignited

In 2015, my Amiga disks containing artwork was converted to a PC format enabling them to be shared with the world. One Amiga picture remained unfinished but thanks to emulation and DPaint III, it was finally completed in 2015.

This re-ignited a passion for pixel art and I turned my attention back to the old faithful ZX Spectrum and set

about finding games that never had a loading screen. My first being for Stop the Express (Hudson) and I've drawn alternative loading screens, mock-up title / in-game screens for games that were never released on the ZX Spectrum, as well as many screens for new homebrew Spectrum games and even dabbling with game graphics ever since. I've no plans to visit AAA - Artists Addiction Anonymous just yet though. I've also recently drawn screens for the Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64, though I never owned those home computers. Certainly an interesting experience with the different screen resolutions and palettes with the aforementioned compared to the ZX Spectrum.

Drawing screens today (ZX Spectrum)

I use an excellent free drawing program called Multipaint (for Windows) that emulates various 8-bit home computer resolutions and palettes. Drawing tools are limited and it's like a stripped down version of Amiga DPaint but

Stop the Express (ZX Spectrum alternative loading screen)

perfect for the methods I use to draw screens. An added bonus is that work can be saved in SCREEN$ format (.scr) for use in a Spectrum emulator or the real deal.

For alternative loading screens I've drawn, I normally copy the original game inlay artwork, or other available media (like posters, adverts, etc.) or even a custom one. Of course, some media artwork tend to be in portrait which doesn't necessarily mean it's difficult to convert to landscape. The simplest choice is to pad out objects to the left and right of the screen, which, if applicable, helps reduce colour clash (see right). Or I draw beyond the inlay to fill out the screen using my imagination.

As an example, on the right are various work in progress screenshots of a (partial) custom alternative loading screen for the game, Wheelie (Microsphere). The bike (mirrored) is from the re-released cassette inlay. The buses from photographs online and the rest, expanded on the original game graphics.

Remember buying gridded A4 paper from WHSmiths? This is a similar method used when copying. A grid (snapped to attribute blocks) is placed within Multipaint and I then draw outlines of objects to a reasonable scale to create a rough sketch, normally in just one colour (white).

Once happy with the rough sketch, it's time to start refining those objects and apply detail. Here's a tip: if objects within inlay art contain a high amount of detail, try to replicate only what stands out to you. Squeezing detail into a confined area of 16 x 16 pixels, for example, of a person's face when the original artwork contains much more detail will lead to much frustration. It's not about producing a 100% match which is nigh on impossible. It's about drawing a screen that partly resembles the original game inlay art but applying your style to make it instantly recognisable.

Adding colour and dealing with attribute (colour) clash

Ahh yes, the ZX Spectrum's infamous colour clash! Only two colours per 8 x 8 block is
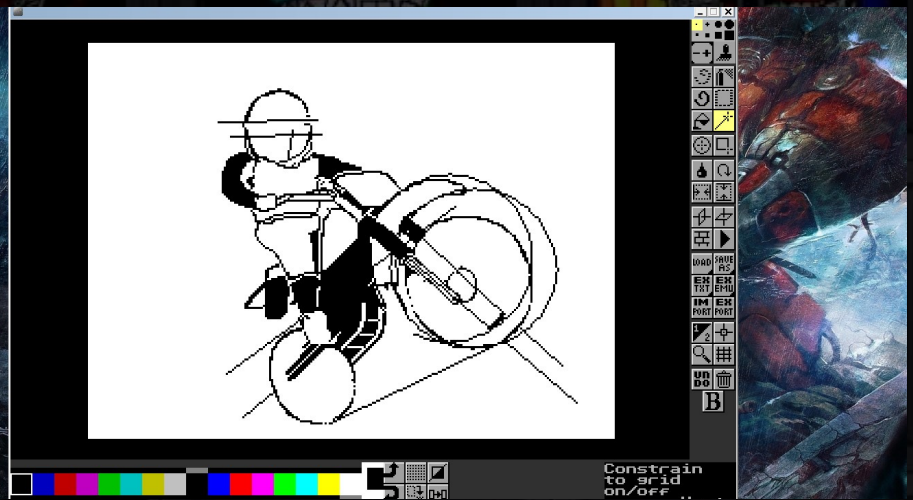
Wheelie 1 (Microsphere); copying the re-released inlay artwork motorbike
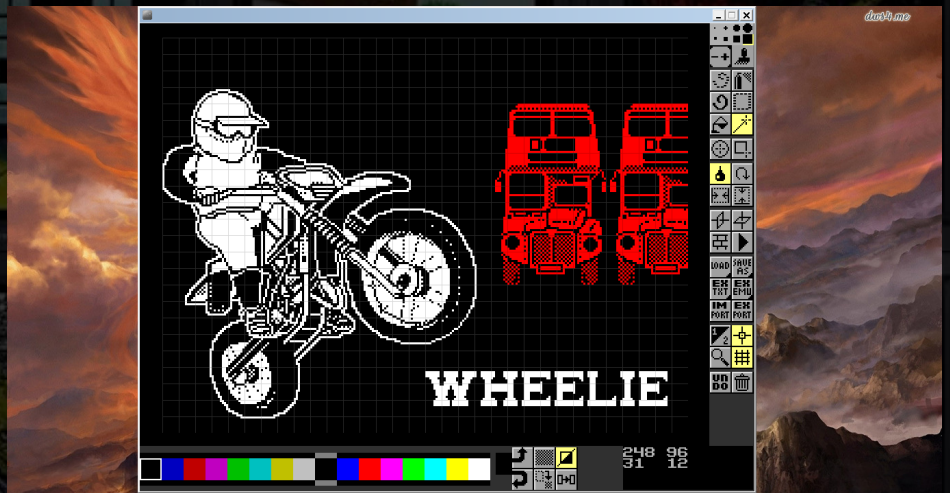
Wheelie 2 (Microsphere); copying the re-released inlay artwork motorbike
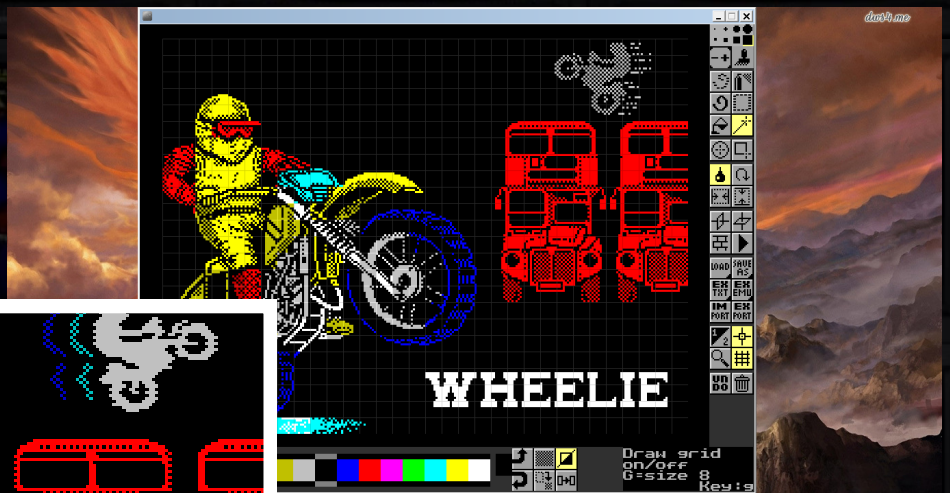
Wheelie image almost completed

permitted. This consists of Paper (background) and Ink (foreground) colours. Non-bright colours can not be mixed with bright colours either. With any picture being replicated, and the Spectrum limited to just 15 colours (8 bright and 8 non-bright; black is equal) it's not possible to match every colour so a case of picking one closest. For example, non-bright red for brown, or just go wild and see what looks most effective!

Another tip: With one screen I drew; Heavy on the Magick, the original inlay artwork consisted of many objects so drawing a rough sketch proved slightly more difficult.

Wheelie, completed image

To get round this, it was easier to plot, using single attribute blocks (8x8 pixels) of a particular colour to define where the objects are placed (e.g., candle, books, beakers, utensils, etc.). This in turn reduces colour clash with adjacent objects.

Applying shading and effects

By this point, a picture will consist of solid or hollow objects and depending on the type of artwork being copied, it's a case of adding colour and shading (or dithering as it's called) which, for most I've done, consists of adjacent 2x2 black pixels to give the desired effect. Shading is normally linked to light sources but you don't need to be over-particular about this (again, depends on original picture type) but it can give the illusion of depth.

So there you have it in a nutshell; above is a rough guideline to how I normally draw most screens. As for how long a screen takes for me to draw this really depends on contents, anything from 5 to 20 hours. There are of course many other methods other pixel artists use and it's all about what works best for you. My love for pixel art is a hobby I thoroughly enjoy and the only limit is your imagination, so Why not give it a go?

Heavy on the Magick, ZX Spectrum alternative loading screen

Heavy on the Magick, Amstrad CPC alternative loading screen

Reflections of Tranquillity, ZX Spectrum - personal scenic drawing

First Samurai (ZX Spectrum - mock up in-game screen - never released on the Spectrum)

Toki - Amstrad CPC - mock up loading screen - never released on Amstrad (apparently homebrew version being released in 2019 - Ed)
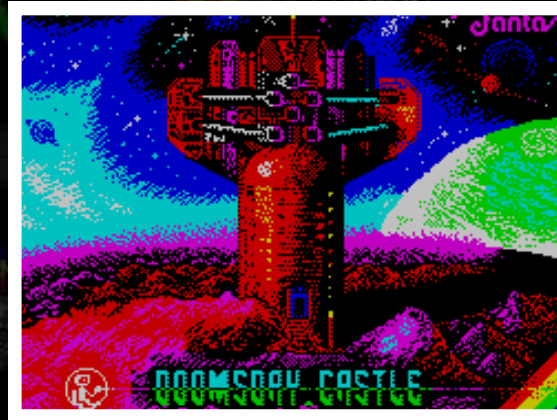
Doomsday Castle, ZX Spectrum alternative loading screen
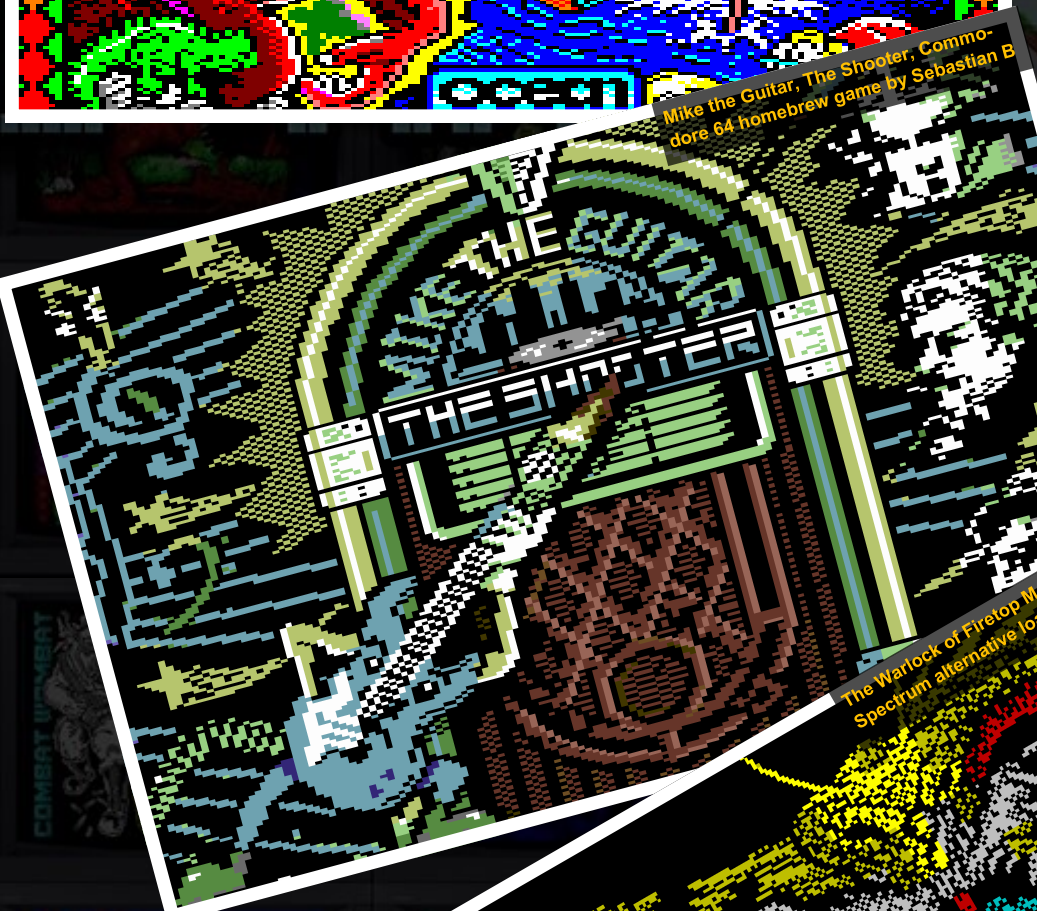
Mike the Guitar, The Shooter, Commodore 64 homebrew game by Sebastian B
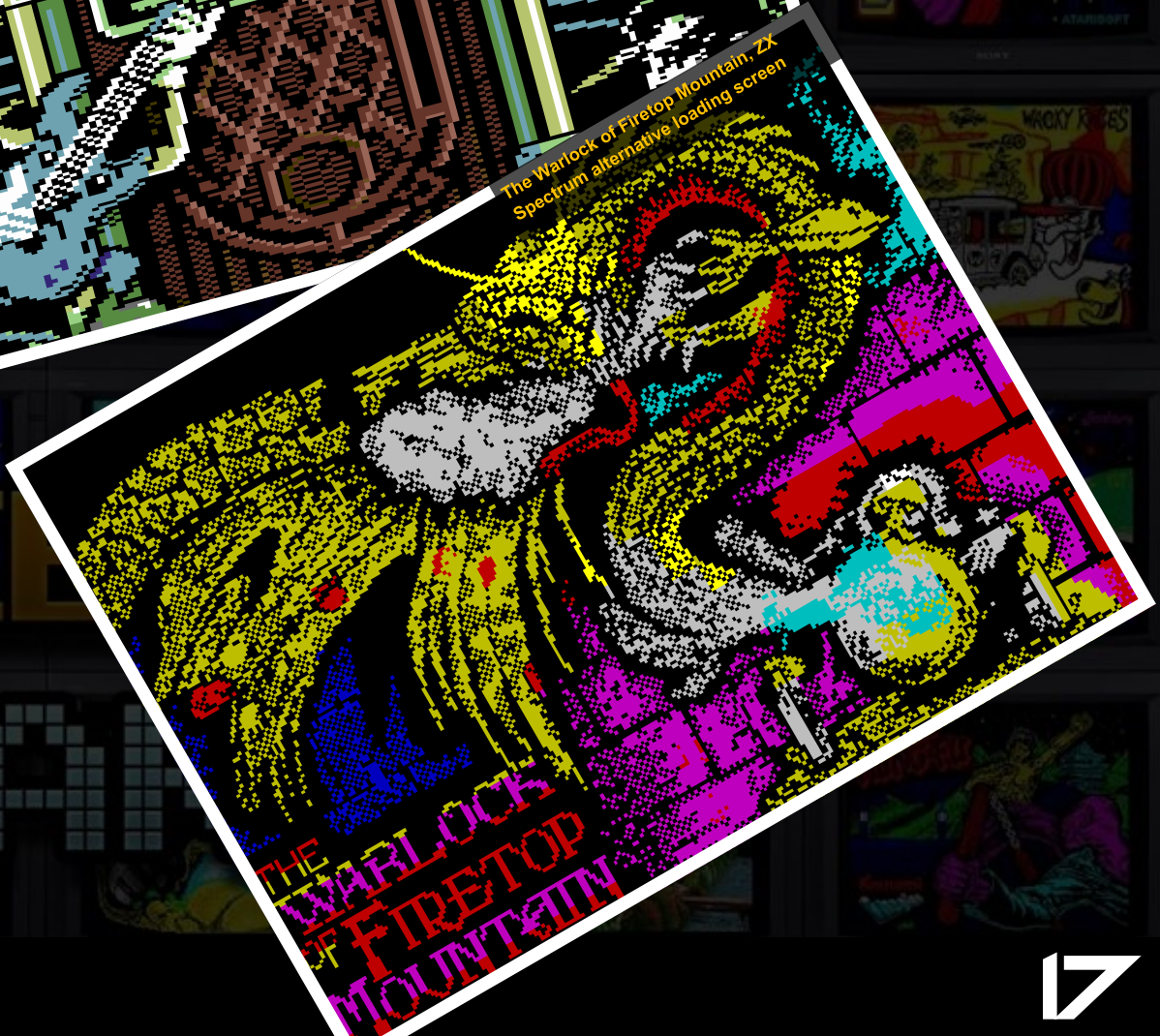
The Warlock of Firetop Mountain, ZX Spectrum alternative loading screen

Amstrad CPC CHESS VIA LAN / ONLINE

By Joseman

HI, I am Joseman, from Spain. My English is not so good so please bare with me. Here is my story about Amstrad CPC Chess using LAN. The concept began when my friend, Rafa asked me to get a real CPC for him as he wanted to go back in time and re-live all those fond memories he had with his brothers when they were growing up. So last year I got a CPC 6128 with CTM644 colour monitor for him. I opened it and put inside a 512k memory expansion and included an M4 Wi-Fi / micro SD board.

Rafa, loved playing games on his CPC again. He loves to play chess so we looked at

making a game on Symbos, because there are online games on it, but I was waiting for the next version of the IDE enviromment to program on Symbos so this idea was discarded quickly. The next choice was (obviously) program it directly on the CPC. So I set about coding it entirely on my own. Rafa told me a lot of tips on chess and the rules.

Duke (he made the M4 board), helped me with some problems with my code on the Lan part of the M4. The code is 100% assembler. I used Winape to code all of the game. The code was generated on the different versions directly to the PC, HDD. Then with the xfer utility (by Duke) transferred and executed

directly onto the CPC's. For the chess pieces, I simply copied the 2D graphics of Colossus Chess from CDS software (1986), with a snap shot. Then I magnified the pieces to 1000% or so and with Rgas (a sprite editor), I edited the chess pieces pixel by pixel.

I started the project on 26 / 02 / 2018 at 13:43pm and the last revision (English language) was 28 / 03 / 2018 at 1:28am. It's so precise because the creation and modification dates are on the file I called main.asm.

So how did I get the game to be played between another CPC I hear you asking? The chess part of the game was relatively easy to
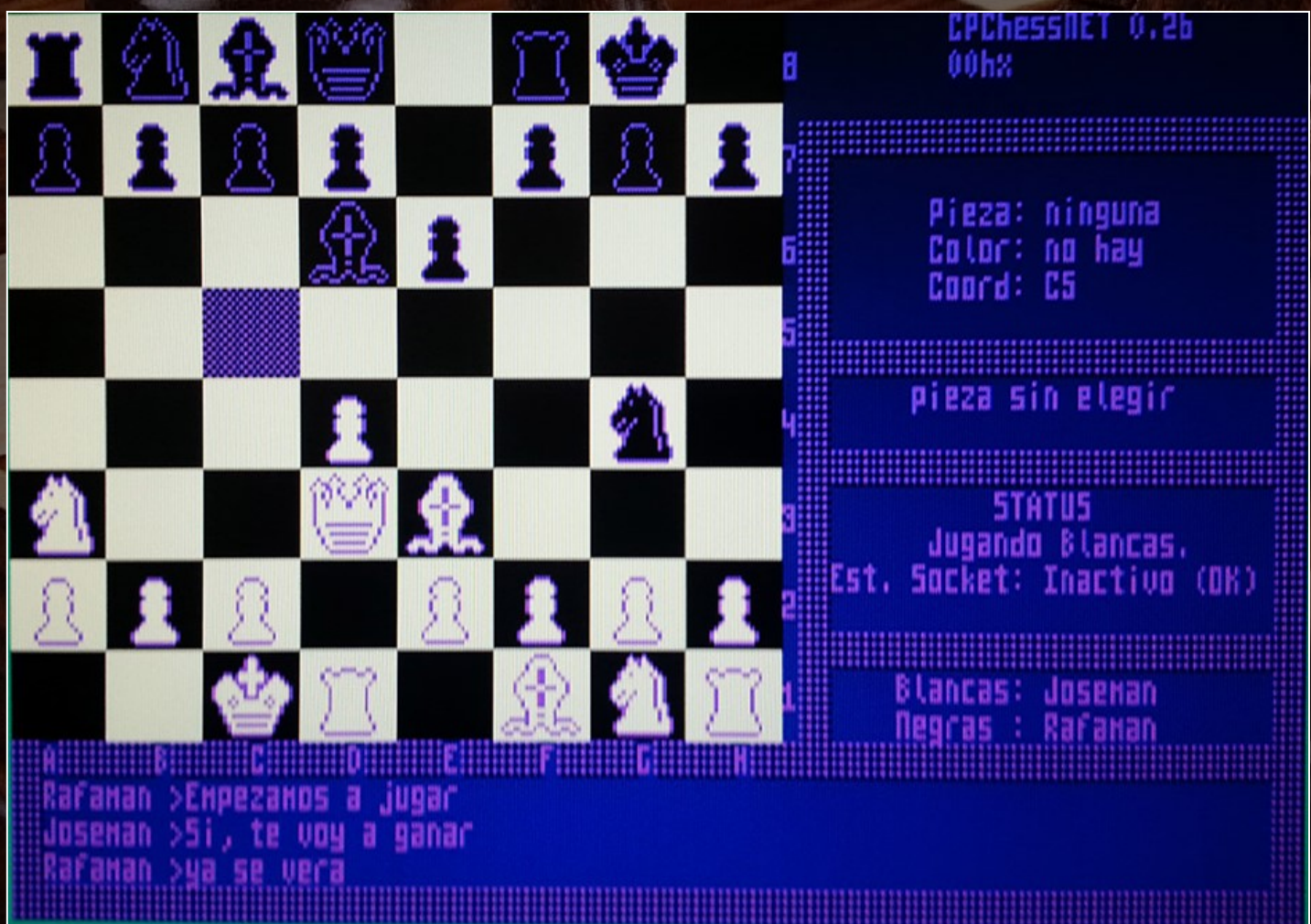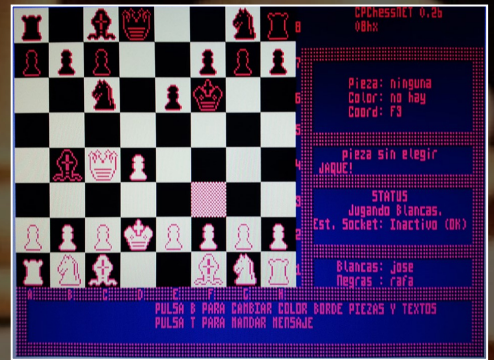
do, it's a one-dimensional table with the 64 board squares and the piece locations. There is another table to know if the squares are black or white to make the piece movement and repaint the square. Then you invert the coordinates if the black is moving or the white is moving, and you INC or DEC the board pointer to do the logic of the pieces. On the chess part the most difficult thing was the check and checkmate condition, on these days I was going to sleep or walking on the street thinking how to do it!.

When I did the check part, the checkmate part was even more difficult because you have to calculate if the King can avoid the check condition by itself (without falling on another check condition), if not, look if any of our pieces can capture the threatening piece or put itself between our King and the enemy piece and a special condition for the Knights!.

But the hard part without any doubt was the LAN part of the game, because there isn't any

emulator that emulates the M4 board. It was a real hell, it was like coding blind the LAN part, inject the code on the two CPC's (I had 2 CPC's with M4 board to test the game), and if anything was going wrong, you had to guess what exactly was going on.

I coded a little debug code that was showing on screen the register values and the last enter on the stack to know what functions were involved on the bug. But it was really hard anyway, and the chess movements part only worked with the two CPC's connected and playing. Then if a bug occurred it could be a chess bug or a LAN bug but you have to guess on Winape what was the problem, make changes, inject the code, see that it didn't' work and repeat these same steps 10 or 15 times!.

And the chat part was a little hard too, because in the first version of the game, if you opened a chat window to write a message, the game wasn't looking for any

received message of the other side. This meant that if one of the CPC's had made a move in the game when you had a chat window opened, the board never received the move and the two CPC's start to think that the other side had the move turn.

It took almost 15 minutes on the first online game we played to be aware of that, because the two sides were waiting for the move of the other side. When the move started to look as though it was taking a lot of time, we sent some chat messages like "you have to move", "no it's your turn!". That's how we found out it was not working properly.

Then I had to recode all the chat code and add a control byte on the data sent between the two CPC's to make sure that all the data was received ok. The speed is almost immediate on LAN, on internet it depends on each sides connection. The data that is sent is a 1 control byte + 64 byte board + 8 byte pawn_table (for the en passant move). The control byte is a byte that tells the game if the data received is a board, a message chat, an end game situation or a transmission confirmation message.

The game is 64k compatible and any CPC can execute the game. You need two CPC's each one must have an M4 board. Unfortunately, there isn't any emulator supporting the M4 at this time. Well, my friend, Rafa, was very grateful to me for doing the game! Since completing it, I have played various online games with people all around the world. Some people sent me messages saying that it was like a childhood dream for them. I have even heard that some CPC party's groups will try to do an online competition, which would be cool to see.

To download the link is here - http:// www.amstrad.es/doku.php? id=juegos:cpchessnet. The M4 board is made by Duke (a nice nice guy). His link is here - Webpage: http:// www.spinpoint.org/2016/05/06/m4-board- retrofun-8-bit-amstrad-cpc-wifi/
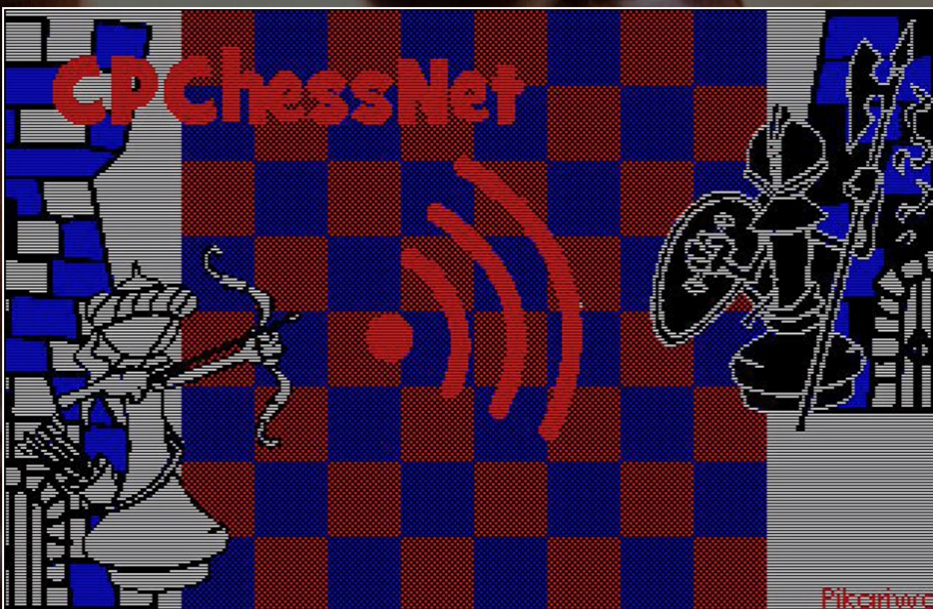
JUAN J MARTINEZ

By George Bachaelor

Dawn of Kernel, opening screen - Amstrad CPC, 2018

Juan J Martinez, never heard of him you say? Well if your into 8-bit gaming it would have been very hard not to have seen Juan J. Martinez tweeting on twitter about his 8-bit game development projects. By day Juan, works as a Software Engineer, but for fun he has been programming since he was the ripe old age of 13. His very first experience with computers was with his cousin's, 48K, ZX Spectrum. Soon after this experience his parents bought him a ZX Spectrum +2 for Christmas. While he had a Spectrum in the home, he also had the opportunity to use and work with an Amstrad CPC 6128 at school, where he learned some coding in Amstrad CPC Basic.

Juan says "I've been making games on and off for some time, but I wasn't very successful finishing things. I joined some game jams in 2013 but it wasn't until 2014, that I actually submitted a game for the Speccy Jam 2. It was a PC game emulating the restrictions of a ZX Spectrum, and that made me wonder, just how hard would it be to make a "real" ZX Spectrum game? That's how I started making games for old 8-bit microcomputers".

Five years on and many games later, Juan has gone on to be a prolific 8-bit gaming coder / developer. I say prolific with great pleasure as the games Juan has made cover multiple 8-bit platforms - the ZX Spectrum, C64, Amstrad CPC and now I have found out via his twitter feed that Juan is undertaking his first MSX game project called Moonstone. Well that would have been the case, however Moonstone has been placed on hold and instead a platformer, Night Knight for the MSX, has been released instead. While I have not played all of Juan's games, I am a massive fan of the games he has created on the Amstrad CPC.

They are impressive on all fronts. Music is always catchy, complimenting gameplay. Graphics are always colourful and make the Amstrad CPC look like an amazing games machine. Sprites and animations for each of his Amstrad CPC games are of such high standard you could be forgiven for thinking these games were commercial releases from the 1990's. As for the gameplay and playability, well that definitely is the icing on the Amstrad CPC cake so to speak.

There is innovation such as the Koga Magic (invisible teleporter) in Golden Tail as well as an incredible amount of creativity in his most recent Amstrad CPC game release, Dawn of the Kernel. It's hard to not get addicted to Juan's Amstrad CPC games, all the more impressive is that the games all play in 64kb, there are no enhancements to memory or anything else. In fact Dawn of Kernel is so good it has received a 'MEGA' game status in the Amstrad CPC reviews section of this 8-bit Annual.

THOSE 8-bit WARS WILL NEVER DIE!

Back in 2016, I was trying to release an Amstrad CPC year book / magazine and failed. Anyway long story short during this experience I had the opportunity to ask Juan, just how did he get involved in coding CPC games? The answer was fuelled by listening to an 8-bit wars podcast.

Juan said "I think it was after a Retro Asylum podcast about 8-bit wars. Basically they compared games of the most popular 8-bit home computers in the U.K. The ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64. It was a lot like the computer "wars" we had in our school days, arguing and making claims which was the best 8-bit system? Some friends at my school had an Amstrad CPC 464, but back then you had one system and that was all, so basically that is who you fought for in the school yard. Retro Asylum podcast that I had listened to sparked my curiosity and shortly after someone nearby was selling a CPC 464 with colour monitor, and I couldn't resist not getting one to try my hand at developing games with it. I had already had some experience making games for the Speccy, so I thought how hard can it be on the Amstrad CPC?"

HOW an MSX game was born

Juan says "I have a few friends that love the MSX so I always wanted to know what was all that about? After I finished with The Dawn of Kernel there was a month until it was released, because the publisher needed some time to duplicate the cassettes, disks, etc. I had a week off, so I decided to investigate the MSX system. Turns out it is quite interesting! It is both similar and quite different than any other 8-bit systems I know, so I'm quite enjoying learning new things. I'm developing a new game under the working title of "Moonstone" and it'll be similar to Rescuing Orc (adventure platformer), a game I released in 2017 for the Commodore 64. It all happens again in the World of Magica and, although it is still quite early on, I think it'll be a prequel to the story of Rescuing Orc. I'm going to use this game to try some ideas I want to include in The Goblin King, the sequel to Rescuing Orc for the Commodore 64." So that was the original plan, Moonstone was going to be his first MSX game release, but now Night Knight has become Juan's first ever MSX game release.

Interesting 2019 on the way?

On January 2nd, 2019, Juan informed his followers on twitter there were games for three different 8-bit systems in the works for a possible 2019 release, it could be four. Night Knight was released for the MSX on May 15th, 2019. Upcoming games in the works is platformer, Kitsune's Curse, the follow up to Golden Tail (Amstrad CPC). Maze type explorer, Starblind, is in progress for the Spectrum and there is still the Moonstone project for the MSX - an interesting 2019 for the 8-bit community it appears it will be. Juan J. Martinez, 8 BIT ANNUAL salutes you and all your coding achievements for the 8-bit gaming community - it is simply awesome!

THE JUAN J. MARTINEZ 8-bit GAME FILES

This is the full list of all Juan's completed 8-bit games released over the years. All games are free to play! Find out more by going to his website https://www.usebox.net/jjm/games/

Amstrad CPC
The Dawn of Kernel
Magica
Golden Tail
The Return of Traxtor
Space Pest Control
Kitsune's Curse (work in progress).

Commodore 64
Rescuing Orc
Goblin King (sequel to Rescuing Orc in development)

ZX Spectrum
Castaway
The Return of Traxtor
Black Star
Escape from Colony 8
Micro INC
The Legend of Traxtor (ZX)
Starblind (work in progress)

MSX
Moonstone (work in progress).
Night Knight (released May 2019)

Rescuing Orc, C64, 2017

Moonstone, MSX game, work in progress, 2018
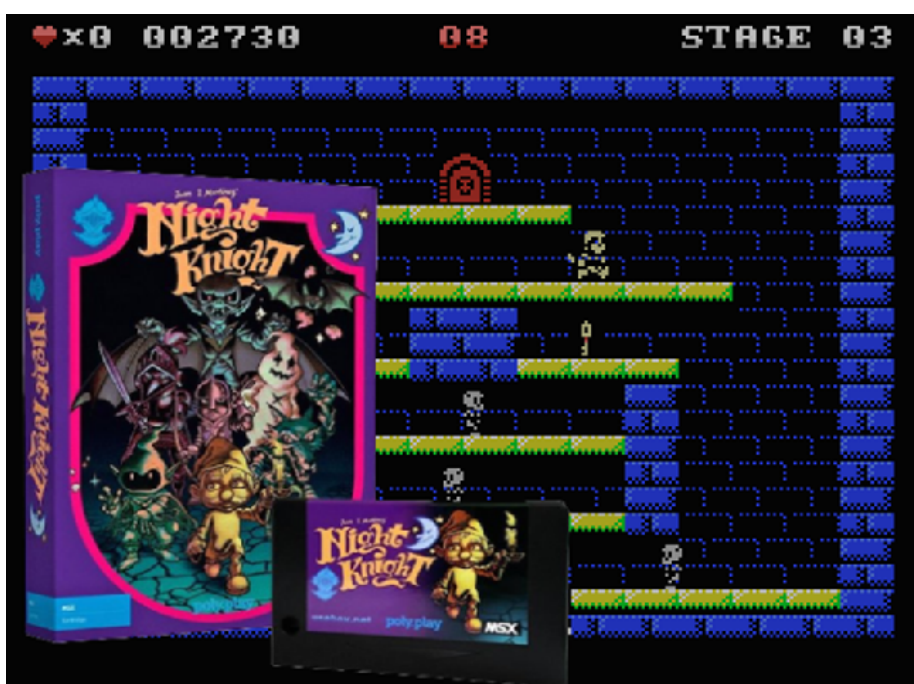
Night Knight's impressive physical release box and cartridge artwork and in game screenshot. Colour the squares, avoid enemies and exit when all tiles are coloured

AMSTRAD CPC COLLECTORS CABINS

Thomas's CPC 464 and games collection as well as Dizzy posters!

Thomas Scoffham

Hello there! I have been collecting games for 17 years now, give or take. My main passion is for the Amstrad CPC 464, which I first got when I was 14. It was bought to help me with my school work but like most people it ended up being used for playing games. Just loading up the cassettes pleases me. The distinctive loading noise always takes me back. My collection was kept in the attic but my wife very nicely allowed me to take over the dining room. So my Amstrad collection of 1300 cassettes and boxes began there. Journey south and my man cave was finally born. I'm a big Dizzy fan and love other titles such as Robocop and Wec Le Mans. I still buy newly developed Amstrad games as well. So let's hope there's more collecting and playing brand new titles to come in the future.

Even more games shelved and presented in Thomas's house

Jason Cass

Got my Amstrad CPC 464 way back in 1986 for Christmas. Was in a cupboard in my mums bathroom for the best part of 25 years! Took it home, cleaned it up, hey presto it worked for the first time! I turned our spare room into a games room, and this has pride of place, although nowadays I play the ROM's on an emulator on my PSP. I'd say I have collected about 1000 Amstrad CPC games, give or take a few. Favourite games? Probably Elite, Soccer Boss and Footballer of the Year (yeah I love that one too -Ed). But, I always looked forward to games by Hewson & Gremlin, as often they were so awesome on the CPC.

CPC games can be stored anywhere says Jason

Jason's games in storage

Paul Kemp

I have been a retro collector for the last 14 years. I had an Amstrad CPC 6128, Commodore 16 and an Amiga 500 during the 1980's and early 1990's until the PC started to take over. After discovering Ebay in 2014 my love for the 8-bit machines was rekindled. I built up a nice collection of computers until my divorce in 2011 and ended up selling the lot. Started collecting again in 2013 as my current wife is also a lover of the old stuff and she takes me to many a place to pick up items that show up now and then. My main collection is the CPC. I currently have over 1800 pieces of software displayed and 6 boxed machines. Still have a big box of software to sort out yet. I also have a soft spot for the Commodore 16 and have quite a bit of software and a couple of boxed C16 computers stored elsewhere.

Immaculate presentation from Paul Kemp's games collection

Paul Kemp

Rare item in Paul's collection, an Amstrad CPC 664!

Christian Van Tilburg

Hey there, I am Christian Van Tilburg. I wasn't an Amstrad man, I was brought up back in the day when you fought hard in the school yard about which 8-bit computer system was the best. Back then I had a ZX Spectrum and I made sure every non speccy kid knew their place because for me the Speccy was the best. My oh my, how things change. Now as a collector and gamer in my mid 40's, I want to collect all of the major 8-bit systems from the 1980's - ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, BBC Micro and Amstrad CPC's. However, I must mention as a collector the so called power of the Commodore 64 that I hear so much of doesn't blow me away, it is the power of the Amstrad CPC and the quality of this machine that does blow me away. I am the proud owner of three Amstrad CPC 464's and a growing collection of Amstrad tapes. My wife and family are incredibly supportive of my retro computing enthusiasm and they have even built an extension to our home so I could have my own man cave. My children have grown up with the sounds of data loading on cassette tape just like I had before them, oh the great times live on.

Christian doing his Bill Gates IBM impersonation but with one of his three Amstrad CPC 464's

That's a lot of CPC tape games Christian! Awesome looking collection beautifully presented

Patrick Furlong

I have been a CPC fanatic since the age of 5. I specialise in collecting Codemasters games on the Amstrad CPC.I am one game away from completing the set, that game I need is Wrestling Superstars - I can't find that game anywhere, hopefully it will turn up one day. My Amstrad CPC games total approx 300 - 400. I also have a complete set of Amstrad Action magazines and all but one of the countless AA covertapes. I have my Amstrad CPC set up in a corner of my bedroom, luckily for me I live alone so no one in my family can ever give me grief about my collection being in the way and taking up so much space. I also collect other systems. I have a C64, Commodore Amiga, various consoles and all added up my total games collection is near to 800 titles.

Look at all those AA covertapes and Codemasters games!

Lot's of big boxes in my collection along with a few 3" disk based games

ATARI GAMES IN
TESLA CARS

By George Bachaelor

Retro gaming influences are a dime a dozen these days, old school gaming often meets new school systems, whether it be on mobile devices such as smartphones and ipads or new hardware where the Spectrum Next and Raspberry Pi come to mind. In 2018, something a bit different, something quite unexpected, something new, innovative and a little left of field, just happened to show another of these old school gaming meeting new school systems, this time coming from a car company.

While not exactly 8-bit based, the announcement from Elon Musk via twitter in August of 2018, that Atari games were coming to Tesla Electric model vehicles certainly had many retro gamers and enthusiasts captivated. What has been revealed since Elon Musk's tweet, is that four absolute iconic Atari arcade games - Asteroids, Centipede, Missile Command and Lunar Lander have been installed on the new Tesla software update Version 9.0. It was widely reported that Pole Position would be included too, but not at this time unfortunately, Musk has hinted it could be on

Elon Musk
@elonmusk

Following

Some of best classic @Atari games coming as Easter eggs in Tesla V9.0 release in about 4 weeks. Thanks @Atari!

4:40 AM - 2 Aug 2018

4,177 Retweets   36,020 Likes

1.6K   4.2K   36K

Elon Musk announcing that Atari games were coming in the next Tesla OS upgrade

a future upgrade and these four mentioned games are just the tip of the iceberg for games on Tesla vehicles.

A specific customized emulator enables the owner and passengers of a Tesla car to play modified versions of Atari's original arcade cabinet games via the touch screen display. For obvious safety reasons, the Atari games can only be played while the car is parked.

Playing Centipede in a Tesla!

Judging by the images below, people love the idea of having Atari games installed in their car. The games themselves look great too, nothing appears to be out of place, they look like and play as their original releases but with a more modern playing approach, there is no use of a joystick or gamepad. The four games installed are fantastic choices, as they are considered to be some of the best retro Atari arcade games ever released.

Discussing Games.
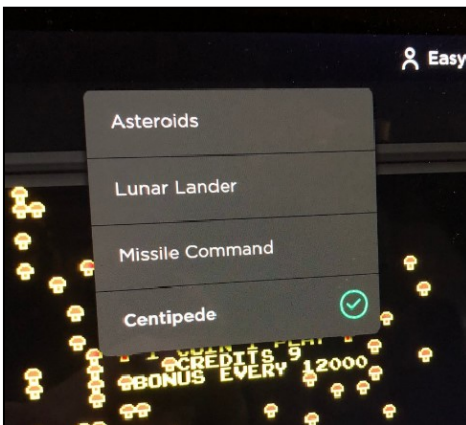
Just some of the games available, more to come

The massive 17-inch touchscreen suits retro gaming very well. There's enough screen space to display a well sized game screen along with good space for the virtual buttons

The Tesla model S is just one of the models that can play Atari games

In 2018, The BASIC 10Liners competition run and organised by Gunnar Kanold, celebrated its seventh year of showcasing games written in 10 lines of 8-bit code. In total 66 entries were received on various 8-bit systems, that's two more than 2017 but 23 less than 2016. While the development contest is open to all 8-bit machines, it was particularly disappointing to observe there were no Spectrum entries this year and only a handful of MSX, Tandy and Amstrad CPC games as Atari and C64 dominated the four contest categories. If you have not followed The BASIC 10Liners contest before, the rules are simple - code a game in BASIC only using 10 lines of code. All of the games must be workable on an emulator and inform the judges on how to play them. The competition is constantly evolving. The three well-known BASIC contest categories remain as well as by popular demand - another category in which machine code is allowed. The basis of each of the contest categories are as follows:

Category "PUR-80"

Program a game in 10 lines (max 80 characters per logical line, abbreviations are allowed).

Category "PUR-120"

Program a game in 10 lines (max 120 characters per logical line, abbreviations are allowed).

Category "EXTREME-256"

Program a game in 10 lines (max 256 characters per logical line, abbreviations are allowed).

Category "WILD"

Submitted programs that do not comply with the rules are summarized in this category. For the full results of THE BASIC 10Liner contest and to download all the games visit this link: gkanold.wixsite.com/homeputerium/basic-10liners-2018.

Category "PUR-80"

1st Switchback. Coded by Eric Henneke on Atari XL / XE.
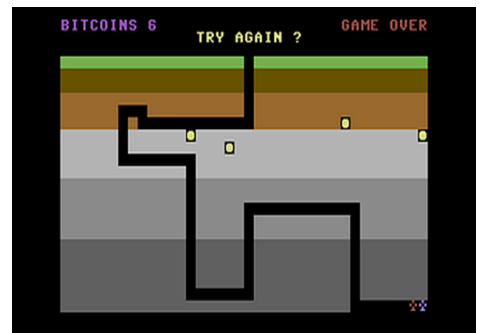
2nd place. Bitcoin Miner, Coded by Romwer on C64.

3rd place. Last Outpost. Coded by 5ace on C64.

Category "PUR-120"

1st place. WR-Ball! Coded by Zoltán Szőke on C64. (see right).

RESULTS CATEGORY "PUR-80"

Placing	Game	Developer	System	Score
1st	Switchback	Eric Henneke	Atari XE/XL	8.79
2nd	Bitcoin Miner	Romwer	C64	8.67
3rd	Last Outpost	5ace	C64	7.67
	Base Scout	onlineprof2010	C64	7.67
5th	Bomber	Endurion	C64	7.33
6th	Deep Canyon	Vitoco	Atari XE/XL	7.21
7th	Space Patrol	Masterware	VIC-20	7.17
8th	Long Jump	Kevin Becker	M100	7.00
9th	Golf 64	romwer	C64	6.83
10th	Uncle Simon	Vitoco	Atari	6.64
11th	Duck!!!	Sander Alsema	C64	6.50
	2nd Stroop	somebody	Atari XE/XL	6.50
	Windy Day	Sander Alsema	C64	6.50
14th	Knight's Tour	Micione	VIC-20	6.33
15th	ESU Pro Boxing	5ace	C64	6.00
16th	Spike Dislike	layenkai	Amstrad CPC	5.17
	Chemtrail Pilot	Zaadii	C64	5.17
18th	Böser Watz	Cylex + Telespielator	Amstrad CPC	4.67
19th	Codebreaker	48kRAM	M100	4.25
20th	Squareland	Holy Moses / Role	C64	4.20
21st	Egg Collector	Sander Alsema	C64	3.83
22nd	Top Broker	5ace	C64	3.17
23rd	Goat	Cout	C64	2.83
24th	Hacking the Logon	Matteo Trevisan	CoCo	1.00

RESULTS CATEGORY "PUR-120"

Placing	Game	Developer	System	Score
1st	WR-Ball!	Zoltán Szőke	C64	9.17
2nd	Slalom 1.1	Naufr4g0	C64	8.50
3rd	Magic Cups	Vitoco	Atari XE/XL	8.36
4th	Der Kappellmeister	1NG	Atari XE/XL	8.00
5th	Alby, the albino	Vitoco	Atari XE/XL	7.21
6th	Fin Lander	NYYRIKKI	MSX	7.20
7th	Build10	Bill K	Atari XE/XL	7.17
8th	Maze Race	Jim Geerie	MC-10	7.10
9th	Drop	leffpiep	Atari XE/XL	6.93
10th	Numaze	Ken Pettit	M200	6.75
11th	Crazy Balloon II	8Bit 1337	Atari XE/XL	6.50
12th	GATES	Mr SQL	VCS	6.17
13th	Alien Attack	Out Bush	MC-10	5.90
14th	Diamond Hunt	Jim Gerrie	MC-10	5.50
15th	Dots & Boxes	Bill K	Atari XE/XL	5.33
16th	Alert 0	Jim Gerrie	MC-10	5.00
17th	PENG!!!	Christian Jacobi	C64	3.33

RESULTS CATEGORY "WILD"

Placing	Game	Developer	System
1st	Golf 64 Selector	Romwer	C64
2nd	Aliens Attack	Out Bush	Amstrad CPC
3rd	Plan0	Bill K	Atari XE/XL
	Squidscape	SEGLabs	C64
5th	Starfield	Baptiste Bideaux	Amstrad CPC
6th	APR-X	octasoft	C64
7th	Eastership 2018	logician	C64
8th	Amiga BASIC Login	Matteo Trevisan	Amiga

RESULTS CATEGORY "EXTREM-256"

Placing	Game	Developer	System	Score
1st	Defensor	Vitoco	Atari XE/XL	9.83
2nd	Tempest	Carangil	CoCo 2	9.30
3rd	ShiPS!	Zoltán Szőke	C128	8.83
4th	La Peste	Vitoco	Atari XE/XL	8.71
5th	Defender	leffpiep	Atari XE/XL	8.21
6th	Good Guy Bad Guy	Hexworx	C64	8.17
7th	Tetris	Jim Geerie	MC-10	8.00
8th	Skydiver	slx	Atari XE/XL	7.67
9th	Red Meets	Out Bush	Amstrad CPC	7.50
10th	BOSSNVDR	Eric Henneke	Atari XE/XL	7.43
11th	Asteroid Belt	Giovanni Nunes	MSX	5.80
12th	Red's Hurdles	Out Bush	Amstrad CPC	5.67
13th	Katy Ledecky's	joesg	MSX	5.60
14th	Last Target	Snake Plissken	Amstrad CPC	4.83
15th	Race 2018	Baptiste Bideaux	Amstrad CPC	4.17
16th	Castle Thief	onlineprof2010	C64	3.17
17th	30 Seconds	Wiremu Te Kani	Amstrad CPC	3.00

ACTUAL SITE
SCORE FROM PREVIOUS AND CURRENT SITE
SITE PROGRESS
REPAINT COLORS
CURRENT HIGH SCORE
AIM CURSOR
REPAINTS LEFT
BUILDING TO CLEAR
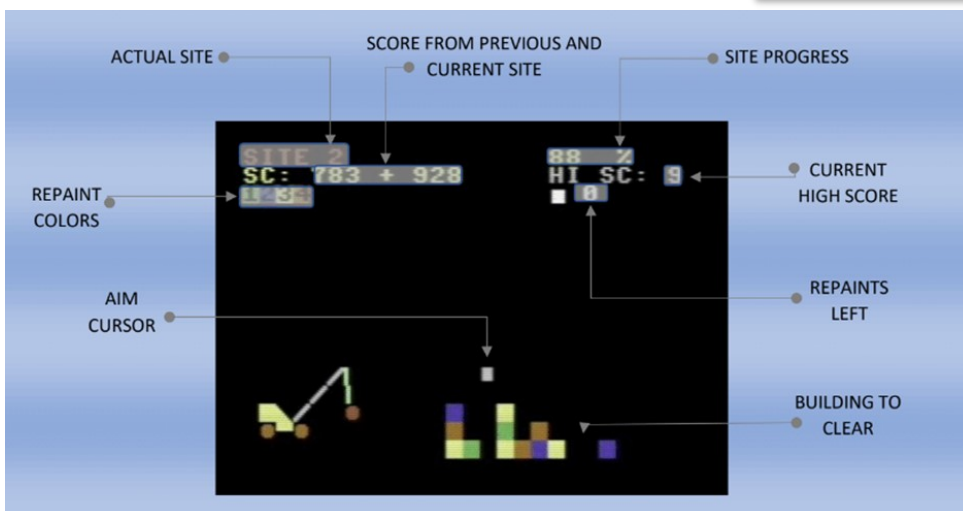
2nd place. Slalom 1.1. Coded by Naufr4g0 on C64.

3rd place. Magic Cups. Coded by Vitoco on Atari XE / XL. (next page).

Category "EXTREME-256"

1st place. Defensor. Coded by Vitoco on Atari XL / XE.
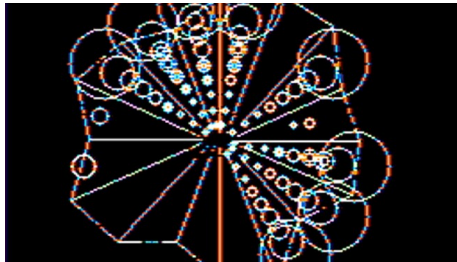
2nd place. Tempest. Coded by Carangil on Tandy CoCo 2.

3rd place. Ships! Coded by Zoltán Szőke on C64.

CATEGORY "WILD"

1st place. Golf64 Selector. Coded by Romwer on C64.

2nd place. Aliens Attack. Coded by Out Bush on Amstrad CPC.

3rd place. P1an0. Coded by Bill K on Atari XL / XE.

OTHER ENTRIES

Amstrad CPC

Starfield. By Baptiste Bideaux.
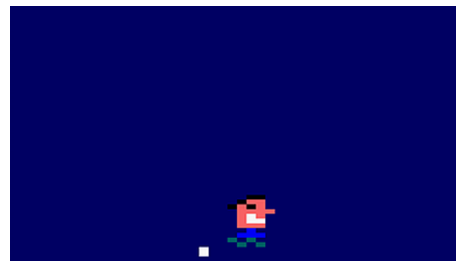
Reds Hurdles. Coded by Out Bush on Amstrad CPC.

MSX

ASTEROID BELT. By Giovanni Nunes. (top right).
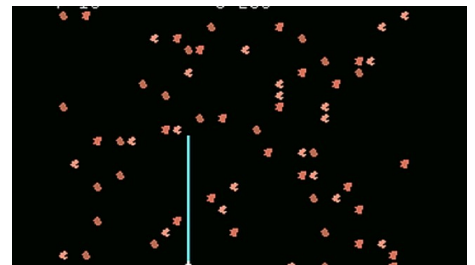
Fin Lander 1.0. By NYYRIKKI.

TANDY TRS 80

Tetris. By Jim Gerrie.
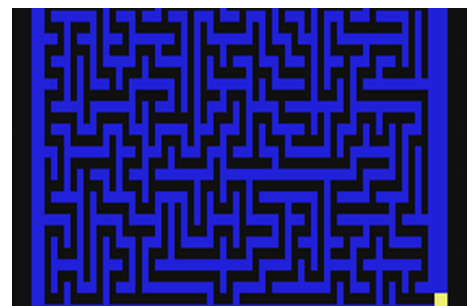
Maze Race. By Jim Gerrie.

ATARI 8-bit

BOSSNDVR. Coded by Eric Henneke on Atari 8-bit.

GENESIS PROJECT

www.gp-64.com

Review by Louie Dimovski

Hi there, I am Louie Dimovski, founder of the RetroGamerNation YouTube channel and contributor to multiple retro-gaming themed Internet blog sites, and I have a great passion for 8-bit personal computer hardware and gaming, with the Commodore 64 being my specialty.

As part of my daily routine of keeping up to date with new gaming developments for retro systems, I came across a Twitter post from The Future Was 8-bit (TFW8B), promoting the physical release of RodMan. What stood out in the announcement was that the game was not released for one format but 8 different systems (Amstrad CPC, Atari 8-bit, C16, C64, MSX, Oric, Vic 20 and ZX Spectrum) and that the release would, initially, only be available in a special triple cassette covering all of these formats. Being an avid collector of current generation 8-bit releases, there was no way I was going to miss out on having this unique product in my collection.

RodMan is developed by hobbyist programmer, Mika 'Misfit' Keränen, who has recently been quite active in developing new games for vintage personal computer systems (Cheese & Onion (VIC-20), Pentagorat (VIC-20), WTF (C64) and Time Pilot (ZX Spectrum). Mika is always looking for projects where he can add a new perspective to timeless classics so when TFW8B asked him to port his previous titles to other formats, he instead came up with the idea to create a new title that would be designed to be easily portable across all of the 8-bit personal computers that he personally owned. It was surprising to hear that the whole development timeline was only a few months (working on and off when time permitted) with about 90% of the code being shared across all platforms, meaning that platform specific coding only took a few days for each supported system.

Taking a look at the game itself, Rodman is a great example of reimaging classic titles that provide a fresh gaming experience. Upon first glance, you would be forgiven to consider Rodman as nothing more than a Pac-Man clone, however, as you start to guide RodMan around the maze collecting round pills while avoiding enemy characters, you soon realised that in place of power pills are diamond bombs that can be used to blow up and eliminate the bad guys, similar to another classic game, Bomberman.

The game also takes a departure from single screen action by having its game levels spread across three distinct screens which is supposed to depict a house setting with a garden and basement. Completing a level requires the pills to be collected from all 3 screens.

Overall the game play style is somewhat consistent and very responsive across all versions. Despite the limited levels on offer, RodMan does provide quite a bit of a challenge which will ensure that it will take many hours before it can be mastered. Perhaps the main criticism of RodMan is that collision detection is somewhat dubious and you will often lose a life despite it being visually clear that the enemy character did not touch your RodMan character. Despite this oversight in game design, it is hard not to be drawn into this modern day reinterpretation of
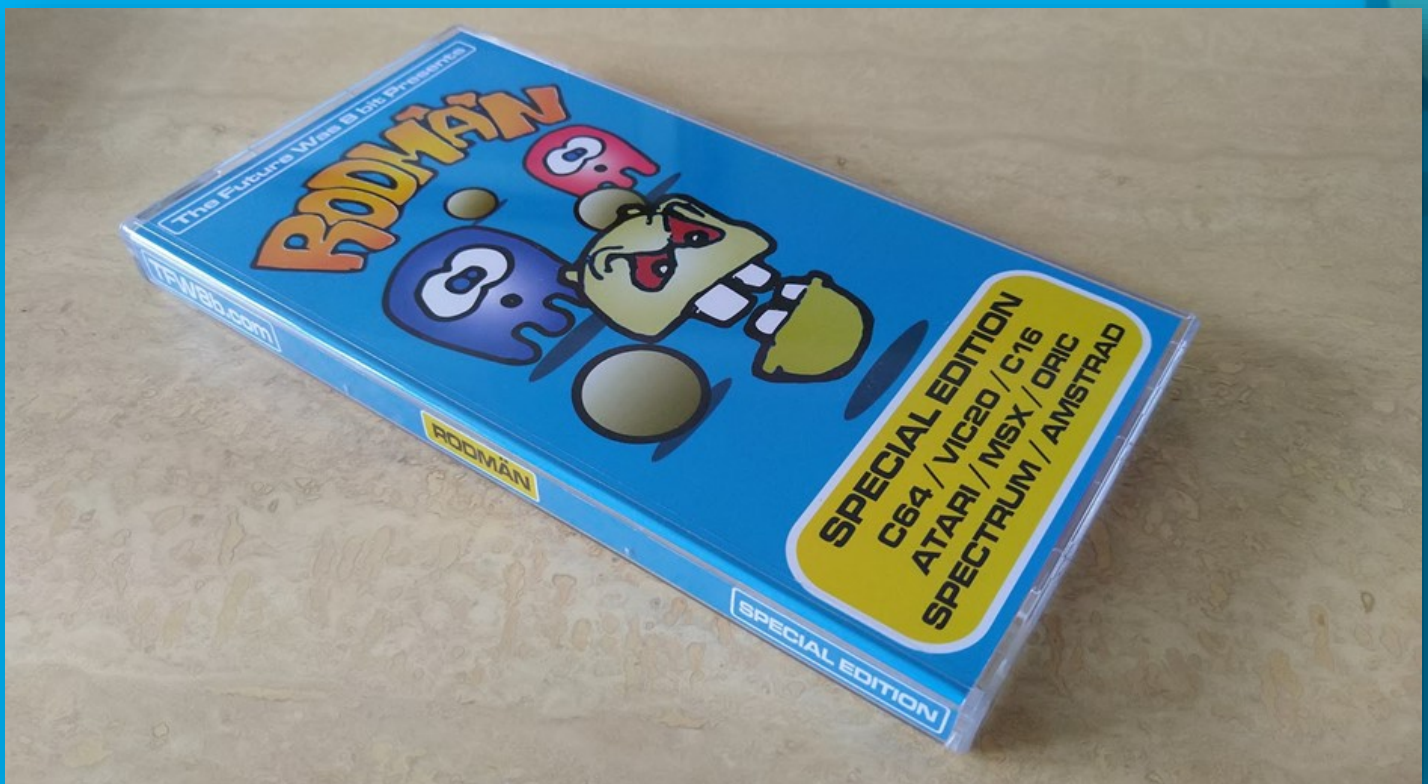
a classic title that provides some engaging game play.

AMSTRAD CPC VERSION

The Amstrad CPC version uses Mode 1 graphics, which means only 4 colours are used on screen at any one time. This produces a bright colour scheme but it means that all enemy characters are of the same colour, making it a little difficult to immediately distinguish between them.

SCORE 70%

C16 VERSION

The Commodore 16 version runs without any memory expansion and the results produced here are quite good. The game runs very well and certainly looks on par with the C64 version, albeit colours look a little subdued. Interestingly, my best performances were on the C16 version and as a result, I found myself coming back to this version the most.

SCORE 75%

C64 VERSION

The benefit of multi-colour mode is highlighted here as enemies have their own distinct colour, making it easier to isolate the most dangerous one on screen. Plays well overall and the limited sound effects sound good but don't push the system's SID chip to anywhere close to its capabilities.

SCORE 75%

VIC 20 VERSION

This is the system that RodMan was initially designed for. The VIC-20 version distinguishes itself by providing a near full screen game play and the 'chunky' graphical style that the system is well known for. It takes a few plays but ultimately you appreciate that the full screen display provides the best '8-bit' experience. However, note that the game requires a 16K expansion pack in order to run the game.

SCORE 78%
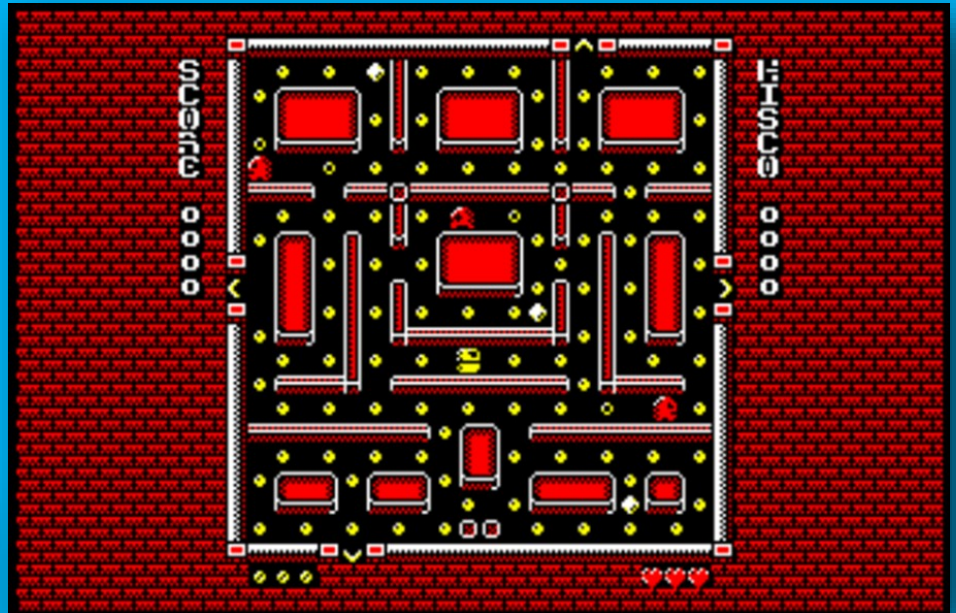
AMSTRAD CPC VERSION
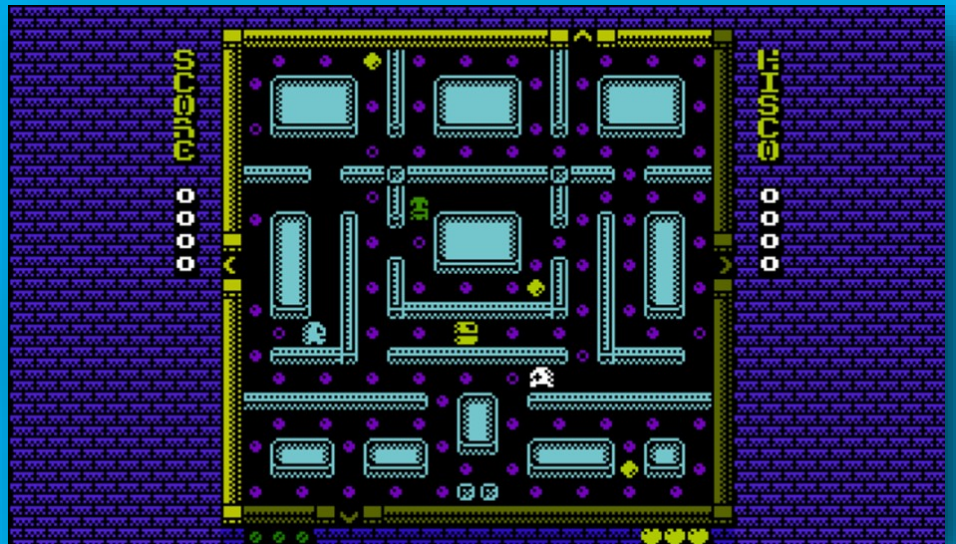
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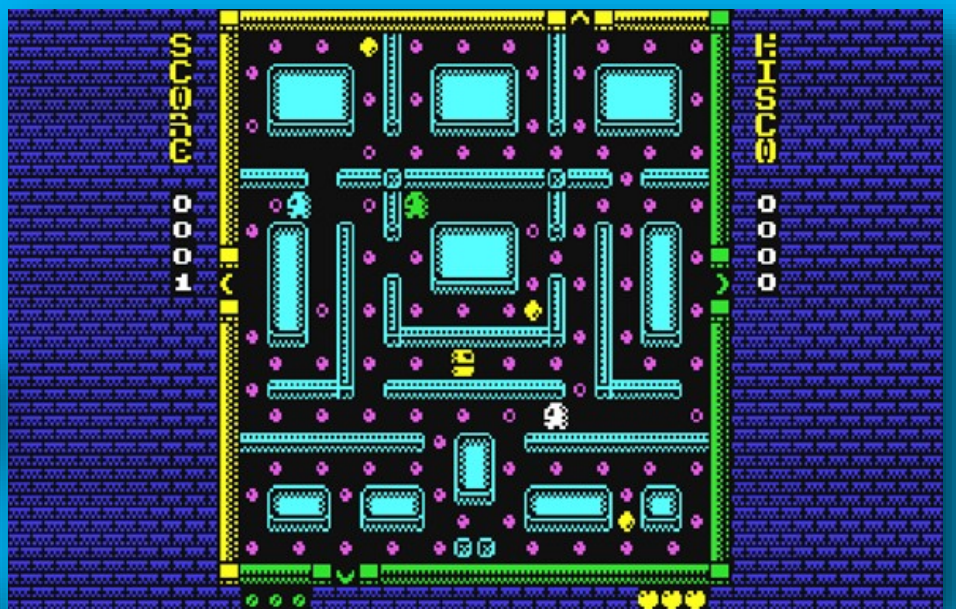
COMMODORE 64 VERSION
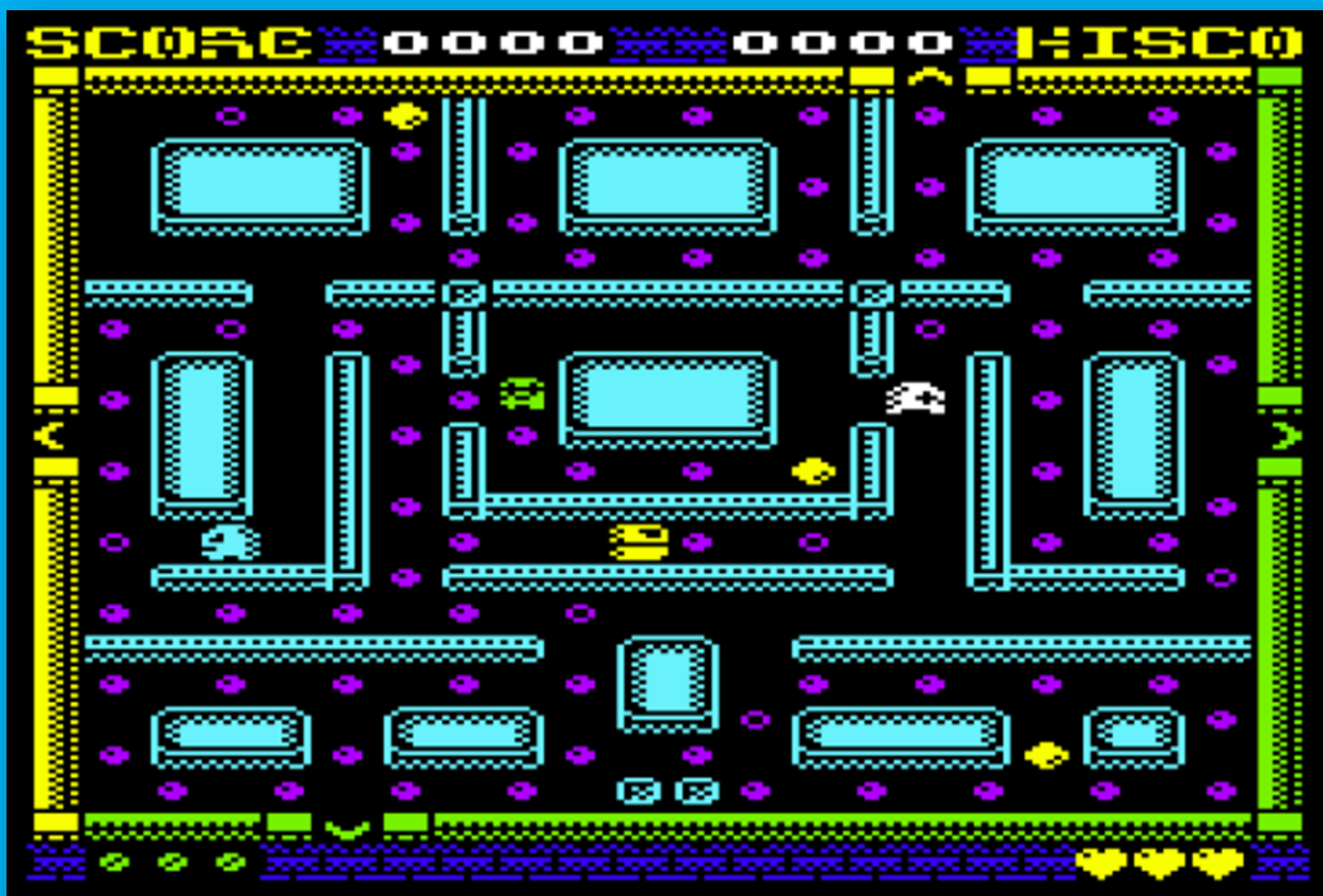
COMMODORE VIC 20 VERSION

The ZX Spectrum version provides a good all-round visual experience. Bright colours, enemies are easily distinguishable and the game moves around quite well. Curiously though, the sound levels on the Spectrum version is very low and you need to dial the volume knob up to 10 to just get a decent sounding output.

SCORE 74%

MSX VERSION

Perhaps the most pleasing version to the eye. Plenty of bright colours on offer and enemies are of a different colour. Plays well like most of the other formats. A good experience overall and definitely a great addition to the MSX library.

SCORE 76%

ORIC VERSION

Limited graphical scheme on offer means that RodMan, the enemies and the pills are all the same colour. The Oric version is the only one that features some minor graphical glitches of the RodMan character. Plays fine but the graphical limitations does make this the least engaging version to play.
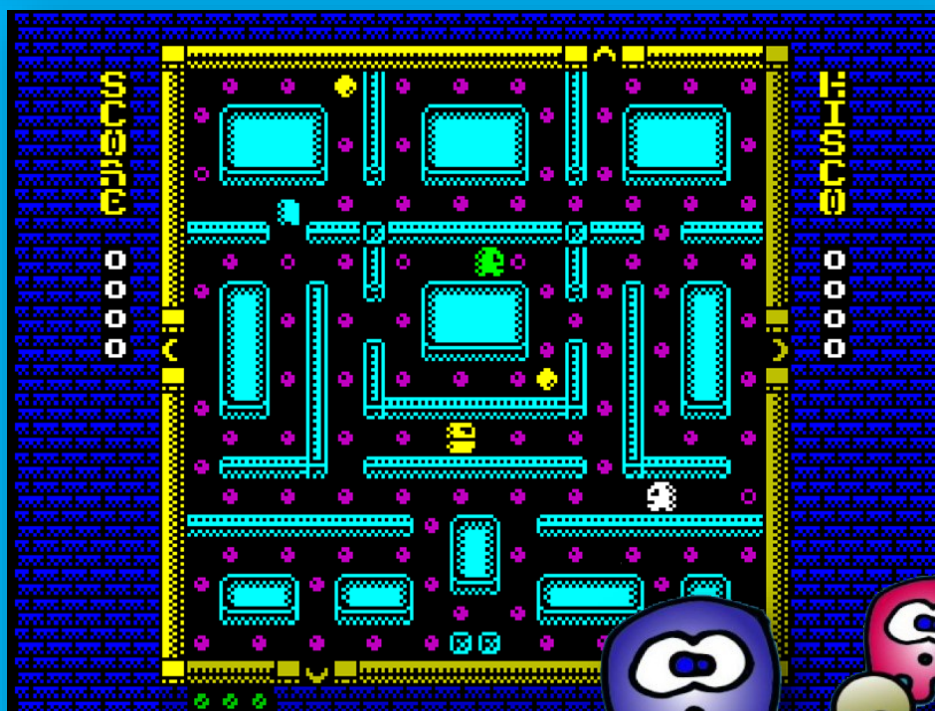
SCORE 60%

ZX SPECTRUM VERSION
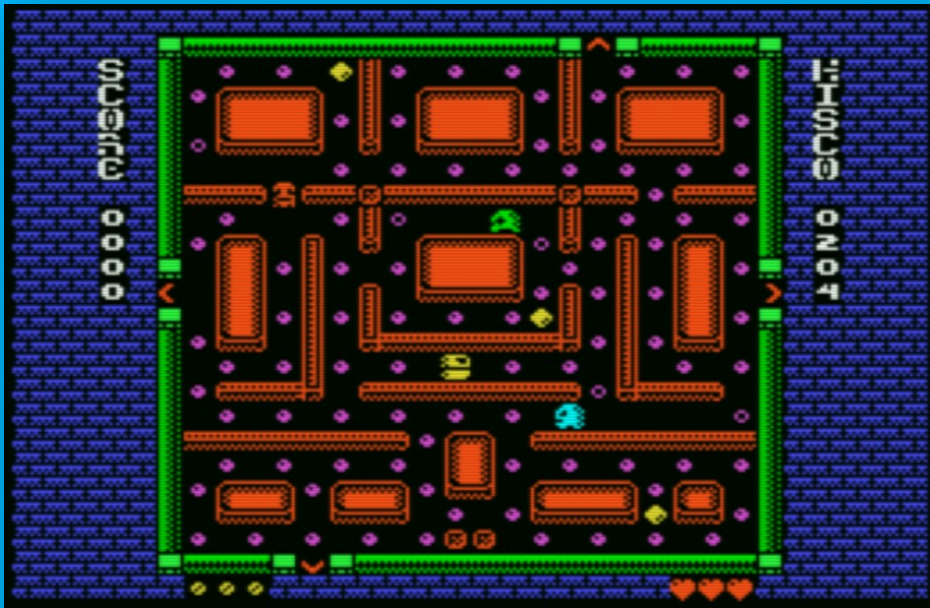
MSX VERSION
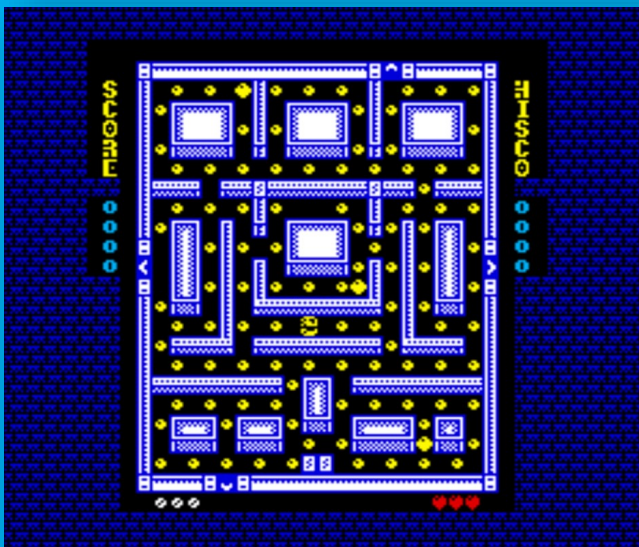
ORIC VERSION
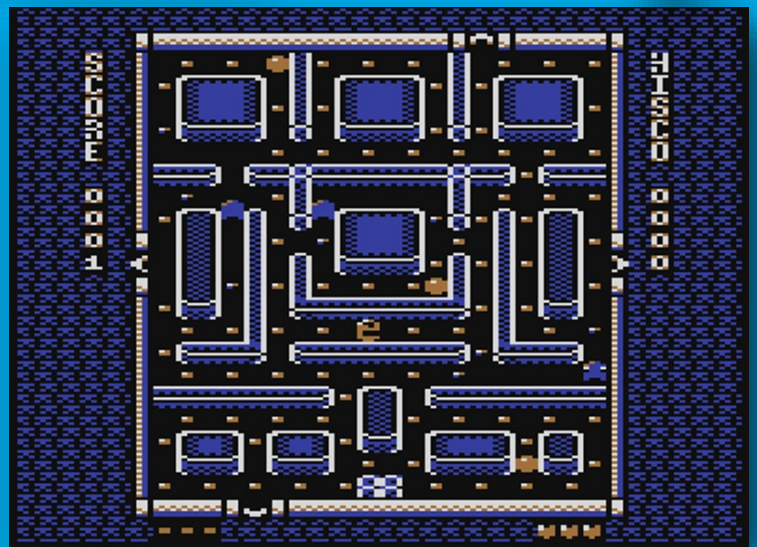
ATARI MULTI-COLOUR VERSION
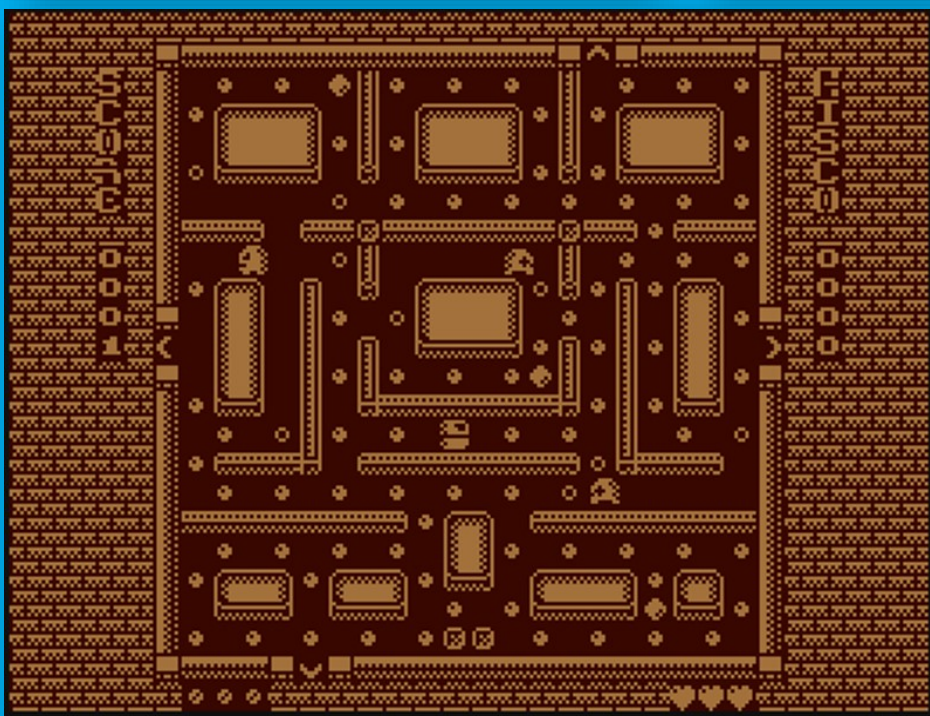
ATARI HIGH RESOLUTION VERSION

ATARI VERSION

The Atari format comes in two versions, Multi-Colour and High Resolution. The Multi-Colour version provides a good '8-bit' feel but the display output is somewhat 'mushy' in my view and felt somewhat uncomfortable to play. RodMan, enemies, and the pills are the same colour.
The Hi-res version features a monochrome display and it felt like I was playing the game on a Nintendo Gameboy rather than a proper personal computer. Graphics are well defined but the lack of colour ultimately diminishes gameplay experience.

**SCORE 67% (Multi-Colour)
60% (High Resolution)**

VERDICT

Given that all formats of RodMan play very close to each other and that the sonics are not a big feature of the game, the only way to distinguish each version is via it graphical display. As a result, your favourite version will often get down to which personal computer you either grew up with or currently using on a regular basis but there is no doubt that the versions that provide a clear differentiation between RodMan and all the enemy characters will stand out. Despite the Commodore 64 being my personal favourite 8-bit personal computer, I would say that the graphical full screen charm of the Commodore VIC-20 would be a stand out for me, while I am greatly impressed with what has been achieved with the Commodore 16. Coincidentally, in speaking with the developer on this project, Mika mentioned that the VIC-20 and the MSX version were perhaps his two favourite versions.

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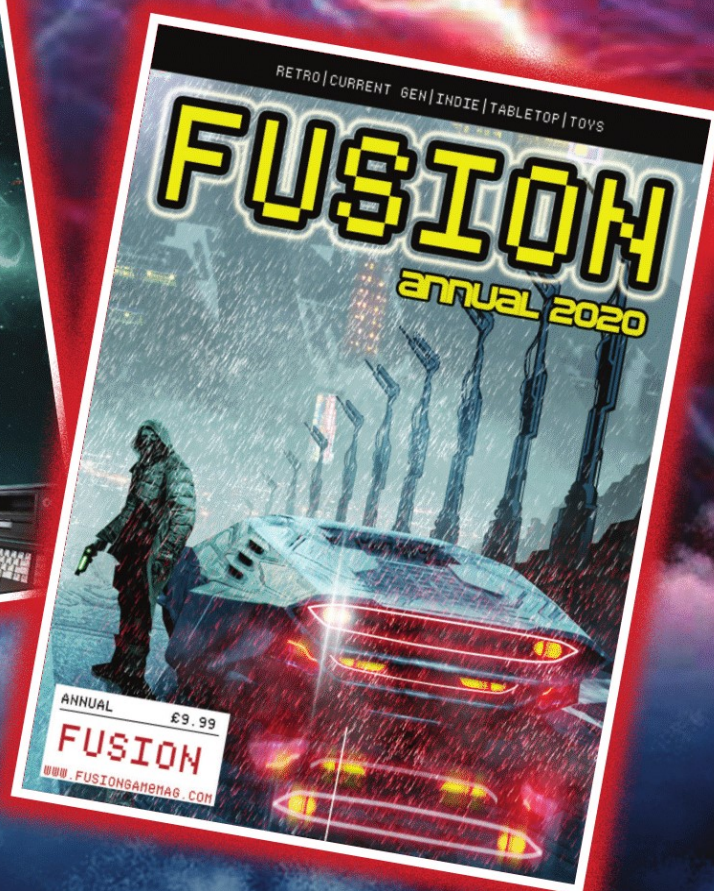
■ **CODING:** Achim Volkers. Graphics and design by Smila (Trevor Storey). Music by Saul Cross. Published by Psytronik
■ **INFO:** Digital download $4.99, tape £6.99, budget disk edition £6.99, premium plus disk edition £13.99 and Collector's box edition is £39.99
Download from http://www.psytronik.net/newsite/index.php/c64/98-organism
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

ORGANISM

This is another project from the prolific Trevor Storey, designing the gameplay and the graphics. It draws heavily on classic sci-fi films and games.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

During a routine supply mission to the Damecles station, something has gone horribly wrong on the United Transport shipping vehicle, Heracles. As the last crew member to be woken from hypersleep by an alarm, the player must investigate what is going on (I get the sense that I have seen this movie before - Ed). And it can all be traced back to a storage pod that was opened.

Wearing a spacesuit and carrying a weapon, the player explores the isometric decks of the ship. Lifts allow the player to move between decks, with some decks having multiple lifts. The side-on view of the ship when using the lifts is very reminiscent of the classic Paradroid. On each deck there are three key objectives. The first is to track down the other crew members and the data logs they have left behind. The second is to find the computer disk needed to access the terminal on each level. And finally something must be done about the alien organisms that now patrol the decks. There are two main types, the small spider-like "huggers" and the larger fully-grown aliens. Deeper in the ship there are more of the walking aliens, making those levels much trickier. The huggers come from eggs, and in some rooms there are multiple eggs to be destroyed before they hatch. Should an enemy get close, the joystick can be waggled left and right to shake them off. There are also many locked doors, which can only be accessed using passcards that must be discovered.

The bottom of the screen holds some vital information. To the left is the crewman's heartbeat shown as a moving graph. It gets more rapid as they take damage, which can be healed by finding first aid kits. In the middle is the radar display, which switches between showing where crew members are (with a C) and where the terminal is (with a T). It shows the approximate direction to the nearest crew member or terminal, relative to the player. To the right are the stats, showing the crew members found, the data logs found, the passcards being carried and the disks found (one disk is needed per terminal). When the player has a disk and tries to log into the terminal, a small puzzle must be completed. A series of coloured chips must be paired using wires, but the wires cannot overlap. The puzzle can be reset by holding down fire, but the hacking must be done before time elapses.

Destroy all the eggs before they hatch

image of the map, which shows the general layout of the Heracles without spoiling the challenge. Psytronik have once again put a lot into the Collector's Box to add value. A choice of difficulty levels on the title screen affects how much damage the player takes from aliens and how many enemies there are around. The download files include a disk image designed for use with the C64 Mini.

WHAT I LIKE

The isometric graphics are very well drawn, using the C64's hi-res mode for plenty of detail. Clever shading and choice of colours really creates a dark atmosphere. The player's character and the enemies are well animated and also drawn in hi-res. There is a superb introductory animation telling the story and giving the credits, before the title screen. Saul Cross has excelled with a moody and dark soundtrack, which can be listened to through a separate program on the disk version. Download versions come with a graphic

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Unless you are playing in emulation, there is no way to save progress – and there are many tricky decks to conquer. More suspense could have been added by having more than one outcome when a crew member is found, but that is a minor niggle.

VERDICT

In the build-up to it's release, many comparisons were made to Project Firestart, an early example of the survival horror genre. That was misleading, as this game is less about the story and lacks that title's cutscenes. What it does have is plenty of exploring to do, and plenty of aliens to kill. The atmosphere is excellent and the challenge deep, so expect to be searching the corridors of the UTS Heracles for some time.
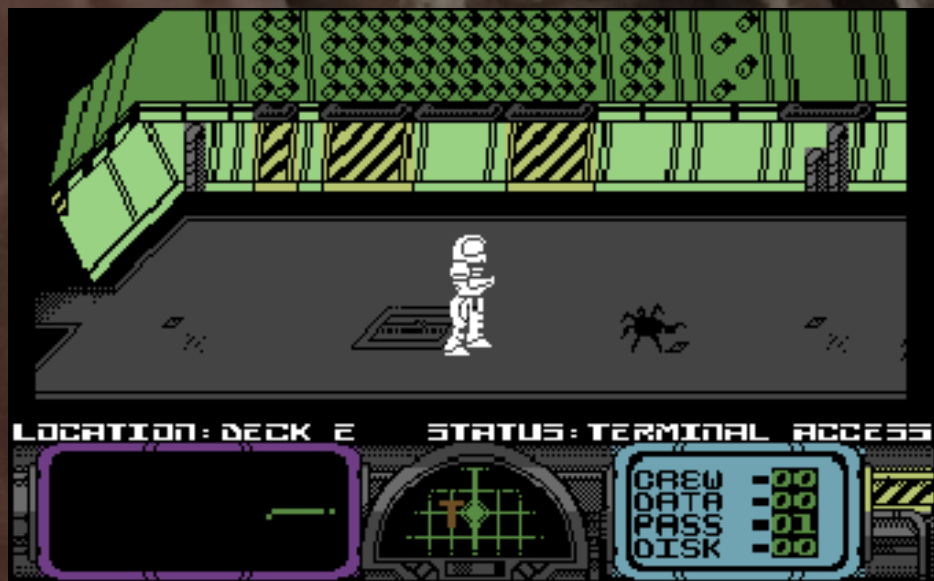
Dealing with one of the little hugger aliens

SCORE

"The atmosphere is excellent and the challenge deep"

GFX	83%
SFX	80%
FUN	84%
STAYING POWER	78%
OVERALL	**81%**

PAINS 'N' ACHES

This is the follow-up to the brilliant Knight 'n' Grail, continuing that game's storyline with a new character, but you don't have to have played the original to enjoy this game.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The Knight gave the Grail to the Archmage for his help, but now the Archmage's partner has been turned into a hideous beast by the magic of the Titans. The Archmage must take human form and seek out the magic pendant that will remove the spell from his partner. A mixture of flick-screen and horizontally scrolling sections is used. Loading gives the choice of starting a new game or loading the saved game (although there is only one save per disk image). The Archmage soon collects a special amulet and a red crystal. This allows the Archmage to shoot magic at the enemies that fill the levels. There are two slots in the amulet, allowing different coloured crystals to be combined, each colour crystal will unlock the same coloured door by shooting it. Pausing gives access to the map and the inventory screen.

Saving your game can be done at certain stones, while other stones give clues when read. Killed enemies and treasure chests drop coins and gems which are used to buy extras and hints. There are destructible blocks in the scenery that can be shot to reveal bonuses. Certain characters send you on quests; for example, the Hunter requires you to find his stolen arrows and return them. New magical powers are acquired that will allow you to access previously blocked areas, including a double jump and a "dash" move to fly over obstacles.

Save your game at the stone and buy hints from the 'Helper'

WHAT I LIKE

This is a highly polished game with a great fantasy setting. Graphics are really good, with well-animated enemies and plenty of clever background details (including references to Knight 'n' Grail). Sound and music back up the graphics well.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Control is at times a little tricky to get used to, but a recent patch has removed a bug where the player could get stuck in the scenery. It's a shame that there is only one save slot and there are long pauses in the action to load new sections.

VERDICT

The end result is a massive map to explore and some interesting puzzles to overcome, with a lot of depth and playability.

Jumping across the falling platforms

Defeat this leprechaun to earn the amulet

SCORE	
"Highly polished game with a great fantasy setting"	
GFX	88%
SFX	81%
FUN	85%
STAYING POWER	85%
OVERALL	**85%**

- **PUBLISHER:** CollectorVision
- **INFO:** $10 digital download **from** https://collectorvision.com/shop/commodore-64/sydney-hunter-and-the-sacred-tribe-digital-edition-commodore-64/
- **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

SYDNEY HUNTER AND THE SACRED TRIBE

This is the third of four games so far in the Sydney Hunter series, published by retro specialists CollectorVision. Although the physical editions are currently sold out, the digital download is still available from the company's website.

The tribesman explain the quest to Sydney

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Famed explorer Sydney Hunter was in the Yucatan peninsula searching for treasure, when he is kidnapped and held prisoner by a mysterious tribe. They ask Sydney to help them. And so Sydney sets off to explore the temple filled with hazards, collecting diamonds as his reward. Doorways and ladders lead to new screens, all of which are automatically mapped on the interactive map (shown by pressing F1). There are 100 screens to explore in total. Sydney can jump and climb ladders, but contact with any of the enemies or fire will kill him. Enemies include static snakes, rolling skulls and fireballs. Pits filled with moving spikes will prove deadly too. He will also slowly sink into the yellow quicksand unless he jumps his way out. Idols can be collected to give limited invulnerability for a few seconds. The all-important pineapples will add an extra life to the five Sydney starts with.

the past, Panama Joe – the star of classic platform game Montezuma's Revenge, makes a cameo on the death screen, guiding Sydney back to the start. The option to turn off the fastloader is handy for compatibility with some hardware.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The major bugbear with the controls is climbing ladders. Sydney needs to be very precisely positioned to climb up and down, leading to much frustration. The game could also have done with a save function or password, as going right back to the start is harsh (but is perhaps more representative of the classic games it is trying to be like.) In

some ways it is too slavish in sticking to the traditions of games such as Montezuma's Revenge.

VERDICT

This is quite a demanding game, with good timing and careful jumps needed to traverse the many screens. Mapping the game out and working out a route will take time, but it is enjoyable to play. The physical editions are going to become highly collectible, but this is one that you should consider paying to download.

WHAT I LIKE

The background graphics are nicely drawn, using hi-res mode for plenty of detail. Sydney is a good sprite, using overlays to add character. The way he burns up when he comes into contact with fire is also well drawn. An excellent intro sequence adds to the quality of the finished product. With a nod to

SCORE	
"The physical editions are going to become highly collectible"	
GFX	72%
SFX	78%
FUN	72%
STAYING POWER	74%
OVERALL	**76%**
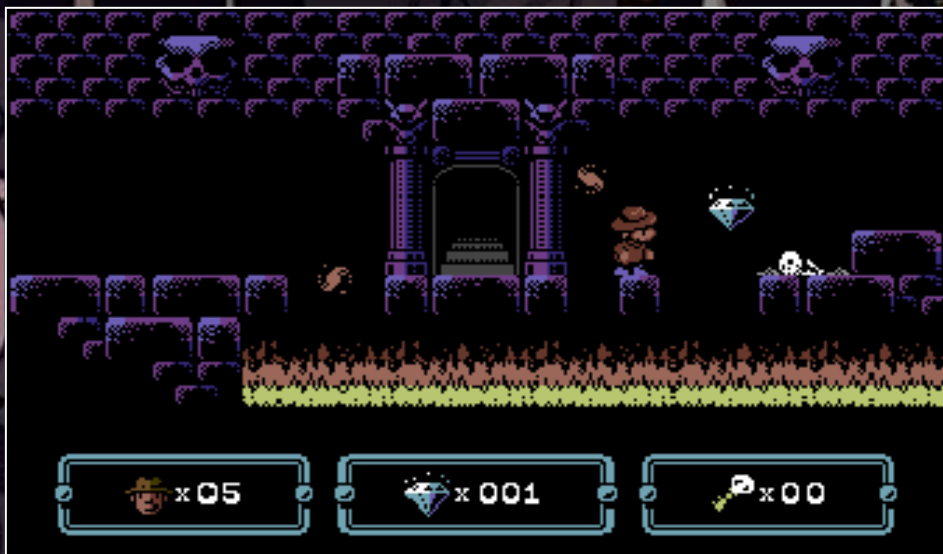
■ **CODING:** Clay Spoerri and Raphael Graf
■ **INFO:** 16K Cartridge only, €34.90 plus €5 postage, from https://clay.ch/mono/
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

MONO

This shoot 'em up arrived suddenly in the summer of 2018 with very little fanfare. A strange name for a new release commercial game that sported a unique marketing presentation, so how does it measure up to other releases from 2018?

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The aim of the game is to help Space Cadet Mono save the universe in her space fighter. Six vertically scrolling levels await. As the player shoots enemies, their score increases (and is shown scrolling down the screen – there is no score panel / display). As the player takes hits from enemy bullets or crashes into enemies, the score is decreased (shown as a minus figure). Attaining the 'P' for power-up increases the number of bullets the player's craft fires. At the end of each level is a boss, with each one having a unique attack pattern. The final level features a slight twist to the gameplay that will not be spoiled here.

WHAT I LIKE

The packaging of the game is very good, including a MONO pin badge and folding manual. The etched logo on the cartridge shell is another nice touch. The graphics themselves have a simple but effective style and the scrolling is smooth. The advertising made a lot of the unique scoring system and it is quite clever. The title tune / riff is alright and there are some above average in-game sound FX. The boss fights at the end of each of the six levels are nicely done too.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The biggest drawback is how easy the game is. I was able to complete it on my first play, giving just fifteen minutes of gameplay. The other major flaw is the way the gameplay changes on the last level; it feels very unfair and detracts from what has gone before. The price is expensive for a very limited game.

VERDICT

With more polish and more levels this could have been a hit, but it falls short of commercial quality in several ways.
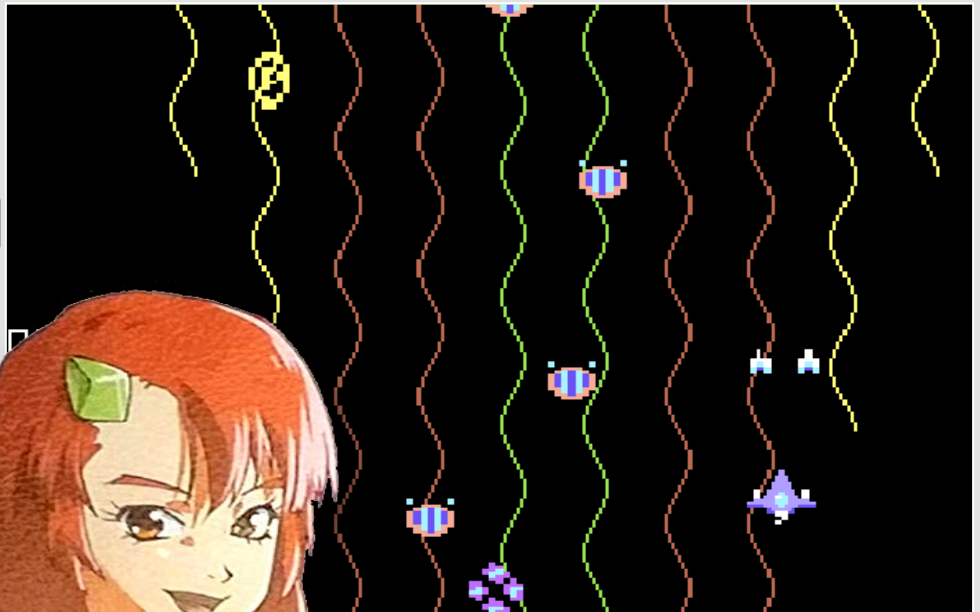
Pick up the P power-up on level 1

The stylish blocks of level 2
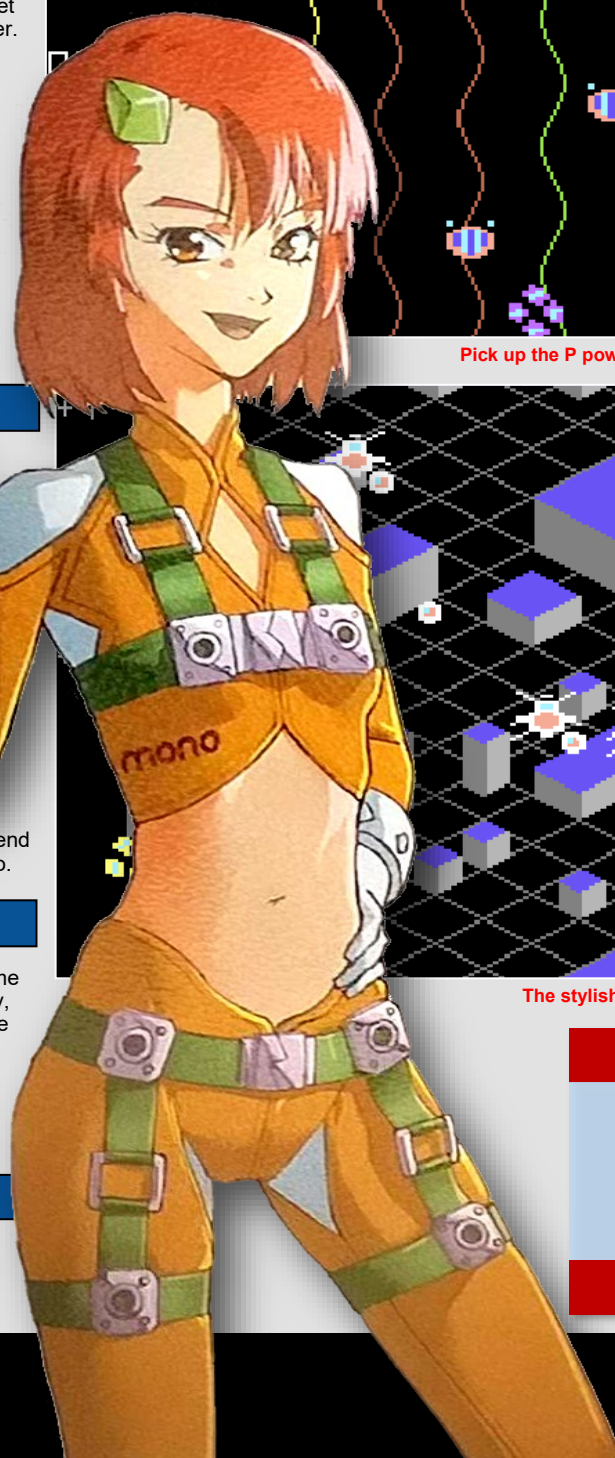
SCORE	
GFX	55%
SFX	45%
FUN	63%
STAYING POWER	47%
OVERALL	**51%**

- **CODING:** Christian Gleisner (Dr. Wuro Industries)
- **INFO:** Free download or €9.90 for the disk version at www.drwuro.com
- **REVIEWED BY:** George Bachaelor

SHADOW SWITCHER

OMG! Fun, fun, fun! Total 8-Bit gaming bliss is Shadow Switcher. I just can't contain myself I have to let you know from the outset just how good this game is. Well not just yet, you will have to read a bit more. Dr Wuro Industries impressed us with multiplayer games Shotgun (2016) and Frogs (2017), in 2018, a single player platformer using a shadow switching technique has teleported me, no, make that, all of us, back to the excellent Lode Runner from 1983.

If you don't know what Lode Runner is you aren't an 8-Bit nerd. Back in the day, Zzap!64 called the C64 version of Lode Runner "a classic for a long time to come, graphically minuscule and aurally crude, the game's sheer addiction kept my eyes propped open until the owls went to bed". In 1984 Lode Runner was awarded "1984 Computer Game of the Year" at the 5th annual Arkie Awards. Judges praised its "outstanding design", and described it as "fascinating", "irresistible", and as "the thinking player's climbing conquest". Now you know a little more about Lode Runner and its impact on 8-Bit gaming, let's get back to Shadow Switcher and find out what impact it will be destined to have on 8-Bit gaming today.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Your objective in Shadow Switcher is simple, throughout all 40 levels of climbing up and down ladders you must collect all the rings, grab the keys that open blocked passages then try to reach an exit door and not get killed in the process. Within each level exist hazards in the form of evil zombie robots who kill you on touch, electrifying beams will zap you instantly if you walk into them and disappearing blocks will be exposed once you walk over them, they don't harm you, just fall away, all of these make your task of reaching the exit door just that little bit more difficult than it looks. But don't worry, you've got a special trick up your sleeve - you can use your "shadow" for instant teleportation, er I mean switching, Yay! Personally I don't recall ever seeing this technique in an 8-Bit game before, i've played games like Mission Elevator (Micropool, 1986) where you walk into a door and come out the same door or Golden Tail (Juan J. Martinez, Amstrad CPC, 2016) where you perform 'koga magic' disappearing and reappearing, but never have I experienced

shadow switching. I am glad I have, as this makes this Lode Runner genre game such joy to play. Picture this, an enemy zombie robots are closing in fast upon you, you have no way of escaping, all exits are blocked, the zombie robots are just millimetres away from killing you, not this time, one press of the fire button and you reappear where you left your shadow. You can perform this as many times as you like and wherever you like, even on ladders. When you hit the fire button that location will be where your shadow remains. While you travel all over the screen you can switch between the real you and your shadow with such ease, avoiding the zombie robot horde couldn't be more entertaining, now you can get to the other side of the screen to get the items required to finish the level. Zombie robots are immune from being electrified by the laser beams but they can't use lifts that appear from level two onwards.

Climbing up and down ladders is performed by speed walking all over the one screen level, yes your character really does move fast. He needs to be quick because those

zombie robots aren't lazy road workers earning 30 quid an hour for holding up a stop and go sign. The shadow switching is crucial to the gameplay, which is how it should be. There will be instances where you will need to lure zombie robots away from one area so you can then shadow switch to another area. Or Perhaps you are constantly getting stuck on a level you need to work out a new strategy of placing where your shadow should be The maximum amount of robots on a level is six, this amount changes on each level you play.

Each level design is different from the last, there may be more or less ladders to climb up and down, more or less zombie robots out to kill you and more or less rings to collect before you can escape through the exit door. Every level has a different colour scheme with 40 different combinations of background, wall and ladder colours. You are given three lives per game, a bit tough but that's what makes you want to keep playing and improving. Each level you collect around 300 points and every thousand points you receive an extra life, basically every third level you will get another

Level 1. Get the keys, unlock the gates, get the coins, avoid the robot zombies, perform shadow switching, this is old school cool!

Level 2. Four zombie robots out to stop you. Conveyor belts included on this screen too!

FROM THE DEVELOPER Christian Gleisner

"My basic idea was to create a game that could have been released in 1983, with platforms and ladders and stuff, and originally my plan was to create a small game within 3 weeks. Well, those 3 weeks became 12 months but who cares, now the game is finished and ready for you to enjoy! My Direct inspiration was the game called 'Love' on the Ouya console (April 2015, Developer: Fred Wood), where it is possible to set your respawn location by yourself. I wanted to create some typical platform game like Lode Runner but I didn't want to copy the mechanic so I tried to come up with something else, the shadow switching technique was the perfect idea. While it may look similar to Lode Runner it is not exactly the same gameplay because the main character and enemy cannot fall down from cliffs". While researching the game I came across a website claiming that the music in shadow switcher is taken from the New Order track "Blue Monday". I asked Christian about this and he replied "yes I read that too, but it's nonsense, the first half of the bassline is similar, but thats all. The rest has zero resemblance to that song". I asked Christian did he do all the work / game dev / coding, he replied "yes, however some of the levels in the game have been created by friends".

Level 3 - finally !!! Looking just as cool as previous levels

life, that is if you are good enough, me I am still trying to reach a thousand points, hahahah I am so crap (yes you are, you need to practice more - Ed).

WHAT I LIKE

The shadow switching mechanic is brilliant. It takes the game to a new level. It is a terrific innovation making the gameplay simply awesome. The graphics may not be totally outstanding but it doesn't need to be for this type of platform game, they are excellent to my eyes. Colours, sprites and animations work so wonderfully well. If I wanted to be teleported back in time to gaming of cica 1983 then this game does it superbly. The tune is just right for this type of game, the urgency or speed of the sounds bring the game together adding for a greater gaming experience. Smooth and fast paced movement around each level to complete your tasks adds to the addictiveness of the game. An option to release your imagination and creativity with a built-in level editor means you can design your own levels which is pretty damn sweet.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

I don't like the fact that I didn't code the game as it's so damn impressive. The game is very hard to fault. Perhaps a code system allowing you to play levels you are stuck on or introduce another kind of enemy in later levels to challenge you? For the devil in me I really wanted to see those zombie robots get fried by laser beams. There isn't much I didn't like about playing the game though.

VERDICT

Shadow Switcher is 40 levels of pure fun, fun, fun (but you cant even get past level 5 - Ed). Yes, ok, thanks for pointing out how crap my progress has been in this game, well I do have a day job and other life matters to attend to. Enough of the personal stuff, this is about Shadow Switcher, I simply can't put it down. An amazingly simple platform game so well thought of and implemented it actually makes the ordinary C64 colour palette look cool. Switching things up, Lode Runner style, is 8-Bit retro video gaming addiction in 2018. If you love your 8-Bit gaming 'old skool' then you must play Shadow Switcher, the best teleport back to 1983 gaming experience since playing games in 1983!

SCORE

"The shadow switching is brilliant. It takes the game to a fun new level"

GFX	90%
SFX	93%
FUN	99%
STAYING POWER	97%
OVERALL	**96%**

Level 4 - More ladders to climb up and down, more robots to avoid and more rings to collect

■ **CODING:** Mark Hindsbo, graphics by Saul Cross, music and SFX by Thomas E. Petersen.
■ **INFO:** Available at http://www.psytronik.net/newsite/index.php/c64/102-aviator, prices range from $2.99 for the digital download to £36 for deluxe cartridge version
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

AVIATOR ARCADE II

Mark Hindsbo's 16K competition entry has been greatly enhanced and turned into a fully-fledged game.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

As an Earth Defense Force pilot, you have to tackle the terrorist X-Force using a state-of-the-art attack helicopter. The first task is to liberate the city of Suburbia from the terrorists, destroying their jeeps and tanks. Enemy vehicles and ground emplacements will shoot towards the player. Over the course of ten levels, more of the plot is revealed (through text briefings between levels) and there may be more than one craft to pilot against the enemies threatening planet Earth. If you don't want to spoil the game, skip the next paragraph.

[SPOILER ALERT] After clearing the Port of Serial and crossing the SID Desert, our hero encounters a large alien boss. Completing the fourth level switches control to a spaceship, fighting through star systems. And for the last two levels the pilot commandeers an actual UFO, relying on alien tech to upgrade their craft and ultimately take on the final boss **[SPOILER ENDS]**.

On loading the cartridge, the player can choose between the original 16K game (by holding down 1, while 2 will clear the save data) and the new game. The disk version and digital downloads contain both games. The cartridge version will auto-detect the C64GS and switch on auto-fire mode; this means the helicopter fires automatically and the fire button is only used to release smart bombs.

After the intro sequence, F1 brings up the help menu and F7 the options. This includes the difficulty level (Easy, Normal, and Hard) and the starting level; levels reached can be unlocked and played again. Auto-fire mode can also be selected here, along with a choice of music and sound FX (in-game keys can change these settings). Pressing Fire to play loads level 1, after the introductory text.

The player starts with 3 lives, with an extra life every 100,000 points. Three smart bombs are also available initially, activated with Space if auto-fire is off. The player's craft has an energy bar, which when reduced to nothing means a life is lost. Dying restarts the player at the start of the current level. Power-ups appear in the landscape and change form according to the craft flown. Restoring energy, switching to other weapons (including homing missiles) and extra bombs are just some of the items to collect by shooting. Bonus objects (such as radar dishes and civilian cars) make a different sound when shot and are tallied at game's end. At the end of each of the ten levels awaits a number of enemy waves followed by a large boss.

The game includes a ranking system. The more enemies shot, the higher the rank earned (reflected in the text messages between levels and the icon bottom-right of the status panel). Missing enemies reduces the ranking points, so it may not be advisable to spray lots of bullets around. At the end of the game a summary page reveals the rank reached, bonus score for difficulty (25% for Normal, 50% for Hard) and bonus objects destroyed. The high scores are saved to disk or cartridge.

WHAT I LIKE

There is a lot of pick-up-and-play value here, with an instant appeal. It is strongly reminiscent of classic vertically scrolling shoot 'em ups, such as Tiger Heli and Flying Shark. The game is really well presented, from the ranking system to the status messages appearing at the bottom of the screen. Scrolling is smooth and the changing backgrounds add plenty of variety. Sound and music really complement the action. Enemy sprites are neatly drawn and animated. Boss encounters are frenetic but beatable. The choice of difficulty levels is a great idea and does make a difference. Saving data to the disk and cartridge opens up the later levels. As ever with RGCD and Psytronik, the boxed editions are highly collectible.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Although there is a choice of difficulty here, I found that the difficulty curve as the game progressed needed more work. Some levels definitely feel more difficult than others and it is not a smooth progression. One bugbear is the energy barriers found in the later levels; these seem very cruel and often lead to instant death. My biggest complaint is being returned to the start of the current level upon death. The levels are relatively short and split into distinct sections, so it could have been possible to add restart points at each of those sections to reduce the frustration level. The draw to see more and get a higher score is quite strong but once the game is beaten interest will wane.

VERDICT

A very impressive game let down by the difficulty curve.

Level 3's boss is the first hint of the surprises in store…

SCORE

"Scrolling is smooth and the changing backgrounds add plenty of variety"

GFX	**86%**
SFX	**85%**
FUN	**84%**
STAYING POWER	**79%**
OVERALL	**84%**

■ **CODING:** Antonio, Graphics, Music and SFX by Saul Cross. PC original by Locamolito
■ **INFO:** Tape £6.99 from http://www.psytronik.net/, digital download CAD$ 7.99, Floppy CAD$ 39.99 and Cartridge CAD$ 49.99
  from https://doublesidedgames.com/shop/commodore/abbaye-des-morts/
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

L'ABBAYE DES MORTS

The latest game from Antonio Savona marks the first release from Double-Sided Games, and his first platform game.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In 13th Century France, the Cathar monks are being expelled from the Languedoc by the Catholic Church. One monk, Jean Raymond, tries to run from the Crusaders and comes across a seemingly abandoned abbey for sanctuary. He sets out to explore and discover what happened to the twelve monks who were living at the abbey. With the Crusaders trying to break down the door, Jean comes across scrolls that will give clues, crosses (twelve must be collected to complete the game) and hearts (awarding an extra life). Should Jean die, he will be reincarnated at the last font that he passed. There are switches and other devices that will open passageways, invisible platforms and more. Contact with any enemy, their arrows, fire or water will kill Jean. Fire will make Jean jump, while pressing Down will make him crouch (useful for more than just avoiding arrows). In some rooms there are portals that will transport Jean to another screen. And watch out for the Pestilent Beast (a fire-breathing dragon).

WHAT I LIKE

The presentation throughout the game is fantastic, starting with the introductory speech and the lightning and thunder of the title screen. Saul's music is haunting,

Maybe the switch will open the unexpected gate?

accompanied by some strong sound effects. The high-resolution main monk (achieved with sprite overlays) has a lot of character and there are a diverse range of similarly hi-res enemies. Backgrounds are filled with detail. It reflects the high-resolution style of the PC original but with a lot extra. One neat touch (among many) is the way the abbey door moves to portray the Crusaders outside trying to break in. Control is fluid, with the monk jumping and crouching on command. There is even a hidden room to find, giving the

opportunity to earn extra lives. Solving the mystery will draw the player back.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There are a few places where pixel-precise jumping is required, which can lead to a little frustration. One or two of the puzzles (or routes) through a screen are not immediately apparent but will take some time to figure out. Starting with just three lives is quite punishing, despite the hearts available to earn more. Although the number of rooms is quite small, the challenge is quite high.

VERDICT

Another high-quality release from Antonio, and a great debut from Double-Sided Games.

In the wine cellar there is a cross to collect

SCORE	
"The presentation throughout the game is fantastic"	
GFX	90%
SFX	91%
FUN	89%
STAYING POWER	87%
OVERALL	**90%**

- **CODING:** Carl-Henrik Skårstedt, music by Stein Pedersen and Ole-Marius Pettersen. Published by Protovision.
- **INFO:** Digital download is $4.99 from https://protovision.itch.io/space-moguls, boxed disk edition €30, cartridge €40 and boxed disk and cart €50 from https://www.protovision.games/shop/product_info.php?products_id=229
- **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

SPACE MOGULS

Space Moguls is a four-player strategy game that pays tribute to the classic M.U.L.E.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In the near future, reality TV shows have exploited every location on Planet Earth. It is time to go to space. Would-be moguls board the Space Yacht and travel to other planets. Here they must purchase and build high-tech droids to collect the planet's resources – harvesting food, gathering energy and raw materials, and mining for ore and rare minerals. Random events can help or hinder; space pirates steal production, swarms of space bees reduce energy output and a meteorite can smash into a sector (possibly leaving rare minerals behind). At the end of each turn, the trading phase happens. For each resource, the player can sell their stocks to other players or the store, or choose to buy more. At the end of the game the player who has earnt the most (in terms of assets and money) is crowned the winner.

The players can choose to watch the attract sequence and credits from the menu, before changing options. These include the number of turns the game will last, as well as cosmetic options (changing the font size in the border, useful for some TVs/monitors). Up to four human players can take part, thanks to the support of keys, joystick and joystick interfaces (Protovision, SuperPad and Inception). Computer A.I. will control any player not selected. There are several different races / characters, before a planet is chosen from the four available. Each planet has different terrain and graphics.

The Space Yacht drops off the characters at the start of the first season. The planet surface is depicted as a map of hexes, with the town central. At the start, not all of the hexes are visible; more are revealed each season. The Land Grant allows each player to select a hex to add to their control, with some phases giving an auction for a randomly chosen hex. The players then take it in turns, with a time limit to make their move (and players low on food suffer a time penalty, reducing their time limit). Terrain affects how quickly the player can move around, and what resource is found there. Mountains are more likely to contain ore, while desert squares generate more (solar) energy. The player must enter the town to purchase a droid and then equip it for a task – food, energy, materials, ore mining or rare mineral collecting. Droids will cost an increasing amount of money and materials to buy, once the store's initial stock has sold. Leaving town, the droid must be taken to a hex the player owns and be installed. Returning to the town, the players can also consult the land registry (to sell off land or have it evaluated) and finally visit the pub (time remaining is turned into bonus cash).

During a player's turn, a small animal (known as a Grumpling) may appear on the map. If the player can get close enough and press Fire, they capture the creature. Different creatures have different effects, giving or taking resources and cash. A random bonus / penalty can happen at the start of each player's turn (e.g. winning an 'iBay' auction for extra cash, or having to make droid repairs) and global events can happen at the end of a turn (for example, rainstorms flooding the store to prevent trading). The vital phase is production, with dots beside each hex showing what has been produced.

During the trading sequence, bars and numbers display how much of each resource a player has produced or used up. Bars show the minimum of each resource (food and energy) required for the next turn. Moving to the top of the screen selects Buying, moving to the bottom of the screen is used for Selling. When the trading phase starts, characters move up or down. If they meet, they can trade between the two meeting characters. If there is no character to trade with, reaching the top or bottom line does business with the store instead (depending on whether the store has stock). At the end of the turn the players are ranked by the value of their assets and money. Once the Space Yacht has returned to collect the moguls, the overall winner is declared in an animated sequence.

WHAT I LIKE

The aim of the game was to pay tribute to Dani Bunten's strategy classic M.U.L.E. It succeeds, adding many great ideas and looking superb. The menus are clear and precise, giving plenty of options. The different characters are great, especially the robot Commodore LXIV (a clever reference to Futurama, and one of many Easter Eggs). The different planets have subtly different graphics and terrain, giving lots of replayability. The music and sound are very pleasant too. A lot of effort has also gone into the packaging, with some excellent "feelies" including a space ticket and trading license. Playing from cartridge is sublime, but disk access is mitigated by the clever presentation and fast loader. As a solo player there is a challenge here, but it is even more fun with four humans gathered around the monitor.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

If you have not played M.U.L.E. then the trading sequence can be quite confusing at first. On the odd occasion the computer A.I. will make a seemingly bad decision, but in general they provide a strong opponent. If the game doesn't grab you at first, then it will take time to appreciate the depth on offer.

VERDICT

A superb tribute to a classic game, with modern presentation and brilliant multiplayer fun just like a classic board game.

The Land Grant office in town can help you by analysing the land you own, and the terrain map (this is Mars) is randomly generated for each game

SCORE

"The different characters are great, especially the robot Commodore LXIV"

GFX	92%
SFX	89%
FUN	91%
STAYING POWER	93%
OVERALL	**93%**

■ **CODING:** Alexander Martinelle
■ **INFO:** $1 from https://cogitarecomputing.itch.io/counterweight-kate
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

COUNTERWEIGHT KATE

Here is an excellent first release from Alexander, aka Cogitare Computing (from the Latin word meaning to think). The weight-based puzzles will make the player think a lot.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

One night Kate wakes up to find all her toys have come alive. Six of her favourite toys are being held captive by the rest, so she puts on her motorbike helmet and tries to rescue them. There are two types of level. The odd-numbered levels are platform based, where Kate must work her way to the top of the level to rescue a toy. This involves using switches, seesaws, weights and cannonballs in various ways – as well as objects that help her bounce higher. Touching any of the patrolling bad toys costs Kate a life. There is also a time limit to complete the level, and running out of time forfeits a life. The even-numbered levels see Kate taking on a big bad boss toy. Now there are platforms that will bounce Kate higher when she jumps on them, and she must find a way to attack the boss (as she cannot fire anything herself). Completing all twelve levels brings the end sequence.

WHAT I LIKE

This is a bright and colourful game with some very nice graphics. The black outlines make the sprites look very cartoony, and the changing background themes add variety. The loading screen and other presentation is very good too. Sound is excellent, with jaunty tunes really adding to the fun. The movement patterns and gravity applied to objects look realistic too. It takes a fair bit of brainpower to work out some of the puzzles and find the correct route, so there is a long-term challenge here. Fortunately the itch.io page includes some walkthrough videos to help the player understand some of the trickier problems.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

At times it can be very difficult to work out what to do next, and much of the game requires some very precise timing; get the sequence of movements wrong and it's time to try again, and again. The harsh time limits make things even tougher. Although the graphics are nicely themed, some of the sprites are a little hard to make out what they

Rescuing the toy at the end of the first level

are. Twelve levels may sound like a lot, but once solved there is little to draw the player back again. And three lives is a meagre amount to start with on such a tough quest. Currently this is a download only, with a limited physical release planned (at the time of writing).

VERDICT

This is a sweet and charming platform game with a hard edge. It may lack in longevity but the price is very attractive.

The start of level 1

SCORE

"Sound is excellent, with jaunty tunes really adding to the fun"

GFX	**78%**
SFX	**72%**
FUN	**71%**
STAYING POWER	**63%**
OVERALL	**74%**

■ **CODING:** Attila Kása and Zsolt Kajtár. GFX by Balazs Oszvald, SFX by Laszlo Vincenzo. Published by Giants Software and Protovision.
■ **INFO:** Digital download €4.99 from https://www.farming-simulator.com/dlc-detail.php?lang=en&country=gb&dlc_id=fs19c64
Limited edition cartridge version €50 plus shipping from https://www.protovision.games/shop/product_info.php?products_id=227
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

FARMING SIMULATOR C64

WHAT I LIKE

The game is well presented, with a clear controls screen and a scrolling credits sequence. In-game the isometric graphics move smoothly and the vehicles are well-drawn (with overlaid sprites for added detail). Sound works OK, with neat touches including the reversing beeps and the horn (press H to sound).

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The controls take a little getting used to, and it is not always immediately apparent if the equipment is working on the current "square" of field. There is not a huge map to explore, and it soon becomes repetitive. Although the boxed edition is very well presented (including the CD sleeve looking like a floppy disk), the price is very high for such a limited game.

Giants Software created the C64 version of their Farming Simulator as a pre-order bonus, before making it available as a standalone cartridge through Protovision in limited numbers.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

We sow the seed, nature grows the seed, we eat the seed… There is a basic gameplay loop in this edition of Farming Simulator. Plough the field (F1 for the red Case IH Magnum tractor and plough), sow the seed (F3 for the green Fendt 700 tractor and seeder), harvest the crops (F7 for the big green John Deere T560 combine harvester) and fill the trailer (F5 for the blue New Holland T7 tractor with trailer). Pressing Fire (or right CTRL) will activate the plough, plant seeds or harvest. Crops must then be taken back by trailer to the farm's silo to earn money. Each vehicle has a limited amount of fuel, so more must be bought by pulling up to the petrol pumps (with money deducted). The seeder can be refilled with more seed at the silo, also at the cost of money, no money, seed or fuel will mean the game is over.

Two of your tractors, outstanding in their field

The trailer returns to the farm to unload crops

VERDICT

Collectors have already made this highly sought after, but the novelty will soon wear off. Intriguing to see such a big company support the C64, though.

SCORE

"Collectors have already made this highly sought after..."

GFX	79%
SFX	77%
FUN	73%
STAYING POWER	59%
OVERALL	**72%**

■ **CODING:** Cadaver/Covert BitOps (Lasse Oorni), published by Psytronik
■ **INFO:** Digital download $4.99 from https://psytronik.itch.io/steelranger
    Budget disk edition £6.99 and premium plus disk edition £13.99 from http://www.binaryzone.org/retrostore/
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

STEEL RANGER

With the excellent Metal Warrior games and 2016's Hessian, Lasse Öörni has carved out a niche in run & gun gameplay. This is his latest release, with Metal Warrior Ultimate in development.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In the year 2218, Earth is under threat from a hostile machine intelligence. It has stolen supplies and created a devastating fleet. The patrol ship Scourge, commanded by Archer Hess, receives a strange symbol 'Omega', coded in ones and zeroes. The ship tracks the transmission's source and comes under attack. The player's character puts on their ranger suit to investigate. A city of living machines is discovered, with its many terminals compatible with the suit. This allows the player to recharge the suit's energy at recharge chambers, and add upgrades. Radio messages from the ship's crew and interactions with terminals will reveal more of the story, unlock new areas and allow the player to progress. The name and appearance of the hero can be changed on the title screen. There are also four save slots on the

game disk, allowing the player to save their progress. Dying will reset the player to the nearest entrance they used, effectively a "continue". The player starts with a basic weapon (full auto) and limited ammunition. Dead enemies drop extra ammunition and parts, which are used to buy upgrades. Extra weapons will also be dropped. Key cards are needed to open doors. The first suit upgrade is 'Wheel Mode', similar to the 'Morph Ball' in the Metroid games, allowing the player to roll through small gaps and drop mines. Pausing the game reveals the current status and a helpful map. Lifts are incredibly important, and can be called to the current level by activating the terminals. Large Guardians will be encountered, with their awesome firepower testing the player's skills.

WHAT I LIKE

The huge world has a great look and feel - the dark caves giving way to the metallic city. The main player sprite is athletic, and the 'Wheel Mode' is such an important gameplay feature. There is a genuine sense of achievement as you unlock new areas. Top-notch music and sound FX accompany the action, although the latter are quite sparse. Saving progress allows the player to tackle this large game in playable chunks.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There can be quite a bit of backtracking to explore previously inaccessible areas, but that is how Metroid games work. Climbing ladders feels a little clumsy at times, and it can be frustrating to be left in a game state with little

Putting on the suit

ammunition thanks to the way the continue feature works.

VERDICT

Another stunning release from Lasse, building on the impressive Hessian to create another thrilling game world to explore.
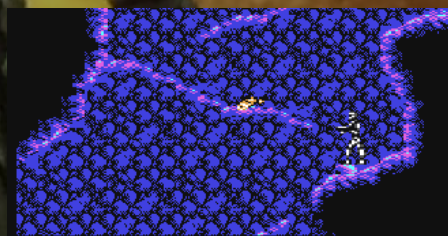
In one of the caves under the city

The map screen can be panned around, and includes the save option
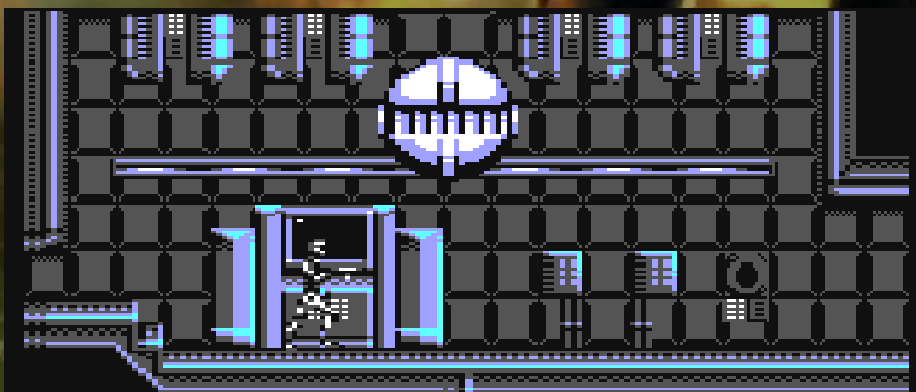
The first Guardian to be defeated

SCORE

"There is a genuine sense of achievement as you unlock new areas."

GFX	92%
SFX	85%
FUN	90%
STAYING POWER	89%
OVERALL	**91%**

- **CODING:** Martin Walker, remastered code by Dan Hotop. Box artwork by Oliver Frey. Published by Thalamus Digital & Protovision
- **INFO:** Digital version $12.99 from https://thalamusdigital.itch.io/hunters-moon-remastered, Cartridge version €47 from www.protovision.games
- **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

HUNTER'S MOON REMASTERED

To mark the 30th anniversary of the classic Martin Walker game, Thalamus Digital have released a new and remastered version – with Martin and Matt Gray both involved.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The boot menu can be accessed by holding down 'Commodore' as the machine is switched on / cartridge file started. This allows access to the original game just as it was in 1988, the new remastered version (with save option, multiple language support and new cinematic intro) and the trainer version (with infinite lives but no save option). There is also a separate level editor to create your own levels.

The new cinematic intro tells the story of a down-on-his luck spacepilot who manages to acquire a new shop – only to get caught in the event horizon of a black hole that sends him far from home. He must explore the star systems to find a way home. In each system there are multiple levels to complete. The aim is to find the four co-ordinates for the next system, obtained by collecting the starcells found in each level. At the start of the level a starcell will be flashing on the radar; collecting this before the time limit is up will award a co-ordinate (thus allowing a shortcut to the next level when four co-ordinates have been collected). Otherwise a level is complete when all the starcells in it have been safely collected. Collecting a starcell also offers a brief period of invulnerability.

Every level contains worker cells, which "draw" the shape of the level and repair damage. On later levels, the worker cells will also turn parts of the walls into shooter cells that fire bullets at the player's ships. Puzzle levels require the player to work out how to blast through walls to reach the starcells. Pressing 'RUN / STOP' and moving the joystick enters the pause mode menu. Here the Hunter craft can be resprayed one of four colours. There are also three different types of engine, offering slightly different controls that will suit different styles of play. Off-Duty Mode lets the player relax and play with the co-ordinates (more below). A limited number of shields are also available and can be activated from the pause menu.

Collecting the four co-ordinates allows the player to enter the bonus round. This has eight worker cells creating patterns and shooting at the player. Once all eight are eliminated, the co-ordinates are used to draw patterns on screen. These co-ordinates can be entered into 'Off-Duty' mode to recreate the same pattern.

The main menu also has some distinct options. Play can be for one or two players alternating. The starfield depth can be changed too. Normal Mode plays the levels in the original order, whereas Random Mode presents the same star systems but with random levels within each star system. The attract sequence will also display the current high scores and a demo of the game.

WHAT I LIKE

The original Hunter's Moon was a favourite of mine, and this remastered version is a superb update. The cinematic intro is incredible, with six short animated sequences that look like small videos brought to life on the C64. This is backed with a new piece of music by Matt Gray that merges beautifully into the original intro music. Matt's music remains a high point of the game too, complemented by Martin's highly unusual sound effects. Martin himself has been involved in the design of the Remastered version, adding new level and enemy types to increase the number of levels available. An even more incredible addition is the level editor. While at first glance it seems very complex, with the instructions at hand it will quickly become easier. Being able to save the game (in remastered mode) to the cartridge is a great new option too.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Although the first few levels are a clever introduction to the game, the difficulty does ramp up very quickly once the "puzzle" levels appear. There was some criticism of the fact that the digital download cannot be transferred easily, but that is a minor complaint – the physical cartridge will work on real hardware anyway. Although Random Mode (an idea borrowed from the later Martin Walker game Citadel) sounds good, in practice it can leave you stranded in a star system filled with very difficult levels.

VERDICT

Thalamus Digital starts off with an exceptional release, a superb update to a great game.

The Hunter has been spray-painted silver as it tackles level 002

SCORE	
"This remastered version is a superb update"	
GFX	96%
SFX	91%
FUN	90%
STAYING POWER	90%
OVERALL	**94%**

■ **CODING:** Stuart Collier, design and GFX by Trevor Storey (Smila), Music by Saul Cross. Published by Psytronik.
■ **INFO:** Digital download $4.99 from https://psytronik.itch.io/legend-of-atlantis
   Tape and disk £6.99, premium disk $13.99 and Collector's edition £39.99 from http://www.binaryzone.org/retrostore/
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

ROCKY MEMPHIS & THE LEGEND OF ATLANTIS

Stuart Collier impressed with his first ever C64 game, The Sky Is Falling (which was based on Ovine's mobile app of the same name). Now he teams up with Trevor Storey for a very different style of game, inspired by a certain archaeologist.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Many people have searched for the lost city of Atlantis, famed for its wealth. Raiding a tomb in Mexico, explorer Rocky Memphis uncovers a clue that leads him to a ruined temple in the North African desert. Could this be the key to finding the mysterious city? An impressive animated introductory sequence sets the story, followed by the loading screen. Starting the game leaves Rocky in a single screen with his way forward blocked by a wall. He can search for objects by pressing down and fire, scroll through his inventory by pressing up and fire, and use an object by pressing the fire button on its own. Pressing up will jump or climb up a ladder, down will crouch or climb down. The first puzzle simply requires careful studying of the screen, a tactic that will serve the player well. Getting past the first wall reveals the temple is filled with traps – some of them set off by pressure pads. There are also stone tablets to be read, but first Rocky must find the Book of Atlantis that will allow him to translate the symbols. Climbing up to the next screen reveals a couple of useful objects (one on the plinth, the other hidden in a pile of rubble) that can be used to move forward. The next screen after that reveals a trick to help overcome the pressure pads and disable many of the traps that lie ahead. Further exploration shows that Rocky is not alone in the tomb – deadly scorpions and bats kill on contact. Trap doors, switches and even illusions all stand in the way of Rocky discovering the truth about Atlantis.

The puzzles themselves are really well constructed, drawing on many familiar ideas. An object found in room 'A' needs to be carried to room 'B' to unlock room 'C', for example. Needing the Book to translate the tablets adds to the atmosphere created; the tablets give vital clues on the puzzles ahead and can help steer the player in the right direction.

WHAT I LIKE

The beautiful single screens are drawn in high-resolution mode, giving just two colours but allowing plenty of detail. Rocky himself is an impressive character made with overlaid sprites, closely resembling a very famous adventurer with a fedora and whip. He is surprisingly agile, jumping across gaps and traversing chasms with the help of ropes. The enemies are drawn in hi-res too, with animation of the whole game beautifully executed. It is important to be observant, as there are many small details that can be missed such as the small pressure pads, they can be hard to see but are so important in the way the game is played. Music by Saul Cross is excellent, an Egyptian-style tune really fits the bill. A few carefully made sound effects can be heard alongside the tune, most notably a "click" or "rumble" as a puzzle is solved to open the way ahead. As with previous Psytronik games, the packaging of the Collector's Box is superb (with old titles having new boxes issued so that they match the new range). The stickers and art card are great, and the printed map is cleverly designed not to give away too much about the game and

how to solve it. The download files include a disk image designed for use with the C64 Mini. In many ways Legend of Atlantis can be seen as an heir to classic games including Montezuma's Revenge and Rick Dangerous, although the pace here is much slower and the challenges more thought-provoking than action-oriented.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

One frustration is the random movement patterns of the bats and scorpions, which make certain screens very tricky to complete. It is also easy to miss an item or a clue, leaving the player stuck in a room. There is no save function, unless using an emulator or freeze cartridge. Controls in general are good and responsive, but scrolling through the inventory sometimes means the player misses the item they wanted and has to go around again. It also might have been nice to have the option to turn off the music as it may get on your nerves when playing for a long spell.

VERDICT

Graphically the sprites are huge, it looks terrific and in perspective throughout the entire game. Opening movie sequence sets the scene of exploration, adventure and danger (which it has plenty of) and also leaves you intrigued as to what is about to unfold. There is a bit of backwards and forwards about it traversing over the same areas a bit, however this is a stylish and well made exploration platform game - the key term is on 'exploration'. It will be the challenge of solving all the puzzles that draws the player back, and that draw is pretty strong. Hopefully we will be treated to more of Rocky's adventures in the future with wonderful exploration adventures like this one.

Exploring the second room, with a blockage bottom right that can be cleared somehow

■ **CODING:** Martin Piper, design and GFX by Alf Yngve, Music and intro by Richard Bayliss
■ **INFO:** Download from https://csdb.dk/release/?id=163678
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

ARHENA THE AMAZON
(SPECIAL EDITION)

Deadly ants await in the desert

This is an updated version of Alf Yngve's 1988 game created with the Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit. Martin Piper's SEUCK Redux code reduces sprite flicker and allows enhancements to basic SEUCK games.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Arhena, Amazon queen, has lost her children to a deadly plague. She sets off across the world in search of the secret of immortality. She must battle tribes and deadly monsters, cross deserts and search caves to find the well of eternal youth. She must also avoid falling into holes. Arhena defends herself by throwing knives, but they have a limited range. Hearts can be collected for extra points, with extra lives awarded every 10,000 points. This is a one or two player game.

Deep in a cave, Arhena blasts a monster

WHAT I LIKE

The presentation Richard and Martin have added to the game work really well. Of particular note is the excellent tune with its tribal drums, sounding in places like classic Matt Gray. I also liked the cave sequence with its tentacled monsters.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Despite the Redux code, there are times when lots of sprites on screen causes slowdown. There are also areas where sections of the map are repeated (a trick Alf often used to extend the length of his games created in SEUCK). That makes the game feel more repetitive. The loading screen is a bit clichéd too.

VERDICT

Above average for a SEUCK game.

Setting off in level 1

SCORE	
"The presentation Richard and Martin have added to the game work really well"	
GFX	77%
SFX	72%
FUN	70%
STAYING POWER	65%
OVERALL	70%

■ **CODING:** Jamie Fuller (Jimmy/Megastyle), GFX by Del Seymour (Hank Splendid/Megastyle), SFX by Roy Widding (Rotteroy/Megastyle)
■ **INFO:** Download from https://www.jamiefuller.com/portal/
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

PORTAL

This is a triumph… Valve's incredible 3D puzzle game has been "de-made" for the C64 in an experiment by Jamie Fuller.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The player takes control of Chell, the human test subject trapped inside a series of twenty test chambers by GlaDOS, a malevolent AI. Before each level, GlaDOS will give advice or taunt the player. Fortunately Chell has access to the Portal Gun, which is aimed with the 1351 mouse (or joystick). The gun can create two portals, one orange and one blue, in light grey walls. These portals are the key to solving the puzzle in each chamber standing between Chell and the exit door – when the two portals are active, Chell can teleport between them. Switches (press E) will deliver a Companion Cube into the chamber, which can be used in various ways, either to stand on a pressure pad (a Cube can be picked up and dropped with E), or to block the gunfire of the deadly turrets. Water is also fatal to Chell, pressure pads will switch walls on / off and later on coloured walls pose an additional challenge. Should the level be left in an unsolvable state, the player can quit to the title screen (with Run-Stop) and resume on the same level. Each level has a password shown on screen, which can be entered on the title screen to skip to that level.

WHAT I LIKE

This is not the first 2D version of Portal, but it is a very good attempt at recreating the gameplay. The graphics evoke the stark grey test chambers, and sound is sparse but effective. Using the mouse and keys gives plenty of freedom. The humour remains in GlaDOS speaking before each new level. Best of all the end game sequence (featuring the classic Jonathan Coulton song Still Alive) has been recreated, with ASCII cake and scrolling lyrics in time with the excellent SID music. And there is plenty of moist, delicious cake as a reward… (Including a cake recipe hidden in memory).

Chamber 17 features strange red and green walls

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The biggest concern is that there are only twenty levels to overcome, which will not take players long. A level editor / designer would have been a brilliant addition. Having to go back to the title screen to reset the level is understandable but frustrating (especially as the cutscene begins again, but can be skipped by pressing E). Many puzzles also rely on jumping rather than portals, and it looks slightly odd when moving right and aiming left (and vice versa) as the Chell sprite is not mirrored completely when aiming. Finally, THE CAKE IS A LIE!

VERDICT

The spirit and humour of Portal is still alive in this C64 conversion, it's just a shame there are not more levels (and cake) to get your teeth into.

How to put the Companion Cube (top right) in the turret's line of fire?

SCORE

"And there is plenty of moist, delicious cake as a reward…"

GFX	**80%**
SFX	**78%**
FUN	**82%**
STAYING POWER	**74%**
OVERALL	**80%**

DIGGER

The group Hokuto Force have established the "Digital Monastery" as their game-making section, and this release is based on a 1983 PC game of the same name.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Digger draws its inspiration from the classic arcade game Mr. Do. There is a built in trainer if you want to cheat, or three lives to start with. An extra life is earned every three levels. The basic aim of each level is to collect all the wealth of the mine using your digger. Large bags of gold are also found in each level, and will drop down when the earth under them is removed. When they land the bag bursts open and the gold can be collected. There are two ways to kill the enemies protecting the treasure. Dropping a bag of gold will kill them. The alternative is to fire the digger's bullet, which takes a while to recharge. Collecting all the treasure dots will complete the level. Killing three enemies will reveal the bonus object (starting with a cherry) for extra points. The music changes and the player must hunt down the enemies. If the enemies are not killed before the music ends, the bonus round is over. If enemies are not challenged for a while during normal gameplay, they may transfer into a Pacman-like digger that will home in on the player and dig through the dirt after them.

WHAT I LIKE

This is a pretty good Mr. Do clone. Graphics are bright if a little simple, drawing on the PC original. The music tunes running during gameplay are good, including a nice cover / remix of the classic, Hot Butter track, Popcorn. Difficulty is pitched about right, allowing the player to learn and progress.

Close to finishing level 4

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Where Mr. Do's tunnels were pixels, in Digger, the dirt is dug away in character blocks, which looks a little simplistic. The enemy sprites are not particularly impressive, and the bullet is difficult to use (especially with its long recharge time). The presentation generally is also quite basic.

VERDICT

A fairly competent conversion of a very old game, which will not last a long time in the memory. The official Mr. Do conversion remains at the top of its class.

The first level layout

SCORE

"This is a pretty good
Mr. Do clone"

GFX	64%
SFX	68%
FUN	75%
STAYING POWER	71%
OVERALL	**70%**

■ **PUBLISHER:** K & A Plus
■ **INFO:** €10 from http://ka-plus.pl/en/zine/single-button-games-collection-en/
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

SINGLE BUTTON GAMES COLLECTION

The Single Button Game Controller (www.sibuga.com) acts as a single fire button when plugged into either joystick port. There have been several games designed just for a single button, and it has the added benefit of acting as the Space Bar when plugged into port 1 (useful for some games that needed that extra control, e.g. Green Beret).

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The coverdisk for issue 9 of K&A Plus magazine collected together five of these games, plus an extra game entitled Firefighter (originally entered into the 10-line BASIC coding competition, Enhanced Firefighter was given away as a type-in listing in the Deluxe Edition's manual). And so a special collector's tape of the five games was put together for release. The games are:

CAPTAIN CLOUDBERRY (Megastyle) – your plane can only turn left when Fire is pressed, so it is tricky to collect the balloons left behind by the evil witch without hitting the clouds.

PIXEL CITY SKATER (Digital Monastery) – in this 4K game there are two modes based around a skater; normal mode speeds up every few screens, where endless mode gives scrolling obstacles to avoid or jump over.

FIRE TO JUMP (Software of Sweden) – a stylish game where the timing is crucial to get the cube over the obstacles.

FLAPPER (Endurion/Megastyle) – based on a Flash game, guide the helicopter through the scrolling canyon pressing Fire to gain height.

FLAPPY BIRD (Sos) – the C64 version of the phenomenally successful mobile app, where the bird must flap its way through the pipes.

Lightning reverses the turning direction of Captain Cloudberry's plane

WHAT I LIKE

The cassette and inlay are very well made, with the cute stickers (representing each game) a nice bonus. Single button games can be very monotonous, but Captain Cloudberry and Pixel City Skater are a lot of fun thanks to their great presentation. Fire To Jump really ups the ante with its unique rotating jump and carefully chosen colour schemes.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Flapper is very simple, and Flappy Bird never really appealed to me. Although the latter looks good it becomes repetitive very quickly. This is very much a collector's piece, as the games themselves are all freely available online.

VERDICT

The gorgeous Deluxe Edition may have sold out, but there is fun to be had with the selection on this tape – whether or not you have the SiBUGA controller they were designed for.

SCORE

"There is fun to be had with the selection on this tape"

GFX	70%
SFX	70%
FUN	75%
STAYING POWER	68%
OVERALL	**71%**

- **CODING:** Karl Hornell
- **INFO:** Download from https://csdb.dk/release/?id=161351
- **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

ICEBLOX PLUS

This was a surprise for C64 fans. Budget programming legend Karl Hornell suddenly returned with a new game, after years of working in the online casino industry. It is actually a conversion of a Java game written in 1996. After the initial release there was an updated version with bug fixes and a built in cheat. Karl also went on to release another new game in 2018 called Scuttlebutt, filled with toilet humour.
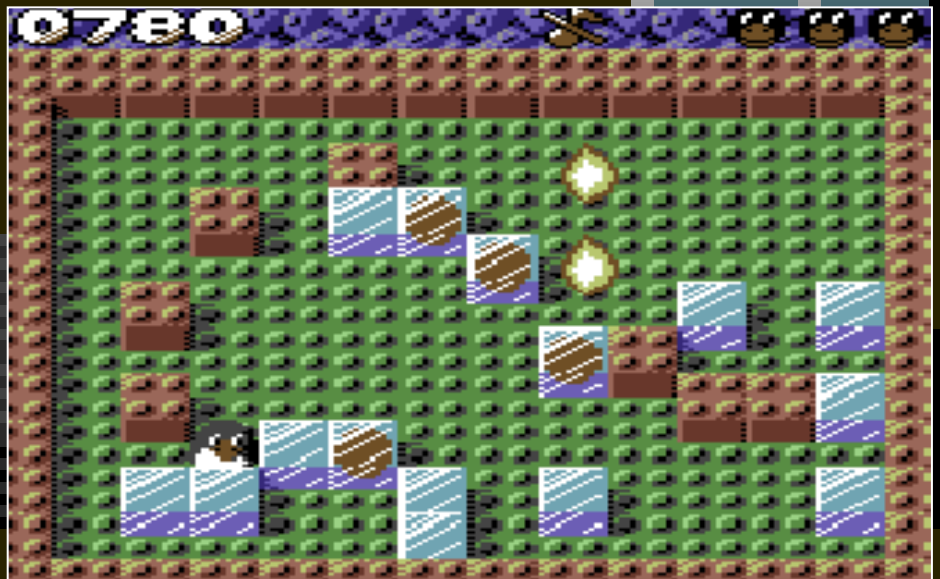
Level 3's background is made from plastic bricks

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Based on the classic arcade game Pengo, the player controls a penguin called Pixel Pete. He must collect the coins trapped in the ice blocks. Blocks can be pushed when there is space beside them; when they collide / are pushed into another block they shatter and release the coin. The ice can also be used to kill the wandering enemies that home in on Pete. Pete only has three lives but there is no time limit.

WHAT I LIKE

The game starts with a lovely sequence that explains the basics of the gameplay. Pete is a great little sprite, especially when he looks happy on completing a level. The background tiles change every few levels, adding some variety, and there is a clever fade between levels. The jolly tune can be switched off during the game. Control is good and presentation works really well.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The first couple of levels are deceptively easy and the difficulty does not increase much, just the number of blocks. The pace is quite slow too, with only a limited number of enemies on screen at the same time. The tune does become repetitive and there are very few sound effects.

VERDICT

It is wonderful to see Karl coding for the C64 again, although he admitted it was a real challenge. With a bit more variety this could have made another great budget release. As it stands it's a fun diversion that compares well with other Pengo style games on the system, with a cute graphical style. At the time of writing, Pond Software are planning a physical disk release.

An early level with two coins left to collect

SCORE	
"Pete is a great little sprite"	
GFX	79%
SFX	66%
FUN	73%
STAYING POWER	71%
OVERALL	**75%**

■ **CODING:** Knight Rider of Excess
■ **INFO:** Download from https://csdb.dk/release/?id=162304
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

INTERNATIONAL KARATE ULTIMATE

The improved International Karate Ultimate from Excess relied on the Easy Flash cartridge to rapidly load new backgrounds. The end result was a competition on the Commodore Scene Database for artists to create new backgrounds, resulting in this new Competition Edition.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The eight new backgrounds are linked together in a story, told in the documentation during the start-up. This is one element of the presentation that can be controlled from the menu; the intro, documentation and menu itself can all be suppressed for faster loading. These preferences can then be saved to the cartridge for the next session and quickly restored. The game effectively has SIX sets of backgrounds to choose from. There is the original IK set, the new Ultimate set and the Competition set. Holding the Commodore key before the menu appears unlocks an additional three hidden sets, the backgrounds from rival fighting game series Way of the Exploding Fist. The menu also lets the player choose which screens from the chosen set

are shown during the game. The trainer menu adds extra keys, such as skipping to the next level, as well as gameplay changes including a handicap system for player 2. There are also three music tracks to choose from, with the classic Rob Hubbard tune always an option (plus the Fist tunes when playing that set). For those with the relevant hardware, a second SID can be allocated to play sound FX

at the same time as the music. The colour of the fighter's tunics can be customised along with the game speed.

WHAT I LIKE

Fighters ready in the Imperial Temple

The new competition backgrounds are superb, and the "story" they tell is a clever addition. The graphics of the judge have also been subtly altered, which is cool. The new loading screen from Jon Egg is very impressive, and the new music really fits the game so well.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

At first glance the menu system is quite complex with so many options. There is also some flicker at the "join" between the new backgrounds and the original fighting graphics, but this is a minor concern.

VERDICT

This is a superb update of a brilliant fighting game, adding more than just new backgrounds. So much has been packed into it that it feels like a new game, and the many options prove to be fascinating.

The first competition screen features a lovely waterfall

SCORE	
"The new competition backgrounds are superb"	
GFX	92%
SFX	92%
FUN	94%
STAYING POWER	90%
OVERALL	**92%**

COMMODORE 64

RENT-A-COP
RELOADED

Achim has reworked his Rent-A-Cop game with new presentation and features to create this new version.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The original Rent-A-Cop was based on the Atari VCS game Keystone Kapers, where a security guard pursued a fleeing burglar up through the floors of a shopping mall. This new version adds different locations including the docks and an airport, as Mr Smith (the player) undergoes two weeks' training as a security guard. The aim is the same – stop the bad guy escaping (reaching the top right of the level). Getting hit by enemies and hazards (birds and shopping trolleys) will reduce the hero's energy, but shooting bad guys will sometimes reveal extra items that can help. A bulletproof vest restores energy to maximum, a gun increases the firing rate, the flashbang grenade makes time and enemies run slower, while the amphetamine pill gives a short period of invulnerability.

Heading into the building site, with a flying bird going past

WHAT I LIKE

The added presentation (including Steve Day's superb title screen) and changing levels make the game look even more impressive, taking it away from its Atari roots. High scores can be saved and loaded to disk. Music and sound FX fit well, and the graphics have a more realistic feel than the cartoonish original.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The time limits are very tough, meaning spending too long dealing with the roaming bad guys will cost you. The control method can also make it difficult to climb stairs fluidly, costing valuable time. Because it lacks the lifts of the original, there is no shortcut. Although it is quite easy to grasp, long term the high difficulty can be off-putting.

VERDICT

A tough game for tough gamers.

Level 1, night shift at the mall
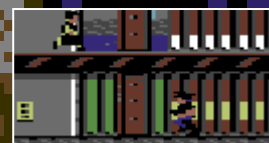
SCORE

"The graphics have a more realistic feel than the cartoonish original"

GFX	72%
SFX	74%
FUN	72%
STAYING POWER	66%
OVERALL	**72%**

■ **CREDITS:** Coding by Darro99, GFX by Errazking of Hokuto Force, Kabuto Factory, The A Team, Music by Uctumi of Hokuto Force, PVM
■ **INFO:** Download from https://csdb.dk/release/?id=165026
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

SKY DIVING

Spanish coder Darro99 (David Asenjo) released his first game in 2017, the fun Rowman. Now he returns with a new game based on falling out of a plane.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The aim of the game is to successfully complete ten jumps. For each jump, the player gets five lives and a timer that counts down. The player must press Space to open their parachute before the timer reaches zero, or it is game over. Birds, planes and other debris are falling from the sky and must be avoided.

Any contact will cost energy (shown by the meter) and cause the player to flash for a short period, meaning they cannot collect anything. When the energy runs out, a life is lost and the jump must be attempted again. The player can steer in any direction and press the fire button to fall faster. The objects to be collected are the coloured balloons that float upwards, awarding extra accumulated time. Too much accumulated time will prevent the player from taking their last two jumps.

The title screen shows the credits and today's records

Free Falling...

The parachute is deployed

WHAT I LIKE

After a nice loading screen and well-presented title sequence, the game itself is nicely drawn. The main sprite is fine, and the clouds flying past are good. The game itself is challenging, with plenty to avoid. There is good music to back up the action.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The score panel on the right of the screen does take up a lot of space, restricting the playing area. At times the enemy objects are hard to avoid, with the movement patterns becoming increasingly complex. Needing to use Fire and Space is a little awkward.

VERDICT

Although it was released outside of the Forum64 / Protovision sports competition, I have a feeling it would have achieved a high result. Darro is making good progress as a coder and this is worth picking up and playing.

SCORE

"The game itself is challenging, with plenty to avoid"

GFX	**80%**
SFX	**74%**
FUN	**79%**
STAYING POWER	**71%**
OVERALL	**77%**

■ **CREDITS:** Design and GFX by Commodore Spain
■ **INFO:** Download from https://www.commodorespain.es/soccer-war-para-commodore-64-nuestro-divertido-juego-de-futbol/
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

SOCCER WAR

Here is a new release from Commodore Spain, created in the Sideways Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit. Note Ten physical tape copies will be awarded to the players who find the Easter Eggs hidden in the game and email them to the correct address.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Subtitled "Death Match", our hero is Futbolino. He must survive three hazardous matches (and a bonus round) played out on huge horizontally scrolling pitches. Each match is filled with hazards – dangerous officials (a red-card throwing referee and his assistants on the touchlines), fans throwing chairs from the stands and flying footballs that could appear from anywhere. Training cones and holes in the pitch present obstacles to walk around. Trophies can be picked up for extra points, and in the bonus round they can be shot for more points. Every 10,000 points an extra life is awarded, as the player starts with just three. At the end of each match is a deadly goalkeeper who must be beaten to win. The game ends with a trophy presentation, before Futbolino must try it all over again.

WHAT I LIKE

There are a couple of good ideas here, from the match officials to the hidden bonuses and intermission screens. The second match has rain falling and flying umbrellas, which adds a little variety. The extra presentation – a loading screen, title music and so on – is OK, and Commodore Spain are preparing a tutorial to help other programmers do the same with their SEUCK creations.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Unfortunately the limitations of SEUCK are apparent at times, with sprite flicker when a lot is happening on screen. There are a couple of places where the difficulty curve is quite steep, but it should only take a few games to master.

Getting ready for the first match

Time ticks down in the bonus round

VERDICT

A fun idea, but flawed.

EDITOR'S VIEW

If you can overcome the limitations of SEUCK, like me, you may just find this game to be one crazy version of the beautiful game, but like me you may just find it quite enjoyable. I had many a laugh while playing, the concept is bonkers for sure, but I love football so I had a great time playing this game. My ratings would be higher especially for the fun factor.

Avoid the opposition and pick up the trophy

SCORE	
"Unfortunately the limitations of SEUCK are apparent at times"	
GFX	60%
SFX	51%
FUN	62%
STAYING POWER	54%
OVERALL	**57%**

■ **CREDITS:** Coding and GFX by MP Software, Music by Echo and FieserWolf
■ **INFO:** Download from https://csdb.dk/release/?id=162361
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

TETRIS MP

Reading the title screen text reveals this game based on the Alexei Pajitnov classic, this game was coded more than 24 years ago and has now finally been released.

The domes of St Basil's Cathedral appear on the title screen
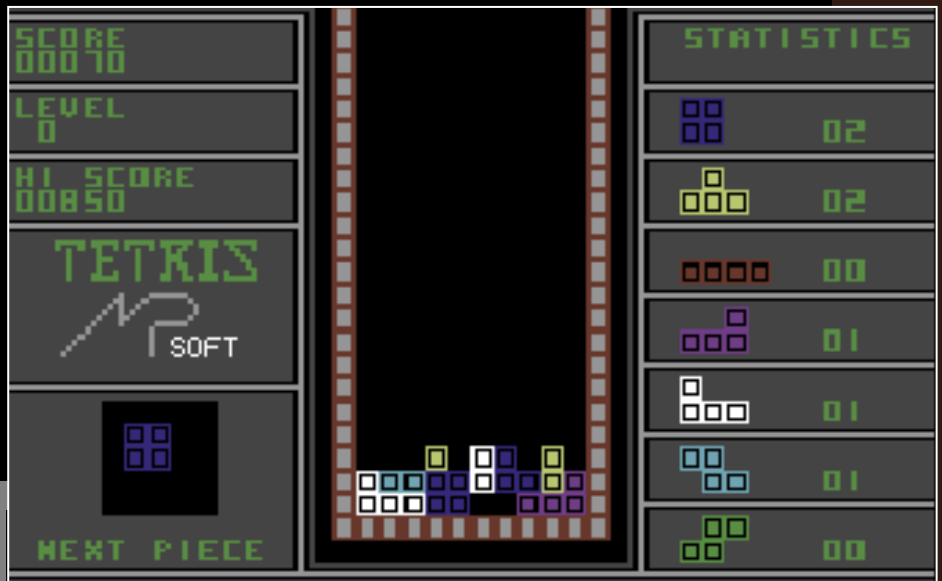
That line is about to disappear

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

If you have never played Tetris before, the premise is simple. Coloured shapes based on pentominoes, with each shape made of five smaller blocks fall from the top of the screen. The aim of the game is to make complete lines across the "well", which will then disappear. In many versions completing a group of four lines at once is known as a Tetris. As more lines are completed, the score and level increase with pieces dropping faster. In this version, down can be pressed to make a piece fall, with the addition of pressing up to regain control of the piece before it lands again. Should the pieces fill up too high then it is game over.

WHAT I LIKE

The gameplay is a very good representation of the classic. An additional touch is the statistics shown on the right of the screen, telling you how many of each piece has fallen so far. The way the border of the well flashes as danger increases is worth a mention too. The pieces move fairly smoothly, with each shape having a set colour to make recognising them easier. Two good tunes accompany the action, with one on the title screen (with its Russian-themed logo) and one during the game. M can be pressed to toggle the in game music on and off.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

One bugbear is the way game over is called when any pile reaches the top few lines, and not when a new piece is unable to enter (as in most Tetris variants). As the stats are being kept, it might have been nice to count the number of lines / Tetris completed as well. Other than regaining control of a falling piece, this does not add much to the formula. The way lines just disappear also feels like a missed opportunity for an animation or effect.

VERDICT

It's Tetris, so you already know if you will like playing it. A decent effort all round.
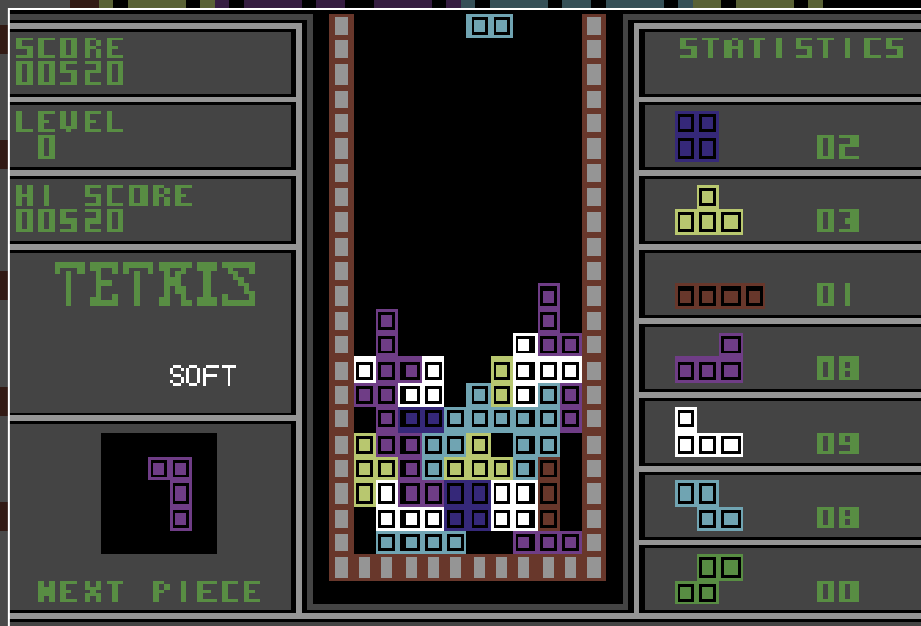
The well is filling up, better complete some lines

SCORE	
"The gameplay is a very good representation of the classic"	
GFX	70%
SFX	72%
FUN	83%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**75%**

■ **CREDITS:** Idea by STE'86, GFX by JonEgg, Saul Cross, STE'86
■ **INFO:** Download from https://csdb.dk/release/?id=166110
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

SPEEDBALL DUOLOGY

Carl Muller's great conversion of the Amiga classic Speedball 2 (by the Bitmap Brothers) gets some extra polish, with the original Speedball thrown in for good measure.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

This EasyFlash compilation boots to a menu giving access to both Speedball games, the documentation for each title and a Save Game Manager. This allows the player to move save games between the EasyFlash cartridge and disk.

SPEEDBALL is set in the 21st Century, when a violent future sport becomes popular. Two teams of five humans wearing metal armour with spikes on enter the arena. The aim is to score goals using the five-pound steel ball. In each arena are different layouts of bounce

The boot menu with the two games, save manager and instructions

domes that the ball will ricochet off, and two warp tunnels that will send the ball to the other side of the pitch. Each game is started and restarted by the ball launcher in the centre firing the ball in a random direction. The time bar is shown at the bottom of the screen,

along with the stamina ratings for each team. Players can slide to tackle or jump to catch a high ball. The goalkeeper comes under player control when visible, diving to stop the ball and automatically throwing it back out into play.

The player can choose a One Player Knockout game, a Two Player Game or a One Player League. Human players have a choice of three teams – Verna, Lacerta and Draco – each with their own ratings (Stamina, Skill, Power) and strengths. Power Tiles can be picked up to help; these include W (turn the ball into a weapon that tackles opponents), G (get the ball automatically) and F (freeze the opponent for ten seconds). Power Tokens can be collected during each match and are spent afterwards. Options include bribing the referee (to give extra time in the previous match), increasing the team's ratings or decreasing the next opponent's ratings.
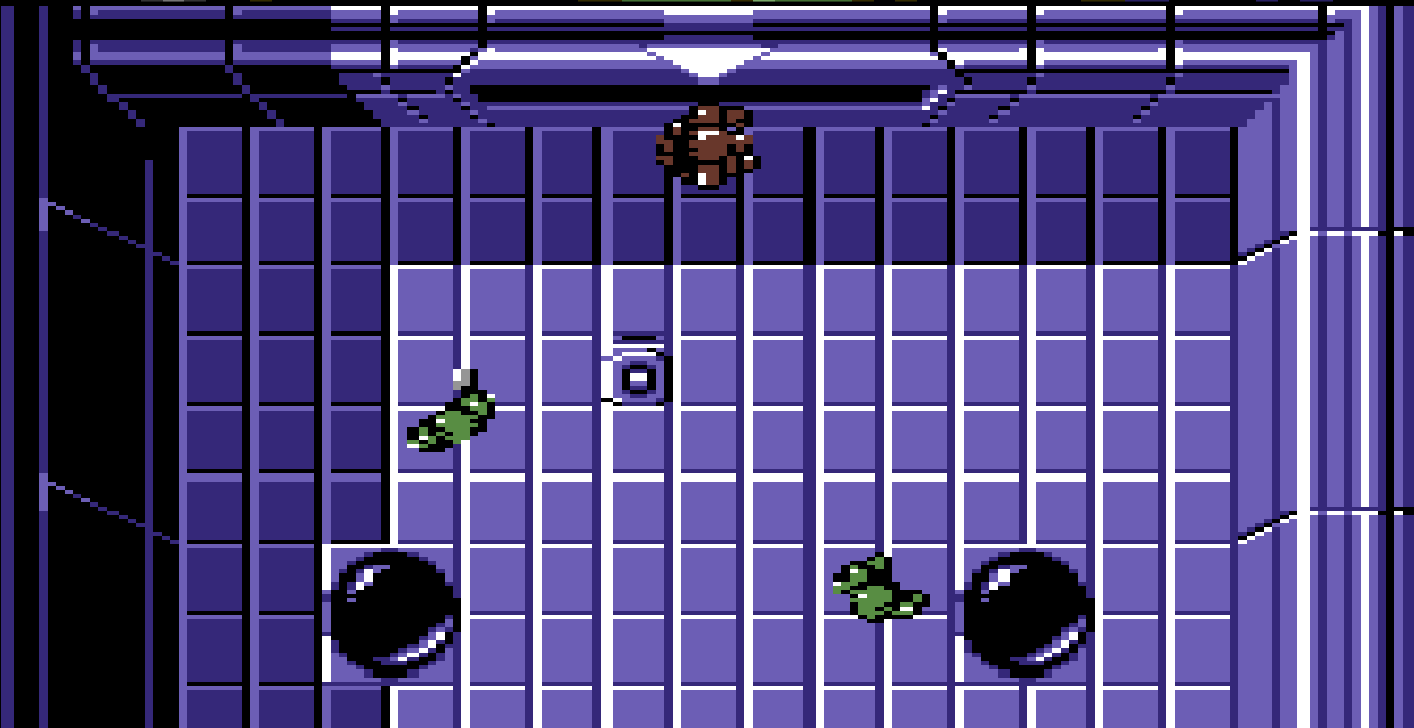
Green goes for goal as a Power Token appears

Knockout games are played over two legs, with a series of increasingly strong opponents. The League is split into two Conferences and played over the chosen number of weeks, where the player's team must play everyone in their conference. Points are given for each match – 100 for the win, 20 for the draw and 5 for each goal scored. When the season is over, the top teams enter the knockout stages leading to the Blood Bowl final.

SPEEDBALL 2 is set years later, with a newly revised pitch layout containing extra features and more players on each team. The new pitch is much larger and the screen scrolls in all directions, with the goals at the top and bottom. The launcher starts play from the middle of the pitch, just like the first game. The bounce domes return, as do the warp tunnels transporting the ball from one side of the pitch to the other. The Score Multiplier allows up to double scoring for the team whose coloured lights are showing. It is activated by throwing the ball up its spiral ramp, changing one light at a time. It also increases the length the Electrobounce is active; throwing the ball against these spikes makes the ball hot so it will "tackle" any opponent it touches. The Bonus Stars appear in two rows along the side walls. Each is worth 2 bonus points, with a bonus of 10 for lighting all five. A goal is worth 10 points. All scores are affected by the Score Multiplier, so at x2 (both lights on) the player earns 20 points for a goal. (Bounce Domes also earn 2 points per bounce). Power-up icons appear during the match, extra equipment (see below) can be picked up boosting a player and coins are collected to spend later.

The main menu gives a choice of 1 player game, 2 player game or a Demo. One player can choose from Knockout, League, Cup or Practice. In the Knockout mode, the player takes control of Brutal Deluxe – the worst team in Speedball history. The aim is to take the team to the top. Players can be bought and sold through the Gym interface. Here, coins earned during the match can be spent to upgrade the players with new equipment (either individually, as a group – Defence / Midfield / Attack – or for the whole team). Progress in the League can be saved.

Choosing a team in the original Speedball
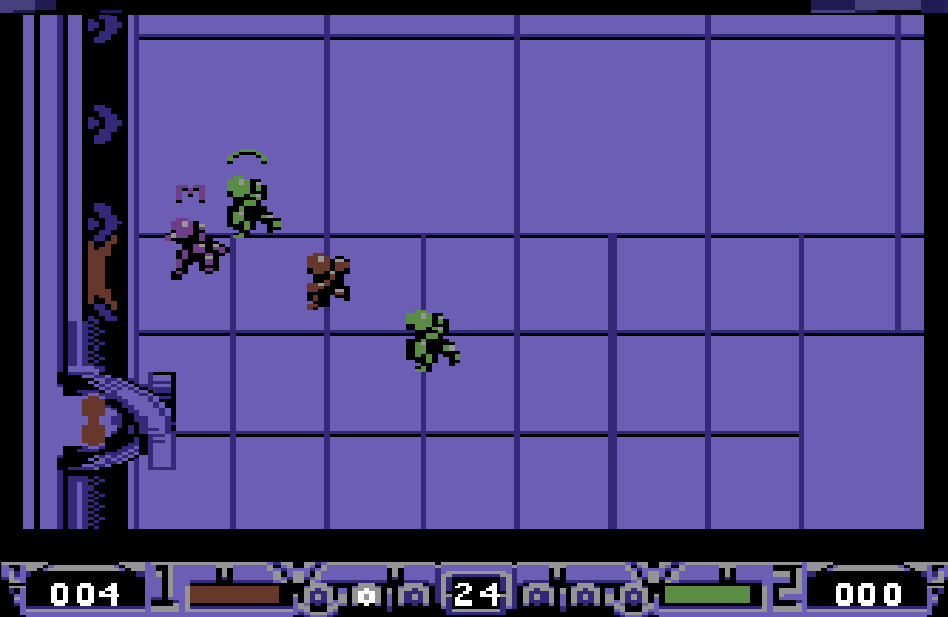
Red has lit one Bonus Star and has a x2 Score Multiplier

WHAT I LIKE

The main aim of this update was to bring in new presentation screens, making the game more closely resemble the Amiga version. This has been done in some style, with the new screens (for defeat, victory, substitutions

Nigel scores for Brutal Deluxe
(one of the new screens)

and goals) looking really good. As an added bonus, the sampled chant of "Ice Cream!" when a player is badly injured has also been converted. Having both games on the cartridge is a nice idea. Both remain incredibly playable, especially against a human opponent. Both games feature excellent music (David Whittaker converting the Amiga tunes for Speedball, Martin Walker creating an original tune for the sequel's intro sequence – also included in this version). In-game sprites and presentation graphics for Speedball 2 have also been tweaked and improved.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

It is interesting to note that some flaws are still present. There is a small raster flicker on the original, which is noticeable here (and on the C64 Mini version). The sequel occasionally suffers from sprite flicker too, most notably when multiple players are moving at centre pitch before play restarts. These do not detract from the gameplay however.

VERDICT

This is the definitive version of Speedball 2 for the C64 and a clever technical achievement too.

A WIN FOR REVOLVER

SCORE	
"This has been done in some style"	
GFX	90%
SFX	85%
FUN	91%
STAYING POWER	90%
OVERALL	91%

■ **CREDITS:** Coding by Tomasz Ankudowicz (Tomxx), GFX by Tomxx, Worrior1, music by Gaetano Chiummo
■ **INFO:** Disk version available at €5 from http://ka-plus.pl/en/tower-of-rubble-64-en/
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

TOWER OF RUBBLE
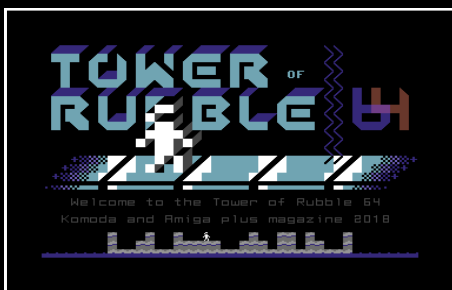
The player can roam around the blocks on the title screen

The first C64 game by Tomasz is a conversion of Flatgub's PC game, entered into the CGA Jam.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

On the title screen, the player can move the hero to learn the controls and pressing F1 for the instructions reveals an extra jumping technique. Pressing fire button starts the game. Our tiny hero is stranded on an island surrounded by water, when blocks of rubble start to fall from the sky. Dotted lines show where one or two blocks are going to fall. The hero must avoid being crushed and can climb one block vertically. Holding diagonally up will help the hero jump across a gap and grab a block as they fall. Pressing down makes the hero hang from the side of a block, and
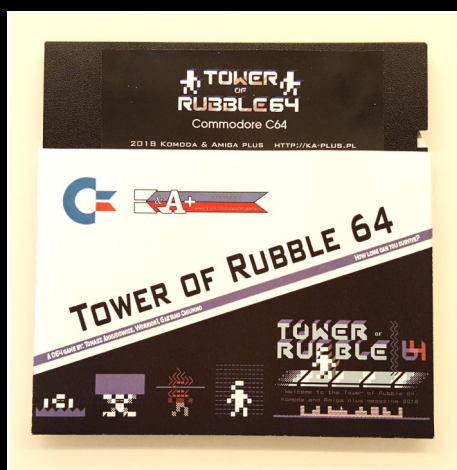
The disk comes in a nicely printed sleeve

Short animations accompany each way of dying

pushing across from this position means they can jump a two block "gap". After a while a disintegrator beam will turn two columns of blocks into rubble, leaving behind the water underneath. New ground can be formed by a block falling there. Every so often a dangerous laser beam fires horizontally, wiping out an entire row of blocks and our hero if they are standing on that row. Any blocks above will fall down. The aim is to survive for as long as possible, with one point awarded for each blockfall. So, avoid being crushed, drowning and being wiped out for a laser as long as you can.

WHAT I LIKE

The title screen with its mini-tutorial is great, backed with an excellent tune. In game music is linked to the gameplay. blocks fall on the beat, giving it a rhythm action feel. The in-game tune has plenty of pace and feels exciting. The tiny 8-pixel high character is smoothly animated and moves fluidly over the blocks. The PETSCII style animations for each death are good fun. It becomes addictive quickly, thanks to the desire to get a higher score.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The random nature of the falling blocks can make the game very tricky, although it is only occasionally unfair to the player. The palette is quite restricted, thanks to the CGA style origins, so the game lacks a little colour. The question is whether chasing a higher score will keep the player gripped.

VERDICT

An impressive debut game that is fun to pick up and play.

Dotted lines show where blocks will fall

SCORE

"The tiny 8-pixel high character is smoothly animated and moves fluidly over the blocks"

GFX	**75%**
SFX	**76%**
FUN	**80%**
STAYING POWER	**77%**
OVERALL	**77%**

■ **CREDITS:** Made by Black Castle Software
■ **INFO:** Name your price at https://blackcastle.itch.io/trolley-follies
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

TROLLEY FOLLIES

Setting various options on the menu

This is an interesting puzzle game from Black Castle, with development ongoing.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The Convoluted Railroad Company is looking for new trolley drivers, who must pick up passengers and take them to the right station. One or two drivers can play at the same time, with the layouts of the neighbourhoods becoming more complex. Drivers must press the fire button to rotate the nearest switch to their trolley, turning the junction piece to line up. Damaged track sections must be avoided until they can be repaired. Running through a damaged section or through a junction that is not connected will derail the trolley. Each driver starts with three spare trolleys. Passengers are colour coded according to the station they want, but will get angry if the driver takes too long; the faster they arrive, the more points are earned. Customers left waiting too long at a station will leave, and they will also abandon the trolley should it derail. Earn enough points and the exit to the next level is opened. If the High Scores option is on, the game saves the previous high score for a level to disk and that is the score that

The trolley has derailed going through a junction

must be beaten. The game also comes with a level editor to create your own track layouts. Pressing F5 reveals the help messages built in, otherwise certain keys will change colours and piece to be positioned with the joystick. Users are encouraged to upload their levels to the website or Commodore BBS systems to share with other players.

WHAT I LIKE

On first appearance the graphics seem quite simple, but they are very effective, in a similar way to the classic Sim City. The expressions of the passengers are really clear too as their mood changes. What is great is the support

for multiple drives in the menus and Level Editor, designed for compatibility with more devices. There is currently a bug when saving to a D64 on an SD2IEC, but the game files can be extracted to a folder to prevent this. The difficulty of the levels included increases nicely too. It may take a little while to grasp the concept but it is fun going for high scores (which can be saved, viewed or reset – and are totally optional, thanks to the menu). It's also good to see the PDF manual included with its sense of humour.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The music on the title screen does grate a little. The level editor takes some time to understand, but the documentation is helpful.

VERDICT

A clever idea that will grow on the player, with lasting appeal in the form of the Level editor.

SCORE	
"It may take a little while to grasp the concept but it is fun going for high scores"	
GFX	60%
SFX	30%
FUN	75%
STAYING POWER	79%
OVERALL	**76%**

Two passengers on board, take them to the right station

■ **CREDITS:** Coding and GFX by Zbigniew Ross, Music by MCH. Published by RGCD & Psytronik
■ **INFO:** PAL only, name your price for the digital download at https://rgcddev.itch.io/yoomp-64, 6.99 for budget disk, £13.99 Premium Plus Disc at http://www.binaryzone.org/retrostore/, and £28 for the deluxe cartridge version
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

YOOMP! 64

This is the long awaited conversion of Team Yoomp's, ABBUC Software Contest 2007 winning game, YOOMP! for the Atari XL / XE.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The player is in control of a bouncing ball and must make their way through 23, three-dimensional tubes filled with various tiles. From the main menu, the player can start a game, choose between music and sounds & fx (only one can be active) and enter a password. The passwords are displayed on completing a level and are entered with the joystick or keyboard.

The tunnel appears from the centre of the screen and moves towards the player. The ball must not touch black space as this will result in the loss of a life, restarting the current level. At the bottom of the screen are displayed the number of lives remaining, the current score and the number of long jumps available. A long jump is selected by pressing fire before hitting the floor, so that the next bounce will go further. Some tiles will force movement (arrows) and the arrow pointing forward gives an automatic long jump (extra jumps can be earned from the tile with double arrows). An extra life can be earned from the 1up tile. The player moves by pressing left or right on the joystick to follow the coloured path, which means they might need to go up the walls and across the ceiling of the tunnel.

Riding the wall of level 2

WHAT I LIKE

The 3D effect is pretty impressive, especially with certain colour combinations. The gameplay is very challenging, reminiscent of Trailblazer and Cosmic Causeway. The illuminated transparent blue cartridge is pretty cool. The digital download and disk version are also compatible with the SD2IEC. Supporting joystick and keyboard for the entry of passwords and names, makes the game compatible with the C64GS.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The physical game (on cartridge and disk) is PAL only, which will disappoint users outside Europe. Playing from disk means a brief load for each new level reached, slowing the flow of the game down. One notable absence from the Atari version is the distance bar in the lower border, which showed how far through the current level the player had reached. Triggering the long jump does take some getting used to, and the ball doesn't seem as bouncy as the original version.

Deep into level 3

VERDICT

A highly enjoyable game that will challenge the dextrous player.

Hit the arrows to clear the gap

SCORE

"The 3D effect is pretty impressive"

GFX	**88%**
SFX	**84%**
FUN	**90%**
STAYING POWER	**88%**
OVERALL	**88%**

■ **CREDITS:** ZeroPaige
■ **INFO:** Nintendo cracked down heavily on this game, so finding it online might be difficult but it's worth the effort
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Louie Dimovski

SUPER MARIO BROTHERS

Super Mario Brothers is an iconic platform gaming title that conjures up warm feelings from retro gaming enthusiasts. Many fondly remember the endless hours they spent navigating a pudgy Italian plumber through the dangers within Mushroom Kingdom all for the sake of saving Princess Toadstool from the evil King Bowser.

Seven years in the making, the Super Mario Brothers port for the C64 was finally released over the Easter 2019 weekend, sending the retro gaming social media channels into a frenzy as they marvelled at the technical brilliance required to pull off the game onto the old 'bread bin'. Despite not being a fan of the original game (or even the Mario franchise itself), I just had to check out the port for myself and see if I had been wrong for all these years to dismiss the game as being a somewhat mundane running platformer.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Super Mario Brothers C64 is pretty much a complete port of the original Nintendo version. The game includes the original eight worlds, each comprised of four sub-stages. You'll find coins scattered around the game world for Mario to collect with an extra life being awarded when you gather 100 coins. You'll come across many bricks marked with a question mark, which when hit from below will reveal either additional coins or a special power up items such as growing twice the size.

A strong point of the original game was the inclusion of bonuses and secret areas within the game world that will either lead Mario to more coins or act as time warps that allow you to advance directly to later worlds. The C64 version doesn't let us down on this aspect as these also look to be all included. The extent

of the faithfulness of the port becomes evident when you realise that even the 'glitches' found within the original title are included in the C64 version.

There are four control mode settings on offer with the default using the joystick up to jump while the joystick button is used to fire or sprint. Those of you who have access to a two button controller will be able to take advantage of the extra button being assigned to the jump action.

Super Mario Brothers C64 also features a turbo mode designed to improve the overall game play speed. Given the original was developed to run on a machine with almost twice the CPU speed of the C64, you shouldn't be surprised to find that the play stutters and lags in some of the busier sections of the game. Using a Commodore 128 in C64 mode will remove most stutters and lags that are exhibited on stock C64 machines, while those lucky enough to have Turbo Chameleon or Super CPU devices should be able to eliminate all performance issues from the game.

The most outstanding aspect of the port is

WHAT I LIKE

clearly how faithful it is to the NES version via the inclusion of original secret areas, tricks and bonus features. It's these touches that elevate the game above from being an average platformer. The inclusion of a Turbo mode is a winner in my mind as it at least provides the means to access smoother game play via accelerator devices or emulators with tweaked settings.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The overall sound within the game is

somewhat poor. The decision to emulate the NES sound results in some tunes sounding clipped, creating an irritating flapping type sound effect while the lack of fidelity with the game music and effects results in thin high pitched sounds being produced that quickly grate on your nerves. Busier sections of the game world will result in game play stuttering on non-accelerated devices. The sound will start sounding choppy and Mario will feel like he is jumping on the moon as your gaming experience is disrupted with the need to adjust your game play to accommodate the lag in responsiveness.

VERDICT

No doubt that Super Mario Brothers for the C64 is a technically impressive port that provides a very faithful recreation of the original title. This game is not going to change your opinion as to the quality of the gaming on hand. Fans of the game will enjoy the C64 version while the rest of us will find the core game elements somewhat dull and wondering what all the fuss is about.

SCORE	
"technically impressive"	
GFX	75%
SFX	30%
FUN	80%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	80%

- **CREDITS:** Coding, GFX and design by Viza of Hokuto Force. Music by NecroPolo
- **INFO:** Download from https://csdb.dk/release/?id=168109
- **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

XXV

The scrolling message gives the instructions

This puzzle game gained 4th place in the **Mixed Game Competition at Function 2018 demo party, a top result considering it was competing against more powerful machines. This is a twist on the well known mobile puzzle app 'Threes', which inspired the very similar game 2048 (and 2048 has made more than one appearance on the C64, including a cartridge version from RGCD). Another 8-Bit version based on the 'Threes' puzzle app was developed by John Lobo on the Amstrad CPC, it is called 'Amsthrees', achieving 9th out of 34 at the 2016 #CPCRETRODEV contest.**

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Your on screen grid has a few starting tiles with low numbers on them. The player moves the whole "grid" in one of four directions, sliding the tiles around. Colliding two tiles of the same number creates a single tile with the next number up – so sliding two 1's together creates a 2. Red tiles with an 'X' on them are there to block moves. Lining up three 'X'

When the grid is full it is game over

blocks will make them all disappear, handy to clear some space. New tiles are generated as the grid is moved. The aim of the game is therefore to create a 25 block, or reach the highest number possible, before running out of clear space or possible moves.

WHAT I LIKE

The presentation is quite good, with hi-res tiles and well chosen colours. The subtle character animation and scrolling instructions

on the title screen are good too. The music has a good beat and goes well in the background. Control is smooth, with either the 'W,A,S,D' keys or joystick in port 2.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

It took some time to grasp the differences to Threes / 2048, making the first few goes very frustrating. How long it will last depends on how hooked the player becomes. It falls short of being a must play game, but try it and see.

VERDICT

A different take on a familiar puzzle formula from Digital Monastery.

Up to the number 3 so far, with red blocks in the way

SCORE	
"The presentation is quite good, with hi-res tiles and well chosen colours."	
GFX	69%
SFX	73%
FUN	64%
STAYING POWER	68%
OVERALL	**68%**

PARTY GAMES

WRITTEN BY MERMAN

Three new multiplayer games have been released for the C64, each allowing up to 8 players with a joystick interface.

MASHED TURTLES

Coding: Angelsoft, GFX: Dorndorf
Download: https://csdb.dk/release/?id=171965
Requires: MultiJoy interface, Protovision 4-Player

Player 1 got squashed, player 2 is still crossing the first road

This is 8-player Frogger, with your score based on how many times the frog crosses the multiple lanes of traffic in a set time limit. Like all these party games, stats are kept and shown at the end of the game. The graphics are quite nice and the music is alright. It is converted from the Atari 8-bit computers, where the MultiJoy interface first appeared (and now works on the C64 as well). Version 2 also supports four players via the Protovision interface. The more human players, the merrier but the lasting appeal isn't there.

SCORE	
GFX	60%
SFX	71%
FUN	73%
STAYING POWER	60%
OVERALL	65%

SCHLIMEISCH MANIA II

Coding: Ray/Unreal, GFX and Music: Akio Tenshi , Music: Music PCH
Download: https://csdb.dk/release/?id=165197
Requires: Inception interface

Two players battle amongst the walls of this arena

Based on the classic Tron Light Cycles sub-game, up to eight players (a minimum of 2) can race around the single-screen arena (with optional walls, in 16 different layouts). The menu has plenty of options to choose from, giving different types of game. Graphics are basic but functional and there are multiple subtunes during play to keep things interesting. The colour coded players makes things easier and the wall layouts add some variety. However there is no computer AI, meaning human players only.

SCORE	
GFX	51%
SFX	68%
FUN	66%
STAYING POWER	65%
OVERALL	61%

VERDICT

Mashed Turtles comes out on top as the most fun to pick up and play, especially now it supports the Protovision interface. All of the games are best suited to a party setting. For more details of the Inception 8-player interface, visit:
http://www.c64.cz/index.php?static=inception – Inception hardware

For the Protovision interface, visit:
https://www.protovision.games/shop/ product_info.php?products_id=34

THE WALKING DEATH PARTY VERSION

Coding: Ray/Unreal, GFX and Music: Akio Tenshi , Music: Music PCH
Download: https://csdb.dk/release/?id=165264
Requires: Inception interface

This deathmatch game comes with four different arenas (viewed from overhead) and was inspired by The Walking Dead TV series. Options include "dum dum" bullets that go through opponents, changing the time limit or playing to a set number of points. Graphics are reasonable, with some nice touches (including the Commodore rug in arena 3). The death sequences are good too. Sound includes two different tunes. It is however easy to get stuck in the landscape, and there are no computer opponents / bots to play against.

Arena 1 has streets and houses to run around

Arena 3 is set inside a house

SCORE	
GFX	63%
SFX	56%
FUN	71%
STAYING POWER	65%
OVERALL	64%

■ **CREDITS:** Coding: Chris Stanley, GFX: Roy Widding & David Eriksson, Music: Roy Widding, Loading Screem: Rune Spaans, Inlay art: Trevor 'Smila' Storey
■ **INFO:** Digital download https://www.binaryzone.org/retrostore/, also available in limited edition cassette, budget disk and premium plus editions.
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

MANCAVE

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game revolves around the hero, Richard Morningwood, the father to two misbehaving kids, Brad and Kyle. His wife is the long-suffering Betty, and his mother-in-law is the totally terrifying Fannie. Arriving home from work one evening, Richard sees that his precious man cave has been turned inside out by those mischievous kids. They discovered his secret stash of adult magazines from his teenage days and spread them all around the house. This has done nothing for his already extreme stress levels and his poor heart is now working overtime. The player must guide Richard around his house and collect up all the magazines before his wife finds them - or his rising stress levels have fatal consequences.

Viewed from side-on, Richard explores the levels of his house by climbing up and down the stairs. Magazine pages appear one at a time and flash; Richard must pick them up and take them to the big green rubbish bin in the basement. Running into one of his kids or Betty will cost a life. Fortunately Richard can

hide behind pot plants and beds by pushing down. Collecting the magazines will reduce Richard's stress temporarily, but if it gets too high he will have a heart attack and lose a life. Once all the magazines have been retrieved it is on to the next level. Later stages see the arrival of the builder Camp Freddie, who is there to mend the holes in the floor (which Richard must jump over or suffer a fatal fall). Between later levels is a bonus stage where Richard must collect the flying beer glasses while avoiding the builder; survive to the end of the bonus level to earn more points and an extra life. Richard's mother-in-law Fannie will join the chase on the fourth level. The final boss battle takes place in Richard's dreams, where he must use sweets to defeat his mother-in-law and find peace.

WHAT I LIKE

This made a great first impression, with its tiny animated characters and superb soundtrack filled with great covers. The house background is neatly done too. Having the Trophies to chase as well as a high score does make it an addictive game to play.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

My stress levels rapidly went up on my first go, as I found it very difficult to get into. This is partly to compensate for the short length of the game, with just four levels and the mini-games. The inertia on the main character is also off-putting, although it can be turned off.

VERDICT

Stylish but tricky fun from Megastyle.

SCORE	
"addictive game to play"	
GFX	83%
SFX	81%
FUN	76%
STAYING POWER	73%
OVERALL	**83%**

■ **CREDITS:** RETREAM, **CODING:** Saimo (Simone Bevilacqua)
■ **INFO:** PAL only download for $ 3.99, cartridge version from RGCD £32 plus postage, and disk version from Protovision €28 plus postage
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Merman

MAH

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Radical group the Purifiers have activated the Apocalypse shield and the clock is ticking down until they unleash Magna Annihilatio Humanitis – their plan to wipe out humanity.

Fate rests on a lone hacker attempting to break through the shield's many layers. On the title screen the player can select the INTRO, the digital MANUAL, start the GAME or watch the ENDING again (if it has been reached before). Each shield layer has one or more gameplay phases. Most layers start with Bitwall, where the tracer must collect symbols and power-ups while avoiding the Guards; after a while the Guards form the Comboss that is defeated by collecting the password. (Shown at the bottom right of the screen, the letter icons must be collected in order with the tracer). Port phase sees the Guardian displaying a random code. It must be shot from left, right and below so its display matches the hidden code; the code gets brighter when each segment matches, until the exit is unlocked. (Making this phase tougher are the moving backgrounds and the data Ghost; hitting the border or Guardian changes the hidden code.) In Channel phase, the tracer must catch falling keys among the hordes of enemies and then defeat the Antivirus boss. Decryption requires the tracer to collect "hand" icons to freeze the Zig-Zagger, allowing its "tail" to be eroded. Running out of power in any phase sends the tracer to Quarantine. The Coberman guard homes in on the player and is shot to release the key. The Coberman returns to its initial form after a few seconds and tries to grab the key back. While holding

the key, the player must undo the lock – when the rotating key icon is lined up vertically (on the top or bottom edge of the screen). The final Switch phase sees the tracer try and turn off the Apocalypser once and for all.

WHAT I LIKE

The presentation and graphics combine with the changing moods of the soundtrack to give a dark and interesting atmosphere. The overlaid sprites and character backgrounds work well at adding to that mood. The different styles of gameplay certainly make the player think hard. Long-term there is a real challenge here to master the different phases and reach the ending. The cartridge version comes with a printed manual, while the disk version has a set of quick reference cards (included as digital files with all downloads).

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

This can be a very confusing and obscure game at times, even with repeated readings of the manual. Some of the phases – especially the Quarantine phase – are tricky to grasp and play well, leading to a lot of frustration. There are videos on YouTube that will help, but it is not an easy game to get into.

VERDICT

A game that takes time to master and will not appeal to everyone.
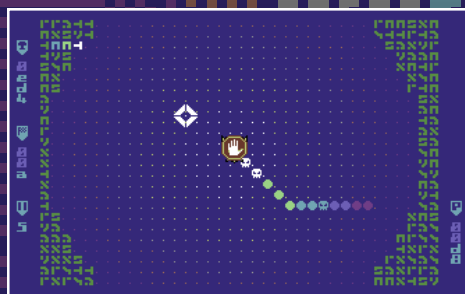
The moving Zigzagger's tail must be frozen and then eroded in Decryption Phase
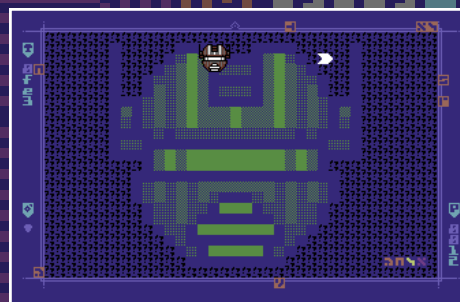
Grab the password letters from the border to defeat the Comboss
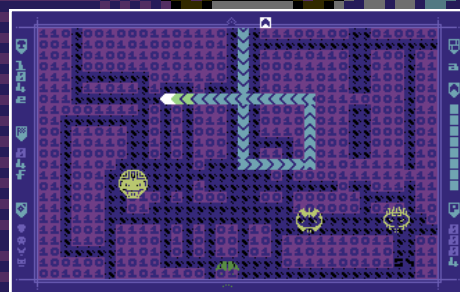
Collect the white tracer icons and avoid the patrolling guards in Bitwall Phase
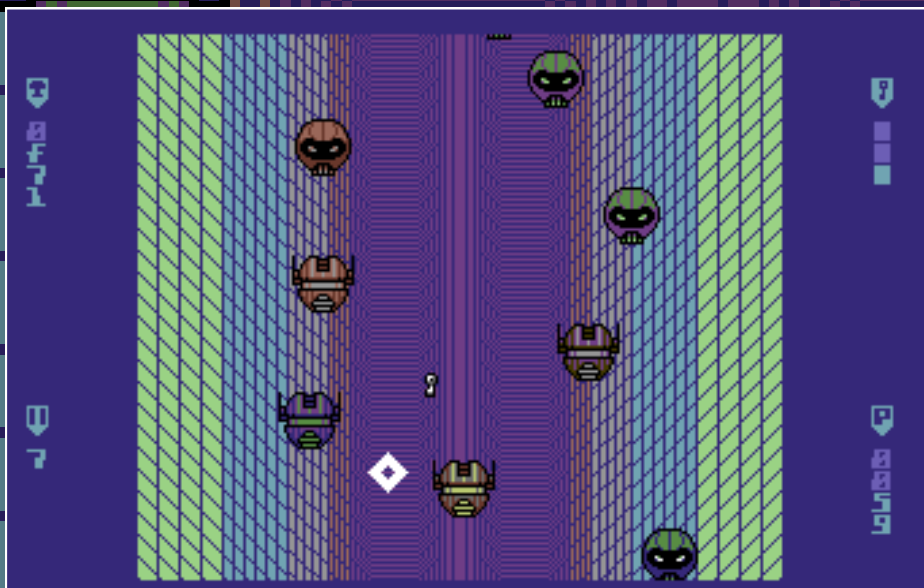
Catch the falling keys in Channel Phase

SCORE	
"Long-term there is a real challenge here to master"	
GFX	80%
SFX	79%
FUN	71%
STAYING POWER	70%
OVERALL	**75%**

SHORT REVIEWS

WRITTEN BY MERMAN

BINTRIS

Coding: Janne Hellsten, GFX: Der Piipo, Music: Zardax. Download: http://nurpax.github.io/posts/2018-05-21-bintris-on-c64-part-2.html

Falling black & white blocks must be lined up to create binary sequences that match decimal numbers. Matching numbers increases the width of the playing area and the size of the numbers. A pleasant variation on Tetris.
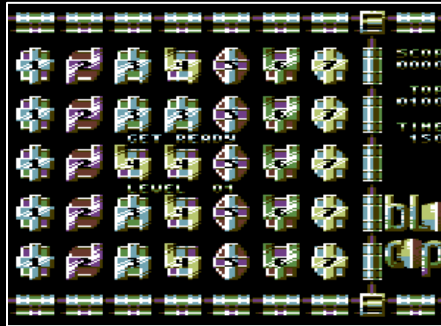
SCORE: 71%

BLOK COPY RX

Coding and GFX: TMR/Cosine, Music: Odie. Download: http://cosine.org.uk/products.php?prod=blok_copy_rx&4mat=c64

Re-arrange the shuffled columns into numerical order by shifting rows and columns. A fun puzzler, with shiny new graphics and PETSCII mode (hold the Commodore key when starting).

SCORE: 73%

FALLOUT HACKER

Coding: Warren Marshall
Download: https://csdb.dk/release/?id=164248

Incredibly basic "hacking" game based on the PipBoy from the Fallout games, all done in the ROM font.

SCORE: 4%

FLAPPY TYPING

Coding: Frodewin
Download: https://frodewin.itch.io/flappy-typing
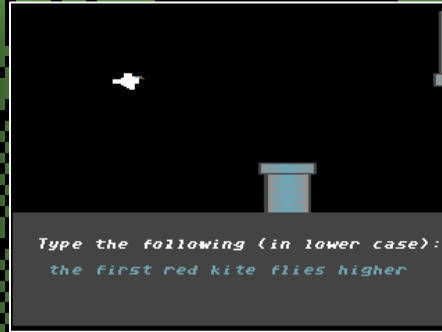
An entry for Ludum Dare #41, mixing two different game genres and produced in just 72 hours. Type in the sentences to keep the bird flying, in a combination of Flappy Bird and a typing tutor.

SCORE: 42%
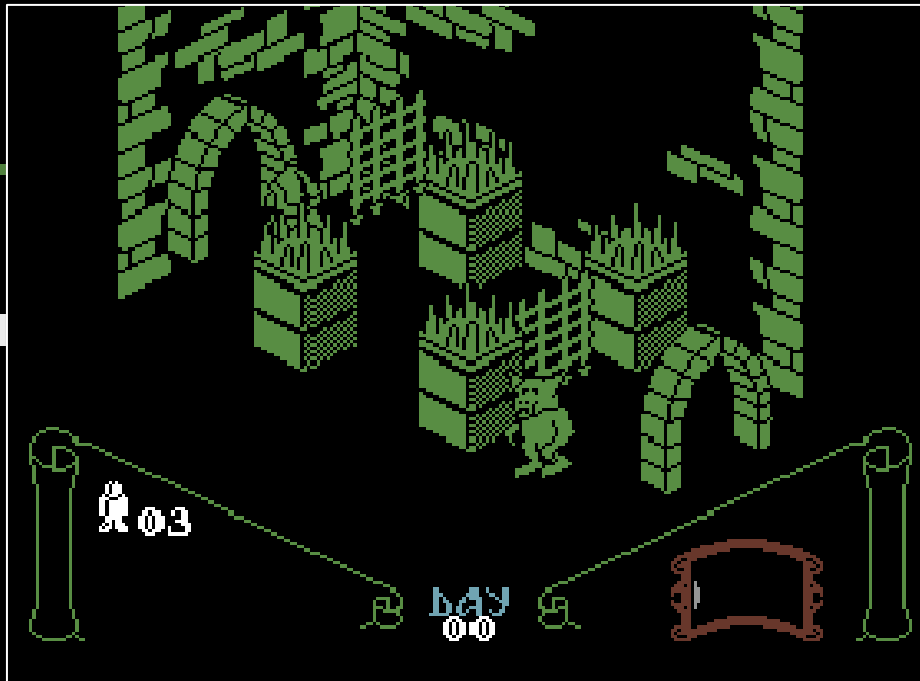
KNIGHT LORE
Coding: Saul Cross. GFX: STE'86
Download: https://csdb.dk/release/?id=169589

Superb conversion of the classic ZX Spectrum game, with explorer Sabre Man turning into a wolf when night falls. The options include rotational or directional controls, support for the C64GS joystick (two buttons) and atmospheric in game music. Special mention to Ste's outstanding loading screen too. Only the random start points and high difficulty mark this down.

SCORE: 86%

MAZE OF DEATH
Coding: Hamrath (Oliver Hermanni)
Download: https://csdb.dk/release/?id=172138

Entered into Ludum Dare #43, explore the maze to reach the treasure but beware the poisonous walls. Reach your corpse to retrieve a spare life. Simple and frustrating.

SCORE: 50%
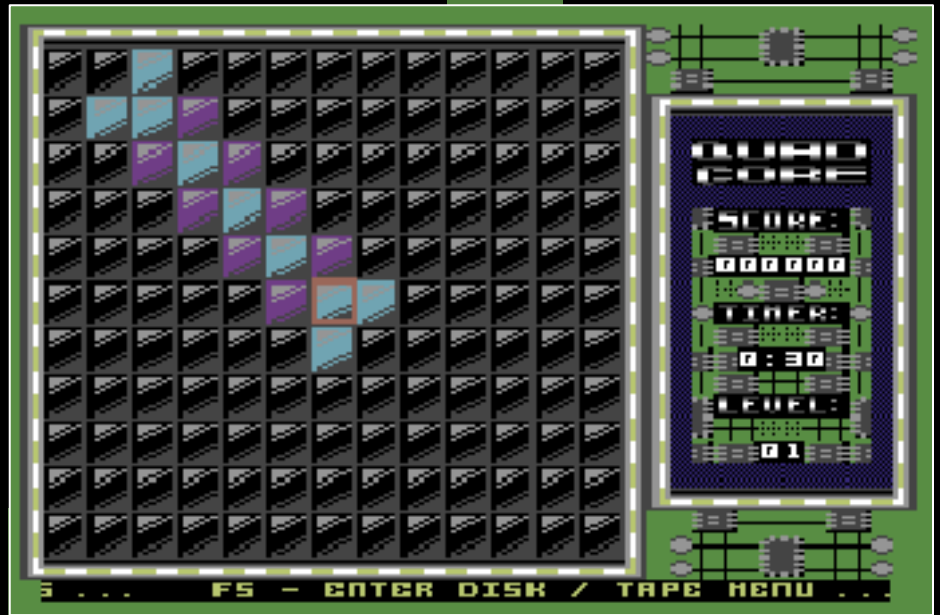
QUAD CORE 64
Coding: Richard Bayliss, GFX: Shine
Download: https://csdb.dk/release/?id=162622

Heavily inspired by Cosine's Reaxion, switch coloured blocks on and off to remove them from the playing field. Nicely presented and includes a level editor to make your own puzzles, but the built in levels vary wildly in difficulty and it feels too close to its inspiration to stand out.

SCORE: 59%

ROGUE NINJA
Coding: Richard Bayliss, GFX: Alf Yngve
Download: https://csdb.dk/release/?id=165226

Defeat waves of ninjas unleashed by the evil Chow Mein, picking up extra throwing stars from the magic chests that appear. Very simplistic single screen game, with some cute small sprites but a disappointing ending for grinding through the levels.

SCORE: 46%

FORUM64 AND PROTOVISION GAME COMPETITION

WRITTEN BY MERMAN

In previous years the Forum64 coding competition has brought us new strategy and adventure games, but this time the theme was sports. Seven games were released at the start of June 2018 and judged. A prize fund was shared between the competitors (based on their points score), along with excellent hardware prizes donated by the sponsors for the top three. The games are reviewed here in reverse order of the results.

7th Place: BASIC BALL

Code - Bytebreaker of Hokuto Force
Music - Sidman of Hokuto Force (Paul Hesford)
Graphics - Grass of Avatar, Hokuto Force, Lethargy, Resistance. Directory Art - Sink of Desire

This game was written entirely in BASIC, with a machine code intro. The aim is for one or two players to take turns shooting a basketball into the net. The power and angle for each shot are set and then fire is pressed to set the ball moving. A nice title screen and short piece of music boost the presentation, but the actual gameplay is limited.
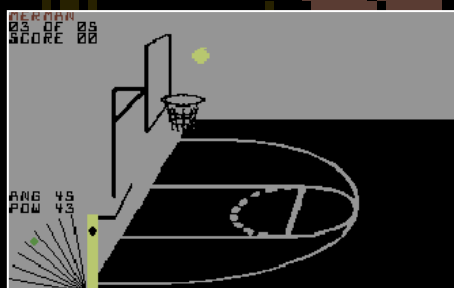
6th Place: EL LOCO CHALLENGE

Code, Music, Graphics, Design and Charset - Jammer of 1mandivision, Artstate, EXclusive ON, MultiStyle Labs, PriorArt, Samar Productions.

The version released into the competition was described as a "buggy pre-alpha" version with only one track to race on, so it was hard to judge alongside more polished games. This one or two player racing game has a stylish intro and great menu full of options. However, when the action starts, there are some serious issues with graphics flickering. The 3D road effect is good, but the method of changing gears proves tricky. A long way to go before this is finished, but promising nonetheless.

5th Place: KUNG FU PIXEL

Code, Graphics, Music – Goerp

This game relies on a clever graphical technique, blanking the screen and then rapidly changing the border colour to "draw" large pixels across the whole screen (including the border area). After the well-drawn intro, the title screen and options appear while music plays. A one or two player game can be chosen. There are four attack moves (by pressing fire) and four defensive moves. A series of gradually tougher opponents await. Some moves cost energy to perform, forcing the player to retreat tactically to regain lost energy. Time a defensive move right and the opponent can be stunned (they "flash" briefly, allowing a counterattack). As a proof of the technique, this is really clever – but it does feel a little simple compared to some of the other entries.
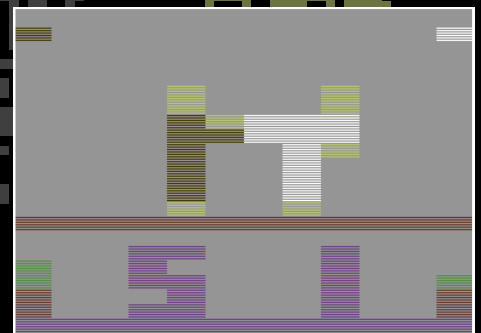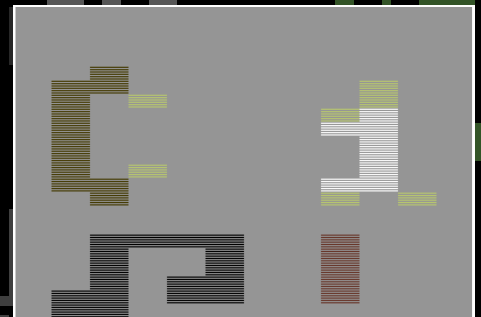
4th Place: Dangerous Sports, Deadly Sports

Code, Music & Graphics - Zaadii

This compilation of five highly dangerous sports allows up to five players to take part, each choosing one of six factions. The different characters (Sportsbrain, Zombie, It-Girl, Lemming, Teddy and Robot) each have their different strong events. In Base Jumping you must change your body angle then release your parachute to land safely. Avalanche Skiing sees you chased by a wall of snow and jumping over hazards. Train Surfing awards extra points for moving further along the train, as long as the player does not get smashed into a tunnel (crikey, morbid gaming too - Ed). Shark Diving requires picking up tokens and returning to the surface for more air, while "Wing Suiting" sees the falling player try to aim for the high scoring holes in the rock wall. Graphics are mixed in terms of their effectiveness but do a good job of portraying the action from different viewpoints. Sound is ok, with good tunes to drive the action along. Control is tricky to learn, with some events easier to master than others. An interesting concept that needed a bit more polish.
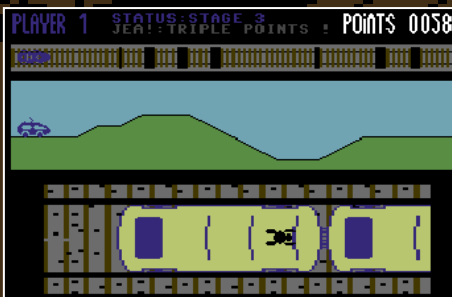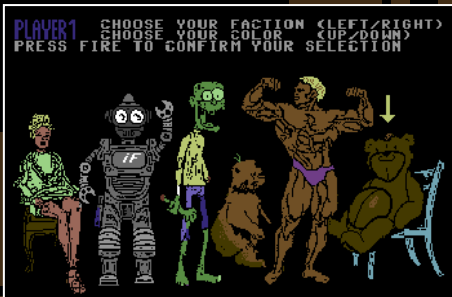
3rd Place: Downhill Challenge

Code - Endurion of Avatar, Megastyle, RGCD, Graphics – Smila (Trevor Storey)

This is really well made, reminiscent of the Slalom event from World Games. Up to four players can compete in a season, a single race or choose to practise the two disciplines – freestyle (ski down the course) and slalom (go through the red gates, but missing one stops the attempt). Three attempts are allowed at each race, with medals awarded after. Pretty good graphics, especially the snow trail, and playable controls are the plus points along with the choice of five courses and the famous skiers named in the records. The slightly odd shape of the skier when viewed straight on detracts, and it does get repetitive. This is still a lot of fun and deserved its high place.

2nd Place: BEECHINGS GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB

Code & graphics -- Larcky. https://golf-dev.blogspot.com/ - development blog.

Inspired by the classic Leaderboard, this is a golf game for up to 4 players (sharing two joysticks) and was known as 'Commodore Golf' and 'This Is For A Birdie' during development. The menu lets the players enter their name, choose skin tone and joystick port before setting the weather (calm, light winds or breezy) that affects the ball. Like Leaderboard, a 3D bitmap view of the hole is drawn quite quickly - with trees, water, rough and bunkers to contend with. Power is set by holding fire, releasing and then pressing at the right moment to set hook / slice (before / after the club head hits the ball). An indicator shows the wind direction, switching to the slope direction when putting. A nice particle effect and optional camera shake add to the atmosphere, along with the well-animated golfer (who looks towards the hole when getting ready for a shot). There are flaws, including raster flicker and the difficulty of gauging shot strength, but a commercial version improving on this release is on the way. There are nine holes, repeated to give the standard 18-hole course. A tricky but impressive release, up there with some of the best golf games on the C64.

1st Place: SAFTS - SPIN ALL FOUR TABLE SOCCER

Code - enthusi of Onslaught, PriorArt, RGCD.Music - Jammer of 1mandivision, Artstate, EXclusive ON, MultiStyle Labs, PriorArt, Samar Productions. Graphics - Veto of Oxyron, PriorArt, Tristar & Red Sector Incorporated
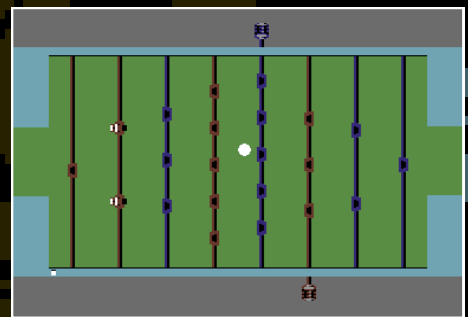
You may know it as Foosball or Bar Football, but the premise is the same. The players rotate (and definitely do not spin repeatedly) and move the handles to make the little plastic players kick the ball. A very good menu structure instantly impresses, with the computer playing a demo game if left alone. The animation of the moving players is very good, looking down on the table from above. Although it will take a little while to master the controls, there is a lot of fun to be had from this one. It's definitely the best table soccer / football game on the C64 to date, and a worthy winner of the competition.

RESULTS

GAME AND PARTICIPANT	POINTS	RANK
SAFTS - SPIN ALL FOUR TABLE SOCCER, BY ENTHUSI/VETO	7.93	1
BEECHING GOLD & COUNTRY CLUB, BY LARCKY	7.00	2
DOWNHILL CHALLENGE, BY ENDURION	6.46	3
DANGEROUS SPORTS, DEADLY SPORTS, BY ZAADII	6.29	4
KUNG FU PIXEL, BY GOERP	5.41	5
EL LOCO CHALLENGE, BY JAMMER	5.29	6
BASIC BALL	4.79	7

S.E.U.C.K COMPETITION 2018

WRITTEN BY MERMAN

Ten new were games created with the Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit for the same named competition in 2018. The 2018 contest were themed in two categories – Sci-Fi / Futuristic and Fantasy / Adventure. Enhancements including music were allowed, with Richard Bayliss adding his music to those entries without. Below are listed the entries in alphabetical order, with positive and nagative points listed for each game, before a personal rating out of 10.

ALGOL

Design & graphics – Mo Denart/PlayOrbit. Music – Richard Bayliss. Loader – Martin Piper. Standard SEUCK, 1 player only, no enhancements, Sci-Fi theme.

The player is in control of Orbis, a spaceship known as the "Harvester of Doom". Use it to invade, subjugate and destroy the planet of Eden.

+ Surreal graphic style.

+ Interesting to control the "invader" for a change.

+ Alien characters for the score display.

- Graphics "inspired by" Slap 'n Tickle look very odd.

- Tricky to tell what parts of the background the player can move on.

- High difficulty.

SCORE: 5 / 10

ATOM HEART

Design & graphics – Mo Denart/PlayOrbit. Music – Richard Bayliss. Loader – Martin Piper. Standard SEUCK, 1 player only, no enhancements, Sci-Fi and Fantasy themes.

Headquarters in Aldebaran informs us that multiple planets in Quadrant WOL-NR2 have been aggressively occupied by the 'Extanoids'. They have already eliminated or expelled the native populations as well as erased all databanks. Your mission is to navigate through The Hive in the Atom-X fighter and destabilize their control centre.

+ Five different levels with changing backgrounds.

+ Nice cover art and PDF documentation.

- Difficulty level needed more tuning.

- Derivative sound FX.

SCORE: 6 / 10

BATTLE IN THE WOODS

(Subtitled Episode 1 - Wizard of the Frogs). Design & graphics - VOX VG. Music - Richard Bayliss. Standard SEUCK, 1 player only, no enhancements, Fantasy theme.

Deep in the hearts of the forest, lived a boy, called Eddie. He was a natural born adventurer, he just loved going on adventures. That was until one day, news had spread that,

an evil wizard had transformed cute forest creatures into deadly evil mutants. Armed with stones, Eddie sets off on a quest, to locate the evil wizard's castle and put an end to his evil spell.

+ Great cartoon sprites with decent animation.

+ Good backgrounds.

+ Collectibles to pick up.

+ Well-constructed attack waves.

- Familiar sound FX needed more work.

SCORE: 8 / 10

CETI 21

Design, graphics & music – Richard Bayliss. Sideways SEUCK, 1 player only, enhancements, Sci-Fi theme.

Humans have been transported across to a new moon, CETI 21. For many years, humans settled on this planet. However aliens also tried to invade it. A security system at Sentinel Security Plant was set up in order to thwart future alien attack. Unfortunately, after a recent computer OS update, the system crashed - prompting shut down to all defences. Unfortunately aliens decided to take advantage and start an invasion on CETI 21. They breached the security systems, entered the inner core and rigged the mainframe with

one of their own. Now the defence systems have turned against the human race. Your mission is to control a low level flying drone, ULTRAX 18 through 3 sectors and do battle against the aliens and rogue defence security systems. Then locate the aliens' mainframe supercomputer and destroy it. Once you have destroyed it. Peace and stability across CETI 21 will be restored. Avoid shooting drones, parked on the runways - otherwise you will have to pay the price. Good luck commander.

+ Good graphics.

+ Three different stages.

+ Clever enhancements, including the penalty for shooting drones.

- Tough to play.

- Needed more variety in the attack waves.

SCORE: 7 / 10

DREAMWORLD
Game design, graphics & music - Gaetano Chiummo. Sideways SEUCK, 1 player only, no enhancements, Fantasy theme.

It's Christmas Eve, and little George is waiting for Santa Claus to bring him some new toys. He's watching his favourite superheroes cartoon shows, and he feels so involved that he climbs on the shelf where the TV is, making it fall on the floor, where it turns into pieces. George is safe and sound (only a bit scared), but his daddy is furious: the TV is still under guarantee, but he planned to watch the Christmas concerts and some sport events: who will repair the TV during the holidays? Well, I won't (I even can't!), will you? So, as a punishment, our little superhero will not get any gifts for Christmas! He goes to bed in tears, but the Toy Fairies can't stand watching him crying, so they decide to send him to the "Dream World", where he can get any toys he wants! The problem is, the "Dream World" is full of angry toys and other dangerous things which will try to stop George and let him wake up with empty hands. Anyway, our hero can throw marbles against them, but some are stronger than others, and some are invincible. There are three stages: the Garden, the Field of Grain and the Winter Playground. George must get the toys while shooting his enemies and avoiding their "bullets". He can climb trees, ropes, and so on. In each stage there are some extra features that will grant George 2.000 points. It's up to you to discover where they are and how to get the points!

+ Very cute graphics and presentation.

+ Good use of Sideways SEUCK.

- High difficulty level.

- Tricky to climb.

SCORE: 7 / 10

ELECTRIC WARRIOR
Design & graphics – Mo Denart/PlayOrbit. Music – Richard Bayliss. Loader – Martin Piper. Standard SEUCK, 1 player only, no enhancements, Sci-Fi theme.

The chosen child of NRAR, trained in the cosmic future art of 'rabbit fighting' (aka ghosting) teleports to Earth, year 9634, to recover an ancient and holy relic, lost years ago after the cataclysmic shattering of its homeworld, scattering it's souls and sacred treasures throughout the interstellar universe. The scene of planetfall - a dangerous and frighteningly dystopic future where madness and technology have joined in an electric world ruled by the mysterious Doktor Gigglesmith. This child is you and your destiny is to become... the ELECTRIC WARRIOR.

+ Interesting small sprites.

+ Nice cover art.

- Bland backgrounds.

- Short-range weapon makes the game tricky.

SCORE: 6 / 10

MOON OVER AFGHANISTAN
Design, Graphics – Last Chance. Music – Richard Bayliss. Standard SEUCK, 2 players, no enhancements, Sci-Fi theme.

You are Captain Moon, sent on a random suicide mission to Afghanistan, with the intention of relieving your own troops of their mind capture from aliens that have invaded the area. Naturally, they are after you precious oil silos and drills near the River Panj. (Note: The author has not verified the reality of this

oil related business, that all comes as an afterthought.)

+ Playable with two people.

- Bland graphics with serious scale problems.

- Short levels.

- Difficulty needed more attention.

- Very average sound FX.

SCORE: 4 / 10

PANZER PATTY'S PINK TANK ADVENTURE
(AKA Panzer Patty)
Game design, graphics - Alf Yngve. Music - Richard Bayliss. Standard SEUCK, 1 player only, expanded sprites & linked players, Sci-Fi theme.

On Patty Patovsky's 16th birthday, her parents gave her the present that all American high school kids wanted: Her own personal armoured tank! (yeah it's all the rage these days lol - Ed). She spray painted her tank pink, drove it to school the very next day and instantly became the most popular girl. But the mean girls of the Forces of Darkness Sorority grew envious of Patty's new popularity. First they started to call her "Panzer Patty." Then they tried to sabotage her tank. That's when all out war broke out between Patty and the Forces of Darkness Sorority. It was, like, total mayhem in the suburbs and everybody took awesome selfies and liked it on Facebook and Twitter.Gameplay switches between driving stages (controlling the tank and shooting down green helicopter drones to save lives, but taking care not to damage civilian cars) and shooting stages (controlling the crosshairs to shoot enemies).

+ Impressive expanded sprites.

+ Great backgrounds mixing hi-res and multicolour.

+ Added variety with two types of gameplay.

+ Really stretching the Kit.

- Flickering caused by large sprites.

- Lack of a score counter.

- Very tough.

SCORE: 9 / 10
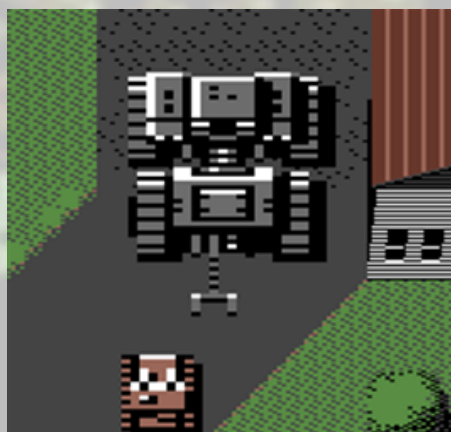
THE LAST HUGGER

Idea, Code, Design, Graphics, Music – Richard Bayliss. SEUCK Redux code (for RX version released outside competition) – Martin Piper. Standard SEUCK, 1 player, smart bomb & background colour flash, Sci-Fi theme.

You are the last of the alien species, but not for long. Human Mercenaries have boarded your home and brought state-of-the-art technology to put an end to your species. Only armed with slime, your mission is to fight the mercenaries, and destroy their technology. Hatch light green eggs to spawn more of your species, but don't even think about hatching the dark green eggs. (Warning due to the additional in game enhancements added, boss stages and large enemies consist of flashing backgrounds, which some gamers may find to be uncomfortable!).

+ Nice twist of playing the alien.

+ Good sprite animation and backgrounds.

- Punishing difficulty level.

- Flashing effects may be uncomfortable for some players.

- Flickering in busy sections (reduced in the RX version).

SCORE: 8 / 10

VALKYRIE 3 - THE NIGHT WITCH

Idea, Design, Graphics – Eleanor Burns. Music – Richard Bayliss. Loader – Martin Piper. Standard SEUCK, 1 player, enhancements, Fantasy theme.

Fly your plane through 6 different zones, battling against the enemy forces. Collect airships in order to gain power ups. Once enough power ups have been picked up, you will be able to shoot fireballs at enemies. In order to complete the game, you must accomplish 3 targets, which are all indicated before each mission starts. At the end of each level will be a giant airborne boss, in which you must defeat in order to progress further. If you succeed with your mission, you will be rewarded a 4-lettered password for the end sequence. Fail to attain your targets, then the game will automatically be over.

+ Enhancements include power-ups and background animation.

+ Amazing end sequence (accessed with a password).

+ Nice PDF documentation.

+ Great sprites and backgrounds.

- Plays very differently to the earlier Valkyrie games.

- Possibly a little easy for the best players.

- Encountered a bug with the fireball powerup.

SCORE: 9 / 10

RESULTS:

Judging took place via an online form in July 2019 and the results were announced on the 6th of August.

1st	Valkyrie 3 (Eleanor Burns)	107 pts
2nd	Dream World (Gaetano Chiummo)	101 pts
3rd	Battle in the Woods (VOX VG)	88 pts
4th	Panzer Patty (Alf Yngve)	85 pts
5th	CETI 21 (TND Games)	81 pts
6th	The Last Hugger (TND Games)	68 pts
7th	Moon Over Afghanistan (Jari)	66 pts
8th	Algol (Mo Dernart)	61 pts
9th	Atom Heart (Mo Dernart)	57 pts
10th	Electric Warrior (Mo Dernart)	50 pts

RESET CRAPTASTIC 4K CODING COMPETITION

WRITTEN BY MERMAN

With no less than 27 different entries, this second coding competition run by RESET magazine proved very popular. There was a memory limit of just 4K, and the "craptastic" title was meant as a joke. Games did not have to be bad, in fact several of them were very impressive (yes they were, I loved playing Wave Hero - Ed). The titles here are listed in alphabetical order, with a plus and minus bullet point under each short description. The **RECOMMENDED** titles are my personal favourites.

Richard Bayliss created a compilation disk for all the entries.

#2 V ABC
by James
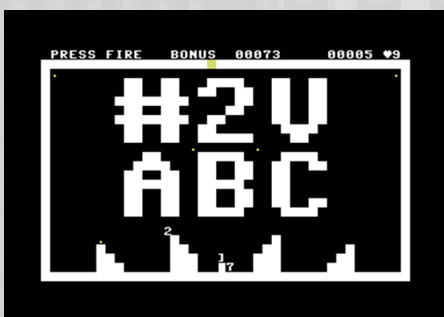
The title screen also acts as the first level.

Single screen platformer using PETSCII graphics, the versatile number 2 can wall-jump and grind to slow its descent as it tries to collect all the dots from multiple screens.

+ Interesting idea, feels like a classic flash game.

- Tricky to progress beyond the first screen.

*** RECOMMENDED ***

100 BLOX
by Cout

Simple number guessing game played out with the standard font.

Find the lucky number from the grid.

- Just too simplistic.

4K VENTURE
by Endurion

Cramming a text adventure into 4K, the player finds themselves in a dark room and must escape. Sadly, the initial release was bugged and a fixed version was released later.

+ Clever coding.

- Limited vocabulary and very tricky problems.
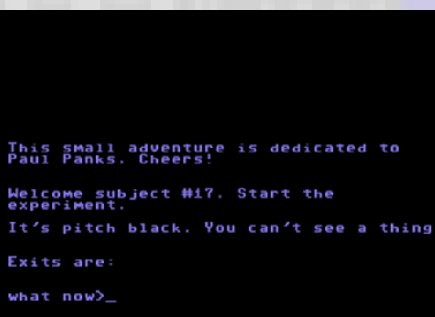
Dedicated to the late Paul Panks, adventure fan.

CHEF QUEST
by Anthony Stiller/Pond Software
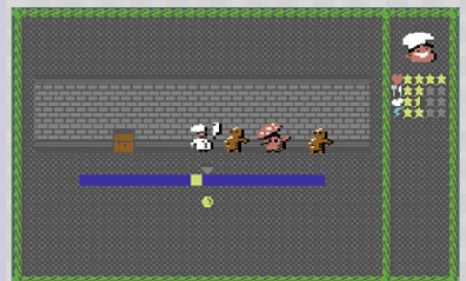
Taking on the enemies in combat with your mighty cleaver.

Guide Chef through the restaurant's dungeon to find delicious ingredients. Choose which room to visit next from the overhead map, then guide Chef along the corridor. Opening chests when next to them will reveal a health potion or booby-trap. Monsters will appear in the corridors leading to combat. Timing is all important; each combat cycle (shown by the moving bar) gives a number of shots at the "markers". Hit all the markers to do damage, miss and the player takes damage. Beating certain enemies will boost the player's secondary stats.

+ Cute graphics, clever map generation, great music by Vanja Utne and an innovative mini role-playing game.

- Takes a while to understand the secondary stats.

*** RECOMMENDED ***

CONGA 4096
by Paul Koller

This is actually a C64 demake of RGCD's PC game Pan-Dimensional Conga Combat (available on Steam and itch.io). The player's character must kill enemies using his "tail" of white bullets. A powerful laser can be charged up by the tail absorbing energy from the Purploids (purple cross-shaped enemies).

+ Great graphics and sound, clever changing background and distils the original's essence.

- Takes time to learn the controls if you've not played the original.

*** RECOMMENDED ***
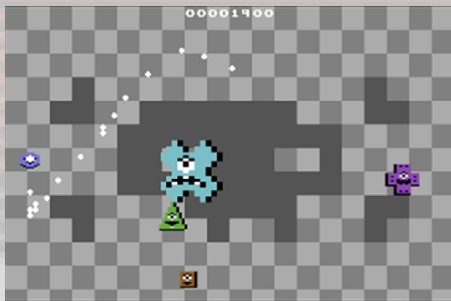
DUSTIN'
by Graham Axten/Privy Software

Tiny robot Dustin must clean up the electrical circuits of an 8-bit computer. Sweep up the dust but avoid the electrical charges that rush across the screen.
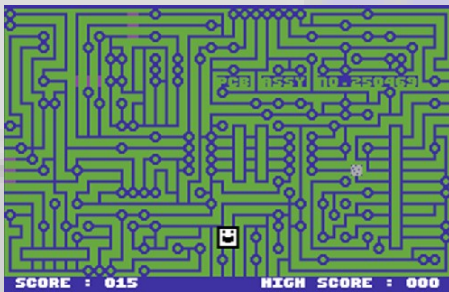
The smiling Dustin has swept up 15 dust piles so far.

+ Excellent presentation and clever game design, fun to chase a high score.

- Only one screen layout and it soon gets tough.

*** RECOMMENDED ***

ELEVATOR ERIC
by Derek

Eric must dash along the floors of a building, avoiding the elevators (lifts) to collect the bonus objects. There are ten levels to play with increasing numbers of elevators that start to move faster.

+ Fun twist on the platform game with OK presentation.

- Lack of variety to keep the player playing, with only ten levels.
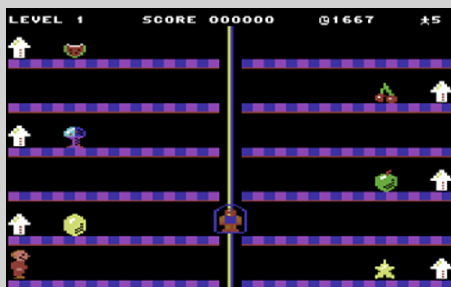
The first level with just one elevator to avoid.

ENDLESS WORLD
by Derek

As the platforms scroll upwards, the player's character falls down and must collect diamonds for points. Fall off the bottom or get carried off the top of the screen and it is game over.

+ Nicely presented, with cute graphics and good music.

- Long delay before starting/ending game detracts.

The cute character heads towards another diamond.

FREAKY FISH
by Chris Page

As a fisherman drops dynamite into the pond, the freaky fish can blow bubbles to raise the dynamite back to the surface blowing up the boat. Getting hit by an explosion costs a life, while getting three hits on the fisherman moves on to the next level.

+ Good graphics and a fun concept.

- Limited sound, very tricky to get the timing right.

The overlaid sprite makes the main freaky fish stand out.

G7000 RACER
by Ignar Coenen

Based on a game from the Philips G7000 console, the player's car must avoid the other cars zig-zagging down the screen towards it.

- Very simple dodging game with basic graphics, not a true racing game.
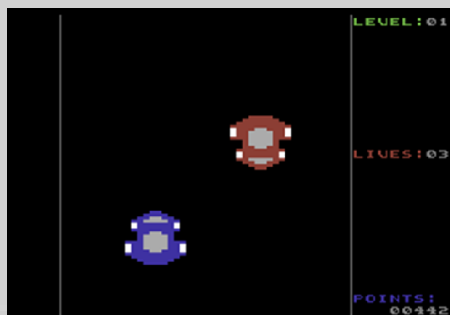
Blue and red car had a race... but why do they look the wrong way up to each other?

I FOUND A MOON ROCK IN MY NOSE aka MOONROCK
by Cout

A nose picking simulation, where both nostrils must be picked an optimum number of times without causing a nosebleed (crazy game idea - Ed).

+ Uses a quote from Ralph Wiggum of The Simpsons.

- Very poor gameplay.

That, believe it or not, is a nose.

KALLE KLOAKK 4K
by Megastyle

An old man trapped in a shopping mall is collecting toilet paper to stack under a window so he can escape. This unusual platform game lets you set the height of the platforms across the screen first (by timing presses of the Fire button) before the old man runs across collecting the rolls of toilet paper. All the onscreen rolls must be collected to unlock the next level. A level can be attempted again by pressing down and fire button (with the player having three retries per game).

+ Original idea with nice music.

- Very average graphics, only eight levels.

MACH TANK
by Malcontent

Looking for toilet paper in all the wrong places.

In the near future, a high-tech tank must destroy ten procedurally generated cities by blasting down the tower blocks while avoiding fire from enemy blimps and helicopters to reach and destroy the enemy factory (top-right of the level). Malcontent has made the source code available for fellow coders to study / modify.

+ Good scrolling cities, with the random generation making each game different.

- Enemy graphics are rather blocky.
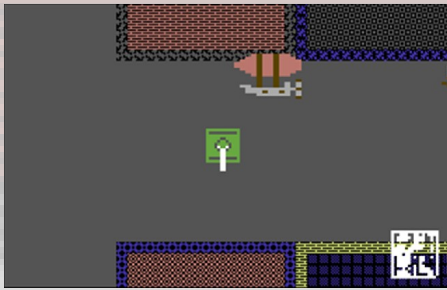
Look out for the low-flying blimp!

MEMORY SAFE
by Jamie Fuller

Based on the classic game of Simon, the player must unlock a safe by remembering a string of numbers that make up the combination. Rotating the dial can be done using keys or paddles.

+ The dial effect is nice and general presentation is good.

- Sound effects are very raucous and distracting.
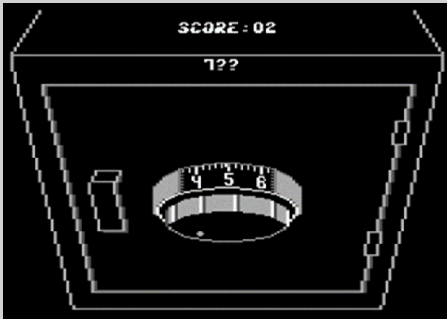
Open the safe carefully.

MIND THE MINES
by Derek

The player must dash through nine randomised minefields, getting from the bottom of the screen to the top. A counter on screen shows the number of mines surrounding the player; hit a mine and the explosion remains. There are five lives and a time limit.

+ Reasonable presentation and music.

- Dying repeatedly makes this less than satisfying.

There are no mines around you – at the moment.

MOLLY aka SNAKE-A-SPACE
by Jamie Fuller

This game was inspired by ideas from the imagination of Jamie's 6-year-old daughter Molly. A spaceman stands on the back of a snake flying through space, avoiding the rolling pigs as he collects the falling objects. As play goes on, the snake begins to undulate more and more – affecting how the player jumps and the pigs roll.

+ Amusing gameplay, with a fantastic snake effect and very cute graphics accompanied by an interesting background sound.

- Takes time to increase the difficulty.

*** RECOMMENDED ***

Jumping over a pig as the snake's back begin to writhe.

ORBS
by Rafaelle Formato

Based on a mobile app, the player must guide a pair of orbs by rotating them clockwise or counter-clockwise as a series of blocks scrolls down the screen.

+ Good graphics and music, controls well.

- Infuriating gameplay, sends you back to the start of the current level to try again.
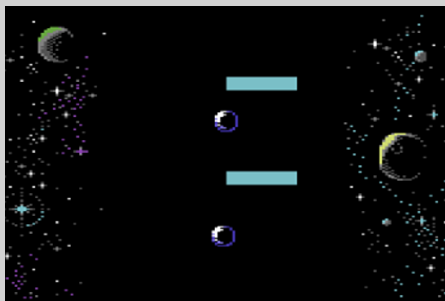
The space themed graphics add a lot to Orbs.

PAC (PARKING ASSIST CHICKEN)
by Goerp

Are you too chicken to reverse at speed?

Two cars are driving backwards towards each other in a game of Chicken – who will swerve first, guided only by the beeps of their parking sensors? Designed for two players.

+ Odd idea with interesting presentation (including animated chickens).

- Very tricky to understand and really needs two players.

PLUNKO
by Cout

Based on a game from TV show The Price Is Right. The player drops discs down the numbered chutes to collect points with pegs affecting the way the discs fall.

- Very simplistic game with only minor presentation frills.
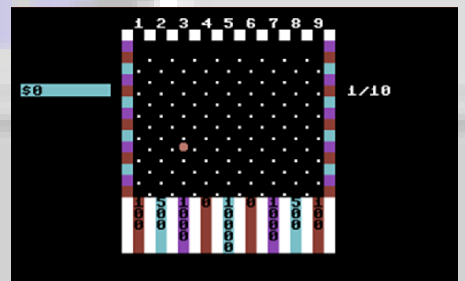
That 10,000 points in the middle would be nice.

RABID ROBOTS 4K
by Richard Bayliss

With graphics by Alf Yngve, the young schoolboy and his dog (which follows its owner everywhere) are confronted by wave after wave of rampaging robots. The water pistol can stop the robots, but if the dog or the boy are hit by a robot it is game over.

+ Decent graphics and OK sound.

- Very repetitive and unchanging gameplay.

RRR (Roll, Roll, Roll)
by Cout

Roll, roll, roll to get a high score.

Across ten rounds you must roll a dice to score the most points possible. After each of three rolls, the player can decide to keep that score or roll again for a higher one.

- A very basic dice game.

SHEEPS!
by Matthew Clarke

Incoming! One pink sheep!

Amazon is delivering new sheep to Farmer Jones, by dropping them from a drone. Each sheep must be guided to land safely using the jetpacks strapped to their feet.

+ Good graphics and sound for a fun variation on Lunar Lander.

- Gets very tricky as the sheep are hard to control.

SPACE POKER
by Karol Stasiak

Flying through space the player must collect playing cards to complete a hand of poker. The higher the value of the hand, the more fuel the player regains. As more hands are played, the game gets faster.

+ Good presentation of a clever idea.

- Needed a little extra to keep you playing.

A pair has just been completed, refilling the ship's fuel tanks a little.

TOXIC
by Richard Bayliss

Debbie the decontamination expert has to cope with toxic green spills. Press and hold fire to spray, waiting for the thumbs up when you have dealt with a spill. The alert meter gradually rises as more toxic puddles appear. When there are lots of spills the area becomes too hazardous, leading to death.

+ A different idea, OK graphics by Shaun Pearson.

- Intrusive sound and a lack of variety.

I'm addicted to you, but you're toxic!

TRUMP TOWER
by Megastyle

An orange-skinned businessman with flyaway hair has all the best buildings… It's just the floors and ceilings of this tower are filled with spikes. Guide him through the floors to grab all the coins he has dropped, and there's something else to grab too.

+ Excellent music, well-drawn main sprite and challenging gameplay.

- Becomes very tough and repetitive quite quickly.

I've beaten all the levels already, anyone saying otherwise is FAKE NEWS!

WAVE HERO
by Geir Straume

You must pilot your personal watercraft along a scrolling course, diving lower into the water to avoid the reefs and rocks. The single button control makes it very reminiscent of Flappy Bird. Love playing the Wave Hero - Ed.

+ Great graphics, including the clever wave animation, and lots of fun.

- High difficulty.

*** RECOMMENDED ***

A life on the ocean waves.

WTF (Warner Thomas Fahrenheit)
by Misfit
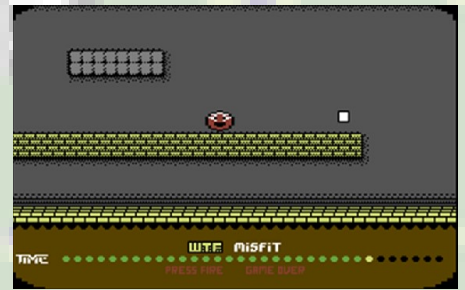
It's just a bounce to the right.

Warner is a bouncing red ball. In each level his aim is to collect the flashing block. However, instead of directly controlling Warner the player must scroll the level around underneath him, making him bounce the right way.

+ Very original concept, excellent graphics and sound.

- Starts out difficult and gets very tough quickly.

OUTSIDE COMPETITION

SHINOBIDEN GAIDEN
by Fou Lu

Missing the deadline, Shinobiden was made as an experiment in creating C64 graphics by Twitter user @_fou_lu. Guide the ninja around a flick screen maze to find four scrolls, all the while under attack from spirits. Throwing stars can be used to keep the enemies at bay for a short while. The graphics are very good, but the gameplay needs a lot more work to make it into a really playable title. It does show a lot of promise, as does the 3D RPG engine he is working on

Having found one scroll, our hero confronts an enemy.

SUMMARY

Judging for the competition took place during the summer of 2018. The results were announced in October. The panel of judges rated each entry out of 5 in seven different categories, giving a maximum score of 35. The categories were Originality, Concept, Execution, Presentation, Gameplay, Lasting Appeal and OMG Factor (in other words, how impressive it was to fit the game into 4K). The average score for each game from the judges was used to determine the overall placings. It was close at the top of the table, with six games within a point of each other behind the clear winner Conga 4096 by Paul Koller.

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RESULTS

1st: **Conga 4096** by Paul Koller (28.86)

2nd: **WTF** by Misfit (26.71)

Equal 3rd: **Snake-a-Space** (aka Molly) by Jamie & Molly Fuller

Equal 3rd: **Wave Hero** by Geir Straume (26.57)

Equal 4th: **Chef Quest** by Pond/Privy Software,

Equal 4th: **Orbs** by Raffaele Formato/Federico Sesler (26.43)

5th: **Dustin'** Pond/Privy Software (26.14)

6th: **#2vABC** by James (24.57)

7th: **Kalle Kloakk 4k** by Megastyle (24.43)

8th: **Trump Tower** by Megastyle (24)

9th: **Endless Worlds** by Derek, Mach-Tank by Malcontent (23.43)

10th: **Space Poker** by Karol Stasiak (23)

11th: **Elevator Eric** by Derek (21.43)

12th: **Rabid Robots 4k** by Richard Bayliss/Alf Yngve (21.14)

13th: **Mind the Mines** by Derek (21)

14th: **Freaky Fish** by Chris Page (20.43)

15th: **Toxic** by Richard Bayliss/Shaun Pearson (19.43)

16th: **Memory Safe** by Jamie Fuller (19.29)

17th: **Parking Assist Chicken (PAC)** by Goerp (17.58)

18th: **4kventure** by Endurion (16.57)

19th: **Sheeps!** By Matthew Clarke (16.29)

20th: **Roll Roll Roll** by Cout (14)

21st: **G7000 Racer** by Igmar Coenen (13.71)

22nd: **I Found A Moon Rock In My Nose** by Cout (12.57)

23rd: **Plunko** by Cout (12.43)

24th: **$100 Box** by Cout (11.14)

- **CODING:** Juan J. Martinez
- **INFO:** Digital download from https://www.usebox.net/jjm/dawn-of-kernel/
  or available on cassette, 3 inch and 3.5inch disc from https://www.polyplay.xyz/New-for-the-CPC-The-Dawn-of-Kernel-
- **REVIEWED BY:** Thomas Scoffham and George Bachaelor

DAWN OF KERNEL

The cool intro scene. So much awesome colour and graphics throughout the whole game

I must say I was rather surprised and honoured to be asked to write this review on Dawn of Kernal by the 8-Bit Annual guys and in all honesty quite apprehensive! Writing about games is not exactly my forte, but since I've spent a lifetime playing them and also have a rather adequate grasp of the English language, I thought I would give it ago (that's the gaming spirit we want to see - Ed.).

Dawn of Kernal, the latest game to be developed by Juan J Martinez, the creator of Amstrad CPC games such as Magica and Golden Tail, two very different yet well received games from 2016, it was easy to be quite eager to see what Juan would come up with in his latest Amstrad CPC game offering, since he had spent 2017 making a C64 game, cough, cough say no more about that for CPC fan boys. All 8-Bit jokes aside, although Dawn of Kernel was available to download for free from www.usebox.net ages ago, I thought, for added authenticity I would wait and order my preferred medium - The cassette. A classic, almost defunct form of game software quickly taken over by floppy disks and eventually, cartridges, cds and now digital downloads, but it is a form of old school nostalgia that adds a certain 'pizzazz' to the gaming experience

almost a time portal to my youth! I waited rather patiently for several months for the boxed version to be released and finally arrive via snail mail and thankfully I wasn't disappointed.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Upon pressing play you encounter a very colourful loading screen which captures the colour scheme of the box artwork quite well. A variety of vibrant pinks, deep purples and bright blues contrast nicely against one another. We are now introduced to the game via mini cut scene style movie intro its only one screen stating something along the lines of "Mining planet k3E-NL of the Leonis system is sending a distress signal. They are having to evacuate the mining base due to a computer virus that has spread quickly through their entire network and is inevitably causing catastrophic problems for the life support of all the personnel". We are then left with the message "Kernal lives". The games menu screen lets you choose either joystick or keyboard. I actually used an Amstrad GX4000

game pad whilst reviewing this game and found it worked really well (i hate those nes style gamepads the buttons are too small and the plastic too hard on your thumb, but that's just me - Ed). The spaceship on the screen can be moved left and right and pressing up causes the ship to engage its thrust, mastering this is a must in order to progress through the levels!

What struck me instantly was the feeling that I had played the game before, many years ago, hmmm, I observe that thankfully the games controls are superb! It wasn't too long before I was dodging enemy fire and taking out floating mines with ease. It really helps that the hit detection is absolutely spot on, putting a lot of other games to shame. Then it hits me, I realise this is a game very much in the vein of Cybernoid 1 and 2 from Rafale

Watch out for that sentry turret below, it is just itching to shoot you down
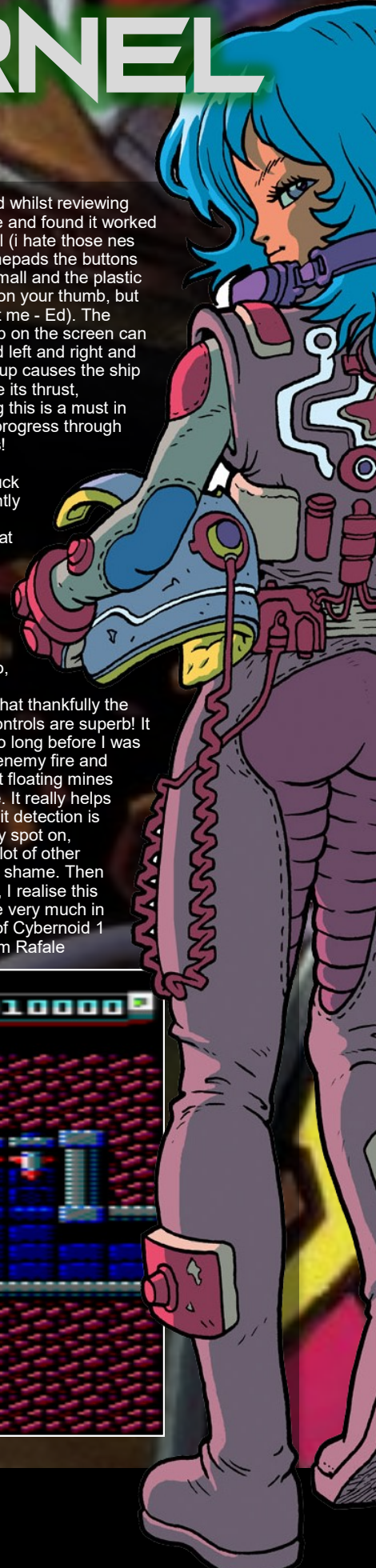
Cecco, circa 1988 (I concur, I wonder what Raf Cecco would think about this game, hmmm ??? - Ed).

Back to Dawn of Kernel - you can get within a pixel of the enemy with no collision problems whatsoever, but you have to be very careful, especially with the sentry rockets. The ship comes with two defensive guns, the primary weapon is a fairly slow shooting gun type which takes out most enemies with a couple of hits, it does have unlimited ammo though (see it ain't so bad - Ed). The secondary weapon on the spaceship is a missile gun with a greater power, taking out most enemies with one hit but has limited shells.
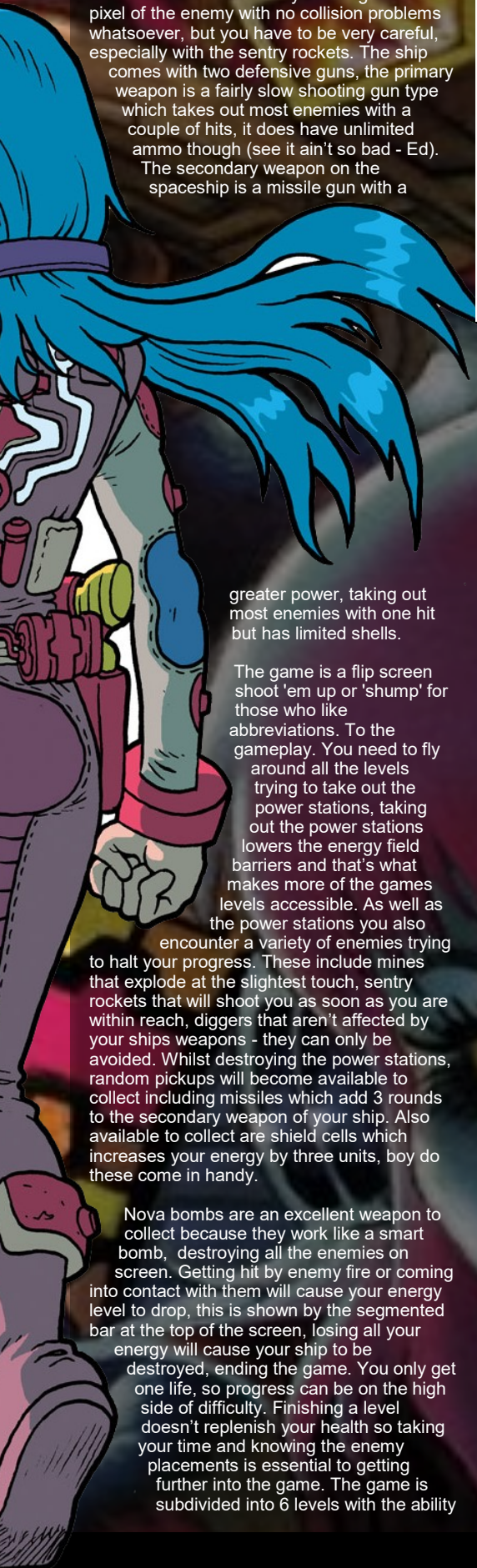
The game is a flip screen shoot 'em up or 'shump' for those who like abbreviations. To the gameplay. You need to fly around all the levels trying to take out the power stations, taking out the power stations lowers the energy field barriers and that's what makes more of the games levels accessible. As well as the power stations you also encounter a variety of enemies trying to halt your progress. These include mines that explode at the slightest touch, sentry rockets that will shoot you as soon as you are within reach, diggers that aren't affected by your ships weapons - they can only be avoided. Whilst destroying the power stations, random pickups will become available to collect including missiles which add 3 rounds to the secondary weapon of your ship. Also available to collect are shield cells which increases your energy by three units, boy do these come in handy.

Nova bombs are an excellent weapon to collect because they work like a smart bomb, destroying all the enemies on screen. Getting hit by enemy fire or coming into contact with them will cause your energy level to drop, this is shown by the segmented bar at the top of the screen, losing all your energy will cause your ship to be destroyed, ending the game. You only get one life, so progress can be on the high side of difficulty. Finishing a level doesn't replenish your health so taking your time and knowing the enemy placements is essential to getting further into the game. The game is subdivided into 6 levels with the ability

Shoot the power station to collect that orange smart bomb power up…..

to move from one level to another. There are three hidden teleporters to access three hidden areas: one at level 4 and two at level five.

WHAT I LIKE

In terms of the games visuals, there's a nice amount of detail to each level. The sprites are well animated and stand out well against the background graphics. The use of the cpc's colour palette is excellent as per usual with games developed by Juan J. Martinez. As for the music and sound effects. The games music is quite catchy, you'll be humming it in the back of your head for quite some time and the in game sound effects do the sounds of firing and explosions ample justice. There are different tunes playing throughout which begs the question why couldn't more CPC games of the 1980's be like this?

The gameplay and playability have that grab factor that keeps you coming back for more. I was more than impressed by the games mechanics and the use of the Cybernoid 1 & 2 playing style. The combat has been given much attention to detail, even though from a playing perspective it can be quite frustrating. At the heart of the game is the combat experience, there is just the right amount of combat strategy and shoot 'em up addiction to keep you wanting more.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Only having one life to get through the entire game is tough gaming. I got the feeling the energy shield can deplete way too quickly when you are not aware of the game mechanics. Getting the power up you want doesn't always seem possible either. Certainly high on difficulty, so repeating sections often before you advance further may frustrate you and drive you crazy a lot. Some sections appear impossible, even though I know they aren't and some may feel this might mar your enjoyment of what is a great game. I was really hanging out for a heat seeking missile like one used in Cybernoid 2, a weapon like that in this game would have been a brilliant addiction as well as addition and in my mind would have sent the game's appeal soaring (always getting 'whacked' out on the good stuff aren't you - Ed).

Which will explode those two massive sentry rockets far right of screen making your path less stressful!

VERDICT

So after many extensive play throughs, I can say that Juan J Martinez has made a stand out Amstrad game. Excellent graphics, fantastic tunes, a great plot that matches the gameplay and sublime controls make this challenging game a must play. Over time you will be able to remember where the enemy placements are and you'll be able to fly through the first few levels with ease. Later levels will take a lot more skill to get though, so it definitely has that 'just one more go' thing going for it. Just a shame you only have one life to work with. Otherwise, I can definitely recommend downloading this game for free or for you to be the proud owner of the physical copy. Dawn of Kernal demands to be played, so get blasting (say no more, I have been blasting away for the past 8 months and I just made it to level two - Ed).

SCORE

"After many extensive play throughs, I can say that Juan J Martinez has made a stand out Amstrad game"

GFX	95%
SFX	93%
FUN	91%
STAYING POWER	83%
OVERALL	**93%**

- **CODING:** David Giron Jareno and Sandra Garzon Hernandez (RantanGames)
- **INFO:** http://cpcretrodev.byterealms.com/2016/04/top-top-rantan-games-2/
- **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

TOP TOP
(REVISED 2018 EDITION)

Top Top first appeared way back in 2015 as an entry into that years #cpcretrodev contest. The original version was in Spanish and consisted of only 5 levels. The game ranked 3 out of 36 with quite a high rating of 8.69 out of 10 and received 3rd out of three in the "PRO" category. While it has been a long time in coming, Rantan games have released a much more polished 2018, English version, with improved graphics and more levels, 20 to be precise.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game manual simply states that this is a two player game. Your goal is to reach the last floor of the 20th level by working together. You start at level one and you work your way upwards to level 20. If you don't have a friend to play with you won't get the most out of the gameplay. Even though you can play the game as one person working the two in game characters you don't get the same enjoyment, believe me you just won't. It's a bit like my workplace, one person working the job of two people and that's no fun, trust me.

Without any further details from the manual I must assume the game takes place in a tower. On either side of the screen are two cute female magicians, one red and the other blue. Your goal is to reach the top platform of each level and to do so the magicians must work together. Each magician is faced with the same set of tasks on their side of the screen. To get to the top of their platform, they must rely on the other magician to perform the tasks necessary to help them get to the top, hence the naming of the game being called Top Top.

Level one starts off very easy with the main task of pressing a coloured lever - blue magician presses a red lever to open red gates for the red magician to pass through and make their way to the top, and the red magician presses blue levers to allow the blue magician
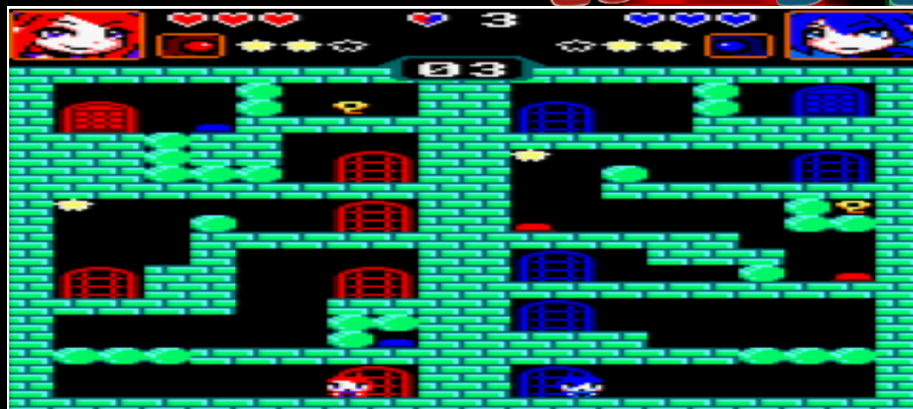
Level 3 and the game becomes more complex, you must shoot those green orbs, collect keys and stars as well as pressing levers to open gates for your co operative playing friend

to advance upwards. Collecting a key allows the magicians to pass through the last gate and onto the next level. Movement is by keyboard only and there is quite a bit of running and jumping involved. As you progress through the levels, the game introduces new items to collect in the form of stars and potions as well as new obstacles to avoid such as spikes, animated blobs and green coloured bricks, the last two can be removed by using your shooter in four directions. The task of moving upwards becomes progressively harder as pressing a lever on the higher levels simply won't open a gate that will allow you to get to the next gate, the levers will open different gates and working co-operatively is the only way to solve the puzzles. When you get to about the 7th level you need to shoot clear bubbles to change their colour either red or blue to open new passageways for your magicians to find their way safely to the top of the level. This is where the puzzles become harder to solve and the two player co-op element becomes essential.

WHAT I LIKE

The music is what grabbed me straight away, such a catchy tune, one that fits in very well with the gameplay. The fact that you can actually play a damn good two player game in mode 0 is pretty cool for the CPC. Graphically its very well presented, the colours used are excellent, sprites are cute and charming. As each level progresses there's something new to discover and a new solution must be found to get to the top platform of a level. The originality of the gaming experience keeps you hooked and the level design plays a starring role in maintaining your interest.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Unfortunately keys only.

VERDICT

Two player co-op games like this don't appear very often on the Amstrad CPC, when they do they stand out and Top Top stands out for all the right reasons. A beautifully, professionally presented game, full of playability, character and charm. The tune might be basic in nature but it is incredibly catchy even the birds outside my window started to sing. 20 levels of wonderful platforming co-op puzzle fun.

Blue player steps on red lever to open the gates for the red player to move 'top wards'

SCORE

"Graphically its very well presented, the colours used are excellent, sprites are cute and charming"

GFX	87%
SFX	93%
FUN	93%
STAYING POWER	85%
OVERALL	**90%**

- **CODING:** BG Games
- **INFO:** Download a preview copy from http://www.pouet.net/prod.php?which=68387
- **REVIEWED BY:** Louie Dimovski

PINBALL DREAMS

My favourite childhood memories from the days back in the late 1970s is when my Dad and I would go down to the local pool hall on weekends. He'd spend hours catching up with friends and playing a few rounds of cards while handing me a handful of coins to amuse myself on the three pinball machines situated towards the back corner of the hall. Despite playing each of the games endlessly, I would never tire of them, fascinated by the gaming experience and mechanics they offered.

As the pool halls faded away into obscurity during the 1980s, the only way to satisfy my pinball fetish was via my C64 but this ultimately proved unsatisfying as the games struggled to recreate the physics and visuals that are essential in replicating the authentic experience. I'd given up on the notion that pinball could be successfully done on a home computer, that is until I saw Pinball Dreams on my friends Amiga.

Pinball Dreams, released for the Amiga in 1992, set a new benchmark in digital pinball gaming with its smooth scrolling, high fidelity sound and crisp graphical display. Receiving numerous completed ports over the years, there were none for 8-bit computer systems, that is until now. BATMAN GROUP (BG GAMES) has changed they way we look at 8-bit gaming with their fantastic port of Pinball Dreams, designed to run on an Amstrad CPC with at least 128K.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The Amstrad CPC version of Pinball Dreams contains all four tables found in the original Amiga version. The first table, 'Ignition', is themed around space exploration. The main objectives of this table is to light up all of the IGNITION letters by hitting the 3 red targets in the middle to obtain a letter. The table contains a saucer, couple of bumpers and slingshots but very little else, making it the easiest but least interesting table to play out of the four on offer.

'Steel Wheel' is the second table containing a theme around steam trains from the 'Old West' era and steps things up a bit with broader use of the colour palette and addition of features such as two large ramps, ball traps, rollovers and three bumpers. As a result, the pinball experience is far more entertaining.

The third table titled 'Beat Box', carrying a music industry theme,

is the most feature rich of the four tables with its inclusion of large ramps, a second level, rollovers, ball traps, bumpers and plenty of targets. The main objective is to reach the number 1 spot in the USA or European music charts to collect a big points bonus.

The final table on offer is 'Nightmare', themed around a graveyard, ghosts and ghouls , contains a darker aesthetic. Containing the most number of pinball features, 'Nightmare' is the most challenging of the four tables with a very well designed table layout which is sure to test the most ardent pinball wizard. Controls are strictly a keyboard affair while Pinball Dreams also features multiplayer mode of up to 8 players and a high score table.

WHAT I LIKE

Overall production values with this port is high. The table visuals are spectacular making full use of the Amstrad's colour palette. Scrolling is quite smooth while retaining the realistic ball physics. While the Amstrad port is not as fast as the Amiga version, the game moves at a satisfying pace with barely a stutter to be seen.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

If there is one thing that I do miss with the Amstrad port is the exclusion of the synthesized speech found in the original Amiga version. Not only does the speech add to the overall ambience but it was quite handy in letting you know what objective has been triggered, especially with the 'Beat Box' table, without having to try and catch the message displayed in the LED display.

VERDICT

Pinball Dreams for the Amstrad CPC is a great technical achievement while at the same time providing a wonderful quick pick up and play experience that never really feels tiresome at any stage. BG Games should be widely applauded with the passion that they have poured into their port of Pinball Dreams and I am sure that all 8-bit retro gaming enthusiasts will be greatly impressed with the overall package on offer.

SCORE

"The game moves about at a satisfying pace"

GFX	**97%**
SFX	**85%**
FUN	**90%**
STAYING POWER	**80%**
OVERALL	**91%**

THE SHADOWS OF SERGOTH

Dungeon crawler genre games aren't renowned for being very prolific in 8-Bits gaming in general, even more so for the Amstrad CPC, in particular. But it was no problem, for this "Dream Team" of homebrew programmers, most of them French, who bring to us this amazing, deep, complex and refined game for all the fans of this kind of game style and more specifically for Amstrad CPC users in general. The Shadows of Sergoth is, as I said, a dungeon crawler in a subjective view, which takes the Amstrad to the top of its capacity, in a game that is hard to believe that is running on a CPC.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game takes us to the Kingdom of Chrisandia, in the south of Marak peninsula. After a tough war against the evil emperor Sul Rakin, times of peace and happiness are installed now and nobody remembers the dark past years. You take the role of an adventurer who, while in Cedicus, the capital city of the Kingdom, children and cattle have been disappearing in a mysterious way, so to find out why, you enter the dungeons of the castle of Sergorth uncovering a frightening situation. What evil lurks in the shadows? Will you have the courage to take up this challenge and save your kingdom?

When you start the game, just after having selected one of three languages - English, French or Spanish, you can then choose one of the three difficulty levels (adventurer, warrior or champion). Then you must decide on one of the five types of adventurer you can play a game as. You can select the gender and the race be it a Human, Elf, Dwarf, Half-Orc or a Human-Lizard. Each one has different 'stats' and 'specific bonuses'. You can check them all them all out in the great player's guide of 28 pages which can be downloaded with the game for free.

The character has three primary stats (strength, dexterity and mind) which will be the ones that we choose to upgrade every time we rise a new level (up to twenty) when we have earned enough experience points. There are also four secondary stats (attack bonus, defence bonus, health points and spell points). You can use keys and controller to

Under attack from a skeleton

So many keys to remember… but no QAOP?

control the adventurer, but you'll need so many more commands than the usual move and attack, so I highly recommend you use keyboard. You have up to thirteen keys to use for moves, move besides, use map, use inventory, view stats, drop items, etc etc. You'll need some training if you are not used to playing this kind of game, because, as its controls are more complex than the usual 8-Bit game. But not to fear, as in a few minutes, having the guide close to your side, you'll be able to explore the dungeons of Sergoth quite easily.

Taking a look at the map, you can see how massive this game can be. Every of its sixteen levels is massive, full of rooms, locks, items, traps, puzzles and enemies. The main screen shows us the stage, compass, stats, mini-map, bag, equipment and health and mana bars. We have a dialogue box, too. So many things for an Amstrad game, it seems impossible. We can check the map in full screen and full detailed stats by pushing different keys.

When we move, we can see fluid movement forward, and to the sides. This makes the exploration experience easier, because we can move relatively fast through the dungeon. We have to click many switches, a find keys and magic portals to get into all the rooms of each level. In the rooms, in addition to enemies, we'll find several types of items: equipment to rise the character stats (helmets, coats, shoes, etc), food to recover HP, different kinds of potions (antidote, HP and SP), weapons and shields and more as well

as certain keys to open doors. We have to take care, because we can find pits where we can fall if we don't realise we are passing through it. We can find banners too (20 of them), to be destroyed in our adventure as a side mission.

The adventurer also can cast spells, there are twenty four different spells to learn of cure, attack, defence or others as levitation and teleportation. We'll need to find first the book of magic, which we'll find in the first level.

Good Dungeon Crawler games have lots of enemy killing and this is no different as you are required to defeat so many kinds of monsters through your adventure. The game rules are based in Microlite20, that is an extreme simplification of the Advanced Dungeon & Dragons. The combat is turn based, move or attack each turn, so we have to choose what to do, which weapon or attack spell to use every moment according to the enemy you are fighting. We can recover health and mana by eating food or drinking potions during the combat. Once finished the combat we can recover all the HP and SP by resting if there aren't enemies nearby.

You can save the game which is great because it is such a huge game, you won't be able to complete it in 10 minutes, you will have to play so many hours to rise to the last level. To discover new levels, we have to solve some puzzles too, this is what makes the game deeper, complex and much more funnier that most other RPG games of it's type.

An in game character, the Half - Orc. Half Orc and half Human

WHAT I LIKE

I have to say that the first time I played this game in a real Amstrad CPC, It was hard to believe to me that it wasn't an Atari ST. It's incredible how these guys have made true such ambitious project for a CPC with such playable results. I have to say that if you are an RPG dungeon crawler fan, this game in the context of a 8-bit game, is the best option right now. Good graphics, big maps, many levels and enemies, all the ingredients for a wonderful RPG game, impossible to imagine it twenty five years ago. A 3D RPG dungeon crawler that actually moves with smoothness and speed with just 128kb. A good selection of different characters to choose from with varying abilities, good to see they have included female characters.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

If I have to say something, it has no music in game (128k, is easy to understand why) only simple sound effects, but has got a beautiful music in the main menu. But it has minimum impact on the global result of this great game. It's such a huge and very long game, so be prepared and have time to play it.

VERDICT

As an RPG fan I could say this is one of the best games that you can play on a CPC right now. It's incredible how polished it is in every detail. I was totally mesmerized right from the moment I typed run"disc. The graphics, the title music and gameplay are all unbelievable. The humorous messages that inform the player you can't be fought because you only have 64kb of memory and the animation of that lightning bolt in the loading screen at the start, and everything after is just so cool. I have to say after playing this game for most of 2018, in my opinion this is world class 8-Bit coding. I was having a conversation with a friend on facebook not so long ago and he stated that the CPC was the bridge between 8 and 16 bit machines. I now understand what he means by that after playing and seeing the awesomeness of, The Shadows of Sergoth!

SCORE

"As an RPG fan I could say this is one of the best games that you can play on a CPC right now"

GFX	97%
SFX	90%
FUN	96%
STAYING POWER	95%
OVERALL	**97%**

WORLD WAR SIMULATOR PART 2

I am very grateful to Toni Ramirez of Retro Bytes Productions for sending my way a pre-release version of his new strategy war game for both Amstrad CPC and Spectrum called World War Sim 2. It is the same team that coded Outlaws, the winning game of the 2016 CPCRetrodev.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

World War Sim 2 (no World War 1 Sim game by the looks of it?) takes place in in you guessed it World War 2 - obviously! Played from the overhead view, this war strategy game felt more like a shoot em up maze adventure, in the same vein of well known commercial games from the 1980's - Gauntlet (Atari / U.S. Gold, 1987) and Into The Eagles Nest, (Pandora Software, 1987).

You find yourself inside Hitler's compound. Your mission orders are simple, yet precise. With four lives locate Hitler and kill him, lose all 4 lives Hitler lives. In total there are 57 screens to go exploring to fulfil your perilous mission. Although it doesn't have a huge amount of rooms to explore, there's plenty to do to keep your mind occupied.

Each room is different, some may appear to be the same but they are not. A room could be empty allowing you to roam free and pass through it without any chance of causing you harm, that's not often though. As you pass from one room to the other you have to be careful not to walk straight into a land mine, or get noticed by Hitler's guards, who will hunt you down if they sense you are close enough to them. Shoot to kill first and ask questions later as Hitler's henchmen won't think twice to bring you to your demise.

Avoiding land mines is done so by walking around them, be careful though as they could be placed close together, one wrong tap on the controls and your instantly dead. Landmine placement is basically anywhere in a room, there may be few or there could be many, the saving grace for your play is that they are not in every room. To get to certain rooms you will have to find keys to open doors. When you locate a key sometimes you may have to back track to open a door you may have passed earlier but couldn't open as you were not holding a key. At first it may feel confusing, like you are going around in circles, however the room layout is easy to remember as they appear to have been constructed in sections, meaning a key is usually found in an area that will open the door to leave that section. Once a door is opened you can travel back through it as it remains open.

Hitler's guards will appear in the same rooms all the time, this helps you remember where they are. They are very cunning adversary's, firing at you pretty quickly. Distance is not an impediment in this game. You can shoot at Hitler's henchmen from across the room, you don't have to be close to them to shoot them down, but you might have to move closer towards them to get a clear shot, as they might be stuck against a wall and will only move about the room if they can sense that you are near.

Ammo is limited so keep a keen eye on your supply. Guards will appear in multiples in some rooms too, so a little bit of strategy to get them may be required, i.e. drawing one out of its location while trying to not get spotted and shot at from the other guards in

When you kill one of the guards they go splat!

And there he is waiting to be killed! But he's having a nap

the room. You could charge at them shooting bullets like Rambo, I tried but usually came off dead. Once the guards have been killed make sure you walk over their dead bodies, because when you leave a screen and then go back to it the guard will reappear if you don't. Doing this will also help you complete the achievements, more on that below. Bullets and energy can be replaced, but you need to locate them as they are hidden. This is done by searching the walls of the compound.

Lots of on screen messages appeared when I was doing this and I had no idea what they were saying as they were in Spanish, unfortunately an English version of the game has not been made. It was also hard to make out what the writing was on the menu screens.

As well as locating and killing Hitler, there are another five tasks to complete if you are to achieve a 100% rating in the game. You need to locate Hitler's dog, Blonda, the propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and his wife, Magda, locate Hitler's wife, Eva Braun and collect all of the bodies. To kill everyone you just have to walk over them while they are in their beds and then keep moving through the rooms. There is no big confrontation or end of level bad guy shoot out or anything, for this type of game it probably doesn't need it, but I guess there are people out there expecting there to be one hell of a last boss battle? Hitler gave up in real life by shooting himself so maybe a big boss battle wouldn't do justice to history.

heart beat is great and adds to the games atmosphere. Movement around the playing area is what makes the game fun, there's no lag or any issues with the controls, so your gaming experience is not one that is frustrating. Graphically, the Amstrad CPC version is full colour mode 0, which just looks so much better than the Speecy game. Hitler's compound, all the character sprites, the rooms and what is inside those rooms are beautifully detailed for such a top down view game such as this.

WHAT I LIKE

The standout elements of this game for me is the fluid gameplay and the music. That music is just excellent as it was in Outlaws. Jose A Martin really knows how to score great tunes to a CPC game. There is a heart that thumps continually, I thought this had some other meaning or purpose, like if you were getting close to an enemy or closer to Hitler it would beat faster and therefore the sounds of anxiety would get louder, but it wasn't. The heart beats faster and the sound gets louder as you lose your lives. The loud thumping

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Probably the only blemish is that World War Simulator Part 2 is a Spanish language only game. It didn't really matter, it would have been nice to choose an English language option, but it was easy enough to progress without too much hassle. The only issue of frustration this caused occurred when trying to work out what the achievements on the screen meant. I couldn't make heads or tails what was going on, like I said though, only a minor issue, not one that takes anything away from the game.

VERDICT

World War Sim 2, is a game that I enjoyed playing from start to finish. After a few goes you realize that it is quite an easy game to complete, but there is enough there to keep you entertained for some time. It's really good to see different styles of games like this one being coded. Another good job by the Retro Bytes Productions team.

SCORE

"The loud thumping heart beat is great and adds to the games atmosphere"

GFX	85%
SFX	90%
FUN	88%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	85%

■ **CODING:** Artaburu, **GFX:** Sad1942, **SFX:** John McKlain, **Design / Idea:** Litos
■ **INFO:** Download both 64K and 128K versions from https://espsoft.blogspot.com/2018/04/galactic-tomb.html
■ **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

GALACTIC TOMB

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In the era of the first millennium, three kings ruled in the Ururben Galaxy. Three kings for three kingdoms, their civilizations not based on technology but on magic. The galactic triumvirate lived with peace and respect until the arrival of Shakar who, through dark arts, managed to overthrow and annihilate the three kings. Later he would impose technology as the standard of his empire, hiding the mystical real bodies of the three Kings in three hidden tombs somewhere in the galaxy. Now the last days of Emperor Shakar are arriving. Having artificially prolonging his life to unsuspected limits, his medical team finds no way to prolong his reign and Shakar is not willing to see the end of his days.

As the most elite, outstanding commander of the imperial army, you are appointed to carry out a mission that will Keep Shakar alive. In this run 'n jump platformer you need to travel through three different worlds, looking for the mystical tombs containing magical objects to prolong the life of Emperor Shakar. Each of the tombs are guarded by three unique guardians of different times of the past, present and future. World one, Pherenos is a planet with volcanic zones, rivers of lava and other dangers. World two, Robota, is more of

a technology age. Along with your standard equipment, you have the use of a backpack to lift you off the ground. Find four memory cards of the four main computers in the base but beware of the droids and the main computers being protected by energy fields that you will have to avoid and turn off.

World three, Microbia, is your final mission. This time you are not running and jumping instead you are underwater in command of a second generation A21 mini-sub. Your mini-sub is armed with two short-range lasers that will allow you to get rid of your enemies, as well as a helmet energizer, which will allow you to electrify the deck and get rid of enemies attached to the ship. Find the silver and gold keys to open the door lock that hides the last tomb and defeat the last guardian.

WHAT I LIKE

The graphics and tunes are undeniably fabulous. These two factors make playing the game more enjoyable than me having to wake up and go to work every day. Glorious colourful graphics with smooth scrolling and fantastic sprites that fit the theme of each level beautifully is where the game excels. The presentation is first class all the way, gorgeous pits of lava to jump over with balls of

lava to avoid while you are jumping is a classic old school platformer component and so is dodging those laser bars that appear on level two. If run and jump is your 8-Bit gaming thing then your in for a wild time as the genre is so magnificently portrayed in its delivery here. While levels one and two are pure run and jump, the change up on level three "Microbia", to underwater gameplay via a submarine vessel is more than appreciated, the subtle change gives some unexpectedness and excitement to a game which is short in supply of it.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

It feels way too short. Only one weapon to use, I found myself craving for some bombs or a rocket launcher to blow up stuff. Enemies are in short supply too, in particular on level two - Robota. At times it feels like you are wandering around in a maze going nowhere. Another irritation is that some items you can't see and probably won't find if you have not watched a walkthrough video on YouTube to learn how to discover them.

VERDICT

If you ever wanted to be whisked back in time playing those gorgeous CPC Spanish games from 1986 -1992 then this is it. While gobsmackingly gorgeous in terms of graphics and presentation, the gameplay and fun factor seem disconnected at times from the rest of the game. It's crying out to me "Where is the challenge?", "where is the tough boss battles?" and "where is the "crikey I didn't expect that to happen" feeling? Sure, you will love this shoot 'em up, but I feel it is lacking elements of fun and challenging battles that would take it from a fab game to an absolutely epic game.

I told you those lava pits are gorgeous, er, just don't fall in.....World one, Pherenos

SCORE

"Glorious colourful graphics with smooth scrolling"

GFX	94%
SFX	92%
FUN	80%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**85%**

- **CODING, GFX and SFX:** Salvador Cantero, **ADDITIONAL GFX:** Felipe Monge, **MUSIC:** Beyker
- **INFO:** Name your price at https://playonretro.itch.io/robbie-amstrad-cpc
- **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

ROBBIE STRIKES BACK

It's turning into a bit of back to the future this 2019, 8-Bit Annual isn't it. 1983 type games seem to be highly in favour at the moment. The C64 Shadow Switcher game by Dr Wuro Industries is a Lode Runner variant, and developer Salvador Cantero started this theme off way back in January 2018 releasing Robbie Strikes Back on the Amstrad CPC. He wrote to me on twitter saying "basically this is a recreation of Ultimate's "PSSST" for the ZX Spectrum", originally coded by the Stamper brothers. Salvador Cantero says "It's a port of PSSST for CPC 464 in the Amstrad CPC's mode 0, so they are not identical and I have coded it using CPCTELERA. It's really just a programming exercise, just for fun"

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

You play Robbie the Robot. While tending to your garden, your mission is to protect a plant known as a Thyrgodian Megga Chrisanthodil. This plant grows from a seedling from the bottom of the centre of the playing screen until it fully opens. For it to become a flower, Robbie must protect it from getting eaten by three different types of insects - green greasy worms, yellow sucker wasps and red hairy aphids. These pests fly or crawl around the one screen playing area, you need to avoid them and grab the cans of pesticide that are on a ledge on either side of the screen. If they touch you, a life will be lost. To keep them at bay from harming Robbie's flower, he is able to use three coloured insect sprays to repel them from latching onto the Thyrgodian Megga Chrisanthodil and stop them from killing it. It's pretty simple to work out which insecticide to spray for each insect, the colour

of the can that matches the colour of the pest will be able to destroy it. Yellow can for yellow sucker, wasps, green can for green greasy worms and red can for the red hairy aphids.

The game is presented from a single, 2D perspective. During gameplay some collectable icons appear in the form of a fly swatter which acts as a smart bomb killing everything on screen. A watering can helps speed up the Thyrgodian Megga Chrisanthodil growth and collecting a bottle of fertilizer will help the plant grow twice as fast as collecting a watering can. Collecting these items will also add points to your score. You have five lives to complete your mission which happens to be five levels of the same screen. The first level introduces the green greasy worms, the second level you fight off green greasy worms and red hairy aphids and from the third level the yellow sucker wasps join in the fight to kill off your gorgeous Thyrgodian Megga Chrisanthodil flower from growing and flowering. Once you complete the five levels the game repeats but at a much faster pace, with insects becoming much more aggressive.

WHAT I LIKE

It's a beautifully presented, colourful fun game. While basic in design and lacking some depth, the graphical representation of the sprites does re-capture the spirit of the original game. The tune is very catchy and the growth of your flower is worth you completing each level. The five lives is adequate and moving around each level is quite smooth. You are more than able to complete Robbie's task of killing off all the insects before they kill off the Thyrgodian Megga Chrisanthodil. The

The end of level 1 when the flower has opened

gameplay is minimalistic but also entertaining, shooting down insects in this game makes you want to go do real garden work, but then you realize nah, i'll just keep playing this and not break my back bending over pulling out weeds all day.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The cans lock back into the side walls way to easily just when you didn't want them to. I found this rather annoying and then when you went to pick them up you had to be precisely level with the can. The collision detection was a little off and swapping shooting direction was sluggish. Perhaps there could have been a different plant flowering on each level just for something a little different.

VERDICT

The small number of levels may be a disappointment to some players, but the speed does increase once you complete level five, ultimately making the game harder and more challenging. There is much to like about developer Salvador Cantero's fun and very cute looking homage to the original ZX Spectrum game "PSSST". Back to 1983 video games sure is turning out to be a great deal of fun in 2018.

Level 1 starts off very easy with green slugs to spray away

SCORE

"It's a beautifully presented, colourful fun game"

GFX	82%
SFX	88%
FUN	82%
STAYING POWER	78%
OVERALL	**82%**

■ **CODING:** Xifos
■ **INFO: Amstrad GX4000 / PLUS only.** Download from https://cpcrulez.fr/GamesTest/ghosts_n_goblins-gx4000.htm
■ **REVIEWED BY:** John Kavanagh

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS
(2018 REMAKE)

Is the remake of Ghost 'n Goblins worth the wait over the somewhat botched Amstrad CPC version from 1986?

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game starts with a nice intro, just like the arcade version. You play a knight named Arthur. While with your new bride in a graveyard surrounded by beautiful forest, wearing nothing but your underwear, she is brutally kidnapped by demonic forces who grabbed her from the sky and flew away with her to Satan's palace. Being an honourable Knight, it's your job to fight the hoards of the undead and other evil nasties as you make your way to rescue your love.

The game is a side scroller where you must progress from the left of the screen to the fight through six stages. Your weapon is a throwing lance but you can find other weapons such as flaming torches, axes and the best weapon, in my opinion, knives.

There are several improvements in this remake. For example, in the original, the game only scrolled when you get near the end of the screen, and it kept scrolling until your character is back to the centre of the screen and then scrolls again as you move your character to the end of the screen again. While this sounds very annoying, once you engrossed in the game, you'd hardly notice. However, the remake has constant smooth scrolling and it's a massive improvement in gameplay. The graphics are also improved with much nicer sprites and the 4096 colour palette of the Amstrad PLUS / GX4000 range. The sprites are big and detailed, especially the enemies and especially bosses.

The improvements aren't just graphical either, the original CPC version only had the first three levels of the six-level arcade game, this remake, I'm happy to say, has all six levels. The difficulty level is much fairer too. Ghost 'n Goblins is still frustratingly hard, but at least now, you don't get put back to the start of the game when you are first hit. Instead, you lose your armour and get to run around in your underwear (again), giving Arthur a chance to finish the level and indeed, find more armour. Now the game feels possible to complete, still hard as nails but not too hard as to put you off playing.

Like the original, the game never feels unfair, just difficult, but it is the type of game where you improve as you play. It's a case of remembering your enemies movements and positions as well as your own character's limitation, such as a short shooting distance and being able to only shoot left and right. It's impossible to shoot in any other direction, unlike later games in the Ghost 'n Goblins series.

The controls feel tight and responsive, and while many said the game plays faster, it isn't that much faster but it's just right. It's certainly a lot smoother, not just the scrolling as previously mentioned but the sprite animation. Yes, Arthur still walks weird and shakes his arms like a mad man but he did that in the arcade version too.

WHAT I LIKE

What I like more than anything, is that there are now a total of six levels, with the options of various weapons. That's the biggest improvement, then it's the scrolling and sprite design. The sound effects are spot on too, nothing special, but again, just like the arcade version.

The enemy sprites are big within this game, just like the Arcade version

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

While the music is good, it does seem a bit repetitive as you play. Another annoying factor is that the game is still frustratingly hard, but the only difference now is that it offers the chance to at least make one or two errors and still be able to complete it.

VERDICT

If this game came out during the life of the Amstrad Plus / GX4000, it would have been highly praised as one of the best games available on the GX4000 / PLUS. It's certainly a game where the desire to play just one more time is strong, just to get a little further. Highly enjoyable.

The original version (left, 1986) compared to the 2018 remake (right)

SCORE	
"A mass improvement over a game that wasn't too bad in the first place"	
GFX	92%
SFX	81%
FUN	85%
STAYING POWER	92%
OVERALL	**90%**

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#CPCRETRODEV2018

Now in its 6th year, the Spanish Amstrad CPC game competition organized by the University of Alicante received a whopping 41 new Amstrad CPC game entries - a new record for the game development contest. As a tribute to Topo Soft's, 1988, mobster game, "Chicago 30's", developers were required to include a reference of this classic home computer game in their own games.

Some developers also used the Chicago 30's theme as their game style such as CNG Soft's 4th placed, The Adventures Of Timothy Gunn. What I liked about this years contest is that there were very few games if any that were not finished, in previous years it was the opposite and reflected poorly on the competition. Also catching my eye was the inclusion of two sports / football games - Foosball F3 by QuiQue Miquel achieving 7th place overall and Penalty Kicks by Sakis Kaffesakis receiving 39th place overall. They may not have been the greatest games of the contest but it is good to see any sports games being developed on the CPC. The most notable achievements of this years contest was the variety of game styles, the new techniques shown and the improvement in the student games.

Operation Alexandra, a run n' jump, shoot 'em up platformer by

4Mhz with 393 votes was crowned overall winner. Run n' jump, hack n' slash platformer, Jarlac, by RetroBytes received 2nd best game overall with 380 votes. Then after these two games it was daylight. Legend Of Steel by TOD Studios received 3rd overall with 283 votes, The Adventures Of Timothy Gunn by CNGSoft with 278 votes received 4th overall and on 261 votes, rounding out the top placings was the funky Tetris inspired game OPQA vs QAOP: The Final Battle by Manuel Sagra receiving 5th place. 77 Attempts by Unknown Design was crowned winner 'Best Student' game, the Rookie Thief by CPZenon Games received 2nd 'Best Student' game and Earth Defender by Carlos Perezgrin received the Opera Prima Award as a first time CPC developer.

Congratulations to everyone who entered the contest, it's not about winning, it's about having a go, making your ideas come to life, learning new languages and coding skills and being able to

demonstrate them within the 64kb limitations of the contest. The standard of the games entered were much improved on previous years and everyone should be very proud of their creations. Well done to everyone, you have made the 2018 #CPCRETRODEV full of awesome Amstrad CPC gaming.

Download from:
cpcretrodev.byterealms.com/2018/11/results-and-games-from-cpcretrodev-2018/

POSITION	GAME	SCORE	POSITION	GAME	SCORE
1	Operation Alexandra (4Mhz)	393	21	Space Cowboy (VoxelTower)	94
2	Jarac (RetroBytes)	380	22	Indigo (Indigo)	87
3	Legend of Steel (TOD Studios)	283	23	BringRGBack (Dead Pixel)	74
4	The Adventures of Timothy Gunn (CNGSoft)	278	24	OverHeap (BastaCPC)	70
5	OPQA vs QAOP: The Final Battle (Manuel Sagra)	261	25	Turtle Slam (TurtleSlam)	68
6	77 Attempts (Unknown Design)	202	26	Space Ball (Altered Vision)	67
7	Foosball F3 (Quigue Miquel)	180	27	Elfo Saves Christmas (Ninja Pointer)	66
8	Deeper Warrens (Arnaud Bouche)	162	28	Two Finger Death Now (Spherp08)	62
9	The Rookie Thief (CPZenon Games)	145	29	Cat Pang (Lady Cats)	61
10	Crimson Knight Adventures (Nibble Games)	134	30	Cuchara Voladora (CucharaVoladora)	60
11	Harvest Day (Pixel Productions)	129	31	Fitzroy and the Infestation (awergh)	60
12	Redsea (Gameroid)	114	32	Bank (ACReturns)	53
13	Earth Defender (Carlos Perezgrin)	113	33	Hacktank (Retroleto Games)	50
14	Snake Bubble (The Bubble Club)	106	34	Lunatic (Lunatic)	45
15	The Last Debt (Retrojam Games)	105	35	Invade Space (Proyecto Red)	41
16	KimoHiyoko (SarayCow)	103	36	Tank (ARDAD)	41
17	Taulellets (Vicente Jimenez)	99	37	Disassembler (Machine Gun)	40
18	The Spirit of Halloween (Lab16Devs)	98	38	Killing Machine (PizzarT)	40
19	The Crypt (RetroGamma)	97	39	Penalty Kicks (Sakis Kaffesakis)	40
20	Cannon Duels (David Asta)	96	40	Crocker (Merienda)	20
			41	18th Century Invaders (LYSGames)	3

■ **GROUP:** 4MHZ, **CODING:** Javier Garcia Navarro, **GFX:** Rafa Castillo, **SFX:** John McKlain
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

OPERATION ALEXANDRIA

I always think back to my Amstrad gaming days with fond memories. There are a few magical moments that reside in your brain from early childhood. In the forefront of mine is Christmas morning of 1984. Waking up as most youngsters do around 4 a.m. to find my father getting ready for his early shift and showing me my present in all of its' glory. A full colour monitor Amstrad CPC 464.

We loaded up Harrier attack and he left for work after showing me how to use it. In the coming 4 or 5 hours (before my brother got up) a lifelong gaming obsession was forged in my soul. Could life get any better? The answer was a resounding "YES!" Still, countless CPC games are being released

which blow my mind and create new and wonderful experiences. Operation Alexandria is one of those games! Javier Garcia Navarro, Rafa Castillo and John McKlain have created a true gaming masterpiece which deserves to sit up there in the company of the very best Amstrad CPC games. If this had been released in the mid to late 1980's I believe it would feature on many gamers' top ten Amstrad lists, it's that good!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The creators of the game, 4mhz describe the plot as follows: "In October 2016, Russian scientists discovered a secret Nazi base in Alexandra Land, an island belonging to the archipelago Franz Josef Land, within the Arctic Circle. The existence of this military base was known thanks to the documentation seized from the Nazi regime at the end of World War II, but not its exact location. This base was called Schatzgräber , (in English "Treasure Hunter") and, according to the official documents of the time, its main purpose was to serve as a meteorological station to get more accurate weather forecasts and thus provide a military advantage to Nazi Germany in the battles that took place during

The opening reminds me of Metal Gear in all the right ways!

World War II. When Russian scientists arrive at this base in 2016 they find a kind of time capsule. Weapons, ammunition, supplies, food cans, even personal effects of all kinds and half-written journals. Everything intact!

We embody the protagonist of this story, Mihail Mashkov, a Russian army officer who is a member of this mission. During one of our usual patrols by Alexandra Land , the base informs us of some strange radio signals near our position, and asks us for visual confirmation that everything is in order there. Upon reaching our goal, we discover that these mysterious radio signals come from an old abandoned Nazi base . An unexpected

Shoot to kill but make sure you get closer and crouch down lower to kill off those red orbs

snowstorm complicates our return to our camp and makes all radio communication impossible, so we choose to take refuge in the mysterious building and wait for the storm to subside. We soon realize that we are not alone.

Your goal is to unravel the riddle that resides inside this ancient military base. Go as far as you can and discover why the Nazis built the base in this location and who are the mysterious beings that inhabit it. You must avoid the dangers that the base contains.

To deal with so much adversity you have your old but reliable AK-47 and, of course, your intelligence. You can also find certain objects that will give you an immediate advantage, such as the medikit , which will reset your health points, or a genuine " Tommy Gun ", with which you will achieve a greater range in your shots. Keeping you alive will require skill and the invaluable help of your AK-47, but in order to advance, your brain will be your best weapon. During the game you will find certain objects that must be collected to be used in other parts of the game and so unlock access to new areas in the base. In the HUD you will always have information about how much health you have left or what object you are currently carrying. You can also see the score you have in the current play and the best score of the session."

As you can see from the synopsis above the game is steeped in storyline which is engrossing and engaging throughout. The opening credits immediately make you think of Metal Gear Solid while the style and gameplay are more akin to the Amstrad classic Dan Dare.

The soundtrack is fantastic throughout and further adds to the experience and atmosphere of the game. Now and again when you play a game for the first time and a huge smile spreads across your face. It's when everything is just right. The graphics are great, the controls are responsive and you know you are experiencing something special. That is exactly the case with Operation Alexandria. The effort that has gone into every aspect of the gameplay is outstanding. Even the storyline is based on real events. The base is real and was indeed discovered in 2016. As for the rest of the story…

As with many action platformers, you are equipped with a health bar which means medical packs become a necessity. As the game progresses these become few and far between and you will require some considerable skills to reach the end. The quality of the experience on hand here though ensures that you will persevere and hone your skills to beat it even if only to see how the fantastic story concludes.

A 64k CPC masterpiece!

Watch out for the animated enemy above it opens up and fires at you

The outstanding story keeps you engrossed throughout

WHAT I LIKE

Fantastic storyline which provides a deep and rewarding gaming experience, seldom seen in the 8-Bit era. Outstanding action platforming which requires both skill and thought to progress. Excellent music and graphics which round off the perfect package.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

As in every game with a health bar to be replenished finding medi packs can be a chore and can distract from the otherwise excellent and engrossing gameplay. It's not a short game by any means but I still found myself wanting more! A compliment of sorts but I would have liked even more levels.

VERDICT

If you are going to play one game on the Amstrad this year. Make it Operation Alexandria. The game won the CPCRetroDev competition for 2018 for a reason. It is truly the greatest accomplishment on the CPC for years and deserves to be played by as many people as possible. What are you waiting for?

SCORE

"If you are going to play one game on the Amstrad this year. Make it Operation Alexandria"

GFX	96%
SFX	95%
FUN	97%
STAYING POWER	93%
OVERALL	**95%**

■ **CODING:** Toni Ramirez**, GFX:** Alejandro**, Music + SFX:** Jose A. Martin
■ **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

JARLAC

The legends tell that one of the greatest love stories was the one that Arlett and Jarlac lived in the lost kingdom of Tyramat. Happy as they were they did not realize that with their love they had raised the envy of a dark sorcerer named Ott, who was in love with the beautiful Arlett.

Before the rejection of Arlett, Ott enters into anger and decides that, if Arlett is not his, she will not be of anyone and turns Arlett into a stone statue. As soon as the news reaches Jarlac, he goes in search of his beloved. He finds her petrified, but in her hand she shows the solution to his spell: a heart of stone.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In this run n' jump, hack n' slash platformer, to return Arlett to her human form you must collect 13 fragments of a heart and the lost parchment containing the spell of Topo that are scattered throughout the 60 screens of the kingdom of Tyramat. You search high in the trees and underground for them running and jumping everywhere. Once they have been

collected, Jarlac will be able to break the curse that has petrified his beloved Arlett.

Armed with a huge sword, Jarlac means business. Enemies appear every time he enters a new screen. There are huge Skeletons that rush at you, spider looking creatures called Aranna that crawl on the surface of the platforms and Flying Sisu that make your life very difficult if you don't wait for them to come towards Jarlac. All of them are pretty easy to kill but you need to strike them before they touch you and drain away all your life energy.

Every time you kill an enemy it adds more to Jarlac's magic power. This is critical to the gameplay so that you can unpetrify the hearts when you locate them. If you don't have full magic then you can't unpetrify those hearts. A heart turns red in colour so you know it has become unpetrified. You can build up the magic by killing enemies and go back to the screen before where the enemies respawn and kill them again. There is nothing difficult at all, it's just good old hack n' slash platform gaming. Each time Jarlac picks up a heart, an indicator will light under the magic bar. When

Jarlac's magical power is at its maximum, he will be able to use magic, which will wipe out all the enemies on the screen and also demolish the hearts in it. The Topo Scroll contains the only spell that, together with the power of the 13 hearts, can return Arlett to her human form. While enemies are plenty, Jarlac faces many other obstacles to be wary of including rivers of burning lava flowing underground, they look too long to jump over but Jarlac will not be stopped, the only way to survive and find his true love is by jumping over them, any contact with the lava will kill Jarlac instantly. Large spikes are found everywhere and must be jumped over to continue your quest. In some screens you will find water, this has a healing effect on Jarlac and will recharge his energy. If Jarlac falls from too great a height between screens he won't die but it will remove much of his energy bar.

WHAT I LIKE

The music is outstanding. That tune is as cool as you could want when playing a game like this. Your sword slashing Jarlac sprite is huge,

Have a look at that massive sword slash!

Huge enemies everywhere and at all heights, plan your jumps carefully

Turn those hearts when your magic meter reaches full turn those hearts red and collect 13 of them to remove the curse of your love Arlett back to human form

Stuck between two skeletons, kill them as quick as you can to build up your magic meter and turn that petrified heart to red

LIST OF ENEMIES

ARANNA

The aranna is the most common of the enemies that Jarlac will find in Tyramat, since by its constitution it can fly almost anywhere, although they feel more comfortable in the grassy area.

FLYING SISU

The flying sisus live among the vegetation and trees on the surface of Tyramat. As soon as they detect Jarlac they will go for him, so close, that Jarlac must make the effort to separate from them so that he can eliminate them with his sword.

SKELTONS OF ANCIENT KNIGHTS

These enemies guard the basement of Tyramat. You can try to pass by them without being detected, but as they do they will do everything possible to eliminate you.

OTT

Ott is the one who made up all this mess. He sure does not make things easy for Jarlac.

for sure, but like I said they don't take away a great deal from the game but they may have enhanced the playability if they were included. Perhaps 5 lives instead of 3 would have made it more enjoyable.

VERDICT

There is no doubt the game has its failings, but as they say beauty is in the eye of the beholder. At first play I was negative towards it, but Jarlac grew on me and I have enjoyed it much more than I had originally thought I would. Not hack n' slash platforming at its best, but Jarlac has some awesome tunes, colourful large sprites, is a lot of fun and sure is a cool game to play.

SCORE

"Your sword slashing Jarlac sprite is huge, so are your enemy sprites"

GFX	88%
SFX	96%
FUN	86%
STAYING POWER	85%
OVERALL	**87%**

so are your enemy sprites, making a grand impact on your enjoyment of the game. Good colourful graphics with a good variety of the CPC's palette has been used. Building up your magic powers to unpetrify the hearts ensured a lot of slashing and hacking, that's what you want in a game like this. The recharge in the water is a terrific innovation too. I enjoyed the exploration; you could uncover new sections in all directions and the jumping high into the trees and then travelling underground made the game interesting. The

shooting skeletons in the underground section kept the game challenging.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

While not taking a great deal away from the game I didn't like that you can't jump and slash and you can't kill the enemies that are touching you. The latter means your energy is drained way too quickly. It was frustrating, yes

■ **CODING:** Juan Miguel Castillo Zaragoza, Luis Fernando Perez Perez and Daniel Ponsoda Montiel
■ **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

LEGEND OF STEEL

Legends of Steel is a story of ancient century old battles, a story of a fight for survival of the human race, a story of heroism, where you get to play Darkin, the hero that saves human civilization from terrible demons known as the 'Delorians'. But it won't be easy, trust me, I have a very sore controller thumb as proof of that!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In this maze action dungeon exploration game, the situation is dire, only one small settlement of humans are left carrying the fight to the evil Delorians and they are based in Garua, a city in the centre of Africa. They have managed to capture a Delorian shaman who after several days of interrogation tells the humans the secret of his strength - "Your swords are useless, no matter how hard you fight, you will not be able to destroy us. We have the source of Immortality in our underground den. With it we shall live eternally. It is found in the deepest part of our dungeons, but you will never be able to find it. Only death awaits you there". As I found out death did await me many times. So what are humans to do? They hatch a plan to send out fearless warrior Darkin to invade the Delorians Den (lucky guy isn't he - Ed) and bring the war to an end once and for all.

As Darkin, you possess a glorious sword forged with Astatine, a rare metal giving it unparalleled capabilities, almost the perfect weapon for such a spiteful war. I say almost as it has its flaws, you know in the movie Jaws, the line "we're going to ned a bigger boat", well I wish I had a bigger bit of steel. Your battle skills are paramount to success. While there may not be hordes of foes like in Atari's arcade game Gauntlet, there are enough on each screen to give you a cracking challenge to overcome, giving the feeling that you are battling hordes of enemies. This is done by the enemies constantly rushing at you, bringing the fight to you, ready or not. Battles can get pretty

intense at times. This is why I mentioned above that you really need a bigger bit of steel.

The game consists of a large number of challenging screens divided into 3 distinct levels: Initially you start in the dungeons, then descend to the dark caverns and finally if we can get out of these you will reach the underground palace of the Delorians. As you control Darkin around each of the rooms, which is really quite smooth and fast, you need to grab the keys to open the doors so you can pass through to the next screen. Don't worry, they are always in the same place every time you play. As you will find, the screens contain items including food, magic potions, hearts and treasure to collect. Food and hearts are the most important to collect as they replenish your health shown at the bottom of the screen as red hearts.

Each of the enemies have different capabilities. Green Orcs are easiest, knock them down three times and they are out for the count. Skeletons are pesky evil villains, knock them down three times and they respawn after 4 seconds. Delorian guards, they are tough. I don't think they can be killed. Their armour is resistant to your sword attacks. Then there are the Slimers. These green blobs were the most frustrating for me, as I couldn't escape them when they jumped me, my best plan of attack was to avoid them. Wizards are cool looking dudes, but don't befriend them as they shoot fireballs at you. When you knock down some of the enemies they may leave gold or a heart for you to collect.

WHAT I LIKE

Save points have been installed. Once you reach one you have the option of returning to it when you are dead. Basically if you pass one of the levels you can start your next game from there instead of repeating from the very start, that's a cool option. Graphically its very colourful and has the right feel for a dungeon exploration game. In game sprites are very cool, I loved the sprites in particular all of the enemies. Moving Darkin around the dungeons is quite fast and you are challenged throughout all the levels with new foes to contend with. Nice bit of title music and animated fire on the menu screen.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Those green slimes, I just couldn't seem to get away from them. Darkin needs a bigger and better looking sword to show he is a true warrior. Battles can get frustrating quickly as you get pinned down by enemies. When you walk through doors there could be an enemy on the other side attacking you as you have passed through. There is no in game soundtrack just some noises when you interact with enemies.

VERDICT

A highly enjoyable game for sure, challenging and frustrating at the same time. That loading screen is so impressive, one that oozes real legendary status, however it doesn't translate into the game. Inserting more steel into the gameplay would have made it a true legendary game.

Where your journey and battles begin, got the key, now get to an quick exit

SCORE

"Graphically its very colourful and has the right feel for a dungeon exploration game."

GFX	80%
SFX	75%
FUN	82%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**78%**

- **CODING:** César Nicolás González (CNGSOFT)
- **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

THE ADVENTURES OF TIMOTHY GUNN

Armed with a red jacket cooler than Al Capone, sporting sunglasses more menacing than Sylvester Stallone's in the movie Cobra and having blonde hair styled better than any Parisian barber shop could, this is Gunn, Timothy Gunn! Developer, César Nicolás González, stated this game was created in difficult circumstances as he was very ill at the time and only had limited time (under four weeks) to make sure the game was completed.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

A war among crime families had flooded the streets with blood. The Mayor calls upon Timothy Gunn to clean up the streets in this fast paced, action packed side scrolling shoot 'em up. In this game crime is the disease and Timothy Gunn is the cure. Your goal is to annihilate every gangster roaming the city by shooting them stone cold dead. Initially armed with a pistol, you run, jump or crouch to kill and avoid enemy mobsters. They rush at you from left and right of the screen, throwing all sorts of weapons your way, as well as shooting at you with high powered machine guns. If you want you can also stay in the one place and battle it out, the choice is yours.

Some of the gangsters will be carrying evidence they isn't hard to locate when they are shot, they will drop the evidence item that you must collect to advance to the next level. Other mobsters may drop better weapons when they are shot, that machine gun gets a good work out when you pick it up as it has a better rate of fire than your pistol, but with limited ammunition.

You have three lives per game, probably not enough with so much action going on. Every time you are hit by an enemy attack it drains your energy, perhaps too fast or my liking. When your energy runs out, a life is lost. Energy can be recovered by collecting dropped items left behind by the enemies. The higher panel shows your score, the energy and the number of remaining lives. The lower panel shows the amount of gathered evidence.

WHAT I LIKE

There's so much colour, graphics are gorgeous. I loved the huge sprites for Timothy Gunn and all the enemies. The detailed backgrounds of the city streets is classic gangland. Gameplay is fast paced all the way, it suffers little slow down even when there are many sprites on the one screen. It's so well done, very polished presentation, I love the mini intro to the game and all the fonts in the game looking just like those used in Ocean's, The Untouchables game from 1989, it gives the game terrific mobster like presence. Scrolling left and right is just how you would want it, no lag at all and the music throughout is top notch.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Playability could be better, you don't seem to be able to recover quickly enough from ongoing attacks meaning your enjoyment is lost as you die too quickly.

VERDICT

A wonderful, fun game, oozing so much mobster coolness, incredible to think it was created while the developer was in poor health and in under 4 weeks. As shoot 'em ups go, it's almost as untouchable as Kevin Costner's, Eliot Ness, in the film, The Untouchables. This is a lovely bit of shoot 'em up, mobster blasting fun.

Timothy Gunn under attack by mobsters

Classic mobster background artwork

SCORE	
"A wonderful, fun game, oozing so much mobster coolness"	
GFX	90%
SFX	90%
FUN	90%
STAYING POWER	81%
OVERALL	87%

■ **CODING:** Manuel Sagra de Diego
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Neil Reive

OPQA VS QAOP:
THE FINAL BATTLE

OP-QA, erm, Q-A-O-P? OPQA vs. QAOP? What's that all about then? Well, apparently, this relates to the two differing ways various development community factions refer to the keyboard configuration used in games. Some people are adamant that it's OPQA, while others insist it's QAOP. It's amusing how people can be so divisive over such a logical sequence of letters; of course, it's QAOP. End of! (why can't 8-Bit gamers end all these 8-Bit wars and just all get along, using a joystick is my solution - Ed).

Manuel Sagra de Diego thought that the subject was so intriguing that he based his CPCRetroDev 2018 entry on this key configuration debate. *OPQA vs. QAOP: The Final Battle,* came in fifth place and just missed out on a prize in the game creation contest.
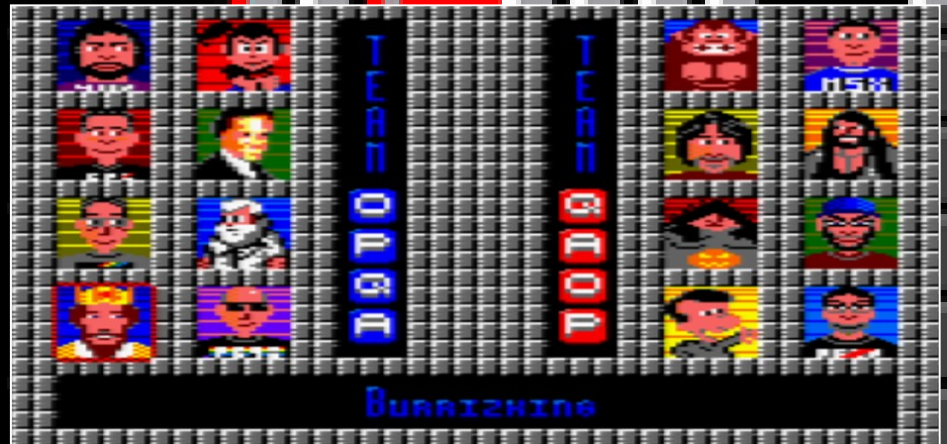
Familiar faces of 8-Bit communities to select as your game character

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The gameplay is similar to the classic *Puyo Puyo* tile-matching puzzle game. The game's main playing area has two grids, with one player on the left and the other player on the right. Sets of random coloured tiles (comprising of two sets of randomly coloured blocks) drop slowly down from the top of the grid. It's the players' task to manoeuvre the tile left, right, or rotate it towards the bottom of the grid, hopefully to make a combo of four or more similar colours.

The game options are Story Mode, Versus Mode, Mission mode, or Endless Mode, so there is plenty of choice and replayability on offer here. Speed is a key factor in *OPQA*, as by making chains of coloured tiles, the player is not only rewarded with points but the opponent's grid is filled up by a matching blank tile. The winner is the surviving player whose grid has not been filled up by tiles.

While matching colours will create chain effects, there are a couple of special moves to look out for. A special purple tile will eliminate any colour that it falls onto. Also, the tiles not only have colours, but also variations of the letters OPQA in them. If the OPQA team manage

to form a combination of OPQA, either up or down, then they are awarded with 1,000 points and a double dose of trash tiles sent to the opponent's grid. Be careful, though, as combining QAOP will result in the player's score being reset to zero.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Right from the menu screen, the game shows how polished it is, as a great little soundtrack plays away while the two different teams profile images scroll smoothly down either side (Outstanding main title tunes so good you could make a dance anthem out of it, so jolly and catchy - Ed). The graphics are clear and colourful, displaying the CPC's vibrant palette in all its glory. It was also a nice touch to include CPC sceners in the two OPQA and QAOP teams. *OPQA vs. QAOP* plays

smoothly and is very responsive of the player's key inputs, so any mistakes will be down to the player rather than the controls. There are plenty of different modes to play, so if one mode proves to be a tad frustrating there are others to try out.

WHAT I LIKE

While not a major flaw in the game, the loading screen is not quite up to the same standards as the rest of the game. It would have been nice to see those super vibrant colours used for a great loading screen.

VERDICT

Excellent graphics, a great soundtrack, varied options, responsive controls, and good lastability make *OPQA vs. QAOP: The Final Battle* a super effort all around.
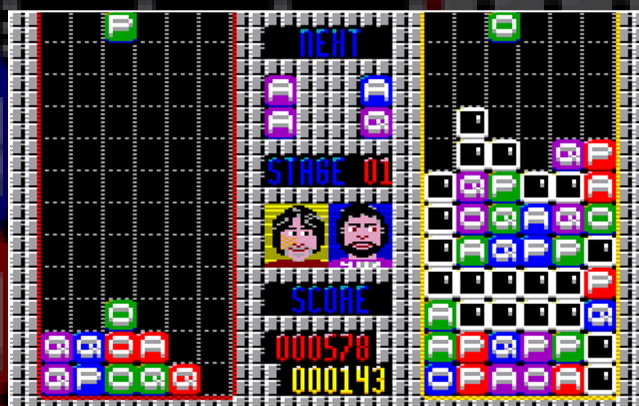
First up is Story mode

SCORE	
"The graphics are clear and colourful, displaying the CPC's vibrant palette in all its glory"	
GFX	84%
SFX	91%
FUN	82%
STAYING POWER	86%
OVERALL	**85%**

■ **CODING:** Álvaro Jover, Jordi Amoros and Cristian Garcia
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

77 ATTEMPTS

77 Attempts is powered and developed with CPCTelera. It is a platforming video-game based on the original and hugely popular PC flash game "Super Meat Boy". Álvaro Jover, Jordi Amoros and Cristian Garcia have combined their efforts to create an outstandingly playable platformer which will challenge your reflexes along with your sanity (so true, I have gone crazy playing this game -Ed).

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In the story you play as Alex who the synopsis describes as: " A nice creature who has lost his beloved, the queen of gravity. The evil villain Attempo has kidnapped her to absorb her powers and reverse the gravity of the planet. Attempo is on vacation and is the perfect opportunity for our hero to go and save his beloved. Attempo's evil henchmen will try to stop Alex, who will have to be quick to avoid all the traps set by the despicable Attempo."

As the main title says, the player will have 77 Attempts to complete the 56 levels. Sounds easy right? Think again! Like Super Meat Boy those lives disappear quicker than a reasonably priced copy of Daze Before Christmas! Before you know it your lives are spent and you are facing the turmoil of having to go through it all again. With a groan, you start over with a newfound determination and within seconds are filled with joy at the superb platforming on offer. You soon forget the frustration as the Godlike skills you developed on the previous go make the first few stages a breeze. Filled with confidence you reach the same level and this time succeed! Few games manage that small progression with every go as well as this. It's what keeps you coming back for more and what makes this game stand out amongst its peers!

The controls of the game are the standard platforming affair with left, right and jump. The additional skill of wall jumping is also available and you soon become used to the physics of both meaning you can accurately control those pixel perfect jumps. You have real control over this, especially when playing with keys so when you die you are left blaming yourself instead of the mechanics! The graphics are cute and charming. They are purposefully basic to capture that 8 bit feel perfectly and the main character is full of personality, so much so that you feel bad each of the hundreds of times you kill him! The learning curve is such that it draws you into the game and doesn't let go.

WHAT I LIKE

The game is full of character and personality. The platforming, although challenging, is accurate and fair throughout. The learning curve is such that it keeps you progressing and coming back for more. Even upon completion of the game you will revisit it to see if you can do it in fewer lives / attempts.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Sometimes the speed feels uncontrollable and the slightest mistake is punished with instant death but then you do have 77 attempts. The anti gravity sections add variety but aren't as enjoyable as the straight forward platforming.

VERDICT

This is a fine example of what can be accomplished in terms of platforming greatness on the CPC. The game frustratingly fantastic and captures the essence of Super Meat Boy perfectly. I will return to this over the years to come and rage quit it all over again!

The bright and vibrant colours of the CPC make even the most simplistic of backgrounds look fantastic. Unless of course you're on a green screen!

Looks simple enough, except that your character moves at 200 mph!

SCORE

"This is a fine example of what can be accomplished in terms of platforming greatness on the CPC"

GFX	**80%**
SFX	**80%**
FUN	**95%**
STAYING POWER	**90%**
OVERALL	**84%**

FOOSBALL F3

7th Place.
Coded by: Quique Miquel.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

The only other table football type game I recall seeing on the CPC was Table Football released in 1987 by Alligata Software. It is a primitive 2 player only affair. So what's the difference between that and Foosball F3 released at the 2018 #CPCRETRODEV? The differences can be measured by a lob over the keepers head from 90 yards away. Foosball F3 has much greater detail in gameplay as well as many more options available. First up you can select one of any 5 game modes of one or two players versus the computer or against each other. From there you can change a host of options from the colours of the table / pitch to colours of team kits. You can set your victory terms and also choose the length of matches to be played. Activating or deactivating sound and music can also be performed. The gameplay is simple where you must use the control knobs on the side of the table to move the ball into the opponent's goal. Overall playability is high on difficulty and becomes frustrating just trying to kick the ball into the opposition area when playing against the computer opponent. It's like you have no chance to win against the computer. A highly professional presented game, looks fantastic as a table football game just not that exciting to play.

So many options
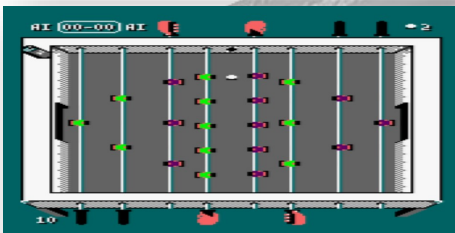
Cool looking in game

Score: 66%

DEEPER WARRENS

8th Place.
Coded by: Arnaud Bouche.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

As the young hero you are seeking glory and wealth in the mysterious and dangerous place of the Deeper Warrens. Inspired by the Atari arcade game, Gauntlet from 1985, in this action / rpg game the goal is to reach level 25 to find the treasure room. To achieve this you have to gain experience by killing monsters and buy equipment with the gold found. One on one melee combat gameplay with a limited amount of daggers makes this a tough game. To progress you can use magical objects, potions and buy better equipment. To reach the next level you have to open doors, avoid traps and of course kill monsters. At the end

of the level all the blue keys will be removed. I really enjoyed the graphics, colour scheme and combat gameplay. There is plenty to keep you wanting more to progress further. It is a fine Gauntlet inspired game, one I have enjoyed playing.

Cool loading screen artwork!

Your warrior looking to get through that door.

Score: 72%

THE ROOKIE THIEF

9th Place.
Coded by: Yolanda Cruz Girona & Antonio Ríos Vila.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

In the middle of the screen that blue item is a transporting door

You are sent on your first thief mission and it just happens to be robbing a family of rich people called the Millonetis. Your motive for stealing from their home is to bring back justice to the hard working people of your village who have been dying of hunger at the expense of the rich Millonetis. Scattered inside the house are policemen, who are defeated by using your firsts as they approach you, its tight close combat, which doesn't get exciting. Where it improves is the exploration of the house and collecting of keys that can transport you to other rooms via some kind of strange looking sprite. I am sure its a door it just looks out of place being all blue. Primary objective of the game is to steal all the money you can get can off the Millonetis. Graphically limited 4 colours most of which are blue and back. Sprites aren't that good and there's a bit of lag in the scrolling, so it's more of a flip screen game. Musically it sounds wonderful, you can leave that tune playing all day.

Collecting gold

However, the gaming experience I feel lacks depth and under achieves on fun.

Score: 58%

CRIMSON KNIGHT ADVENTURES

10th Place
Coded by: Carlos Soler Mujeriego, Enrique Vidal Cayuela and Alejandro Gutiérrez Martínez
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA

You are the Crimson Knight and your mission is to infiltrate the skelton castle and defeat all the evil inside that has been tormenting this kingdom for years. In this sideways hack 'n slash game, your objective is to reach the end of the level. Each level is connected through special gates so when you finish one level you will start at the beginning of the next level. The goal is to reach the final level and complete it alive. Groups of enemies run towards you from left and right of the screen trying to stop you. You deal with them by slashing them with your sword. It starts of fairly easy avoiding arrows on the first level then introduces an easy foe with skeletons attacking you then becomes much harder and fast with what looks like sand people from Star Wars attacking you at high speed. Each level must be completed within a time limit if you dont its game over. You get three lives and an energy bar for each life. It is a jolly game that you enjoy initially but becomes frustrating as you progress through more levels. Large sprites make this game look cool. However your movement is a little jerky and the screen doesn't scroll smoothly.

Slash those skeletons!

Score: 68%

HARVEST DAY

11th Place.
Coded by: José Manuel Ladrón de Guevara García, Álvaro Molina García and Daniel Saura Martínez.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

In Harvest Day, you are an old man that after a hard life of work decides to retire and start a farm to have a quiet life. After months of effort, the harvest season starts and you have to harvest your crops. But there is one problem,

SCREEN ELEMENTS

GAME SCREEN

The action will take place in this screen, and all the game elements (the hero, the enemies...) will appear and perform their respective actions.

TIME LEFT

This other numbers represent how much time you have left to complete the level. If you run out of time, the game will also be over.

SCORE

This numbers represent your current score. You get score by defeating enemies, so try to get as many score as you can so you can beat your personal record and show it to others!

HEALTH BAR

This bar represents the hero's current health. When an enemy attacks him or he is hit by an arrow, his health bar will go down. If your helath bar drops to 0, it's game over.

LIVES

These icons represents how many times you can die before the Game Over screen shows up.

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you forgot to close the animal's fence and they are running, out of control. Your mission is to pick up all the food while avoiding the animals, if they touch you, it is game over. You start with a simple one screen game map showing tomatoes to be collected, when they are picked up lettuce appear outside of the hay bales. To get to them you press the fire button to remove a piece of the bale wall. Each new level the layout and foods you need to collect changes. Collecting some items of food becomes more dangerous as they move around the screen such as walking carrots for example. Levels become progressively harder introducing new enemies such as foxes and cows, They are top of the enemy chain making your life difficult. You can press the fire button to lay out hay to try and halt or slow progress of the enemies towards you. A simplistic game with basic looking sprites and graphics. Overall a fun bit of life on the farm gaming.

RED SEA
12th Place.
Coders: Ángel Jesús Terol Martínez, Carla Maciá Díez and Raquel González Romá
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA

Barbanegra is a well known pirate of the 7 seas, he is legendary for great adventures and discovery of large treasures. Every self-respecting pirate wants to be like him, even to the point that one day when he woke up he discovered his crew were trying to sabotage him and steal his massive fortune. In this third person view shoot 'em up, in the same vein of Outlaws (2016), Red Sea has 6 levels. On each level you need to kill the number of enemies shown in the score to progress to the next level. As you progress more content is revealed throughout the levels.
On the lower part of the screen is where the scoreboard is. There are two important elements there. Your lives - you have 4 of them. If Barbanegra gets hit by a bullet, you

will instantly lose a life and his face will turn into a skull. If he loses all his lives it's game over. The enemy counter - on the left side of the skull with a pirate bandana is a counter. It shows how many pirates you need to kill to progress to the next level. In the game there are two types of enemies - Pirates: Those cowards start running side to side and will shoot downwards. The other enemy is Eliot: This little detective will show up sometimes through a window and will shoot at you really fast. Barrels are scattered around the levels, if the enemies pass behind them you will not be able to shoot them, you can destroy them, but it will require multiple shots. Graphically colourful with large sprites. A nice bit of music and plenty of shooting let down by not having any joystick controls., but a cool bit of coding and fun game of blasting at your enemy.

Score: 69%

Collect those lettuce even the ones inside the hay bales, but watch out for the chickens one touch and its game over

Score: 63%

Looks simple enough, except that your character moves at 200 Aaaaaaarghhhhh shiver me timbers the pirates got me!

- **CODING:** Carlos Pérez Peregrin
- **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

EARTH DEFENDER

Earth Defender is developer Carlos Pérez Peregrin first ever game on an Amstrad CPC. It uses the CPC's, 80 column, Mode 2 graphics display. Quite rare to see this being used in a shoot 'em up style game, normally mode 2 is used for text adventure gaming or in word processor and other serious applications. Earth Defender is inspired and based on the book, Ender's Game, written by Orson Scott Card.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The year is 2070. The International Outer Space Organism has detected a serious menace. Some galaxies away, an enemy fleet of Insectors is coming towards our planet. Earth's only solution is to train gifted children to become the next soldiers in this future war. You are one of the few that have been specially selected.

Once you have read the cool introductory "how to play" cut scenes, you are straight into the action. You have a fine looking Spaceship, not quite wireframe, not quite filled in, but all cool in two colour glory for sure. Your goal is to shoot everything you see on the screen. To do this you fly around the one screen getting closer to your enemy. Your enemies will be above or below your ship, you won't be able to hit them unless you reach the same plane as they are.

To see how close you are to your enemies with the press of the fire button you can switch you view from vertical to horizontal. This will show you the distance you are between your enemy. The enemies will either be huge or

small this is how you work out how close or how far away you are from them. When you see you are the correct distance, don't waste time, press the fire button and shoot your laser at them to destroy them. Once you have cleared thescreen of all enemies you move to the next level.

There are six levels in total. Level one: The beginning of your training, learn to move your ship and clear the screen of the one and static enemy, Meteor's (yes you can still crash and die on this level too). Level two: Shoot down moving giant wasps. They don't shoot at firs, but once you have killed off a few of them, they will make life difficult shooting at you. Your timing of switching views becomes fraught with great danger, because if you are not paying attention to enemy bullets whizzing from one side of the screen to the other you will find yourself killed quite unexpectedly. Level three: Master your movement skills through the narrow paths. No shooting or enemy here, just navigate through the narrow tunnel and switch views when required to make it to the end. Level's four and five are basically a mash up of levels one and two, however the game is no longer black and white but blue and yellow. Finally, on level six you get the opportunity to destroy your enemy once and for all as you encounter the end of game boss.

WHAT I LIKE

Two colour mode 2 graphics worked beautifully. Sprites were large and absorbing in the context of the gameplay. While sound

not exactly what you would call "blast your ears off brilliant", they were eerie and dark, it served the purpose of making the game atmospherically space orientated. The technique of switching views was innovative and creative. Identifying the distance you needed to be to shoot your enemy down increased my interest in the gameplay.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Gameplay can be frustrating at times. You think you are at the correct distance to swap your view and take out the enemy but this is not always the case, this was a major frustration for me and predominantly occurs with the wasp sections as they constantly change their size. Another frustration of switching views was being killed by a wasp or bullet as it landed on you as soon as you chose to switch views.

VERDICT

For a first time homebrew game on the CPC for this developer, it's such a cool idea and very well executed. Who knew playing a CPC game with two colours was better than playing a game in 4 colour mode 1, that would often look like a speccy port. Earth Defender breaks the myth that you can't use mode 2 for any CPC games other than text adventures and developers should explore this more in the future, I hope they will. Carlos entered the game into the 8-BIT ANNUAL DEV contest and he made a number of changes to the game from the original #CPCRETRODEV entry. To see those images please go to the 8-BIT ANNUAL DEV section to find out more.

> welcome to the international fleet battle school. some of your opponents are out of your reach. that is because your screen only shows a bidimensional projection from a 3d world. press s to change view. get near the enemies and hit them with your laser. refer to the manual for more info

score 00100   lives ▲▲▲
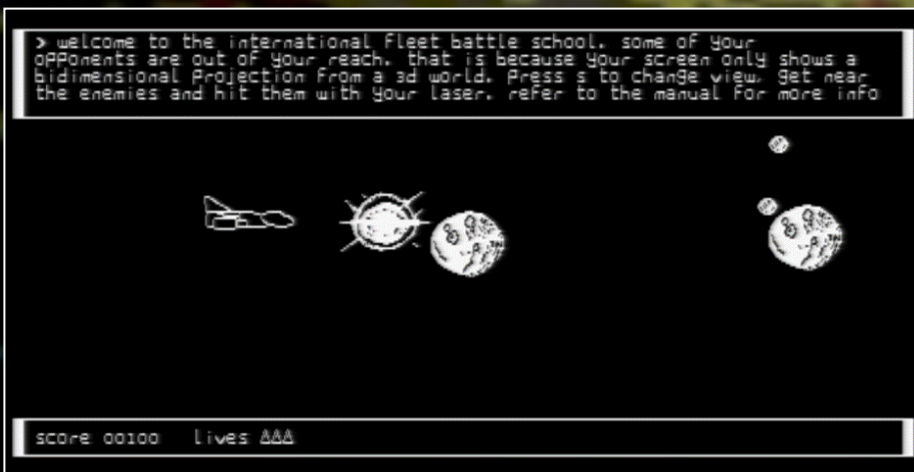
Side on view. When your targets explode they make a flashing impact

SCORE

"Two colour mode 2 graphics worked beautifully"

GFX	80%
SFX	80%
FUN	90%
STAYING POWER	88%
OVERALL	**85%**

SNAKE BUBBLE
14th place.
Coded by: David Ramon Sevilla
and Jose Vicente Anton Coy.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Watch out where you jump or you will be cactus!

Poor green snake, Serpentine, when he was a child he was pushed by some evil animals into a bucket with soap, so every time he opened his mouth bubbles came out. Now Serpentine is an adult snake traveling all around the world, exacting revenge on the evil chickens, frogs and mice that have made his life a living soapy bubble of hell. In this run 'n jump platformer, you start the game with 3 lives and must capture the enemy animals on each level by blowing bubbles at them. When you have killed all enemies on a level you move onto the next one and are given an extra life. The game is filled with many other obstacles in the form of arrows, cactus, spiked stones and icicles making your challenge treacherous. The difficulty level increases the further you progress. While it does not have the same speed as the original Bubble Bobble game, Snake Bubble is graphically colourful and cute, providing a decent bit of fun and bubble blowing blasting even though the gameplay is a bit on the slow side.

Score: 58%

THE LAST DEBT
15th Place.
Coded by: Manuel De Santiago Canet, Alicia Núñez Alcover and Jasmina Rais Martínez.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA

It's the year 2066, an outbreak of diseases is wreaking havoc on the planet. A biotech corporate "savior" called GenTech offers organ transplants for a price. Those who can't comply with the payment are killed by the 'butchers'. You're a father whose daughter was killed by those monsters and now you plan out your revenge by killing all the employees at the GenTech HQ. In this flip screen, run 'n jump platformer you have 5 lives, 1 shield and 20 bullets to use at one time to fulfil your mission of clearing each level of enemy employees and leaving through a door to the next screen. Your enemies are crazy Cyborgs made by GenTech, they patrol the entire building. Butchers are more powerful and smarter than

Cyborgs. Bosses. They are the toughest enemy, being bigger, stronger and faster. As you progress through the screens the skills of the enemies change, some move faster, shoot faster or even worse, will shoot two bullets at the same time. Inside the building there are some places where you can teleport and other places you can't, it's pretty simple to work out as pressing down or up moves between the platforms on a screen and the colour of the platform will either allow you to do so or not. Throughout your journey, you will find some objects scattered about the screens to help you on your quest. You can pick up more ammo recharging 5 bullets to your gun. Health packs give an extra life and shields help deflect enemy bullets. During combat you can crouch to avoid attacks and are able to change weapons selecting to use an ultra-precise rifle or a trusty sword, but the sword is pretty useless. Gameplay is smooth and entertaining. Using the spacebar to shoot with joystick controls is annoying and the bosses seem too hard to kill with your limited amount of lives. A fun bit of platform exploration and blasting with a nice little tune all the way up to the bosses then it becomes frustrating but you do have a replay function included instead of having to go back all the way to the start when you die.

You can't just walk through the wall you must jump upwards and over
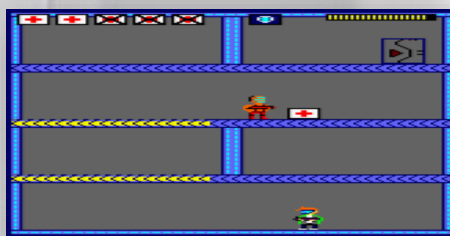
Gameplay becomes harder with enemies and the yellow walls you can't move through

Score: 69%

KIMOHIYOKO
16th Place.
Coded by: Álvaro Amador Ruiz
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA

KIMOHIYOKO has a strange story and plot, something about a centuries old bloody battle between humans and chickens in the fight for supremacy of the planet. Now a computer by the name of Roland comes along to take side with the chickens making nanotechnology capable of destroying the infection the humans have used to kill the chickens. The cure consists of an antidote that when disseminated through the bloodstream neutralizes any invading agent so playing as a chicken you have to go inside an infected chicken host for this antidote to work. You must collect all the components necessary for the treatment to work and then reach the heart of the patient host. So you explore a

large map of the entire body of the patient in order to obtain the necessary samples to make the antidote. Along the way you will find all kinds of enemies, obstacles and difficulties that will not make your mission easy. I agree it's not easy but when you find that first weapon that game starts to get better. There is a huge map to explore that comes with the game files. Alot of pink and colours that look hazy, not your normal cpc colour scheme. It plays as a flip screen shoot em up, the screens don't flip smoothly, there is quite a bit of lag and the jumping takes quite a bit to get use to. The saving grace of the game is editing controls to joystick play and the ability to continue where you left off when you have lost all your lives. There is also a cool explosion taken from Chicago 30;s when you blow up walls and other items, just wished the game had more speed and smoothness.

So many platforms to jump around, too bad chickens can't fly

Score: 60%

TAULELLETS
17th Place.
Coded by: Vicente Javier Jiménez Vázquez
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

The objective of Taulellets is so simple. All you have to do is move your green coloured square around a random designed shape, which just happens to be a road. As you move about the road you paint it yellow wherever you move on the road. You only have a limited amount of paint which equals 30 units. When the paint runs out it can be reloaded by touching the yellow enemy on the screen, you only need to touch it once. Recharging will be indicated by a flash on the edge of the screen. Blue coloured squares are your only enemy and they will take away one of your nine lives if you touch them. There are 25 levels, each one with a different designed road and with a greater amount of blue enemy squares to avoid. I found it to be simple fun gaming, not a great deal of depth to it, the level design keeps you interested enough to try and complete all the levels.
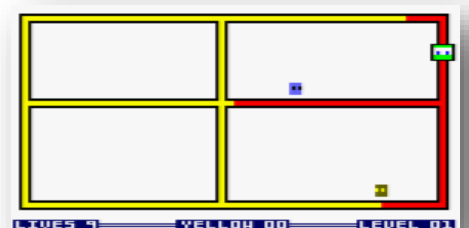
I have run out of yellow pain and need to get to the yellow eyed enemy for a recharge to complete the level

Score: 67%

THE SPIRIT OF HALLOWEEN
18th Place.
Coded by: Alvaro B. Sebastian M. and Tudor M.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

The Spirit of Halloween is a run 'n jump platform shoot'em up inspired by PC game, Super Crate Box, released in 2010. Halloween is approaching and the candy is not safe! Monsters have been sighted near them and their sweet tooth drives them mad. You need to guide Jack around each of the 10 different screens using his speed, agility and magic pumpkin seeds as projectiles to defeat all the monsters from eating all of the very large pile of pink candy and save Halloween! Your enemies are Pink bones, who are addicted to marshmallows, to the point that their skeleton turned pink. Spooks are angry ghosts, they are not interested in candy, they only seek the unhappiness of other people celebrating Halloween. Goblins are fast and small scavenger creatures and want the candy for their winter reserves. Chicago Mobsters are corpses from the Chicago Mafia from the 1930's who have remained active and have a thirst for blood (and sugar!). On each level, the monsters spawn somewhere on the upper part of the screen and continue to descend seeking the candy piles at the bottom of the screen. The game starts off very easy and increases with difficulty as your progress increases. The only thing that varies from level to level is the number of candy allowed to lose before it's game over.

After finishing all of the levels, the game will start an "endless level", where monsters will keep on spawning until the player either loses or tires of playing. After unlocking endless mode for the first time, a new option will appear in the main menu used to jump directly into it again (during the same gaming session). You receive 6 lives shown as three pumpkin faces that are divided into half when one of the enemies touch you indicating you have lost a life. I am not a fan of the keyboard only controls and your character moves rather slowly in comparison to the enemies. Graphically it's just a pass. There is a nice bit of in game music and with the large amount of spooky enemies to stop, provides a tough challenge as your progress higher.

Protect the pink candy stash!

Score: 64%

THE CRYPT
19th Place.
Coded by: Danny Gabriel Rivera Solórzano, David de la Calle Sancho and Pablo Máñez Fernández.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Not a great deal of info from the manual about the plot of this game. A top down view exploration shoot 'em up. Your objective is to defeat all the enemies on each of the crypt levels. Once all enemies have been killed on a level a hole / portal will open up to the next level. Judging by the info provided there appears 20 levels in all to complete. The screens / levels get bigger and open up as you move around them. The amount of enemy to be killed on a level is shown at bottom of the screen and each level gets increasingly harder with more and more enemies to kill before you can progress to the next level. You are given 5 lives to fulfil your quest. The loading screen is its best graphical asset as in game graphics and sprites are underwhelming to look at. Having said that there is a nice bit of music throughout and the gameplay isn't so bad, the only issue for me is the keyboard controls and using different keys to shoot in different directions. The enemies aren't too difficult and you can work them out pretty quickly and advance quite far into the game. An enjoyable blast for maze exploration fans.
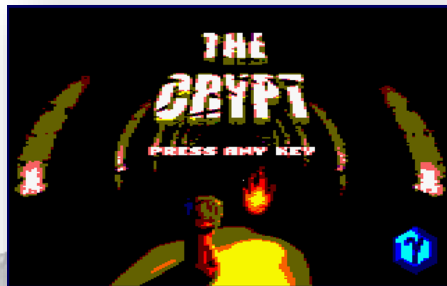
Great looking loading screen artwork

Two frogs on level two to kill before I can move to the next level

Score: 66%

CANNON DUELS
20th Place.
Coded by: David Asta.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Cannon Duels is a one or two players game with the objective of shooting bricks, scoring points and killing your opponent. Two Cannons, one each located on either side of the screen. At the centre of the screen, between the Cannons, there is a group of bricks formed into a shape of different colours. The shapes of the bricks are as unique as a Picasso painting which look really cool. You control a cannon moving it up and down shooting cannon balls at the bricks. Cannon balls will destroy the first brick they encounter in their path or take a life off your opponent if

you aim it at them making a direct hit. When a brick is hit it is removed so you can shoot at the blocks behind them Some bricks when hit will reveal a power up. You will receive an extra life every 464 points. When a cannon ball hits a brick, the player receives a certain amount of points depending on the brick colour, ranging from one point to 16 points. I really liked this game I thought it was easy to get into, fun to play, had a nice bit of music and cool in game sounds. Good to see a game you can play against your friends with too. However the gameplay is not the best at times as the computer cannon seems to get stuck in one position and offers no challenge. You can avoid your computer opponent and make the games longer but at other times it feels the games are too short ending faster than swiping left on Tinder.
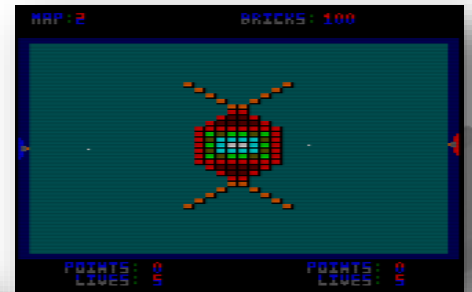
Wonderful designs for each new level

But it's over too soon….Chicago 30's style

Score: 68%

SPACE COWBOY
21st Place.
Coded by: Israel Roman Alvarez.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

The year of 4353. Over 400 years ago the guardians of the law were not able to control the corruption of the galaxy so they employed Space Cowboys to fix the problem. But now a virus has been created which has led to a factory of killer robots using the virus to locate and attack all cowboys and guardians and they won't rest until they see all the cowboys dead. In the midst of this war between good and evil, the cowboy known as Dante tries to hunt ZeR0, the criminal with the greatest reward ever offered. The guardians believe ZeR0 is the head of the entire organization that implemented the virus and his arrest is vital to stop the disaster. Find and destroy ZeR0 and annihilate all the robots that cross your path. In this shoot em' up you get three lives to achieve your goal. Not really enough. Shoot down everything and collect the power up loads that appear after shooting three enemy robots to improve your armament. Laser Beams, Magnetic Missiles and a Plasma Cannon can be equipped to your spaceships standard semi-heavy weapons loaders, which will allow you to use a great variety of weapons. Its well presented

graphically quite different from the norm space shooters that use a starfield and black backgrounds, I really liked the graphical effects and use of colours I also enjoyed the sounds. The sprites are quite lovely for this type of game looking futuristic. The game play is not so great as power ups fly away and you have no chance of getting them before they disappear, some of the action is tight and difficult and doesn't flow as smooth as I would have liked. It's a good effort I found myself coming back to it so that's a good sign, some tweaks / game adjustments and this could be quite a cool futuristic blast.

Love the presentation of Space Cowboy

Space Cowboy looks very futuristic

Those aliens are too good for this Space Cowboy!

Score: 68%

INDIGO GAME

22nd Place.
Coded by: David Azuar Alonso, José Antonio Agulló García and Elza Sarrías Alieva.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

In this maze exploration game the manual says you control a powerful magician called Indigo. He is the chosen one among the rest of humanity because he is the only one capable of defeating the imminent threat of the evil skull demons coming to destroy your world. This couldn't be further from the truth as Indigo is really quite helpless. There are only 4 rooms, that's all I could find, and each time you actually get past the skull demons to the next screen you are set upon by more skull demons, as soon as they touch you its game over. You have a gun but it's quite pointless as before you know it you're at the

game over screen. There a time limit that probably shouldn't be there as you die way to quickly. Its reason for being there is because of the collectible Chicago 30's gun that appears at random so you can replenish your time when what you really need is more lives and better gameplay. Graphically basic in display and poor on the sonics.
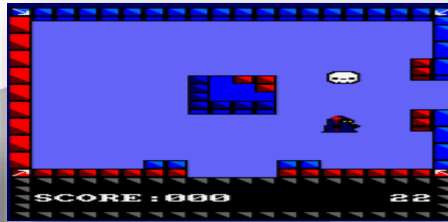
Score: 25%

BRING RG BACK

23rd Place.
Coded by: Javier Richarte Gras
Edward Thomas Owen Nolla
Iván Palacios Verano.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

The colour of the world has disappeared. Or, rather, it has been stolen. Your mission is clear: bring back colour. Armed with a square shooter you work you way up the screen in Ikari Warriors type fashion shooting at the enemies that approach you. Once you complete a zone of enemies you will recover a colour from the RGB set of red, blue or green. Get them all and kill off this plague of the Eyes. The levels consist of a forest, beach and military base. In the Forest level you are required to recover the red color. Avoid the obstacles and kill the red coloured eye enemies as they appear. On the Beach level you are to return the green color to the world. This level introduces new scenery and new enemies. You will need to dodge rapid fire from large turrets. The Military Base level you need to recover the blue colour obviously set in a military base. Finally your last mission is on the Road where you return all the colours to the world and wipe out the plague of The Eyes once and for all. It's not such a bad game at all, a bit on the repetitive side, has a good mix of levels and a nice bit of intro

Looks simple enough, except that you...
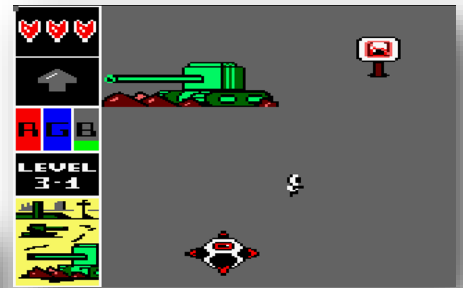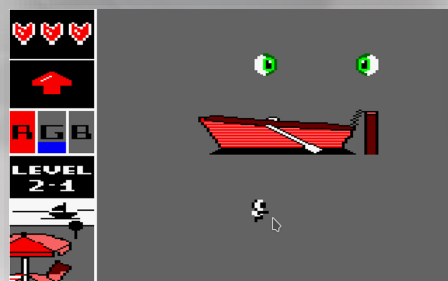
music, too bad that intro music doesn't play throughout the game.

Score: 59%

OVERHEAP

24th Place.
Coded by: Juan López Quiles, José Luis Gómez Antón and Alejandro Aliaga Hyder.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Your objective in this flip screen run 'n jump shoot 'em up is to complete 5 rounds destroying all the foes inside the castle. As you progress from one round to the next set of enemies will be stronger. Your enemies are in the form of Skeletons, Vampires and Bats. Even though you have three lives the gameplay is short lived as I am sure there is a recurring bug that happens when you get killed on the restart after you die, enemy bullets come from nowhere and kill you again. It's the most frustrating thing. I feel the game received a higher award than it should have from the contest judges but that's just my opinion. The gameplay is uninspiring. Graphically its very basic in presentation and the playability is awful.

Score: 20%

TURTLE SLAM

25th Place.
Coded by: José Miguel Gomis Antón, Guillermo Lloret Talavera, Carlos Perelló Camacho.
Reviewed by:CPC4EVA.

If there had been joystick play available I am sure I would have enjoyed top-down dungeon crawler, TURTLE SLAM so much more. You find yourself in a two-dimensional maze like orange coloured map. Your objective of each room / screen is fight monsters dodge lava or
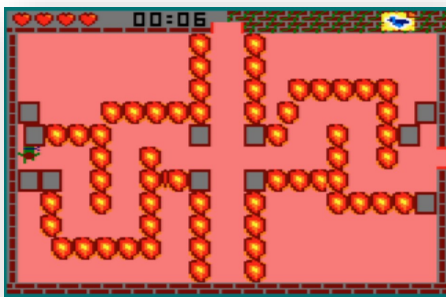
Can you make it to the exit without touching the walls and losing all your lives?
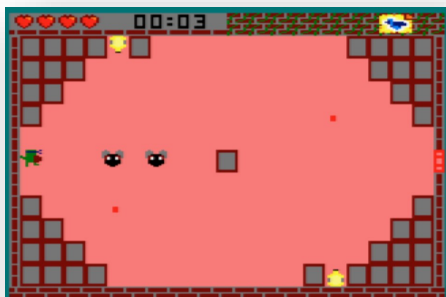
Those mice are deadly. Do you see the reference to Chicago 30's in the top right?

solve a maze before continuing onto the next room. The room appearance is always the same, but the monsters, obstacles and lava vary. The map structure is generated randomly. The path to the exit is unknown in each run. The player starts with four health points and for each level completed the monsters get stronger and the player recovers one health point. The concept of Turtle Slam! is a speed run game, the whole point of the game is to complete it as fast as you can. I like the concept and think its a good effort it lacks staying power and grab factor.

Score: 50%

SPACE BALL
26th Place.
Coded by: José Manuel Malagón Alba, David Torrijos Casar and Emilio Serrano Lloret.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.
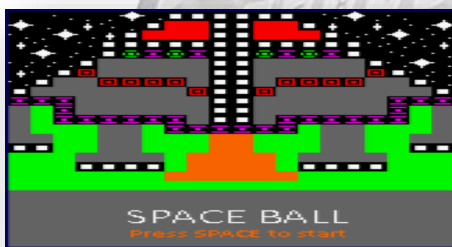
The game consists of successive matches of "Space Ball" with progressive difficulties. Space Ball is a match where there will be 2 goals, two players and one ball. Both have to try to bump or throw the ball on the opposite

side of the field with the intention of entering the opponent's goal. The match ends when one of the two opponents scores 3 goals. Graphically quite poor and so is the gameplay. The ball seems to get stuck in a recurring pattern. Overall the game fails to excite or have any kind of fun to it.

Score: 20%

ELFO SAVES CHRISTMAS
27th Place.
Coded by: Luke Blanes Duffy and Miguel Ángel García Gandía.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Santa Claus has been kidnapped by evil creatures who do not want Christmas to be celebrated. Mrs Claus has sent Elfo on a mission to save Santa by going into the lair of the evil creatures. If he manages to get past them and finds the keys that will lead him down to the bottom of their lair, he might just find Santa and save Christmas.

During the game you will explore the current level through different rooms looking for a key to go down to the next level. When you enter a room and there are enemies inside, you're trapped in the room until you defeat all enemies. You defeat them by shooting them. There are items that will help you along the way. There is an item to raise your health and an item to raise your damage. While traversing the levels, you will stumble upon enemies that want to stop you. If you die, the game is restarted.
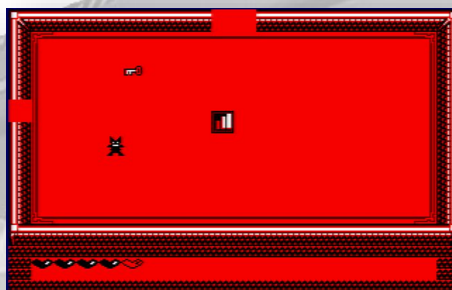
Keys and trap doors, old school coolness!

What a jolly looking Santa

If you can handle all the red coloured screens, it's not such a bad flip screen maze adventure. I quite enjoyed playing it, there is enough of a challenge to solve how to complete each screen. Quite annoying at times as you only get three lives and the enemies jam you up against an entrance you just walked through and you are scratching your head. Nevertheless it's quite fun controlling Elfo (who looks like a black cat) around the rooms shooting at the evil enemies, why couldn't there be in game music and joystick controls?

A few improvements and it could have been much more fun to play.

Score: 61%

TWO FINGER DEATH ROW
28th Place.
Coded by: Adrián Gordo Prieto
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

One of my least favourite games of the game development contest. You are meant to be a boxer or a karate fighter, wearing that yellow kit you could say it's meant to be the Great Bruce Lee. Unfortunately the game is nowhere near as good as Bruce Lee. All you do is remain in one position and you press keys 'A' or 'D' to turn to your attacker coming from the left or right of the screen, hence the name two finger death row. You get 5 lives to play with but it may as well be zero because it's just so disappointing to play.
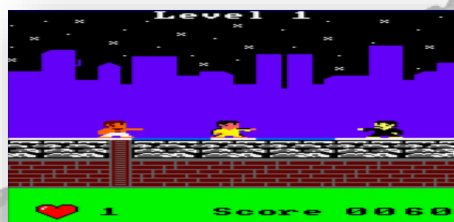
Score: 10%

CAT PANG
29th Place.
Coded by: Marinés Antón Castelló and Débora Galdeano González.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Cat Pang tells the story of the eternal love and hate relationship between cats and yarn balls from a cat's point of view. Main character Kitten -T, chases the bouncing yarn balls and splits them into smaller balls of yarn till they disappear by throwing its hyper-claws at the yarn. You get three lives and are challenged over six levels. The game starts off easy with one bouncing ball of yarn and then becomes harder as you progress further introducing more balls of being required to be divided and removed from the screen. It is not a bad adaptation of the original game of Pang. It has good controls and playability, not such a bad game at all.

My, oh my. Kitten - T, what great big balls of yarn you have!

Score: 63%

FITZROY AND THE INFESTATION
30th Place.
Coded by: Adrian Parker.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

The defence of the realm is in peril. The Tesla tower has been infested. The lurking evil will soon be arriving and the safety of the realm is in peril with the Tesla tower out of action. Now it is Fitzroy's job to become an engineer as well as an exterminator and bring the tower back into operation before the lurking evil arrives. Our intrepid hero, Fitzroy, can move around in all directions and shoot at enemies and any infestation. He also must collect keys to open doors and pathways. The goal of the game is to reach the exit of each level satisfying each of the objectives. You can see what the objectives are by pressing a key to bring up the objective menu during play. Objective items are the items that Fitzroy must pick up in order to repair the tower machinery. Fitzroy can carry many different items, however you must figure out what item is required to progress to the next stage of the game. Fitzroy is only able to carry one of a particular item type at a time. There are three difficulty levels to select - Easy: This is the default level for the game, enemies are simpler and a greater number of lives are available. Normal: This is the default difficulty; enemies are mixed, and you have less lives then easy mode. Hard: This is the hardest difficulty with harder enemies and fewer lives and weaker power ups. Fitzroy has the option of switching between three possible weapons to take out the enemies. I was quite enjoying, the gameplay held my interest and I was enjoying the exploration experience and battles in the game, but I found it crashes often making it unable to complete the tasks or the game. This game showed a lot of promise though.

Score: 48%

CUCHARA VOLADOR
31st Place.
Coded by: Sergio Pérez Pérez and Borja García Pizarro.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Legend tells the story of an epic adventure in which we will have control of a spoon that aims to make you long for breakfast. I wish it did do a better job of it though. You will have to overcome a series of obstacles such as cereal bowls or toast. But not before having to face enemies representing other daily meals

such as a fork and knife. All this takes place in the immense space where nothing and nobody can help you. There are 5 levels of the same size which will increase in difficulty presenting you each time with more complex combat, you have 2 lives which will be reduced upon receiving damage from any enemy. Once again I would have liked the option of joystick controls, the keyboard for me makes the game too frustrating. Not a great shoot'em up, lacks a great deal of depth and gameplay.

SCORE: 34%

BANK AC RETURNS
32nd Place.
Coded by: Arturo Zambrano Perales
Baptiste Samper de Diego
Daniel González Luque.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Get the key to escape!

Police are everywhere!

You are a bank robber in the 1930's of Chicago. Set inside the floors of a large bank, you must guide the robber through each of the differently designed floors, avoiding the police scattered around the screen, then get the key and escape each floor through a door all within the time limit. The police sprite move around levels in defined patterns so you are able to work out pretty quickly what you need to do to get out of each level. If a police sprite touches you, the level restarts until you either complete the level or run out of time and die. The further you progress the more difficult and challenging it becomes. Those police officers arrest you pretty damn quickly, so avoid them as best as you can. Basic graphics but they do their job quite nicely in this game. Quite a fun bit of avoidance gaming, with some tough gameplay if you aren't fast enough to avoid the police and escape to the next level.

Looks simple enough, except that your character moves at 200 mph!

Score: 63%
HACK TANK
33rd place.
Coded by: David Melero Morant, Javier Martínez Aracil, Adrián Alloza Carrilero.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

In a futuristic world, a war has begun. A computer virus has taken control of all the armies. Just one hero can save the world of the computer rebellion, that hero just happens to be you. In Hack Tank, your objective is to destroy all the other tanks on the screen, avoiding their bullets and firing back at them in multiple directions using any obstacles or walls to make your bullets bounce off and make a direct hit on those computer controlled armies. Graphics and sound are pretty average and so is the gameplay. I like the concept and idea but you really need a joystick to control your hack tank and not keyboard to get the most out of it, well that is if like me you suck as using keyboard.

Score: 35%

LUNATIC
34th Place.
Coded by: Jorge Marco Esteve. Gema Moreno Compañ. Lucas Meirelles.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Lunatic is a story of how our hero called Strike fought against the revolution of robots. In this platform game to complete each level, you have 3 lives and you need to get the key and reach the door. The key is often protected by robots who shoot directly at you and can be hard to avoid but on the flip side you can also shoot at them but make sure your aim is accurate as you don't get many bullets. The keys are placed in the same spot in each screen, once you have it you will need to make it to the exit door that suddenly appears and not die in the process. It is a very simplistic looking run and jump platformer, with some items to collect but that's where the gameplay ends. Not a great game, but not the worst either, worth having a crack at it.
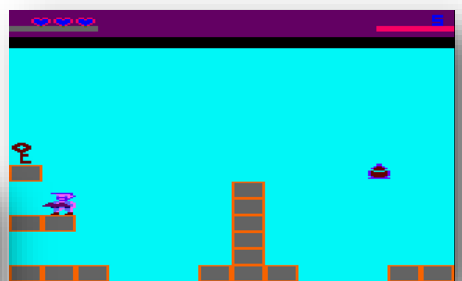
Jump up high to collect that key on the left and grab that item in the right

Score: 36%

TANK
35th Place.
Coded by: ARDRD.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.
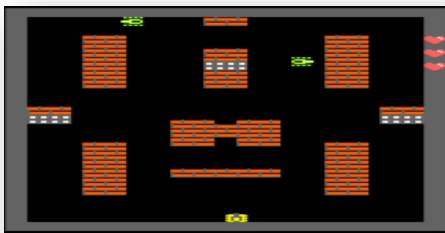
Charge those enemy tanks and destroy them!

In a single screen game you are a yellow tank which has to survive against other enemy tanks. The game has 13 levels with 3 kind of enemy tanks. Every 4 levels the type of enemy tank changes to a stronger one. You only have 3 lives but they are restored in each level. The game is based on the game Battle City produced and published in 1985 by Namco. I quite enjoyed this battle of tanks and wits. The movement around the screen is quite responsive and smooth considering its keys only. The graphics are basic, there is no sounds which could really have helped this game along. The gaming does become challenging with the computer tanks becoming more aware of where you are. It's a bit of a one way street and advantage to the enemy tanks when you are required to shoot 4 or 5 tanks per level and the computer opponents only get to shoot down one!

Score: 38%

INVADE SPACE
36th Place.
Coded by: Manuel Giménez Suárez, Pablo Fraile Anuarbe and Ismael Bertaïba Fernández.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

The year is 2548, the remains of humanity are still searching for a planet to inhabit. Having consumed all the resources of planet Earth, humanity has been searching for a place to migrate to. After many years of navigation and with the resources becoming scarce, your jump in your spaceship called the Z80, from the advanced unit of special operations and

locate a habitable planet on its radar, humanity sees hope after its long journey through space…. But that hope is lost as Invade Space is a Space Invaders clone that is definitely one to forget. It uses larger bug type sprites for your spaceship to shoot at and after you see that it's time to put the game down.. The game is soooooo slow waiting for your bullet to hit its target and it suffers from poor collision detection as your shots can miss and still make an enemy bug alien disappear, when you shoot the last bug alien the game goes into a real bug mode with a bullet continually being fired but there are no bugs on screen, arrrghhh.

Score: 12%

PENALTY KICKS
37th Place.
Coded by: KAFFESAKIS THEODOSIOS (SAKIS)
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.
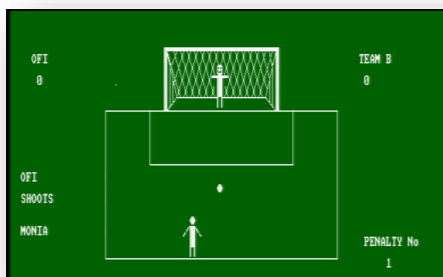
As the name says you kick penalties for a living in this game. Not quite for a living but for a few minutes anyway. The game may not be great to play but it's coded in basic and for

that it's not such a bad result. What it has going for it is that it has a decent amount of screen being used with decent sized sprites for the goal keeper and the goals. Not a lot to the game play just kick the ball a certain direction to shoot at goal to score or move the goalkeeper where you think the ball is going to stop it. Not such a bad effort.

Score: 50%

KILLING MACHINE
38th Place.
Coded by: Pablo Aragonés López, Gilberto Jesús Brito and Airam Pérez Catalá.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

You play Charlie, he is somewhat of a loner, without a job and without a girlfriend / boyfriend, He needs help and badly. Not only does his personal life suck so much it just got even worse as waves of large black creepy crawly enemy spiders want to harm him. The only goal of this game is to survive as many waves of enemies as you can. It will get more challenging as you advance in the game. Charlie has 12 health points or lives displayed as red hearts at the bottom of the screen, if you run out of them, Charlie will die and its game over. However, if you stay safe for some seconds, they will regenerate. Charlie can shoot the enemies but they appear at random and everywhere so he needs to quick on shooting at them. An addictive little game that becomes frustrating quickly.

Score: 51%

DISASSEMBLER
39th Place.
Coded by: Diego Cárcamo Porres and José Ignacio Nadal Sánchez.
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

Disassembler is an Arkanoid style game. Your objective is to destroy the wall at the top of the screen using the bar to make the ball bounce against them. You have three lives to help you achieve your goal. You will need to take into account that the ball will bounce with everything on screen. You have 40 pieces of wall to destroy, every one with its number of hits it can handle, so one bounce against a piece of wall does not necessarily mean its destruction. Once you break every block,
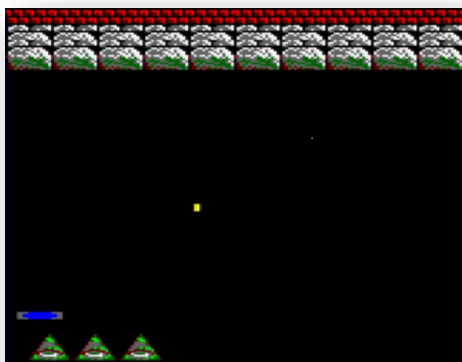
congrats! you've won. But if you drop the ball 3 times, you'll lose. It looks and feels like a demo rather than a full game. Not the best of games of brick breaking games, the gameplay is rather slow, the ball feel like its takes forever to move from one end of the screen to the other and the music is rather annoying.

Score: 23%

CROCKER
40th Place.
Coded by: Sara Vilaplana Rúa
and Enrique Cortés Tárraga
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

You are a crocodile stuck on one side of a busy road. Sound familiar? Yes it's a Frogger type game. You have been searching for your snacks, a big sized delicious sandwich. Crocker seems to have lost them but can now see them on the other side of the road. The only way to get his yummy sandwich is to cross a very dangerous road full of fast moving cars and trucks that won't stop anyone let along poor Crocker. If you can move Crocker the crocodile from one side of the road without being run over you collect the
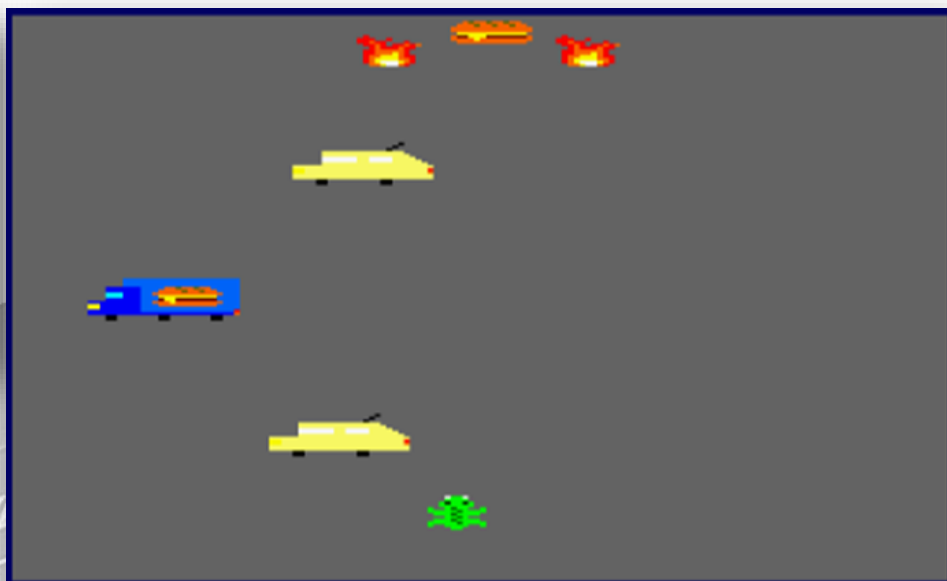
food and its game over. The game feels more like a demo than a proper game. Once you have done it once you probably won't go back as that's all there is to the game. A very basic presented game lacking any lastability.

Score: 20%

18TH CENTURY INVADERS
Coded by: Lourdes Mas Lillo
Sid-Ali Eric Crénier
Reviewed by: CPC4EVA.

As a Space Invaders clone, 18th Century Invaders fails to excite the imagination. Unfortunately for its team of coders it received last place in #CPCRETRODEV 2018. Not

something you would want to have as a developer, but the judges got it right with this games ranking. My opinion, it just doesn't play well enough to be a Space Invaders clone. While there might be a jolly 18th Century American tune playing during the game it just can't save it from being a poor game to play. Missing from the game is the shields to give you some form of protection instead you get pummelled by the 18th Century army with waves of bullets dropping towards you with very little room to hide. With the colour scheme they can be hard to see. With only three lives my games ended rather quickly. Try it and have a go for yourselves, but I just can't enjoy it.

Score: 7%

- **CODING:** Jerri (Turi Potapov), **GFX:** Driver4D (Aleksey Golubtsov), **SFX:** DaRkHoRaCe (Paolo Arus)
- **INFO:** 128K Only, Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=32232
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

NINJA GAIDEN
SHADOW WARRIORS

Ninja Gaiden Shadow Warriors is a direct port of the 1991 Gameboy title of the same name. Jerri has programmed no fewer than nine ZX Spectrum games including the Speccy version of Walker.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY
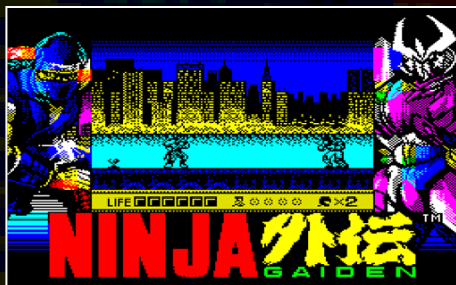
Only you can save New York City!

Ninja Gaiden Shadow Warriors is set 3 years before the original Ninja Gaiden story featured in the 1988 NES title. New York city is under attack by the evil forces of Emperor Garuda. The only hope lies in the knife wielding hands of our infamous hero Ryu Hayabusa.

Upon loading the game you are greeted by an outstanding loading screen showing the main character against the New York City background. The use of colour is excellent for the Spectrum and this sets the tone for a high standard of conversion. The main title screen follows and there is the handy option to redefine the keys or use a joystick. This is a welcome feature, considering that most people will not be playing this on original hardware and would be more comfortable using 'WASD' or arrow keys. As with many of the old Spectrum games the 'QAOP' keys are set as default and used for movement with space to fire.

The playable screen of the game is quite small due to the same resolution being used as the original Gameboy version. At first glance this may seem disappointing but then the action starts and you soon become oblivious. The rest of the screen is made up of a huge illustration of the antagonist Emperor Garuda on the right (bearing an uncanny resemblance to Shredder from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles) and the controllable character Ryu Hayabusa on the right with the title of the game below. These are well drawn and add to the aesthetics of the game.

The music in the game is exciting and matches the action perfectly as you are thrown directly into the action. If you have played any of the Ninja Gaiden series before the controls are immediately familiar. You run from left to right with up as jump, down as crouch and fire to use your sword. The basic attack is short range so the timing and control of your jumps is vital if you want to avoid losing energy. Your energy bar, lives remaining and magic levels are all displayed at the bottom of the screen. There are several power ups to collect such as magic and additional health which can come in very handy as the game progresses.

Each level features a variety of henchmen and machines to dispatch before you meet the end of level bosses. The Boss characters have their own attack patterns which will take some practice to memorise if you aim to beat the game.

The gameplay becomes more challenging and has a good learning curve but never reaches the levels of extreme difficulty that the NES games had. This is not a 'NES Hard' game which may come as a disappointment to you but will be a relief if you are one of us mere gaming mortals. Anyone familiar with this kind of action platformer will finish the game quite quickly and without a great deal of effort. There are only 5 levels to beat but each one comes with different music, its own end of level boss and features a cut-scene showing their demise. There are also surprising moments of joy like when you think you are trapped only to discover you have a grappling hook which you can fire at the ceiling and climb up. The highest praise I can give any game is that the controls and design are fair, so if you die, it's your own fault!

WHAT I LIKE

Memorising the attack patterns of the boss characters is key!

Shadow Warriors features tight controls and good level design which makes it a joy to play. After a few plays you become familiar with the levels and as with any game in this genre you fall into a rhythm and quickly become skilled in landing jumps perfectly and dispatching enemies with ease while feeling like a real 1980s Ninja Badass! The music is excellent throughout and adds to the atmosphere of the game building your adrenaline as you progress.

Some impressive cut scenes break up the action between levels and if you're using a tape deck it's time to load!

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Although you quickly forget about it, the size of the playable area of the screen is a slight drawback. It's completely understandable why the decision to stick with the Gameboy resolution was made but it is a downside nonetheless. There are times when the colours clash which could have been avoided. This doesn't hinder the gameplay in any way but is not pleasing to the eye. The game is quite short and skilled players will complete it in a day.

VERDICT

Ninja Gaiden Shadow Warriors is an excellent addition to the Spectrum Library. It inspires a 'One more go' attitude in the player and you will find yourself revisiting it for a quick play through every now and again. The game does not push the Spectrum to its limits or offer a great deal more than the original Gameboy title but it is fantastic fun while it lasts. It also comes with the bragging rights that you finished a Ninja Gaiden game!

SCORE

"Shadow Warriors features tight controls and good level design which makes it a joy to play"

GFX	70%
SFX	80%
FUN	85%
STAYING POWER	70%
OVERALL	**76%**

- **CODING:** Antonio J Perez. **Loading and ending screens:** Igor Errazkin
- **INFO:** 128K Only, download from http://retroporuntubo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Gimmick-Spectrum.zip
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

GIMMICK!
YUMETARO ODYSSEY

Some clues to what's in store

Only a ninja could get through this level!

There has been a lot of excitement around the release of Gimmick! for the ZX Spectrum since the early screenshots and footage emerged some time ago. Antonio J Perez has used the Mojon Twins' MK2 Engine to tremendous effect to deliver an 8-Bit side scrolling platforming masterpiece that hits you right in the nostalgic centre of the brain. Although based on Sunsoft's 1992 NES release Gimmick! this is not a port or a remake and bears little resemblance to the original game, opting instead to base 10 worlds on the most memorable of retro video games. The shocking thing here is that it *is as good as it sounds!*

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In the original NES game, the hero, Yumetaro rescued his owner from the 'Jealous Toys' and has been living in peace and happiness until now. The last remaining 'Jealous Toys' have managed to suck him into the incredibly modern super computer (The ZX Spectrum) where he is stuck and must fight through 10 worlds to reach the dragon who can take him home.

There are clear inspirations from Wonder Boy Dragon's Trap on the Master System as individual levels are reached through separate doors but joined together by one main world. Upon starting the game you are given a choice of 4 control options with various key

This level may look familiar!

combinations and the usual Kempston and Sinclair joystick options. The music is extremely charming from the outset and sets the mood of the game perfectly. The game begins with your character falling into the 8-Bit world and landing on the roof of a house. You quickly discover that most of the doors are locked but there is a kindly teacher in the Turtle School who will point you in the right direction. Each building is the entrance to a world which you must complete in order to unlock the others. There are some puzzle elements and hidden areas to discover which adds to the challenge and enjoyment of the game. You control the main character Yumetaro in the usual way as with most platformers of this era. However, there is no crouch, with the normal down button instead being used as an action key to read signs or speak to people. This can take some getting used to as years of retro gaming have conditioned your fingers to automatically press up for this function making your character jump before you realise. The jumping itself is accurate enough to feel fair and responsive. The game runs at a slower pace than many of its 8-bit counterparts but that does not make it any easier.

The first level you come to is called Mushroom Gate and is based in the world of Super Mario. The scenery and enemies are instantly recognisable and familiar. There is even a final showdown with Bowser at the end! The music here really sets the game apart with a wonderful speccy version of Super Mario Land from the Gameboy. The platforming in each level is difficult and will take some practice to master. One of the only drawbacks is the flick screen style causes cheap deaths all the time before you learn how to avoid it and even then it can be frustrating.

Your character starts defenceless but picks up abilities along the way which he can use on certain levels such as the ability to throw ninja stars which you achieve in the Shinobi World and can then use to defeat Dr Robotnik in the Ring Gate. The feeling of pure joy when you enter a world and hear the Sonic 2 Emerald Hill tune or Castlevania, Wonderboy, Gradius

and so much more makes the game worth playing alone but what makes it really stand out is that it's so charming from start to finish. I actually don't mind dying that much. The game does not overly punish you, it just starts you back at the beginning of the level with your 5 lives to try again and it's so much fun that it doesn't seem like a chore. The main character is lovable and even the animation of every jump puts a smile on your face. The game is quite long and will take some skill and memorising to finish but is enjoyable throughout.

WHAT I LIKE

The game oozes charm and personality from the beginning to end. Discovering each world and going on a trip down memory lane is a fantastic experience. The platforming is sound and the controls are accurate. The music (although lifted from other games) is what makes this really stand out. The game offers the right amount of challenge and is by no means a small game.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The flick screen platforming can be frustrating at first. Some of the deaths seem a tad unfair and you can end up escaping rooms by sheer panic as opposed to skill at times.

VERDICT

Gimmick! Yumetaro Odyssey is amongst the finest new games available for the ZX Spectrum. It is a triumph in both design and execution. It unashamedly pushes every nostalgia button and is all the better for it. Whether it's to play for half an hour or to put the time into and finish the whole game, every retro gamer with the hardware or software to download and play this should give it a try.

SCORE

"Discovering each world and going on a trip down memory lane is a fantastic experience"

GFX	90%
SFX	95%
FUN	90%
STAYING POWER	90%
OVERALL	**91%**

- **CODING:** Cristian Gonzalez, Alvin Allbrecht, SFX: BeykerSoft and Hikaru
- **INFO:** Download from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T9HK0_isoMrfogSIJVhPGehjVIdFus4c/view
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

GANDALF

One does not simply create an outstanding platformer based on the Lord of the Rings franchise, in this case however, that is exactly what Cristian Gonzalez and Alvin Albrecht have done with this game. Gandalf, is a platform game, with heavy influences coming from the Super Mario Brothers game. The game has been coded in C using Nirvana+ to wonderful effect. Before the game even begins, the stage is set when a wonderful 8-bit rendition of the Lord of the Rings theme welcomes you to the start screen. This is a sign of things to come as the sound throughout the game is excellent despite the absence of in-level music.

The flags throughout the levels to save progress are a welcome feature

Your platforming skills are put to the test as the difficulty increases towards the end of the game

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game is set many years after the events of the final book in the Lord of the Rings Trilogy. (The Return of the King). Gandalf has returned to rid the Land of the four remaining demons. This time there is no fellowship to help but he comes equipped with his staff which is more than capable of disposing of the various enemies he encounters along the way.

The usual options are available on the start screen with keys and joystick to choose from. The controls are tight and responsive and you will soon get used to making precise jumps accurately. The graphics are cute and colourful and the animation is smooth. There is a clash of colours now and again which is unavoidable and sometimes Gandalf seems to be in the floor as opposed to on it but this has no adverse effect on the gameplay.

Power-ups come in the form of Super Mario Brothers' blocks which work in the familiar way, when hit from below they release power-ups in the form of mushrooms which need to be caught in order to receive the new ability. It's not the most original of ideas but it works well and adds an instant familiarity to the gameplay. The level design is excellent and

sometimes requires some thought on how best to traverse the level successfully while collecting all of the power-ups.

The game has a gradual learning curve and you enjoy the action along the way as you build your skill set and become familiar with the attack patterns of the various enemies. Each one of the four Demons (which you must vanquish if you are to save the realm) come with their own set of weaknesses to be exploited and are fun battles to engage in. The final showdown with the eye takes slightly longer but this is not a game that will take an avid gamer long to finish and with a bit of practice can be finished in around 45 minutes.

WHAT I LIKE

The gameplay is instantly familiar and enjoyable due to its similarities to the Super Mario Brothers game. The level design is excellent and it is great fun playing through them. The sound is good throughout and the power-up system is used well. There are several nods to the Lord of the Rings books peppered throughout the game which will delight fans of the series.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There is no in level music which is a real shame. Although the starting theme and completion theme are excellent it would have made the game better to have had the soundtrack within the levels themselves. There is a flicker in levels on every system from original hardware to various emulators which can become annoying at times but after a while, you stop noticing it. The game is quite short with only 4 levels.

VERDICT

Gandalf was a wonderful surprise. I instantly enjoyed the gameplay and level design which never gets boring or repetitive. It is a compliment of sorts that I enjoyed the game so much that I wanted more but I felt a bit deflated to have finished the game so soon. This could be a wonderful sign of things to come from these fantastic programmers and I would highly recommend the game to everyone who enjoys the genre.

The final showdown!

Gandalf must use all of his skills and magic to defeat the last 4 remaining demons

SCORE

"The gameplay is instantly familiar and enjoyable due to its similarities to the Super Mario Brothers game"

GFX	85%
SFX	85%
FUN	90%
STAYING POWER	70%
OVERALL	**82%**

- **CODING:** Allan Turvey. **Music:** Davis Saphier. Load screen: Craig Howard
- **INFO:** $2.50 from https://highriser.itch.io/roust
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

ROUST

Fantastic Loading screen from David Saphier

Roust is a conversion of the William Electronics classic arcade game Joust. Joust was loved by millions worldwide for its addictive gameplay with many of us pumping coin after coin into the arcade cabinet. Despite the simplicity of the game, the Spectrum never received its own port… Until now. Allan Turvey has used the 'Arcade Game Designer' to code a wonderfully playable version of the coin-op favourite which will not leave fans of the original disappointed.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Roust is a single screen jousting game where you take control of a brave knight riding his very own blue ostrich. You are equipped with a jousting lance and are tasked with defeating the many enemies which spawn throughout the level.
The winner of each joust is determined by the height of the character's lance as it makes contact on your enemy. If your lance is deemed to be higher you win the joust and the opponent disappears, dropping an egg which

you can collect for the ever important points tally. By catching the egg in mid flight you are rewarded with bonus points, but leaving the egg uncollected results in it hatching and a new enemy will join the fray.
The game is a simple concept but it is a joy to play due to the flight mechanics of the ostrich. If you think along the lines of the swimming levels in Mario Brothers where pressing the jump button moves you up slightly so to reach the top requires repeatedly tapping it while not pressing it allows the character to descend. Now if you triple the speed, add in lots of enemies seeking to de-ostrich you and an unforgiving time limit you will build a decent picture of what's on offer.

As the levels progress, the platforms are removed and you spend more time flying and less time running with your ostrich. The gravity of the controls is different to the arcade machine and it takes some getting used to, but ten minutes in and you are familiar with how to perfectly control your ostrich. The worry with arcade conversions on the Spectrum is the memory limitations of the machine. All too often some of the features or levels of the original games have to be sacrificed. On this occasion you will be pleased to hear that that the egg wave and survival wave are not only present but just as much fun as in the arcade original. The Hand still emerges from the Lava to catch those that fly too close to the bottom of the screen and the pterodactyl is there to punish those who are too slow in dispatching their enemies.

There is no over-complicated plot here or story to follow. The concept is simple and all the more fun for it. You are unaware of the reasons for climbing aboard your blue ostrich and attacking vulture riding knights. You are not saving a princess or protecting your homeland from an evil villain. This is a fight for survival. There is no elaborate ending screen but you can use your imagination to insert Ryu's ending from Street Fighter 2, walking

side by side with your noble (feathered) steed into the sunset and rest assured that you have achieved greatness.

The game is just as frustrating as it always was but keeps you coming back for more. Whether it's to experience Joust for the first time or to enjoy the experience of playing it on the Spectrum, this is definitely worth checking out.

WHAT I LIKE

The controls are intuitive and you quickly become skilled at navigating the screen while knocking your opponents from their steeds. Score chasing is addictive and keeps you coming back for more. All of the best aspects of the arcade original are present and fun to play.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Sometimes the spawning of the enemies can be temperamental, meaning there can be spells of inactivity during levels while you wait for enemies to arrive. This wasn't present in the arcade game and sometimes spoils the frantic feel of the level. At the moment there is no option for a second player. This has been promised in future versions of the game but if you want to battle through the levels with a friend and relive those golden arcade memories of 2 player bliss you'll need to look elsewhere.

Roust raises the question of why Joust was

VERDICT

never coded for the ZX Spectrum before. The controls and format of the game suit the machine perfectly and the result is a joy to behold. The game is as addictive as its arcade counterpart which is high praise indeed.

The Egg Wave features in the game and brings a much needed extra life. You'll need to be quick though as those eggs hatch into enemies if left uncollected

Level 1 - Buzzard Bait. All the comical touches and personality of the original are there

SCORE

"There is no over-complicated plot here or story to follow. The concept is simple and all the more fun for it"

GFX	**80%**
SFX	**80%**
FUN	**93%**
STAYING POWER	**90%**
OVERALL	**86%**

THE ADVENTURES OF JANE JELLY: THE EGG DIAMOND

Having played through the first two Adventures of Jane Jelly games my expectations were high for this one but after playing it, I am in two minds. Using both the Arcade Game Designer and AGDMusicizer II Grilo has taken some of the positive aspects of the first two games and improved upon them. Perhaps it's just a personal preference, but the one hit death (in the style of Manic Miner) has been replaced with an energy bar which makes the game less challenging and alters the entire dynamic of the gameplay. The game has now changed from a precise platforming experience into more of an exploration with platforming elements. The game is unquestionably bigger and more ambitious than its predecessors with superior graphics and animation but not necessarily a better playing experience. The music by Yerzmyey however, is outstanding for the Spectrum and hugely adds to the excitement and atmosphere of the game.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game opens with an excellent loading screen and some fantastic music. This transitions into some informative text setting the scene as follows: "Jane Jelly is on Badass Guys Island to find the Egg Diamond and then leave the island with her clothes on."

This is a rarity for Spectrum games but this title has to come with a mature content warning. The humour is very tongue-in-cheek and the graphics are in no way explicit but when Jane Jelly is captured the character re-starts in jail and has had her clothing removed. There are also several strong swear words throughout the game so I wouldn't advise allowing children to play it.

This all seems rather unnecessary and tarnishes what is otherwise a very playable and enjoyable game. The controls are intuitive but an imprecise jump can lead to Jane becoming stuck in the scenery which can be frustrating at times. There are several items lying around and you will spend some time trying to figure out how to pick them up before realising that you can't. When you find an item which is of use, only then will Jane pick it and the text at the bottom of the screen will inform you what it is. This makes up most of the gameplay. Each room features some form of flying enemy to avoid, a human enemy to jump over, a ladder or two to climb and artefact to explore. As with many Spectrum games, the flick screen comes into play as each enemy will change position when you walk on and off of the screen. So if an enemy is in a dangerous position you can walk back off the screen and then return to find them in a much more favourable place.

After many captures and deaths you will find the Egg Diamond and escape on a boat to fortune and glory! The problem now is that you know where everything is and in future the game can be finished in under five minutes so the replay value is very low.

WHAT I LIKE

This is a larger and more ambitious game than its predecessors. The exploration element is fun while it lasts. The music is excellent.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Removal of clothes when the character is caught seems to be unnecessary and may cause offense. The precise platforming action is no longer present making the gameplay less challenging and addictive. The game has almost no replay value after finishing it once.

A beautiful night for a speedboat escape from (the creatively named) Badass Guys Island!

VERDICT

I can see where Grilo has tried to improve the Jane Jelly series and as a programmer, he has created a more impressive game in almost every sense. The game is well designed and fun to play but is not the same platforming experience or as much fun as the other games in the series.

To escape, Jane needs to find that wheel!

SCORE

"This is a larger and more ambitious game than its predecessors"

GFX	85%
SFX	95%
FUN	75%
STAYING POWER	50%
OVERALL	**76%**

- **CODING:** Andy Ford, Ian Rushforth, Daniel Gromann
- **INFO:** Download from http://jswmm.co.uk/files/file/106-jet-set-40-40/
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

JET SET 40-40

Jet Set 40-40 is not a new game but a re-design of Matthew Smith's original Jet Set Willy game from 1984. As much as this game is just more of the same, there are enough differences in the challenge to feel fresh and once again spend some agonisingly frustrating hours exploring the mansion.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The original Jet Set Willy game featured Miner Willy who was desperate to go to bed after a big party but was prevented from doing so by the immovable housekeeper Maria until he tidied up a huge array of items spread across 61 rooms throughout the mansion. The remake is set over only 40 rooms but this time there is an additional challenge. As you collect sets of items the difficulty of each room escalates with more enemies and new items placed in more difficult to reach areas. This breathes new life into the old classic and merits a full playthrough if your nerves (or temper) can take it. All the wonderful pixel perfect precision platforming is there in all it's glory and the rooms of the house are instantly recognisable and familiar from the original.

The usual controls are in effect with left, right and jump. There's no dash, pick up item or attack buttons, you simply avoid all obstacles and collect any items on the screen. Touching an enemy results in instant death as does falling from even a medium height so you'll

become used dying a lot! The familiar sight of the boot descending to signal 'Game Over' will appear after you lose your sixth life. Although six lives seems a lot, it is nowhere near enough for anyone outside the best of Jet Set players and you will soon find them disappearing in a matter of minutes. The music in the game is jolly and entertaining in the typical 8 bit renditions of familiar classical music. The in-game sound again matches that of the original and is instantly recognisable. The game requires memorisation of each screen in order to traverse it in one piece and even then the slightest of missed timing will result in the loss of a life. However, you are always aware of what went wrong and approach the screen again with a new found determination to get it right this time. There's a fair amount of problem solving, a pinch of trial and error a handful of skill and a hefty load of luck required but they all come together to create a wonderful masterpiece that you just can't get enough of. It's been years since a game has kept me up all night but the challenge of collecting every item, mixed with the nostalgia overload from the original game was just a concoction I couldn't resist. I can't think of a better sequel to compare it to, than perhaps Super Mario brothers: The Lost Levels. You've developed your skills on the first game but now here's a real hardcore, rock solid challenge to see just how good you are. It's not just a 'One more go' game, but a dozen more goes and then some.

WHAT I LIKE

Everything that made Jet Set Willy a timeless classic is here and the chance to experience it all again under a different guise is very welcome. The platforming (although difficult at times) is precise and fair. The game is immediately enjoyable and the learning curve is well designed.

Having the choice of where to start the game from the options menu lets you quickly become familiar with the layout of the house The option to make the game easier at the start is a welcome feature.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Sometimes you can get caught in a loop and lose all of your lives in one go as you are dropped to your death over and over again. Although the 40 levels are challenging and it is by no means an easy game I'd have loved the 61 levels of the original if not some additional ones too. Perhaps I'm just being greedy!

VERDICT

Although the game is a re-design so a lot of what I'm scoring here is based on the hard work of Matthew Smith's coding for the original, there are still enough differences and changes in the gameplay for this to stand on its own two feet and be judged as a game in its own right. I had an absolute blast playing through every challenge of every room. I laughed, I cried, I screamed in frustration and I emerged at the end with an enormous sense of achievement and joy. If you have any nostalgia for Jet Set Willy and Manic Miner you won't be disappointed and if you are new to the games then you are in for an extremely frustrating treat!

A very familiar screen from the original mansion with the scariest toilet I've seen, since Look Who's Talking Too!

SCORE

"Everything that made Jet Set Willy a timeless classic is here"

GFX	85%
SFX	90%
FUN	97%
STAYING POWER	90%
OVERALL	91%

- **CODING:** Apsis (Max Ruano [Cthonian Godkiller]), **MUSIC:** Augusto Ruiz, **LOADING SCREEN:** AGOD
- **INFO:** 128K only, download from https://cthoniangodkiller.wordpress.com/2018/01/28/harbinger-2-the-void/
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

HARBINGER 2
THE VOID

For anyone who played the excellent first instalment of Harbinger: Convergence you may be surprised to find that the sequel has snuck under the radar and is out and ready to be played. Once again Maxi Ruano has used the Mojon Twins MK2 engine to wonderful effect to create another classic which merits any Speccy fan's attention. It has to be said that everything about this release screams quality. From the stunning cassette covers to the detailed game manual (which has been beautifully graphic designed) everything is of the highest standard. The game is also split over no fewer than four cassettes with an introduction and three game cassettes. This is a game of mammoth proportions.

Hopefully the Kempston issues will be sorted in time but at the point of writing the game is keys only

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Upon loading, the introduction to the game immediately sucks you into the storyline. Written in a comic book style you are introduced to the design team before some excellent artwork and text boxes explain the plot of the game. After the exploits of the first game our hero is on his way home when his ship is caught in the gravitational pull of a black hole (The Void). This causes damage to his ship's Tau engine and leaves the ship paralysed and our hero helpless until the sensors in his Harbinger exosuit spot a strange structure. With no options left our hero has to fight through 80 screens of intense shooting and action platforming to disable the threat posed by the evil Space Pirates and save the Galaxy. No pressure then.

The MK2 engine ensures the gameplay is smooth and intuitive and the level design is excellent from start to finish. There are some extremely tough screens to clear before the final showdown but the ending itself is a bit of an anti-climax as it's far easier than most screens before it. The familiar QAOP control scheme is in place but I did notice that there is no Joystick support. Upon querying this Apsis has emphasised that this is a bug which will

be sorted in due course. This may put off those emulating the game who are unaccustomed to the old Spectrum controls but for many of us it's the best and most nostalgic way to play.

The action itself involves jumping and shooting, precise platforming and clearing each screen to progress. The tapes can be loaded in any order but are labelled A,B,C for a reason and to enjoy the game as it was programmed to be played they should be tackled in that order. Another point which sets this game apart is the outstanding soundtrack from Augusto Ruiz. I would put this right up there with the very best tunes the ZX Spectrum has to offer. I can think of no higher acclaim to give than the fact that it has recently become my ringtone.

As with many Spectrum games there are flaws throughout with some scenery becoming confusing and the odd clashing of colours but these are the most minor of points in the grand scheme of what is a wonderful game. The game was written as a tribute to Maxi Ruano's cousin David (who sadly lost his battle with Leukemia) and a fitting tribute it is too. This is clearly a labour of love and that shines through from start to finish.

WHAT I LIKE

The action kicks off at 100 miles per hour and never slows down. The gameplay does not become repetitive as each screen offers a fresh challenge and playing through them again is great fun as you master each one in turn getting a little bit further every time. The presentation is top notch and the attention to

Equipped with your Harbinger Exo suit you tackle the platforms and wipe out the space pirates

detail is fantastic. The music is outstanding and suits the atmosphere of the game perfectly.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The lack of support for the Kempston joystick or even the ability to change the keys will be a drawback for many gamers. On occasions, the background clashes with the foreground a bit leading to some confusion over what areas the player can land on.

VERDICT

Harbinger 2: The Void, is a wonderful game and if it was released during the manufacturing life of the Spectrum would be up there with the best titles we so fondly remember today. It deserves to be played by as many people as possible as it is a fantastic achievement. I will return to this one over and over again over the next few years and I am looking forward to the final release in this fantastic trilogy!

The learning curve is well paced so you have the skill set to complete each screen but do you have the nerve?

SCORE

"The action kicks off at 100 miles per hour and never slows down"

GFX	93%
SFX	98%
FUN	97%
STAYING POWER	95%
OVERALL	**96%**

■ **TEAM:** Soren Borquist, Lobo, Simon Butler, Craig Stevenson, Saul Cross. Published by Tardis Remakes
■ **INFO:** Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=32204
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

SQIJ 2018

It is with a great deal of confidence that I can predict, there is not a single Spectrum gamer in the world who has been keenly anticipating this release. Mostly due to the fact that the original SQIJ on the Spectrum was completely broken. I don't mean a cheap death kind of broken, I mean the kind of broken, where you cannot control the character at all. The fact that it was released with the problems it had, is amongst the most baffling oversights in 'Speccy' gaming history. You would have thought that the quality control checklist would have covered: Can you play the game? Y / N ? But apparently not.

To add fuel to the fire young Spectrum enthusiasts had to turn up on the school playground and listen to the C64 owners gloating about their version of the game which was actually very playable and enjoyable. The C64 version was programmed by Jason Kendall when he was only twelve years old and is a remarkable achievement. The fact that this remake is playable by today's standards is testament to his programming skills. Fast forward to 2018 and the Spectrum has finally received the version it should have had all those years ago. SQIJ 2018 is a remake of the original C64 version of SQIJ and is in an entirely different league in terms of… everything.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

SQIJ 2018 sees you take control of a fish with the ability to shoot projectiles from his mouth. You are tasked with finding the hidden parts of the tree of life in order to achieve immortality for you and your family. You quickly become familiar with the maze and after a few hours can navigate it successfully. What is slightly more challenging is that every screen quickly fills up with enemies which give no warning to their appearance so you often swim right into one and lose some vital energy. Touching the walls or platforms also runs down the energy bar so you need to be careful and quickly

Enemy sprites fill the screen quickly. Better get blasting!

learn to be accurate in your movements. This is perhaps my least favourite style of energy bar as there's sometimes no way to avoid collision which feels a bit cheap. The gameplay gets a bit repetitive after a while as every screen offers more of the same spawning baddies to shoot and bump into inadvertently in turn. The title screen is beautiful and the theme on that screen is fantastic but unfortunately there is no in-game music due to the memory restrictions. There is a bit of a missed opportunity here to offer an improved experience with some tweaked gameplay and more levels but they have remained true to the C64 original and there's an argument for both cases.

I enjoyed my time with the game but after finishing it, I don't see myself playing through it again. The Spectrum has hundreds of better games on offer but I appreciate the effort that has gone into righting one of gaming's biggest wrongs and finally releasing a game worthy of Jason Kendall's original. It's worth playing just as a piece of history. Now I just need to track down those C64 fanboys and shove this in their face!

WHAT I LIKE

Your task is to complete the tree of life to gain immortality for you and your family

The game is a million times better than the original which was unplayable. The controls are easy to master and you quickly get used to not touching the edges of the screen. The idea of righting a gaming wrong is a noble undertaking.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The gameplay becomes repetitive after a while. Replay value is low Some collisions are unavoidable leading to frustrating gaming.

It takes some considerable skill to avoid the walls and enemies

Eternal life is yours! Which is just as well as shooting lasers from your mouth must be a fire hazard!

VERDICT

I enjoyed SQIJ 2018 for what it is. However I have been able to play it on the C64 since it's release and there are really no significant improvements to the gameplay to offer anything new. As a piece of history it's a great story but you won't find yourself coming back for more.

SCORE

"The idea of righting a gaming wrong is a noble undertaking"

GFX	80%
SFX	60%
FUN	65%
STAYING POWER	50%
OVERALL	**64%**

NIXY
THE GLADE SPRITE

2017 was a prolific year for Andy Johns as he was involved in no fewer than 4 of the best ZX Spectrum releases of last year. With 2 fantastic Monty Mole games, Foggy's quest and Ooze under his belt, hopes were high for Nixy: The Glade Sprite, and he certainly didn't let us down. The game once again makes wonderful use of the Arcade Game Designer software to bring us one of the most enjoyable Spectrum platforming adventures to date.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game centers around Nixy the Glade Sprite (a wingless fairy or pixie character) who has been tasked with cleansing the 'Gaia' stone by dipping it in a pool of water. The stone has become corrupted and is causing the plants to become carnivorous. It's like the Little Shop of Horrors has been given an Aliens style sequel where there are now hundreds of the pixie devouring venus fly traps taking over the world. Only Nixy can restore order to the glade but the task will not be an easy one.

From the very second the game loaded I absolutely loved everything about it. The menu music is outstanding and I was smiling from ear to ear before I even started the game. What I saw next blew me away. Pictures cannot capture what happens as you start to play. The music again captures the atmosphere perfectly and transports you to the Glade. The colours and design are excellent but it's the animation which blew me away. I couldn't believe what I was seeing as each landing caused a little splash on the ground under Nixy's feet. The level of detail is second to none on the Spectrum. Even the colour clash is done artistically and watching the game unfold is nothing short of a delight. The controls are the basic 'Q,A,O,P' setup, but joystick options and the ability to redefine the keys are present, which is a must for modern 'Speccy' games hoping to capture new audiences. The platforming is immediately familiar although slightly less floaty than Jet Set Willy, the same pixel perfect jumping and timing is necessary to progress. Like in the Willy games, avoidance is the key. There is no jumping on heads or attacking with projectiles or swords, this is simply a game of careful planning and skill and is all the better for it.

The game has a solid learning curve with every screen becoming progressively more difficult while teaching you the skills needed to survive the next. The level design is outstanding and leads to a few 'Eureka!' moments as you finally figure out how to succeed. This sense of achievement and the constant improvement in your progress ensures that you keep coming back for more. You won't hit a dead end and give up but the game is extremely challenging and may take several hours or even days to master.

Each level becomes progressively more difficult giving your mental and physical reflexes a workout

If you persevere you will quickly find the Moon Pool and drop the Gaia stone there. You are then tasked with finding the 10 Blooms which are hidden in ever more difficult to reach places throughout the Glade. This again requires some considerable skill. Upon collecting them all you return them to the pool where they combine with the water and the Gaia stone to purify it and cleanse it of evil. Job done right?... Wrong! Now you have to return the Gaia stone to where you found it to restore the Glade.

Health Warning: dying in this section can cause severe distress and keyboard bashing tendencies! When the stone is finally returned safely the ending starts where we are promised the return of Nixy in the form of Nixy 2: The Seeds of Doom. When given a teaser like this, one can only hope there's not a 'Back to the Future' style wait for it! Once you have finished the game and become more skilled it can be finished in around 20 minutes but I still find myself putting it on just to play through it again like I do with all the best Speccy games which in itself is high praise indeed.

WHAT I LIKE

The music is outstanding. The platforming is precise and enjoyable. You want to finish it and even then come back for more. The game is incredibly charming and oozes personality. I

was immediately impressed with this title, seeing the amazing use of colours and professional level of artwork both on the loading and menu screens as well as in game. It has a high quality finish to it which would make any software publisher proud. The games design does not disappoint either, the control of the character and collision detection with hazards feels very accurate and fair. This, coupled with the extremely well designed layout of the maze being challenging enough to make you feel like you need to think about where you are going without seeming to be overwhelmingly difficult.

It works in the way a good platformer should, which is to let you make progress as long as

The menu music is outstanding and immediately let's you know you are in for a treat

You've found the Moon Pool but that's just the beginning. Now for those 10 pesky Blooms!

you concentrate on what you are doing and not get too overconfident about the hazards. As long as you take your time and think about what you are doing you can get through it. Even the more subtle parts of this game like the background music and sound effects are so well put together it only serves to improve the enjoyment of the game and continue it's polished feel.

There's Giant pixie eating plants, ghosts and mushroom hatted tyrants to avoid. No-one said this was going to be easy!

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

It takes some time to figure out what you can jump through and what you will collide with which causes some cheap deaths at first. Honestly though, I couldn't find a single thing I didn't like about this game. At first it felt like there were not really enough variety of obstacles, but my opinion of this soon changed the further I got into the game. There were six methods of exit from this existence for Nixy that I could count, the five hazards mentioned and falling too far being the sixth. When put this way, it doesn't seem like much, but when you realise the myriad of combinations these hazards have been laid out in, it's clear, they are hazardous enough!

VERDICT

Nixy: The Glade Sprite, is a perfect example of a modern Spectrum game done right. A fantastic Spectrum game with a well balanced challenge. There's enough elements of classic Spectrum gaming to satisfy the nostalgia junkies combined with an ample amount of creative and original touches making this feel like something completely fresh and new. I will be playing Nixy for months to come and can't wait for Nixy 2. Considering the polish and fantastic gameplay of this game I can only imagine how good it is going to be. Nixy has to be amongst the best 8-Bit games released in 2018, (possibly up with the best Spectrum games ever) a year which has been an outstanding year for the Spectrum in general.

SCORE

"Nixy has to be amongst the best 8-Bit games released in 2018"

GFX	97%
SFX	93%
FUN	96%
STAYING POWER	95%
OVERALL	98%

■ **CODING:** Dave Hughes
■ **INFO:** Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=34298
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor
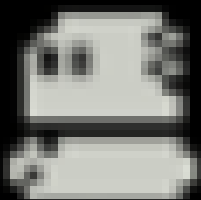
O.P.Z

Dave Hughes is one of the most prolific British speccy coders of the last five or six years releasing no fewer than 40 games including Biscuits in Hell, Donkey Kong Re -Loaded, Encyclopaedia Galactica, Gen Blast, Left Behind and Pitfall 3. O.P.Z is a tribute of sorts to celebrate the Speccy's 36th Birthday. It was coded in just 6 hours which shows the extraordinary talents of Dave Hughes. With such a short timeline to create a platform game you'd be forgiven for thinking it would be a poorly coded, shallow, unplayable mess with hints of Atari's E.T, but I can guarantee there would have been no need to bury this one in the desert!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Dave Hughes sums up the premise of the game as follows:

"I present a 100% original idea - a platform game in which you go around collecting things then go to the exit. It's authored with P.G.D, has 6 levels, and infinite lives. It's not easy, but it's short. If it helps my case it took me 6 hours yesterday (every idea I tried before this had something novel that I wanted to explore further and not rush). The keys are O - left, P - Right, Z - Jump and H - Pause". That's it. It's that simple but what he doesn't mention is just how fun and entertaining those six levels are.

The first thing that hits you in O.P.Z is the absence of any sound. Not even a jumping or collision beep is present. (Which I discovered after checking my speakers and re-loading the game a couple of times.) The second thing you notice is that this is an incredibly tight platformer and soon the wonderfully frustrating joy of completing each sadistically twisted and insanely difficult level takes over and 45 minutes later you are still there wondering what happened to the time. It's not so much a 'one more turn' game as it is a few dozen more turns and then some! There are shades of wonderful retro inspired indie games like Super Meat Boy in the precision of the platforming needed and the infinite lives where each death becomes as entertaining as it is frustrating. You quickly become skilled in the platforming elements of the game but skill is not enough as time and time again you need to re-think your approach to each section.

Once the game is mastered the real fun begins. I love trying to complete games without losing a life and for O.P.Z that is one hell of a challenge. One pixel off at any time and that's it. Although not an official part of the game, having this approach adds to the longevity of the title, as it may otherwise be over in an hour or so and it's so much fun you'll not want it to end! This is by no means a timeless classic. There is a lack of polish here and there but it's an absolute blast while it

lasts and well worth checking out. If this game had 50 levels and some music or sound effects I would be scoring it well into the 90s, it's that good, but alas, for the time being I'll need to stick to my 'no death' challenge. This could take a while…

WHAT I LIKE

The graphics are fun and engaging. The level design is excellent and there are a few problem solving elements involved to spice up the gameplay. The platforming is precise and entertaining making the challenge of finishing each level rewarding without the agony of cheap deaths from poor collision detection. The game is incredibly addictive and you feel quite skilled in traversing the levels.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

It's too short to score higher which is a real shame as this could have been a modern classic. There is no sound at all.

VERDICT

For a game coded in six hours this is an absolute masterpiece. I actually had to move computers to finish this review as I showed a colleague at work the game (over an hour ago) and he's been on it ever since, it's that addictive! I will return to play O.P.Z over and over again to attempt to get through the six levels in one life but there is just not enough game there to merit a higher score. Hopefully in the future Dave Hughes will return to O.P.Z for an extension or a sequel as I'm sure there will be many others who will have high opinions of this one. I would still advise everyone I know to go and download O.P.Z as it is brilliant fun while it lasts!

WHAT AM I?

HORACE'S DILEMMA

Time

High score 000000   Score 000310

Press any key to start the game.

Poor Horace. I don't know the answer I'm afraid. I do know that on the first go you are going to die… a lot

SCORE

"Once the game is mastered the real fun begins"

GFX	85%
SFX	N/A
FUN	95%
STAYING POWER	75%
OVERALL	**85%**

- **CODER:** Valdir
- **INFO:** Download from https://www.dropbox.com/s/m7vetx4o0lqt0xp/Estriker.tap?dl=0
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

EUROSTRIKER

Valdir brought us the Vampe and ZX Nights games but is most commonly known for ZX Striker a football game with up to 16 players that was great fun. Now he has made a sequel of sorts. The game is no longer a multiplayer party game but is now a footy sim. Great footy games are few and far between on the Spectrum so hopes are high Valdir has delivered a game to rival the on pitch action of Match Day 2 or Emlyn Hughes International Soccer or perhaps to challenge our managerial prowess like Football Manager did in an in depth simulation style. One can dream.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

To appreciate what is on offer here we have to cast out minds back to the limitations and challenges of producing a fast, fluid and fun sports game for the ZX Spectrum. Although some managed it and others such as Hyper Sports exceeded all expectations, most sports titles left a lot to be desired (I'm looking at you 'Peter Shilton's Handball Maradona!). Some of the best football games were management simulations and Valdir has attempted to bring the two genres together mixing some aspects of football action within a simulation style game. The issue here unfortunately is that it doesn't deliver on either front. Instead we have a game which is like Player of the Year without the same excitement levels.

You are given no choice of who you sign for. Sometimes this is ok but on other occasions you may turn the machine off in disgust!

Upon loading the game you are asked to sign your name and are allocated a team. There is no choice so you could end up at any of the chosen European clubs. Your name will then appear in all the statistics (cue the silly names for comedy value). The game then progresses to an extensive menu which gives a chance to view your player's attributes, training options, statistics, results, league tables, upcoming fixtures and the matches themselves. This is the most enjoyable part of the game as the statistics are accurate, extensive and fun to analyse. There is a wide

range of European teams in the league and promotion / relegation is possible at the end of each season. The league is a Euro league with no domestic competitions available, there is however, an additional knockout style cup competition to compete in.

The problem comes in the games themselves. You are tasked with watching a ball go from right to left on a 2D horizontal bar. If it gets to the opponents goal you are occasionally notified that "You are through with a chance!" Then you are taken to a screen with your player and a goalkeeper where the striker will be in a different position each time facing an isometric goal with an aiming dot that rotates along in a semi-circular fashion in front of you. You have to time the shot when it's in line with a corner of the goals. The keys will allow to add height or curve to the ball. If you score you are awarded with the word "Goal", filling the screen. The extent of the game is to time the shot correctly and score each time. You do not control the movement of the player. There is no passing or defending, it's just a matter of timing. You will not get a chance every match and your player may have had two chances and scored both goals but then be substituted off for no apparent reason. You also have no control over any managerial aspects of the game and cannot switch players.

Injuries often occur to your player which can be frustrating as you miss games and fall behind in the scoring charts. Sometimes you come back only to be injured again in the first match over and over again. If you are injured you get to skip matches but otherwise you have to watch that horizontal representation of a game for a couple of minutes praying for a chance to actually do something. This boredom forces a sense of excitement when the pink bar notifies you that you have a chance and this is really the only saving grace of the matches as you quickly start to consider what else you could be doing with your time. There is no way of speeding it up either. Instead you are forced to endure a form of football less entertaining than a Jose Mourinho team playing for a draw in the Champions League.

There is an addictive element to the game but the lack of any sound other than the occasional beep means there is no atmosphere or real sense of excitement when you score a goal. I played through an entire season but upon completing that have had no urges to return to the game so replay value is not high, unfortunately.

WHAT I LIKE

The statistics are detailed and it is fun to try and catch the leading scorers. Like real

football, results are unpredictable and add a sense of excitement to every game. There's depth available through player transfers and through promotion / relegation.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The game becomes so repetitive it stops being fun. You can go for whole games without getting a chance which can lead to boredom and disengagement. The lack of any sound means there is no real atmosphere to the games. A lot of your time is spent clock watching.
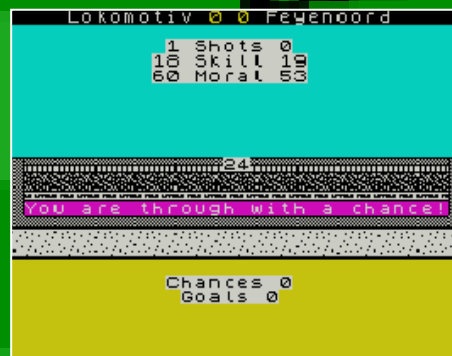
You wait patiently for this screen then the pressure is on

VERDICT

Eurostriker attempts something admirable and comes very close to delivering. With a few tweaks in either the interactive gameplay or managerial elements this could be a very good game indeed. As it is however I fear most people will enjoy it for a few minutes then switch it off and not feel any great need to return. Hopefully we see another instalment in the future that rectifies these problems and adds more excitement.

SCORE

"The statistics are detailed and it is fun to try and catch the leading scorers"

GFX	**55%**
SFX	**15%**
FUN	**45%**
STAYING POWER	**40%**
OVERALL	**39%**

- **CODING:** John Blythe, Andy Johns, Allan Turvey, David Saphier
- **INFO: Download from** https://www.rucksackgames.co.uk/allhallows
- **REVIEWED BY:** John Davies

ALL HALLOWS
RISE OF THE PUMPKIN

An earlier than expected release from Rucksack Games and John Blythe in the shape of All Hallows - Rise of the Pumpkin. Another great platform game developed in less than five months using AGDx, an extension of AGD (Arcade Game Designer) by Jonathan Cauldwell, following in the footsteps of the homebrew heroes equally fantastic Foggy's Quest, Circuitry and The Incredible Shrinking Professor. John took his inspiration from Andy John's wonderful bounce mechanic and another AGD platform game called Pumpkin Poe developed by Ariel Endaraues. There's no bouncing in that game but you can see quite a few similarities between the two.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

So the story goes, thousands of years ago Ancient Sages used five magical moonstones to trap the evil forest lord within his dark tower in an effort to protect the great forest kingdom. But now you have noticed that the dark tower has awoken and the binding pentagram of moonstones magic is fading away and can only be restored by the touch of a forest spirit, such as yourself, otherwise the evil forest lord will break free and have his revenge. I don't mind convoluted plots for games with such simplistic gameplay, but I do prefer the old 'You got drunk last night and have to tidy up your mansion or the maid won't let you sleep' plot. Actually what's that all about? What kind of maid holds that sort of power over her millionaire employer. That woman seriously needs to check out her job description.

Anyway, in the game your bouncing pumpkin must traverse various interconnected screens, in a not too dissimilar fashion to the pumpkin found in Cauldron II, using just two keys, left and right. This meant I could actually drink my own homebrew whilst playing the game at the same time. Awesome? Well maybe unless like me you get game rage and end up scolding half your head with said beverage. Your task is to find the five magical moonstones and restore their magic by touching them, along with the three magical tablets which add or remove 'magical' blocks to open up new pathways through the game. Once you have accessed the moonstones and tablets you will need to find the gateway which will re-awaken the magical binding spell and keep the forest lord imprisoned in his tower once again.

There's plenty of nasties to avoid during your quest such as bats, fireballs, monstrous gnashing heads, pots of fire, creepy spiders and lava pits. Bats and pots of fire drain your energy whereas all the other nasties are fatal to touch. Unfortunately it's not a happy feeling inside when you first discover this fact. But to cheer you up a bit special pots of green / blue (or is it Turquoise?) fire can be bounced in to restore your juice back to one hundred percent. Extra lives, in the form of little pumpkin heads can also be found, up to a maximum of ten. Coloured levers scattered around the tower can be pulled to unlock various matching coloured doors.

As well as platforms there are ladders that can be climbed to reach higher points but unfortunately your bouncing pumpkin does not possess the ability to climb down them. A case of candle light on but nobody home perhaps. This is one of those games where you probably need to make a map so you know where to find the moonstones, magical tablets, levers, etc. Youngsters might even be able to use their memory for the same purpose.

I wouldn't dip your toe in this to check the temperature

WHAT I LIKE

The level design is clever and each screen has its own recognisable characteristics. The screens also have eye catching graphics full of tiny intricate details from the fiery flame effects to the twinkling stars in the night sky. The game's difficulty might be too challenging for some. Luckily for me my game rage limit is tea spillage as I'm too much of a cheapskate to throw my PC out of a top floor window, unlike some rich lunatics I've had the pleasure of watching on youtube. The lack of any sort of time limit takes the pressure off slightly and the AY chiptune music is very soothing. All four tunes are catchy and the in game music seems to last forever before repeating.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There's no scoring system, points or percentage of the game completed. I'm one of those players who likes to see an indication of how well I've done and how I've progressed on further attempts as inevitably I'll end up giving up before finishing the game. What can I say, I'm not a completionist. Unless it's Ant Attack where basically you never stay dead and can keep trying forever. Love that game. This game though, suffers from the old Jet Set Willy flaw of multiple falling deaths leading to instant game over. It is avoidable, as your pumpkin can drift slightly, but not by an old geezer like me whose teenage ninja reactions have been shot to pieces over the years. In fact I would say once I reached twenty years

of age. The ladders can be a bit annoying sometimes because as soon as they are touched you fly up to the top of them, more often than not right into a waiting nasty. I'm not sure the bouncing mechanic fits in too well with ladders or maybe I'm lacking in ladder skills. I was never a window cleaner or librarian in one of those huge old libraries.

VERDICT

Simple gameplay, intricate graphics, fantastic audio and that 'just one more go' magic ingredient, all help to position this game high up in the list of modern day spectrum classics. It's not perfect by any means. However, it's flaws are quite minor so they're easily forgiven. It's quite a challenging game and maybe too difficult for some but this increases the game's longevity. If you don't like to lose you will return to this game again and again for months until you finally trap the dark lord for another thousand years. Or if you're like me the dark lord will turn us all into his slaves and all hope will be lost, at least a thousand times over.

SCORE

"The level design is clever"

GFX	92%
SFX	79%
FUN	85%
STAYING POWER	82%
OVERALL	**85%**

- **CODER:** Fabio Marconi (Couvej), **GFX:** diver4d, **SFX:** Quiet, nq and karbofos
- **INFO:** Download from http://zx-dev-conversions.proboards.com/thread/20/bobby-carrot
- **REVIEWED BY:** John Davies

BOBBY CARROT

Bobby Carrot is a ZX Spectrum de-make of a game which first started off in life as the first in a series of five mobile games developed and published by a German company called FDG Mobile Games back in 2004. This Spectrum version was an entry in the ZX Dev Proboards conversions competition from Couvej.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

There are a couple of ways to play this game, harvest the carrots or plant the Easter eggs. In carrot harvesting Bobby's objective is to collect all the carrots in a field (level), thirty in all in harvesting mode, and then proceed to the next field via the exit once it becomes active. Hardly at the top of the ladder in the originality stakes but this games simplicity is one of it's strengths. Added complexities arise in the form of a number of obstacles such as spike traps, one way conveyor belts (don't ask me how you plant a conveyor belt in the middle of a field), rotary stones and Locks requiring keys. There's also a bunch of push buttons and switches which have an effect on some of the aforementioned obstacles.

In egg planting Bobby's objective is to plant easter eggs in all the nests that appear in a field. Similar obstacles are introduced in the twenty fields you need to progress beyond to complete this mode of the game. It has less levels but it's still a little more difficult than carrot harvesting because you cannot retrace your steps. No treading on eggshells in this game. Well actually just eggs but you get my drift. This is rather like those old Nokia snake games, Snafu on the Intellivision, Tron, Surround, etc, only it's a bunny and eggs.

Control options are keyboard, Kempston, Sinclair and cursor. Keyboard is the usual QAOP and cannot be redefined. Space is Fire, or select. Pressing the Break key pauses the game and allows you to select from a bunch of options for Help, Look Around, Lose a Life or Quit. 'Help' tells you all about the elements of the game and how they work. It's definitely worth a look. 'Look Around' allows you to scroll around the entire field enabling you to plan your strategy. 'Lose a life' is used when you find you've gotten

Bobby trapped in a field and have no other option besides bunny suicide. 'Quit' ends the game and goes back to the main menu.

To play the game well you need to be familiar with how the obstacles work. Spike Traps can be stepped on once but as you step off them the spikes appear so you cannot step on them ever again. Rotary stones come in two varieties, corner and straight. There's only ever two compass point directions out of four which can be used to climb off a stone. Every time you stand on one it rotates clockwise ninety degrees changing the two available exit points. There are switches that when touched will rotate all the rotary stones on the screen ninety degrees. You can only walk in the direction a conveyor belt is pointing but unlike Spike Traps you can use it again and again. Push buttons can also be found which when stood on will reverse the direction of the conveyors. Locks sometimes secure gates which block your path and can be unlocked with keys found elsewhere in the fields.

There's no time limit to finish a level. However, you are timed during each level and if you are quick enough you get to enter your name on the leaderboard, which can be saved or loaded in from the main menu. A nice feature for a bit of friendly competition with your mates.

The game comes in two versions. The definitive 128k version and an inferior 48k version. The 48k version has a smaller (tiny) on screen playing area and has attractive pixel art surrounding it. The 128k version loses the pixel art border and has a much larger playing area which makes it easier to see everything and enables the cute graphics to shine through a bit more as well. The difficulty level of the game is perfect for me personally as I'm no puzzler. I just don't enjoy

thinking too much about stuff. But hardcore puzzle gamer's who'll find this a push over may become bored of it in no time at all.

WHAT I LIKE

I'm not a big fan of puzzle games but this one it quite easy so it didn't have me pulling what's left of my hair out. The gameplay is simple and absorbing. It won't take anyone long to get straight into this little puzzler. The graphics are cute and functional. There's not much animation but there doesn't need to be. I found the title screen music a bit chaotic and grating for my tastes but the in game music itself is excellent and the little level completion ditty is nice too. The leaderboard of best times is a wonderful feature for increasing the lifetime of the game.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The 48k version. It sucks in comparison to the proper 128k version. There's no option to turn off the in game music so if you don't like it your ears will just have to bleed. I'm not a big fan of games where you get stuck and have to do a spot of harakiri by going into a menu and selecting lose a life to restart. I'd much prefer it if the game itself could figure that out and do it.

VERDICT

The 48k version of this game is so bad that you'd be inclined to commit bunny suicide almost immediately. However, the 128k version is so good it will rescue you from all that torment and despair. It's a shame the 128k isn't the only version in existence. It's polish and presentation is second to none. The simple and absorbing gameplay will appeal to the masses but I've a feeling hardcore puzzlers might turn their noses up at this fine effort because even the egg planting levels would probably be a breeze for them.

Later levels become a bit more complex, but only a little

SCORE

"The gameplay is simple and absorbing"

GFX	**81%**
SFX	**73%**
FUN	**86%**
STAYING POWER	**75%**
OVERALL	**79%**

ASTROSMASH ZX

AstroSmash! ZX is a port of the classic shoot 'em up released in 1981 for the Intellivision video game system, created with AGDx. The Intellivision version was originally intended to be another game mode for Meteor!, an Asteroids clone. Meteor! got cancelled but the game mode, called Avalanche!, survived and gained its own release as AstroSmash! The Intellivision system was better known for its sports games so this arcade style shooter was a breath of fresh air. It became so popular that in late 1982 it became the cartridge shipped with Intellivision systems.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Your planet is in peril! From above reigns down a nightmare of molten meteors and alien bombardment. Armed only with a fleet of remote controlled laser cannons, you must hold off the attack for as long as you can. In other words you ain't gonna survive this buddy. AstroSmash ZX is a bit of classic video game mashup of Space Invaders, Asteroids and, to a lesser extent, Missile Command. You have a bunch of laser cannons and you must blast everything that falls out of the sky.

Your cannon can move left (O), right (P), fire (M) and enter hyperspace (Q) landing at a random, hopefully safe, location on the surface. A status bar at the bottom of the screen shows, from left to right, shields remaining, score, cannons remaining and current level. As the game levels increase the enemies get faster and deadlier. Meteorites, which come in a range of shapes, sizes and colours, must be blasted before they reach the surface and, in the ZX version, damage your shield. In the original version there were no shields and upon reaching the surface meteorites would just decrease the players score. This enhanced ZX mechanic gives the game a bit more urgency.

Spinning bombs, which come in two sizes, must also be blasted or they'll destroy the players laser cannon if they reach the surface. Then there's homing missiles which track your movement and, you guessed it, must be blasted, or avoided. Although blasting a homing missile is the better option as it handily restores your shields too.

Beyond level three alien spaceships fly across the screen and start blasting you. Blasting them will give you an extra laser cannon and a whopping 100 points. The graphical style is very close to the original game. There's no music but the spot effects in the AY audio version are very Intellivision in flavour. A mechanic in the original game, which was an original concept in itself at the time, was to have the game not only become more difficult as the levels increased but also to become easier again when laser cannons were lost. I'm not sure this concept has made it into the ZX version or it might just be my almost half a century old reflexes playing tricks on me again.

WHAT I LIKE

From what I can tell it plays very much like the original. It certainly looks and sounds like an Intellivision game. It has a few improvements over the original and It's quite addictive. I always wanted another try to reach a higher level and beat my high score.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Sometimes blasting is not as responsive as it could be and on a few occasions it didn't respond at all. Yep, sure ain't gonna survive this buddy. I never pressed the Hyperspace button once as it was located well away from all the other controls so I'd have to look away from the screen to find it. When the levels increase the background colours are only either black or blue. The original game had more colours.

VERDICT

The developer has taken a classic Intellivision game, ported it to the Spectrum and improved upon it whilst retaining all the ingredients which made it such a fun game in the first place. Even though it has the odd bug I'd still highly recommend it.

It's time to start…. BLASTING!

SCORE

"It has a few improvements over the original"

GFX	78%
SFX	72%
FUN	87%
STAYING POWER	84%
OVERALL	**81%**

- **CODER:** Aleisha M. Cuff
- **INFO:** Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=34364
- **REVIEWED BY:** John Davies

PROSPECTOR

Prospector is an action platformer created using AGDx. Not only can you jump around the levels but you can shoot your foes too. It has 30 screens to explore which contain all manner of obstacles and creatures.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In the frozen wilds of British Columbia, you're searching for your lost work crew. You should have believed the townsfolk when they told you that abandoned mine was cursed… That's right folks, like every good B-movie horror you didn't heed the warnings and now you are in deep doo-doo. But you do have a gun. At the start a simple menu appears giving options for Keyboard, Kempston and Sinclair. The keys are climb/jump (Q), descend (A), Left (O), right (P) and fire (Space). Your gun ammo is limited to 6 shots. Touching one of the guns scattered around the game's levels will refill the ammo. There's one in the house at the very beginning of the game.

Being able to shoot foes is particularly useful when there are two of them in close proximity to each other because this makes it twice as difficult to jump them, knocking one of them out makes things a lot easier. Some foes need more than one hit to kill, so you must be careful to shoot only one of them or you'll end up possibly killing neither of them. Foes respawn each time you leave the screen. The movement of some foes seems to be random, which makes them less predictable, whilst others are from the back and forth Manic Miner school of movement that even the worst weather forecaster could predict. I think this mixes up the game quite well. There are yetis (4 hits to kill), ghosts, bats, which are attracted to you and steal your ammo, super fast runaway mine carts and trees that throw green balls at you. There are other creatures too but I'd rather keep those secret for you to discover.

Your prospector jumps around rather spritely. There's no jerkyness or stodgy feeling to the movement and the levels have an interesting enough design. There's no 'I've seen this all before' feeling. Screens connect together logically and there are multiple paths through many of them with plenty of secrets to discover. There's no score. You just need to rescue your lost work crew from whatever's down them there mines, 'pardner. There are extra lives, in the form of the Prospectors head, which can be collected. The games graphics are of a pretty high standard which is more than can be said for the games audio. There's no music and not even a loading screen. The developer decided to use up all the space for the main games action and graphics. However, she is looking at creating a 128k version of the game which has proper in game music.

WHAT I LIKE

I like the level design. It's fun to explore and gives a good sense of discovery. The graphics fit the concept of the game well. Slightly menacing with cute overtones. The game is a lot of fun to play as you pit your wits against the hazards and foes in the mines. The limited ammo gun mechanic works well when combined with the platforming aspects of the game. The graphics are smooth, cute and menacing. The no frills approach to stuff exterior to the game, like the main game menu, is something I admire when I realise the precious space saved is going to benefit the actual game itself.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The audio is rather lacking. There's no in game music. Invisible platforms. I think they're a bit unfair, especially if there's no clues as to where they are.

VERDICT

I really enjoyed playing this game. It's a typical platformer with a nice limited ammo gun mechanic which feels like part of the grand design rather than an afterthought. It's well balanced in terms of difficulty and never feels unfair, well, besides those annoying invisible platforms. They are totally not fair. This is almost a 90% game if you disregard the lack of audio. So, it's still highly recommended.
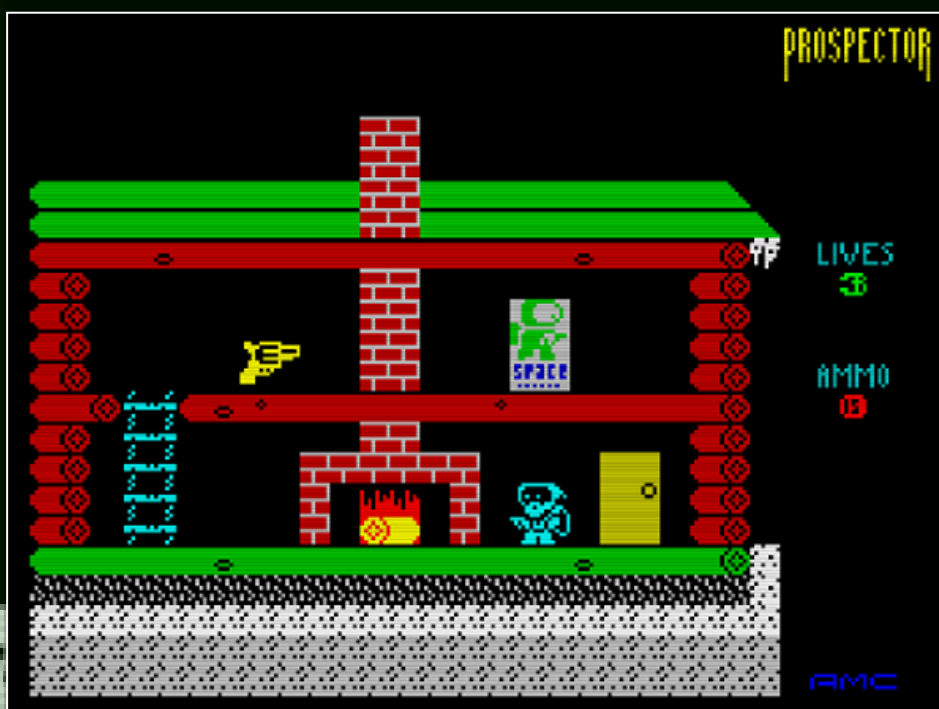
Come home to a real fire…… and a golden gun

SCORE

"It's fun to explore and gives a good sense of discovery"

GFX	82%
SFX	24%
FUN	92%
STAYING POWER	87%
OVERALL	**72%**

- **CODING:** Aleisha Cuff, Allan Turvey
- **INFO:** Download from https://t.co/ichBhQpNm9
- **REVIEWED BY:** John Davies

NIGHT STALKER ZX

Night Stalker ZX is a port of Night Stalker, a single-screen maze shooter released in 1982 for the Intellivision video games system, created with AGDx. The original Night Stalker, developed by Steve Montero, was a successful attempt to bring an original arcade style title to the Intellivision system.

The red robot is smarter than the average bear, well that one out of A.I. anyway

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In Night Stalker ZX you play as a marooned space soldier trapped inside a hedge maze with a bunch of relentless killer robots, spiders and bats for company. Luckily a gun appears at one of five random locations in the maze and can be used to blast the evil inhabitants, but each gun only has six bullets which once used cause another gun to appear. The only safe place for your space soldier to hang out is a bunker in the middle of the maze. As you progress through the game, smarter killer robots start to spawn.

Controls are up (Q), down (A), left (O), right (P) and fire (M or Space). There is also the option to use a Kempston or Sinclair joystick. Lives remaining and score are shown in the top right of the screen. You begin each game with six lives. Each level of the game introduces new, more difficult to despatch killer robots. Levels increase based on your score.

The first level has a grey robot, a spider and a couple of bats. Spiders and bats don't kill you, they just paralyse you temporarily, but this can become a problem if a killer robot is in the vicinity because they too have guns but with unlimited ammo. Level two is reached at 1000 points and introduces the smarter blue robot. On reaching the next level, at 5000 points, there's an even deadlier red robot, whose bullets can block yours, and any bats shot on this level respawn as grey robots.

Level four arrives on 10,000 points. This number of points also grants you an extra life. The bats are replaced by grey robots from the beginning and a fearsome genius magenta robot comes into play. The fifth and final level

appears at 50,000 points when the ultimate in robot tech is introduced, an invisible robot which can only be detected by it's gun fire. Definitely not the droid you're looking for. The single maze in the game has quite a few strategic locations where you can ambush your enemies. It's also worth noting that a single bullet can pass through multiple enemies standing in a line.

The graphics are Intellivision in style and look great. I especially like the animation of the players character. The audio pleasingly retains the pulse sound of the original along with various spot effects when you collect the gun, fire it, blow up enemies, etc. There's no in game music but there wasn't in the original and I think it would detract from the whole feel of the game in any case. The free game download comes with a wonderful deluxe PDF manual which gives the low down on the game and also covers the details regarding the original games place in Intellivision history.

WHAT I LIKE

Just like the original the gameplay is simple but enthralling. It's addictive, I really wanted to see the invisible robot....eerr.... if you see what I mean (No I couldn't see it, let me get my magnifying glass for a close up - Ed). I love this style of graphics and the audio does it's job, not intrusive at all. I think music may

have crushed the atmosphere of the game so I'm glad there isn't any.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

I would have liked a few more different mazes instead of just the sole original.

VERDICT

This is a perfect rendition of an Intellivision classic for the Spectrum. This is the second Intellivision ZX game by the developer and I really hope she decides to do more. Tron: Deadly Discs next please.

SCORE	
"Simple but enthralling"	
GFX	82%
SFX	74%
FUN	86%
STAYING POWER	88%
OVERALL	**83%**

■ **CODER:** Elton Bird, **GFX:** Andrew McDonnell / Elton Bird, **SFX:** Elton Bird
■ **INFO:** Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=34635
■ **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

MISTER KUNG-FU

The first ZX Spectrum game release from Uprising Games is also an entry into the ZX-Dev M.I.A / Remakes Competition. Mister Kung Fu, is a reconversion of the 1984 classic arcade beat 'em up, Kung Fu Master, by Irem / Data East.

Crash magazine issue 31, August 1986, said of the original release conversion to the 'Speccy', by U.S. Gold in 1986, "the use of colour is also quite bad" and "Overall, a very poor conversion from the arcade game". The rating given was only just passable scoring 56% overall. In my opinion they may have been a little lenient with that score, now though, some 32 years later, developer, Elton Bird, has remade it, but will it be any better?

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In this side scrolling beat 'em up, you are Thomas, a Kung-Fu Master. One day you receive this awful note from the mysterious crime boss, Mr. X. It reads "Your love Silvia is in custody now. If you want to save your dear Silvia's life, come to the devils temple at once. 5 sons of the devil will entertain you." No time to waste, you get cracking to smash heads and break bones. At the core of the game is close one on one (or many) kung fu combat. Kung Fu master is unique in this aspect to other games of its kind, as the fighting is limited to a confined space, while other kung fu games are more expansive in moves you can perform, movement around the playing area and what your enemy can do to you.

Level one sees you moving right to left to reach the end of stage boss before you can move onto the next level. To do this though, an unstoppable conveyor belt of enemy come at you from left and right (in front and behind you) trying to stop you and they do a pretty good job of it too. The level is pretty full on with enemy and dare I say it, that's not even including the bandana wearing dudes that throw knives at you. Switching to face your enemy, killing them off quickly is the only way to get the end of level boss and you'll want to be quick as you also need to beat a time limit. Get caught by the production line of henchmen, they will drain your energy bar as you try to break free of them and that's not good because, you'll want to have a full energy bar to face those knife throwing dudes and the end of level bosses. To defeat any of your

attackers, you can perform leg sweeps, high kicks, punches to the body and head as well as crouch and jump (for avoidance measures) and my favourite move is the flying kick.

Progressing further into the game you will start a new level in the opposite to the previous so now on level two you move left to right and make your way to the end of level boss. New enemies appear and will provide a greater challenge. Tom Toms, are short fighters who can either grab you or perform somersaults to strike your character's head when he is crouching. On even numbered floors, you must also deal with falling balls and pots, snakes, poisonous moths, fire-breathing dragons, and exploding confetti balls. This is even harder than level one. Each of the bosses on the 5 floors have a different skill set and can be beaten much easier than the enemy you defeated to get to them. The boss of the fifth floor is Mr. X, the leader of the gang that kidnapped Sylvia. That is your ultimate goal, once he is defeated, you can rescue Sylvia and live happily ever after.

WHAT I LIKE

Mister Kung Fu, includes a nice bit of music in the 128k version. The thumping noise effects in game as you cut your opponents down to size is in the style of the original arcade version . The presentation looks fabulous, a vast improvement on the original and no colour clash. The speed is the other attribute to this game that is far more superior to that of the original U.S. Gold conversion. It really is faster than a Bruce Lee nunchuck attack. It certainly has that Kung Fu Master arcade feeling oozing out of its crouching leg sweep kicks. It looks and plays very much like the arcade version. Developer Elton Bird has done a terrific job of converting the arcade

original version over to the ZX Spectrum. I found it very enjoyable to play.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Jumping manoeuvres were my biggest gripe. While the rest of the game felt fluid and fast, jumping seemed to be a little sluggish and frustrating in comparison. While jumping is annoying to a degree, the rest of the game, is a real challenge too. Don't think you are getting to the next level to save Sylvia any time soon, it has a high difficulty level This is probably where the game fails against its arcade original. The arcade game has a better responsiveness to jumping aspects of the game, which in a game like this is crucial to your enjoyment. Also regarding the game difficulty, if you are playing with a gamepad, like me, you will get a sore thumb quite quickly. Three lives just isn't enough for this game and that's probably what is making me score the game lower.

VERDICT

If you are like me, you are going to love this game, it has been brilliantly coded and put together, it really is an enjoyable arcade conversion / re-make, however, the high difficulty and not so fluid jumping maneuvers may mar your gaming experience, reflecting poorly on the games staying power, but i guess that keeps you wanting to play more? If you are a fan of the original arcade version of Kung Fu Master, like me, you will love Mister Kung Fu too, and keep on getting those sore thumbs until you complete it - which may be 6 months down the track! - Ed. I have read online that developer Elton Bird has taken on board feedback from players, regarding their concerns about the game's difficulty, and has released further updates of the game addressing this issue. This version definitely deserves a 'FAB' rating and could easily have been much higher.

PLAYER
ENEMY   TIME 1679
                         FLOOR 1

0002600
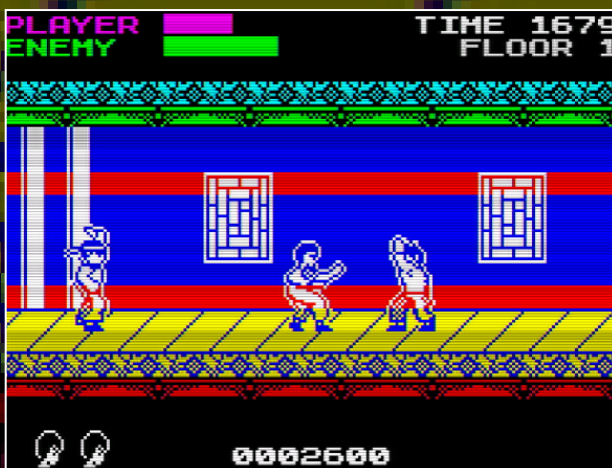
Your enemy attack you from both directions

SCORE

"A vast improvement on the original"

GFX	88%
SFX	82%
FUN	85%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**85%**

- **CODING:** Miguel Ángel Tejedor (aka Miguelelo)
- **INFO:** Download from https://miguelelo.itch.io/parachute
- **REVIEWED BY:** John Davies

PARACHUTE

Parachute is a conversion of the game of the same name released by Homevision for the Atari 2600 video game console back in 1983. It was Miguelelo's entry into the ZX-DEV'17 Conversions competition.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

You are a paratrooper and your mission is to descend from the sky, evading numerous patrols of enemy helicopters, aeroplanes, birds, balloons and other obstacles, to reach your base on the ground. Sometimes you must pass through several screens in the air in order to reach the ground level base screen. If you bump into an obstacle your parachute splits and you plummet to your death. Fortunately you are somehow related to felines and therefore get nine lives to play with. The title screen gives the usual options of keyboard (QAOP), Kempston joystick or Sinclair joystick, but there is no redefine keys option.

Once the game starts a small aeroplane flies along the top of the screen and your paratrooper leaps out of it. He floats down the screen and will do so at a greater speed should you press the descend button. This action uses up some of your precious limited fuel supply so you must use it sparingly, at the right moments. Fortunately You can collect extra fuel canisters on the way down. This fuel mechanic is not in the original game.

The developer has added platforms, which you can land and rest on, as well as mazes to the screens in this conversion which really add to the game's depth. It feels like a completely different game to the original at

this point and is a lot more complex with more varied screens, which gives them more of an identity. There's great variety with enemies consisting of floating bubbles, guided missiles, balloons, patrolling soldiers and even spikes to contend with.

There are thirty-five screens in all. The initial screen has a base at the bottom of it but later it's two, three or four screens in the air before you reach a screen with the base on. Sometimes a soldier at the base level needs to be avoided. Landing on him highlights another, slightly annoying, difference between this and the original in that when you die, rather than just flashing and carrying on down you are taken back to the top of the first screen and have to perform the jump all over again.

The original game reminded me a little of crossing the road in Frogger, only backwards. More often than not the hazards you needed to avoid were almost changed together, rather like Frogger traffic, with one convenient gap in the chain that you could take advantage of and squeeze through. This conversion is similar but on later levels it reminds me more of Lunar Lander with it's maze like caverns that you need to negotiate. It's quite a difficult game, not because it speeds up and adds more enemies like the original, but because more complex screens are thrown at the player. I'm not sure this conversion does even speed up. The fuel mechanic balances out the difficulty level very well.

The graphics are quite pretty and colourful and everything is recognisable as to what it is supposed to be. The original was famous for being one of the few Atari 2600 games to contain in game music and this conversion doesn't disappoint. There are four excellent AY tunes for the in game music which alternate for each level. The title screen music has a fifth excellent tune.

There is a slight flaw in the scoring system as you score points just for flying. There is no time limit and fuel is not

used when pressing the ascend key so you could just clock up your score indefinitely.

WHAT I LIKE

However, the challenge of the game is to see the next screen until eventually you get to the 35th, and this need is so strong that I figure there won't be anyone playing this game solely to achieve a high score.

The additional maze like screens which did not feature in the original, in game music which is nothing short of fantastic and a fuel mechanic which works well in balancing out the games difficulty level.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Starting over again from the top screen when you die and scoring points just for being in mid air.

VERDICT

A highly enjoyable conversion which is a massive improvement over the atari version, whilst retaining the simple playability of it's inspiration, and giving us some awesome AY chiptune music to listen to as we hurtle towards the planet's surface.

Who knew parachutes ran on petrol!
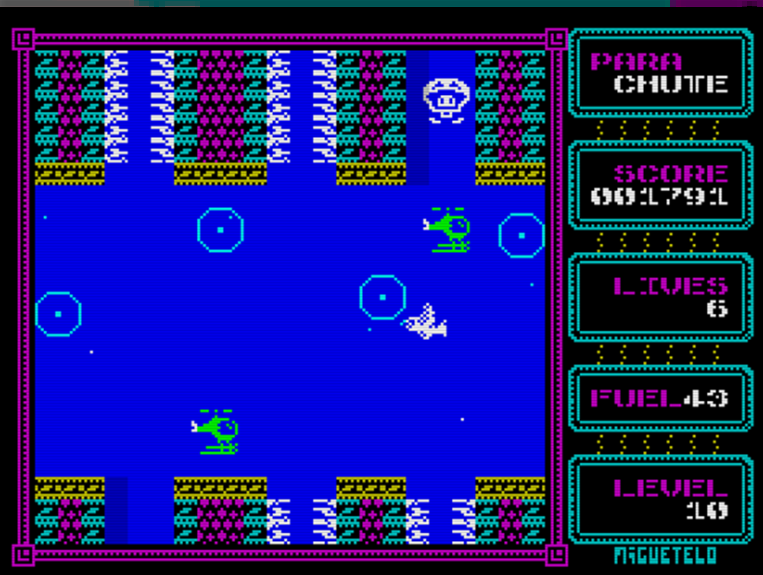
Later levels become a bit more complex

SCORE	
"A highly enjoyable conversion"	
GFX	75%
SFX	92%
FUN	85%
STAYING POWER	85%
OVERALL	**85%**

- **CODER:** Andy McDermott (Payndz)
- **INFO:** Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=32296
- **REVIEWED BY:** John Davies

DUNGEON RAIDERS
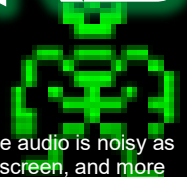
Dungeons Raiders is a treasure collect 'em up maze game with a unique concept, written in AGD by the creator of CyberMania, Sorceress and Sorceress 2: The Mystic Forest. In fact this is the third game in the saga of the witches and the Dark Lord after the Sorceress games.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

For years the necromancer Skulvort has commanded his minions to loot the land surrounding his dungeon fortress. Four adventurers plan to infiltrate the fortress, claim the loot back and destroy Skulvort once and for all. Three of the adventurers, one of which looks very familiar, set off for the dungeons whilst a fourth, a powerful wizard named Zpectru, uses his magic from afar to guide the adventurers in their quest for treasure and protect them from the underground minions within the fortress. You play the part of Zpectru the wizard and control the Eye of Force, which is a fancy, fantasy name for a crosshair. If you move it to a point in the maze and press fire your fellow trio of adventurers will head towards that spot. Any minions that you pass the crosshair over will either be destroyed or temporarily frozen. Even the destroyed minions waste little time in regenerating so chaos ensues on every level of the game.

From the title screen you just press enter to

start. Controls for the Eye of Force are up (Q), down (A), left (O), right (O) and fire (Space). There are twenty levels to pillage and 60 items of treasure over all the levels in total. Grabbing all three treasures on a single level will lead you to the next. Once all 60 are collected the Necromancer will be defeated. Your fellow adventurer good guys are always yellow in colour. But even so, keeping track of the number of different characters on screen may be a little overwhelming for some. This may even be the Lunar Jetman of homebrew games. For me it was a wonderful challenge to keep my eyes on the good guys, bad guys, the traps and the treasure. There's a lot going on but if there wasn't the game would be far too easy.

Your colleagues are sometimes a bit dumb in not using the quickest or even the correct path to a treasure you may have highlighted. For me this added to the games charm and character. I was constantly shouting and cursing at the idiots as they bungled around each level. Failure was always their stupid fault. However, I was genuinely gutted every time one of them kicked the bucket leading to the appearance of a little tombstone and me getting more than a little game rage. What calmed me down a bit and makes no sense at all is that any adventurer missing from the trio is resurrected at the beginning of each level. Happy days!! The graphics are similar to the developers previous efforts. I particularly like the characters for both of the adventurers and

the minions in this one. The audio is noisy as hell, especially on the title screen, and more than a little grating, but it does add to the whole hectic atmosphere of the game.

WHAT I LIKE

The Eye of Force mechanic is a brave departure from the common place mechanics of the developers previous efforts and I'm very happy to report that it works extremely well. The gameplay is intense and has a proper 1980's arcade game feel to it, which I love.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

That "music" is actually enough to drive anyone insane in the membrane, insane in the brain.

VERDICT

This is one of my favourite ZX Spectrum homebrew games to appear this year. It really harks back to the old days of the pure arcade adrenaline rush I used to experience back in the early 80's, only this time at home on my living room sofa.

The grim reaper can only be stunned and has just reaped one of my mates

The initial level is a doddle as your friends find it quite easy to reach the treasures

SCORE

"The gameplay is intense and has a proper 1980's arcade game feel to it"

GFX	88%
SFX	70%
FUN	95%
STAYING POWER	93%
OVERALL	**87%**

MIGHTY FINAL FIGHT

Mighty Final Fight originally released by Capcom for Famicom / NES in 1993 as an 'alternative' version of their 1989 arcade classic Final Fight. Instead of the gritty realistic look of the original, Mighty Final Fight goes for a hyper stylized, 'chibi' aesthetic that is built around the consoles strengths. In fact with its big heads and animations that are full of character and expression the title looks more like an 8-Bit version of Double Dragon / River City Ransom. The original NES game was quite an impressive looking title for the system, so it's interesting to see Sanchez Crew attempt to port the game to the Spectrum. How did it turn out? Let's take a look.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Mighty Final Fight, and by extension the original Final Fight, concerns itself with the takeover of Metro City by a brutal gang known as Mad Gear. They own the government, the police and are now attempting to blackmail the city mayor, Mike Haggar, into falling in line with their demands, courtesy of kidnapping his daughter, Jessica. Unfortunately for them, Mike is an ex-street fighter and wrestler, who has no issue of taking the fight to the streets one broken face at a time. Oh, and he has brought his mates too!

Mighty Final Fight is a scrolling fighter – a genre made popular in the late 80's by titles such as Renegade and Double Dragon.

Choosing from one of three characters, players move from left to right beating up the various thugs that get in the way of using their fists, feet and the occasional weapon. Enemies can also be thrown into other enemies, which is a fairly effective way of damaging multiple foes at once and giving yourself some room. A couple of changes have been made to the gameplay here to accommodate the Spectrum's single fire button, but the game still manages to feature pretty much all of the characters moves and abilities. Instead of pressing the attack button repeatedly to punch enemies, here you hold the attack button down to start your combo, and jumping moves can be accomplished by pressing directions during this animation. It works surprisingly well, and double tapping attack activates your devastating special move in moments of crisis.

WHAT I LIKE

The first thing that hits you upon loading this up is how utterly incredible the graphics are for a Spectrum title. All of the stages, characters, animations and enemies have made it into the port intact. The game even goes one step beyond the original NES title by allowing more than 3 characters on screen at once! The game continues to impress by being fast and fluid to play, moving at a speed that closely matches the original game. Taking on the various enemies is satisfying and fun, and the game features an interesting cast of

unique enemies and bosses that are all parodies of characters from the original Final Fight. The port also features the entire NES soundtrack, and sounds hugely impressive for the system.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Unlike the original game, your character has a single life-bar and no lives. Death means game over, but you can continue immediately on the stage you died on an indefinite number of times. This may be a system limitation design choice, but considering how cheap some of the bosses can be this could quickly lead to frustration – especially later on in the game. The grappling mechanic is also a bit hit and miss, with the player character often walking straight through an enemy only to get promptly pummelled from behind.

VERDICT

Mighty Final Fight is an astonishing achievement that somehow manages to cram pretty much all the content from the 8-Bit console game onto the Spectrum relatively intact. Despite a few minor missteps it looks great, sounds great, and for the most part plays just as well as the game on which it is based. Some of the enemies can be rather cheap in their attacks, and the game is quite difficult, but any fans of this genre owe it to themselves to check it out!

Guy with a technique guaranteed to bring anyone down

Cody - taking names and… err disobeying signs

SCORE

"Goes one step beyond the original NES title"

GFX	95%
SFX	90%
FUN	90%
STAYING POWER	85%
OVERALL	**90%**

- **CODER:** Paul Weller, **SFX:** Sergey Letyagin
- **INFO:** https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=34280
- **REVIEWED BY:** Jim Brown

AEON

Paul Weller (no not that one) is essentially the one man band behind Sunteam, the "studio" responsible for Aeon. With games for other platforms including Windows and the PC Engine under his belt, he only has one other ZX Spectrum game to date, underwater treasure hunting explore 'em up, called 'That Sinking Feeling'. For Aeon however, Paul decides to take things to the polar opposite and head into space for a story spanning across four generations of the Goldenstark family with varying gameplay mechanics.

Jesper living life on the edge courtesy of a forgiving physics engine

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Firstly, let's start by saying this game is presented to you across nine, yes NINE tapes. Yikes. Specifically four game tapes alternate between the five story tapes. They can be played in any order but it makes sense to play them as intended. The story begins with space explorer Jesper Goldenstark finding a new planet that doesn't show on his chart but is giving off energy readings. Naturally our man goes to investigate this energy which turns out to be a special type of crystal. A settlement is established on the planet by a big corporation who plan to monetise the findings. The story continues with Jesper's son Jorda, his daughter Jestra, and finally her son Spencer. We're treated to four generations of one family's life living in the colony and each story tape sets up the premise for your objectives in the game.

I won't dwell too much on the story tapes but the artwork looks great and gives you a sense of what this colony could actually be like. After Jesper lands on the soon to be named Aeon, he's tasked with investigating the energy readings. To get there he needs to traverse the alien landscape in what actually feels like a very heavy spacesuit. You're made less than welcome by the jumping jellyfish and floating headless BB-8 clones. This level is all about avoiding the creatures and jumping across deadly acid pits. Some of the gaps look far too wide but you are able to stand on the very last pixel before making your move.

Tape 4 introduces us to Jorda, whose job is to locate potential mining spots to harvest the crystal energy. Piloting his Roomba impersonator, the Traccle, is the only way to navigate the maze of pipes and avoid the relentless dust storms. This level is a top down maze and the landscape is nicely drawn with all the pipes and cliffs from the story art. Everything moves really fluidly and with a decent speed which gives you better chance to avoid the fast moving storms.

Jesper's granddaughter Jestra is up next and she needs to plug satellite dishes into the side of several buildings whilst piloting her hover-pod which must be running on a 16k modem as it's soooo slow. This makes life pretty difficult as robots working in the building are throwing trash out of the windows. Although you have the sense of traversing the side of a building, this works much the same as the previous level but less mazy.

Lastly Jesper's great grandson Spencer has his work cut out for him as he navigates derelict buildings full of malfunctioning robots. Typical platforming fare here, having to make precarious jumps and make use of gravity chutes to climb higher, all the while avoiding those out of control robots. Spencer's not wearing a spacesuit so feels lighter than his great grandad and thus somewhat more nimble.

There is a little colour clash here and there but nothing that couldn't be passed off as intentional. For instance, the gravity chutes in level 4 make Spencer go yellow but that could just as easily be an energy field or the intense g-force made him wet himself. Every creature you collide with in the whole game will cause an instant death so it's essential to avoid them all. There are 1-ups available but they only appear in the platform stages. The controls don't extend past up, down, left and right movement so the options of QAOP or Kempston joystick are intuitive enough for everything you undertake.

All of the levels have their own unique theme and as such the music has been composed to fit each of them. I feel Sergey has done a great job of it too. The Traccle level starts with the sounds of a massive storm brewing and in the last level it really does feel like the robots have taken over and you need to get a move on. Overall the game has a very fitting soundtrack.

WHAT I LIKE

These days I like to be sucked into an engrossing story so for this game to have an actual story behind it is a nice touch. Although it's quite vague I got totally lost in the story to the point where my imagination was filling in the bits we aren't told about. One of Paul's specialties is creating pixel artwork and what he has created for the story tapes looks great.

The limited colour palette doesn't detract from how nice those scenes are. A lot of games would find one mechanic and stick to it, which is of course down to very small amounts of space for the code, but spanning four tapes gives you more leeway with your content. As such we get to play two different styles of game with slight variations to each which helps to keep things interesting.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Unless your name is Hiro Nakamura it's recommended to have the tape speed set as low as possible to enable you to read the story tapes. A button press to advance the scenes at your leisure would be preferable. The 16k Hover Pod level was ok but felt less exciting so is the weakest level in my opinion.

VERDICT

Aeon is a relatively simple game to get to grips with and it's not going to have you throwing your keyboard out of the window any time soon. At best, it has a moderate difficulty so would make a great game for younger gamers to play without the frustration of it being unfairly difficult. The visuals are easy on the eye and everything on screen can be seen with ease with very minimal colour clash. If the story was fleshed out and the number of levels increased this would have the potential to be a really epic game. Naturally the Speccy would probably not be the best place for it but something with more grunt than a women's tennis final would allow for something truly spectacular. As nice as that would be this is still worth a play just to see the potential of the story if nothing else.

SCORE

"I got totally lost in the story"

GFX	**92%**
SFX	**94%**
FUN	**79%**
STAYING POWER	**90%**
OVERALL	**88%**

ROBOTS RUMBLE

Miguetelo has no less than four games under his belt with 2017's Space Junk being one of the more recent. Space Junk saw you flying your spaceship around maze-like environments destroying the space junk (of course) all the while avoiding the local aliens. Robots Rumble keeps with the space theme but that is the only similarity it has as it's a very different game indeed.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The robots that have taken over day to day life as we know it, have malfunctioned and need disposing of. It is your job to visit the four problematic planets with your industrial strength magnets to guide these broken robots into their final resting place; a vat of lava. Nothing is going to be that straightforward in a video game though is it? As you guide the robot downwards you will encounter some spiky green kryptonite, bouncing laser beams and other fully functional robots. All of these must be avoided lest you lose your robot prematurely.

Each of the four planets has six screens to navigate with the ultimate objective to exit at the bottom. The controls for this game are fairly unique I should imagine with Q and A moving the left magnet up and down while the right magnet is moved with P and L. I didn't even get confused; I just forgot to move the magnets out of the way occasionally. By use of the magnet the robot will only move left and right (whichever way it's being pulled of course) but there are lifter beams to aid you in going up and gravity to aid you in going down when you fall from an edge. Over later screens you'll even come across bricks which you have to push into a gap to enable you to cross it. There are also a handful of bombs

which will destroy other robots and even the laser beams. You'll come across a couple of teleporters on your travels adding some coolness to the gameplay. And what platform game would be complete without having a part of the floor that falls away when you stand on it? Well this one wouldn't be which is why they're in there as well.

You're still not getting through this that easily though. Even though the robots are knackered and you're using magnets to move them, they still seem to need battery power to help them to move. Maybe it's the magnets that need the batteries (which would make more sense) but it's the robot that perishes when the energy depletes. Either way it's best to keep an eye on that energy gauge to the right of the screen because if it runs out you can't get your bot to the lava. But don't be disheartened, there are batteries scattered occasionally through the levels to give you that extra charge needed to get to the end. I would've taken Duracells myself (other battery brands are available). Each screen will need you to plan ahead as there are a few points of no return which can be a tad irritating when you're down to your last life. Also be sure to watch where those magnets go as you may have left it in place from a previous move which will sometimes lead to the robot being pulled onto kryptonite on the next move.

By playing in 128k you get the music as well as the sounds. There's three pieces in total; one for the title screen and two that alternate between the levels. The level 1 and 3 music is my favourite. A nice upbeat little tune there. As with many (all) Spectrum games that dreaded colour clash is present in spades. It doesn't affect the gameplay one bit; it affects all 8 of them (haha). Seriously though it only has an effect on the appearance. The platforms appear to be held up by scraggy wires and when the bot passes by them it takes on the colour from that. Having said that, after using a bomb to take out an enemy and falling to the space left behind, the robot's body disappeared, presumably behind the black left behind by the vanquished enemy.

Migueleto says that this game was a trial of control method but rather than have it sit gathering dust on his hard drive he released it to the public. I'm glad he did because I don't recall ever seeing a game like this before so it's a nice treat to play something a bit different.

Yes Scotty, these beams will make you go up

WHAT I LIKE

The concept of the game is a good one and it wasn't too long to get boring. I think if it was turned into a longer game using this control mechanic that more elements like conveyor belts for example would need to be added as you progress through the game to keep it interesting. Or even more complex rooms to navigate with switches and levers. All the music is good but I take preference to the first and third planet's tune. There's a nice level of detail in the graphics and it felt obvious what I should and shouldn't touch.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Being really nit-picky here I think some of the screens were slightly out of order in terms of difficulty rather than being progressive.

VERDICT

A fun little brain teaser with a novel concept for controlling the character. Easy to pick up and play but it still takes a bit of thought to get through to the end. I hope that Migueleto expands on this idea one day with an entirely new game or even a sequel to this one.

Running away won't do you any good when that enemy bot backs you into a corner

SCORE

"Concept of the game is a good one"

GFX	86%
SFX	89%
FUN	91%
STAYING POWER	93%
OVERALL	**90%**

- **CODER:** Davey Sludge, **SFX:** Yerzmyey
- **INFO:** Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=34465
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

EGGSTERMINATOR

The Death Squad are back with Eggsterminator which is their 12th game for the ZX Spectrum. As you'd expect with a Death Squad game the graphical style is instantly recognisable being bright, vibrant and colourful with many of the characters from earlier games making an appearance.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Our old hero from Death Squad games such as Sewer Rage and Crappy Crates returns, only this time he is the Eggsterminator, tasked with punching poisonous snake eggs. The action is fast paced and fantastic fun throughout with shades of pacman in both controls and the last second avoidance of enemies. The familiar 4 axis up, down, left, right and fire controls are in full effect and the action feels immediately familiar.

Where the game really stands out though is in the graphical style. Everything on screen looks fantastic and the bright colours and enemy sprites are outstanding. The soundtrack by Yermyey is another factor that really makes this stand out from the rest. The jolly tune that accompanies the action ensures you play with a smile on your face from start to finish. The game has a fantastic learning curve with the first few screens being extremely forgiving but that doesn't last long and problem solving tactics soon become necessary if you are to progress. The game

plays in a classic arcade, coin guzzling style which promotes that 'one more go' mentality.

Not every character can kill you and you can punch some away but you need to keep an eye on that energy bar as it diminishes with every contact. The bigger sprites can eat you in one bite too but again, like Pacman you are faster than most enemies so you soon become skilled in avoiding them. The game is a rewarding play which would be great fun as a multiplayer but that isn't an option here. There's still enough to merit a playthrough as a single player though and this is a super addition to the Death Squad Library.

WHAT I LIKE

The arcade gameplay ensures a pick up and play nature which is fun for hardcore gamers

The game has a fantastic sense of humour

and novices alike. The music is outstanding and adds to the experience. The graphics are excellent and there is very little colour clash throughout. The gameplay has a great learning curve which requires a brain as it progresses.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The game is a little too short and can be finished in a couple of hours. Upon completion there is no real reason to play through again.

VERDICT

As an arcade style experience on the Spectrum, this game presses all the right buttons (pun intended). It just doesn't have the longevity that other titles of this style offer. Overall it's well worth a play and you'll enjoy your time with it. A second player option would make it fantastic so perhaps in the future we could see a real classic coming from this talented duo. Let's hope like all Terminator movies: They'll be back!

The colours and sprites are fantastic and have a real arcade feel

SCORE	
"Fun for hardcore gamers and novices alike"	
GFX	96%
SFX	95%
FUN	91%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**89%**

- **CODING:** Dave Hughes
- **INFO:** Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=30411
- **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

LEFT BEHIND

If you have read the O.P.Z review already or if you have played any of the 40 odd games that Dave Hughes has coded you'll be familiar with the quality of his products. This is no exception with Left behind being another worthy addition to his catalogue.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Based on the book "The Martian" by Andy Weir, Left behind takes place on Mars. Each single screen sets a task to complete in order to survive and eventually to escape the planet. There are only 8 levels to complete so the game is very short but, like O.P.Z (Another game by Dave Hughes) the quality of the platforming is so addictive that you will find yourself returning time and time again for another go. When I put the game on for the first time I was immediately reminded of Manic Miner due to the accuracy of the platforming required. You are tasked with the same style of gameplay as Manic Miner too. Collect the keys to open the door and work your way out. This comparison only grew stronger when I completed a level and my left over time bar was converted into points complete with accompanying sound lifted straight from that classic game. However, the game still has a sense if individuality and uniqueness as each level is as much a brain teaser as a platformer, forcing you to figure out the best way to accomplish the task in one piece (which you rarely do!). Each task becomes more devilishly difficult than the last culminating in the final level where you'll need the reflexes of a mythical Ninja to succeed.

From the very first minute I played the game I was hooked and finished it within a couple of hours. Although I've played it a few times since then it's not one I will return to over and over again. The game finishes with a promise of more levels to follow but as of yet they are unreleased so there's a slight feeling of this being more of a demo than a complete game which is a pity as it is so close to greatness. As with just about every game in this magazine this is a free homebrew game and for that it is fantastic and you will probably have a blast for an hour or two but don't expect anything more than that.

The later levels will require some thought and planning to get through

are top notch making this a joy to play. The ability to play the game with only 3 lives adds to the longevity of the game.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The sound starts to grate on you after a while. There's not so much of a tune but an incessant beeping. Some of the collision detection is slightly off which now and again leads to unfair deaths. The 8 levels even with only 3 lives is way too short but perhaps the updated version (alluded to in the completion screen) will come out someday and sort this out. Fingers crossed!

WHAT I LIKE

The platforming is fantastic fun and you'll find yourself hooked on the gameplay until you finish the game. The graphics and animation

VERDICT

Left Behind is a fantastic Manic Miner style game which has a lot to offer but falls short on only having 8 levels. It's great fun while it lasts though and well worth checking out!

Each screen sets a new task. It looks simple enough… wait till you play it!

SCORE	
"You'll find yourself hooked on the gameplay until you finish the game"	
GFX	85%
SFX	70%
FUN	95%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**83%**

■ **CODER:** Catweazle
■ **INFO:** Download from https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/index.php?cat=96&id=32213
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Steven Charlesworth

ZXOMBIES: DEAD FLESH

We haven't heard anything from Catweazle since his 2015 game Descending Dungeons and it's great to see him back developing games for the Spectrum again. I don't know where he's been but there is a good chance that he travelled back in time in the style of Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure and returned a couple of years later with an entirely different skill set which in reality should have taken many more years to acquire. Descending Dungeons was not bad but this blows its' head off with a double barrelled shotgun!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

ZXombies, Dead Flesh, is a survival horror type of game you don't usually find on the spectrum. The events in the story are inspired by the Walking Dead and the game is all the better for it. Outnumbered with little hope and facing a relentless enemy hellbent on eating your brains for breakfast. You are a lone soldier abandoned in a city which has a severe zombie problem. None of your team managed to avoid becoming zombie takeaway and it is now up to you to save the 12 remaining human survivors within the city from a fate worse than death (moving really slowly and groaning a lot!). The game opens to a simple loading screen and a synopsis of the events leading up to our hero (Major Denning) being trapped within a hive of the living dead.

The music is excellent and draws you further into the atmosphere of the game. From the gameplay and graphics this seems to be a 48k game with the remainder of the 128k being used for the music alone. This allows for music throughout the game to accompany the sound effects. The graphics are excellent with colourful explosions, a wonderful game-over animation and zombies that actually emerge from the Earth in a creepy and entertaining fashion. Major Denning is about 3 times faster than the zombies so can outrun them when needed and they are more often than not more of a slight nuisance than a formidable enemy. This lulls you into a false sense of security however as you quickly discover when you happen across the survivor's stronghold. Pressing the action button here will tell one of the survivors to follow you and you have to guide them to safety. Now this would be simple enough but the problem is that these survivors seem as if their brains have already been eaten. They will follow you but not walk directly behind or for that matter remain in the same place behind and will infuriatingly walk straight into any obstacles in their way. This leads to some hair tearing frustration but adds to the challenge of the game. Where are the hostages from Metal Slug when you need them? A simple "Thank you" and the gift of a rocket launcher would really have helped out in this situation!

There are various power-ups spread throughout the screens which range from health to ammo to new and ever more elaborate weapons. The rocket launcher is particularly fun as each shot creates a pixelated explosion wiping out any zombies in the surrounding area. The same effect can be created by shooting the various barrels that are left around the city and again leads to some strategic decision making. Levers can be pulled with the action button but each one takes a certain number of seconds which again leads to some strategic decision making as you can't be pulling a lever for 5 seconds while the guy you're meant to be rescuing is eaten alive. This adds a further dynamic to the game and turns that simple formula of kicking ass and chewing bubblegum into thinking about strategy, safe paths and conserving ammo. The gameplay is fast and frantic. Like all good survival horror games your ammo is limited and you have to use it sparingly. That's the idea but when faced with losing a survivor just before you get them to safety this approach can quickly descend into all out armageddon as you take your revenge in a blaze of glory. The game is not overly long and once you know the layout and are used to having the prisoners following you can be finished in a matter of minutes which means the replay value suffers somewhat.

WHAT I LIKE

The graphics are colourful and there's plenty going on, especially when shooting some types of zombies who would explode in a burst of colour adding further to the entertainment of the action. There is a good selection of weapons to kill those pesky zombies with. The game is indeed huge with varied environments.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Not knowing where to take the people you are rescuing and when operating levers having to hold action button whilst zombies are attacking you. The A.I of the survivors who follow you is beyond terrible.

VERDICT

Although it looked promising at first, I got bored rather quickly, wandering around the maps without a clue what to do quickly became wandering what other games I could play instead.
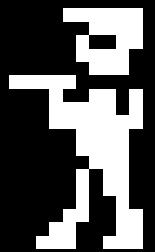
You got 12 survivors to save from the horde of zombies!

SCORE

"The game is indeed huge with varied environments"

GFX	**85%**
SFX	**75%**
FUN	**60%**
STAYING POWER	**30%**
OVERALL	**63%**

EXCLUSIVE
NIXY: THE GLADE SPRITE 2

It is with tremendous appreciation and gratitude that we thank ZX Spectrum game developer Andy Johns, for allowing us to share this exclusive feature of his upcoming game, NIXY: And the Seeds of Doom. The sequel to Nixy: The Glade Sprite game development project was first publicly announced back in 2018. With the general release of the game imminent, developer Andy Johns, has provided us with exclusive access to the new game. Having been able to play the game recently we can now provide 8 Bit Annual 2019 backers with an exclusive mini preview, a brief interview with developer, Andy Johns, and a full game review by Dougie Mcg.

PREVIEW

Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom, is the next chapter in the Nixy story. It stars Nixy the gorgeous forest pixie of course. On her new adventure, Nixy explores new environments and encounters new enemies while navigating her way through new hazards and levels.

The goal of this new platform adventure game is to find the source of the corruption that had caused the Gaia stone to become impaired, contaminating the beautiful flowers and adversely affecting the behaviour of the Mushroom people in the first Nixy game.

The version I received to play from Andy Johns is not as complete as he would have liked right now. However he has managed to get the music in the game, but the intro sequence and game over / game won screens are not currently in the game as yet. As a result the game in its present form is not completable, which Andy says "I got to save some surprises", but you can get pretty far into it as it is now.

The presentation of the sequel is as remarkably gorgeous as its original and predecessor, the colour scheme really makes this game unique among other 8-bit and ZX Spectrum games. Attention to detail with the sprites and overall graphics are of the same high standard as the first game, making you feel right at home and ready for Nixy's next challenge. The essential platform ingredients from the first game are also found in the sequel with improvements Alan Turvey has made to game development tool, AGDX.

Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom has a good mix of different screens and tasks to complete. Some are very easy, it may just be a jump over enemies or pressing a bell to unlock a ladder but as you progress within the sequel the more challenging and entertaining it becomes. There is a great deal of "discovery" within the game.

Much of this occurs from the new feature that stands out immediately - the disappearing platforms. This adds so much more complexity to your adventure. Timing jumps is ever more important this time around. Sometimes you can't just jump over every platform, you must discover and find a new way to exit the screen. I couldn't believe my eyes after being stuck on one level for ages that I noticed a platform didn't disappear and that was the way to get Nixy from one platform to another and make it to the bottom of the screen.

The in game music by Ricardo Vieira will "shake the leaves off the trees" in your forest adventure just as music did in the original game which was done by David Sapphier back then. For 128kb with a ULA plus version as well, you are getting a beautifully presented game with loads of adventure and exploring. Nixy: And the seeds of Doom in its current form is a high class platformer packed with loads of exploring and discovery, much more than I had been expecting to play. I would think a completed full version of the game will only enhance it even more.

There is an immense sense of pleasure knowing that a sequel has been made for one of your favorite computer games. Seeing what developers can do to improve on their original, successful idea, it captures the imagination in many wonderful ways. Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom plays like a great sequel should, it will be a game that you will easily fall in love with upon its full release.

Game design, coding and graphics by Andy Johns. AGDX by Allan Turvey. Music by Ricardo Vieira. Front end Intro / menu and other incidental screens by David Burton. Loading screen by Andy Green.

BRIEF INTERVIEW

8BA: Nixy: The Glade Sprite is one of the best released AGD based ZX Spectrum games of recent times, just how can you improve on perfection with its sequel, Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom?

AJ: Well thanks for saying that...I'm really happy with Nixy The Glade Sprite, especially since I was having "writer's block" after developing the Temple of Lost Souls game. The sequel Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom was a much easier task, it flowed out of my fingers and I am really proud of the game. I wouldn't

call it perfect!! I would like for it to have been double the size or more but that's not possible with 27k of memory! However, anyone who knows me or follows my games knows that I like to push the boundaries. I don't just want to make the same game with different graphics. I want each new game to offer the player something different from the last. Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom hopefully does that, thanks mostly to Allan Turvey's great work on AGDx over the last year. Its given us AGD coders a lot of new toys to add to our games. This is more of an arcade adventure than the previous game but it's still a platformer at heart. I hope that people will find it challenging, I really hope they like the way it looks too.

8BA: What timeline did you have for a full release of Nixy 2?

AJ: Well the game was finished about 9 months ago, but I always wanted to give it the same sort of polish that Nixy: The Glade Sprite had, unfortunately that's taken longer to happen than I would have liked due to unforeseen reasons, but I think we are on the final push now.

8BA: Best laid plans in game development don't always go to plan where are you at with NIXY: And the Seeds of Doom ? Just

how much more is there to go with having the game completed and ready for a release?

AJ: Well all that extra time has meant I've had time to tinker and change things...there has been one bug which has bothered me for a while, it's not really a problem, more of a graphical problem which I want to fix so that's what I'm working on now.

8BA: Your working full time and have a family too, just how much time can you give to homebrew game development projects like Nixy: The Glade Sprite and Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom ?

AJ: The amount of time I spend on making games has definitely reduced over the last few years, but I don't think that's a bad thing. I don't want to crank out loads of games for the fun of it. I want everything I make to be the best I possibly can. I normally get between 10 to 15 hours a week (normally on the train).

8BA: Were the game dev challenges you faced in Nixy: The Glade Sprite the same challenges in Nixy: and the Seeds of Doom or were they different? if so in what way?

AJ: The main challenge with all my games is finding the look first and foremost. This means making loads of blocks and just making screens or sections of screens until I find a theme that works and looks good. Obviously I have an idea of what the game is, the type of environment the character is going to be in and a rough outline of the gameplay. Once the look is nailed then its normally easy after that. Nixy 2 has some new types of obstacles which have caused some headaches but ultimately they have been worth it.

8BA: Has game play in Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom changed or leaped in a different direction in comparison to Nixy: The Glade Sprite?

AJ: Yeah I think it's changed a bit from the original. There's a bit more of an adventure in this game. I didn't want it too different though, just enough to give the player something new to think about.

8BA: What are your future game dev plans after the release of Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom ? Will there be a Nixy 3 ?

AJ: I am currently working on 3 projects, and Yes Nixy 3 is one of them but its at a really early stage. The other 2 are secret for now.

The first in game screen of Nixy: And the Seeds Of Doom. Its as gorgeous as the original

Hmmm what happens if I touch that bell on the left of screen, I wonder? It opens a ladder down into the underground!

You wonder, is there anything more beautiful and gorgeous looking than Nixy: And the Seeds of Doom on a Speccy?

NIXY: THE GLADE SPRITE 2
THE SEEDS OF DOOM

With such fond memories from childhood of hearing a sequel was imminent, saving up pocket money, checking the shops every day just incase it had been released and then finally catching a glimpse of it out the corner of your eye. Thinking to yourself: It can't be! I must be seeing things… Oh my god it's real; I can get it and play it today! Sprinting home and firing it straight into the tape deck. Getting excited at the loading screen and then finally playing the game you'd longed for for so long. Often it was simply more of the same, perhaps a new mechanic or two but that was all you'd really wanted and more often than not, it was worth the wait. Not since those days have I had that kind of buzz and excitement until Andy Johns announced that Nixy 2 was not far away. We knew it was coming, like at the end of Back to the Future. Those of us that finished the first game we were treated to a teaser stating that Nixy 2: The Seeds of Doom was "coming soon" but what did that mean? When? I've followed the progress over the last year and seen screens now and again which only heightened the anticipation but could it possibly live up to the dizzy heights of the first game? With Andy Johns at the helm I had very little doubt.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Like the first game, Nixy 2 is coded through a branch of Jonathan Cauldwell's wonderful AGD engine called AGDx. This is Allan Turvey's project; he has been working wonders with AGDx which is getting better all the time and Andy Johns has taken full advantage of these features to produce a title of the highest quality! When we think of football we know that there's great players and then there's Pele. In writing there's Shakespeare, art has Monet, boxing had Ali and AGD has Andy Johns. He has taken the same engine countless others have used and found a way to make it sing in a more beautiful way.

Once again, the game centers around Nixy the Glade Sprite (a wingless fairy or pixie character). When you think of the graphical limitations of the Spectrum and add to that the sprite limitations of AGDx there is no way that Nixy should have anything like the level of personality and charm that she does. Charm is the perfect term for this as it oozes from every aspect of the game from the jaunty music to the fine detail. There is no lazy animation or level design in sight. Each screen is a work of art and the colours on the humble speccy have never looked so good (yes, I agree, just gorgeous -Ed).

In this year's outing there is more emphasis on the platforming elements than last time and this makes the game feel fresh. I love my platformers and anything utilising the AGD engine is guaranteed to be fun and playable. With several problem solving aspects and devilishly tricky platforming sections (complete with disappearing platforms) to traverse this isn't a game you'll be finishing in half an hour. The energy system is spot on so deadly falls won't kill you off and you have a chance to learn from your mistakes. There are

The loading screen sets the tone for the game. What's down that mysterious path? I must find out!

collectibles to replenish lost energy peppered throughout the game which are well placed and give you that little bit of respite just when you most need it. The learning curve is perfect and (as with most great games) you find yourself coasting through screens you previously struggled with after a few hours. When you finish the game you are left with that incredibly satisfied feeling and an urge to do it all over again. That in itself is the best compliment I could give.

WHAT I LIKE

The game hits that sweet spot of enough familiarity from the first game combined with feeling new and fresh. Nixy was an incredible achievement and this improves on the formula in every way. The music is outstanding. It's amongst the prettiest games ever to appear on the machine. The platforming is tight and fun. The game is accessible yet challenging.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

It's impossible to avoid and it's not a criticism I just never wanted the game to end. Alas,(on a 128k machine especially) all good things come to an end but I'll be playing through this time after time as I wait for Nixy 3.

VERDICT

Andy Johns had set himself an almost impossible task. How to improve on a game that was so loved by the Spectrum homebrew community without losing the essence of what made it great.

This has clearly been a labour of love, so much time and care has been given to every aspect of the game and that's why this shines so very brightly.

We have been spoiled this year with an abundance of outstanding new games for the ZX Spectrum. If we took all the best ones and made a crown. Nixy 2 would be that beautiful jewel right in the centre.

Timing is key! Figuring out how to get that key is a more challenging task

Each level is wonderfully designed and will require good platforming and problem solving skills

Disappearing platforms require the timing and reflexes of people who aren't old enough to remember the ZX Spectrum in its prime

SCORE

"The game hits that sweet spot"

GFX	99%
SFX	96%
FUN	98%
STAYING POWER	97%
OVERALL	99%

DRACONIC THRONE

Runner up to the MSX Dev 2017 competition and developed by GW's Workshop, Draconic Throne is an adoring arcade shooter. The mastermind behind this title is Nobuaki Washio the main programmer, game & character designer and composer.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Draconic Throne follows the story of the citizens of the kingdom that want to get rid of you. (The dragon.) Hence the title "Draconic Throne." The straightforward plot - to user-friendly controls makes this game a beauty to behold. Draconic Throne starts with a bit of a backstory alongside following a snappy flash to the title screen. The music already has me hooked. The build-up and overall catchy beat sets the mood for an arcade game. It's nothing too serious for opening music but matches the medieval graphics. If left alone it will repeat and loop. This once again tries to replicate the arcade feel. The top of the screen has age which basically means level and the score and KILL. What, kill? Yes,kill. The game has a meter for the amount of humans you slaughter. As you burn their corpses to a puddle of ash. A bit on the morbid and too graphic side. Anyway you play as a dragon moving left to right while firing your mighty bluster fireball onto the infantry. The way to progress on to the next 'age' (stage) is by exterminating the boss in each 'age'. The only way to lose is by being hit so far back to the left edge of the screen it cause the game to be over.

GAMEPLAY & STRATEGY

The game contains a range of 11 characters. Ranging from the prince to a slinger. As an arcade game it's ideal to get the highest score and reach the furthest stage of 'age'. I highly recommend taking out enemies with one dragon breath. If you get 5 or more enemies you will rack up more points in the long run. Funnily enough if you get a very high score you can score a rank S to A score. However the lowest can be a rank H with the title of 'Dullsvillie bug'. To get far in the game you need to use a range of tactics which are in the instruction manual. The wide range burning attack is done by holding down the fire button then waiting and letting go. Once down, the blast will kill a range of enemies moving left to right with this beam of fire to kill large scale enemies.

GFX, SFX & CONTROLS

Draconic throne does have a catchy sound landscape. The landscape can range from upbeat tunes to tense loops. Overall the Music and SFX balance is spot on. The sounds of death spikes well enough while the music accompanies this in the background. Clearly the work of Hiroshi Fujita and Nobuaki Washio with their techniques and fine tuning of each track can be seen so smoothly and loudly that they are bliss to the ear. This makes the game tense, enjoyable and overall sets the mood and tone due to the atmospheric minimalistic music. The graphics are just outstanding to the moving background of the terrifying castles. Everything fits the theme. There's small details with the enemies that are even noticeable on an 8 bit computer. All the enemies don't look flat or dull and add even more charm to everything.

I did find the controls smooth and a breeze to control. The dragon moves where you want and when you want. There's no delay and so far in my play I haven't had any bad frame rate problems, I thought I would discover this later on due to the swarm of enemies on screen. However overall in my experience the game copes fairly well. The collision detection is spot on. When firing at an archer or hoplite. I did find the kill was paced, fair and just. Learning the controls does take some time, mainly due to the layout. (The main problems I had was moving the head.)

VERDICT

It's a game that deserves time, patience and overall it is a retro arcade game that definitely will bring fond and awe-inspiring new memories. I won't spoil anything major but it is a difficult game to be able to conquer. I highly recommend practicing over and over again. Similar to that of an exam paper you may sit in the past or present. Once you mastered it, you can enjoy countless hours with this title. In my experience it was an eye opener. I see why it was a runner-up in the MSX Dev 2017. Once again a gratification experience can be awarded with this game. GW's Workshop did put a lot of time, care and love into this arcade bijou. Overall if you enjoy arcade shooters and don't want to play scfi anymore, This game takes the cake. I highly recommend at least trying the rom and donating some cash towards GW's Workshop.

Under Attack

SCORE

"Once you mastered it, you can enjoy countless hours with this title"

GFX	73%
SFX	62%
FUN	91%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**75%**

- **CODER:** Miyako Tako
- **INFO:** Free download from https://www.msxgamesworld.com/gamecard.php?id=5289
- **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

WU-M

After playing Wu-m, I get the feeling it is more like an interactive demo than a full proper game release.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Wu-m does not actually come with any instructions, though there is a readme file which appears garbled on my English language MacBook Pro. I assume the file is supposed to be in Japanese. Google Translate provides the following information:

How to play. Use the cursor keys to move the cover. It is clear if you change all the way to a block and go to the exit.

OK, so I only use the cursor keys and change the blocks. The game boots up and presents a small window off centre of the screen. The main character is a 'cartoony' hippopotamus looking graphic, so let's go with that. The screen shows a small maze with blue blocks with crosses on them. Do they kill you? No, they can't, as they are directly in your path. I move over them and they change into yellow tiles, while the yellow tiles behind me change into metal blocks, stopping you from moving through the level.

"Great! I've figured it out" I think to myself. I change the blue blocks to yellow, then I exit the level. A message on the screen appears, telling me to try it again. But I don't want to try it again. I completed it, right? Apparently not. Through experimentation I determined that every block must be changed to the metal blocks, meaning that the blue blocks must be moved over twice, while the yellow blocks need to be moved over once. There is no music or sound in the game, which is unfortunate because it really could have done with some tunes. Graphically the game is 'cartoony', if small. I wonder why it wasn't made to fit the whole screen. The only other control is the space bar, which will reset the level if you get stuck.
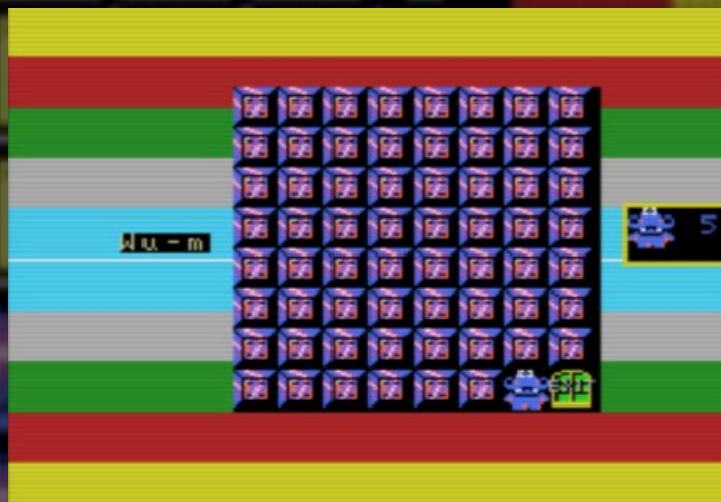
The level is complete. Now to go through the exit!

WHAT I LIKE

The graphics were nice and colourful and the game will definitely keep puzzle fans busy.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

While the graphics were colourful they were also very small. There was no audio at all, and if you're not a die hard puzzle fan then there really isn't much here for you.

VERDICT

I'll be honest, this is not the type of game I enjoy and I just could not get past level 2. With that said, I didn't really care enough to try too hard either. I'm sure it's a great game for people who enjoy real head scratchers, but I like a bit more action in my games.

The very basic title screen

Working your way through level 2

SCORE

"The graphics were nice and colourful and the game will definitely keep puzzle fans busy"

GFX	50%
SFX	0%
FUN	56%
STAYING POWER	68%
OVERALL	**59%**

■ **CODING:** Cobinee
■ **INFO:** Free download from http://blog.livedoor.jp/cobinee/archives/1954588.html
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

50 METRES

So just what is the difference between a rip off and an homage anyway?

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Mario is a huge deal in the world of video games. He has spawned many imitators, some of whom have become just as popular as the adventuring plumber himself. Another thing that fans of the Mushroom Kingdom's saviour like to do is take the character and put him into their own games. Nintendo have sent more than a few cease and desist letters over the years with people who use their IP. However, while the character model in 50 metres is very obviously Mario I don't think Cobinee needs to worry about Nintendo.

First of all they're not calling the protagonist "Mario", nor are they using the typical colours associated with the character. You can see from the screenshots that there is a distinct lack of colours actually. The animations of the main sprite do match Mario almost exactly, though this is where the similarities end. The backgrounds are black and apart from the flames everything else looks like it's a wireframe game from the late 70's. This could have been released on the Vectrex!

The goal of the game is to simply get from one side of the level to the other, avoiding obstacles and flames along the way. These obstacles will move back and forth in a pattern while the flames will sit in one spot. There are 256 courses to play through, so if you commit to the game you're in it for the long haul! As you move through the level the timer will count up while the distance will go down. When it hits zero you have reached your goal and you will be given an option to replay the level again or move on to the next one.

The character, let's just call him Mario. That makes life easier, can be controlled as you might expect with left and right, and the first button on the controller, or the space bar allowing him to jump. The Mario animation appears to be from Super Mario Bros 3, and everything looks very smooth despite the simplicity of the graphics. I did experience some problems playing on the keyboard, with the space bar not working twice in quick succession some of the time.

Sound effects are what you would expect for a

Only 23 metres left to go. We're over half way!

platform game, with a beep for options on the menu screens and a 'boing-type' sound for when you jump. The in game tune is fast paced, which adds a sense of urgency.

Try not to move too fast, however, as the ground in 50 Metres feels a little slippery. Also, unlike the Super Mario Bros series there doesn't appear to be an option to run, so even small gaps will need to be jumped over as opposed to just skimming over the top.

WHAT I LIKE

50 Metres is a fun, simple game. You go from left to right. Easy!

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Even with 256 courses, it's probably a little too easy. This is a pick-up-for-5-minutes-at-a-time type of game with little longevity.

One of the more tricky jumps, and this is only the first level!

SCORE	
"There are 256 courses to play through, so if you commit to the game you're in it for the long haul!"	
GFX	**61%**
SFX	**82%**
FUN	**73%**
STAYING POWER	**60%**
OVERALL	**65%**

- **DEVELOPER:** GW's Workshop
- **INFO:** Free download from http://www.msxdev.org/2018/04/23/msxdev18-2nd-entry-buddhagillie/
- **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

BUDDHAGILLIE

One look at this game and in my head I can hear one of those 50's B-grade sci-fi film presenters yelling "Samurai in Spaaaaace!" Maybe that's just me though?

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In Buddhagillie you take on the role of Prince Siddhartha, who has (according to the manual) vowed, to make all sentient beings his equal without any difference. So does this mean the prince is superior, or the other sentient beings are? Who is he trying to elevate to the higher plane of existence? I don't have the answer to these questions, but I do know that whatever that answer is, it involves hurtling through space slashing at enemies. Buddhagillie is an interesting take on the shoot em up genre in that you aren't actually shooting at the enemies. As the four sufferings (the enemies) fly towards you it is your sword that is going to be doing all the talking. You can earn karma which will give you the ability to shoot a single shot at the enemy in front of you. The problem is that the action is so hectic that you can occasionally not realise you have a shot available, then it's gone before you know it.

Each level provides you with a few enemies to take out before being confronted with the boss. You are unable to move close enough to hit them, so you need to rely on the shots you can earn and aim them carefully. Each enemy has their own abilities with which they will attempt to take you down. The controls are basic, with the Prince being able to move in four directions with either button on the controller performing your sword slash. You can hit fireballs back to the enemy or hold the fire button down to stay in defensive mode. The deflected fireballs will only pass through enemies without causing any damage. Prince Siddhartha will swing the sword in a pattern, with a brief pause taking place at the end. You need to be careful and time your strikes, as I found most of my deaths taking place during this brief pause as it gave the enemy a chance to strike.

WHAT I LIKE

The graphics are decent for an MSX1 title, though there is a significant amount of sprite flicker. The main sprite is well animated, swinging his sword in a variety of ways. When you hit one of the four sufferings they split apart, which actually feels rather satisfying. This split is accompanied by a slashing sound. The sound effects are more than sufficient, with dings sounding as you deflect fireballs with your blade. The music is a spiritual affair which sets the tone for the game and doesn't feel out of place.

The title screen shows the prince's goal

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

That brief pause got me killed so many times! Very frustrating! Perhaps this can be corrected in the future?

While shooting is not your main attack, you do have a long sword

VERDICT

That satisfying slash of the sword as you slice an enemy in two. There's nothing like it! Overall I quite enjoyed Buddhagille. Good, not great, but definitely worth your time.

The first realm boss makes his presence known!

SCORE

"The graphics are decent for an MSX1 title, though there is a significant amount of sprite flicker"

GFX	72%
SFX	80%
FUN	76%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**78%**

- **CODING:** Uninteresting
- **INFO:** Download from https://www.msxdev.org/2018/10/28/msxdev18-7th-entry-bumper-ship-racing/
- **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

BUMPER SHIP RACING

The title screen has plenty of racing options

Super Sprint was one of the first games I experienced on the Amstrad CPC. It was a great little overhead racer, and though the cars were nothing more than small rectangles that moved around the screen it had a reasonable amount of polish. I can remember the amazing soundtrack and the bright colours. On the surface it appears that Bumper Ship Racing has been heavily inspired by Super Sprint. When you dig a little deeper, however, you'll find that it really doesn't deserve that comparison.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

At the start, select the type of race you want to enter. You can participate in a cup, enter a single race or try for the best time. Once that is selected, you choose the class you wish to race in, followed by the cup. If you've ever

played Super Mario Kart then you should be very familiar with these options. The menu is basic and to the point, but if you make a selection you are unable to go back to the previous menu option. The manual made no mention of being able to do this and nothing I tried allowed me to return to the previous menu.

Once you get through the menu you are presented with options for the ship you wish to use. The Nimble has the best turning but the acceleration is a little slow. The Radaccel has the fastest acceleration with the worst turning. Finally, the Jack has an even measure of both. Personally, I found anything other than the Nimble difficult to manage. The ships being a solid colour, while the track has some features but is mostly bland. As the ships manoeuvre around the race track they will angle as they turn, and a little burst of flame will appear as they accelerate.

The game features no music and I could only hear a couple of sound effects during play. As the timer counts down to start you hear a beep, and as the ship hits the side of the track you hear a crashing noise. As you crash into the walls all the time this becomes very annoying very quickly. With any Super Sprint clone the physics are key! Unfortunately this is where Bumper Ship Racing really starts to border on the 'infuriating'. I don't recall Super Sprint having such a steep learning curve. I can be at the beginning of a straight and start to turn, and my ship will still keep going in the same direction and hit the wall. I tried, I really

One of the more basic tracks

did! I just could not get to grips with the movement of my ship. Ultimately what could have been a worthy clone of an 80s classic has ended up as a bit of a shambles. I think you can give this one a safe pass and maybe just revisit Super Sprint instead!

WHAT I LIKE

Plenty of options on the menu screen. The game adds quite a few features to the typical overhead racer...

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

… but the near unavoidable crashing accompanied by grating sound effect just kills any positives. Poor physics hurt the game play and, quite frankly, make it a poor experience.

Look at all the walls! So much crashing… Turn the volume down or your ears will end up hating you!

SCORE

"Ultimately what could have been a worthy clone of an 80s classic has ended up as a bit of a shambles"

GFX	**56%**
SFX	**23%**
FUN	**47%**
STAYING POWER	**22%**
OVERALL	**35%**

- **DEVELOPER:** Carambalan Studios
- **INFO:** Download from https://www.msxdev.org/2018/03/30/msxdev18-1st-entry-burn-us/
- **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

BURN US

The nonsensical plot reveals itself!

Before I start I have to mention the lack of instructions. The supplied text file contained nothing to help me get started, so I was flying blind. I went with my gut and managed to figure out what to do, but it did lead to problems which I will cover a bit later.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

"As a masochist of the sect Givemehard, your goal is to burn yourself to the bonze" (what the? Maybe it's meant to be bones - Ed). The goal is to find and take the gasoline and lighter, then head to the altar to burn yourself. But… if I burned myself in the last level why am I back to 100% and needing to burn myself again in the next level? It makes no sense. Anyway, let's see how it plays (sounds downright bizarre - Ed). I quickly found out the cursor keys would move my character around. The space bar will make your character jump or use an item if he has one. If he has an item then he won't jump, which makes it frustrating trying to get away from enemies.

The first level of the game is pretty basic. Grab the knife, whack the snake with it, grab the petrol and lighter and go. With the second level the frustration factor starts to set in. In this level you need to use bombs to bust through the floor. Bombing the floor requires you to be pixel perfect as you can waste your bombs by hitting the wrong spot. Upon grabbing the lighter I found myself stuck, as the area I was in only had two bombs. I couldn't get out and there was no way for me to restart the level. I pushed every key on the keyboard to no avail. I needed to reset the MSX and start again. There may be a way of restarting the level without having to reboot the computer, but without instructions I have no idea how.

On another level, I found myself at a ladder that needed repairing. Before you start the level it tells you what you need to fix it, but the text doesn't stay on the screen long enough so I missed it. I made my way to the ladder only to find I couldn't fix it, but heading back

Level 1 is a bit of a breeze.

meant facing a snake that I had no way of avoiding. There was no choice but to die and start again. The graphics are average, though the main sprite moves well. There is a single audio track that plays throughout the game with minor sound effects.

WHAT I LIKE

The music is decent, though it is only a single track that loops. The sprite moves well and the controls are decent.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The game is pure frustration in a ROM file. Instructions need to be put onto the intro screen, the character needs to be given more manoeuvrability or a higher jump to get over enemies, and if there is a level reset key then make it obvious.

VERDICT

Overall this was a bit of a disappointment and a frustrating experience. Some people might stick with it for a while, though they might end up wanting to burn themselves for real!

But things become quickly annoying in level 2!

SCORE	
"The game is pure frustration in a ROM file"	
GFX	76%
SFX	60%
FUN	62%
STAYING POWER	30%
OVERALL	**55%**

INFERNO

True story, I actually own the JAMMA board for Rastan Saga. It's a game I grew up with and as an adult I happily parted with the cash for what I consider to be the definitive version. Any popular movie, TV series or video game will be imitated and Rastan Saga is no exception, so when I was told about Inferno for the MSX2 my interest was piqued.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The manual provides a premise that is vague. You awaken to horrific visuals and sounds, with monsters approaching you. You have no idea how you got there, but you know you need to fight your way out of the situation. You can assume that the story will progress as you make your way through the game. For the purposes of this review I was playing a demo provided by the developer. The title screen is bright, colourful and sets the expectation that this game will make good use of the expanded colour palette on the MSX2 hardware. As you can probably see from the screenshots, it does not disappoint!

Your barbarian inspired character is shaded quite nicely, rather than being made of solid colours. The same amount of effort was also put into the enemies, with the zombie like 'Vomanders' being shaded in black and the vampirish Scarlett being… well… obviously topless! I can feel the inspiration from Raf Cecco's Stormlord. Maybe… It's possible Aetherbyte haven't experienced the Hewson Consultants classic and they just like topless fairies too!

As you make your way up the tower the settings and backgrounds change, and it really seems like a lot of care and effort has gone into making this game look as varied as possible. This is the first MSX game for Aetherbyte, who actually specialise in the PC Engine, or Turbografx 16 for all you Americans out there. If you've had a chance to check out their earlier shoot em up, Atlantean, then you know to expect quality.

Music plays throughout the game, starting from the second it loads. Unlike many other efforts out there, it's not a single track that plays throughout the game. The opening screen, the map screen and the game all have different tunes playing in the background. The music feels dark and moody, fitting the situation that your character finds himself in. While the tune does loop I never found myself reaching for the volume controls in annoyance.

The controls are precise with little to no delay. Being a platform game there are a lot of jumps around the levels, but you never feel like the game has cheated you if you accidentally fall into a pit. It simply means you missed your mark and hit the jump button at the wrong time, and you know it when it happens. The same is true when hitting an enemy. If you swing and miss then you know it's your fault.

Upon awakening you find yourself in a pit with three 'Vomanders'. They spew green vomit hurling it forth, the challenge is getting to each of the fiends while avoiding their projectiles. At this stage you have no weapons to aid you on your quest so it's time to throw your fists around and hope for the best. Defeating enemies is not a prerequisite for progression, but it does feel satisfying to knock one of the beasts down.

As each screen flicks over to the next, the position of the enemies can be a cause of frustration as you accidentally change rooms only to immediately hit a monster, sapping valuable energy. Your health is represented by a heartbeat which can be heard and is visible on the bottom of the screen. This provides you with a sense of urgency, as the more hits you take the faster your heart pumps. If it beats gets too fast then it explodes, taking you along with it. The final death screen is rather bloody, with various body parts hanging out of your corpse.

You encounter your first weapon upon defeating a skeleton. Your barbarian takes one of the bones and uses it as a club, providing you with more distance when it comes to dispatching the monsters you encounter. This makes the game just a tad easier to get through. Other weapons are available as the game progresses and it's well worth your time getting ahold of one as soon as possible.

Rastan Saga is already available for the MSX2 and didn't need a fan made rerelease. Thankfully Aetherbyte haven't done this and though Inferno appears to have taken inspiration from the Rastan Saga it has developed into its own beast. You have to applaud the developers for taking a few chances with this title and for refining it into an enjoyable experience.

WHAT I LIKE

The clear and colourful graphics are a standout, as is the soundtrack. This game is so polished but not to the point where the playability was ignored. Gameplay is still very much a part of the experience.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

When the screen flicks you can end up hitting an enemy, depleting your precious supply of energy.

Skeletons yield bones when killed, supplying you with your first weapon

SCORE

"This game is so polished but not to the point where the playability was ignored"

GFX	96%
SFX	90%
FUN	92%
STAYING POWER	90%
OVERALL	**93%**

- **DEVELOPER:** Cobibee
- **INFO:** Download from https://www.msxgamesworld.com/gamecard.php?id=5454
- **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

MAYQ BUSTER

MayQ Buster features Wizards and Warriors action all packaged away in a platforming box. As with many other Cobinee releases the storyline is not documented.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game merely tells you that - You found yourself in "mayQ Buster" (yes well we know that - Ed). That's it! Cobinee's website explains a little more about what you need to do. Running the Japanese through Google Translate we get the story of sorts - "Become descendants of brave people, collect items, help the scared Princess, be like creating the RPG and making actions, as it is the part of defeating the boss living next door". Make of that what you will.

MayQ Buster is a platforming adventure title that equips the protagonist with a sharp blade and the ability to double jump. The game takes place in a huge dungeon, with pathways leading in all directions. While you might be tempted to map the game out using graph paper, just be aware the dungeons are random, so each play through it completely different.

As you venture through the tunnels you will encounter bosses. Upon defeating them you will be given items such as a sword, or a key or even a potion. The problem with no documentation is that I have no idea what any of the items actually do. Keys open chests, potions heal you but I still have no idea what swords are for. They don't increase your attack and various button combinations yield no results.

Be aware that if you encounter a chest and have not yet procured a key you might want to jump over it and move on. Touching a locked chest without a key will result in you taking damage, which feels a little odd. The graphics are extremely blocky, though it feels appropriate for the style of game. Yes, nicer graphics would always be welcome, but these are adequate. Your warrior character moves smoothly, though there is a significant amount of sprite flicker depending on the number of enemies on the screen at the time. The in game tune is dark and moody, while the sound effects are what you would expect, with sword strikes and jumps being the most commonly heard. They're serviceable, but that's about it.

You control the warrior with the arrow keys and space bar, or a controller with button 1. The second button is not used, though I would have preferred using it to jump rather than pressing up on the D-pad as I have never been a fan of that control method.

Your starting point. Don't hit the thing above you or you will receive damage!

Going Up!

Don't touch the treasure chest!

Just what is a mayQ Buster anyway?

WHAT I LIKE

Random dungeons offer a different experience every time you play. The game is just fun!

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

I would have preferred using a button to jump instead of up on the D-pad, and the graphics could be better.

VERDICT

Overall, I'm actually really enjoying mayQ Buster. It's such a simple game, though I still have to figure out all of the gameplay mechanics. With that said, the random dungeons and fun gameplay will keep me coming back for more.

SCORE

"The graphics are extremely blocky, though it feels appropriate for the style of game"

GFX	40%
SFX	60%
FUN	80%
STAYING POWER	81%
OVERALL	**80%**

SHOULDER BLADE OVERDRIVE

During the 1980's and 1990s' the MSX was swamped with poor Spectrum ports , same as the Amstrad CPC, affecting the reputation of each computer. When a developer invested the time and care into their games the result was often an amazing achievement. Shoulder Blade Overdrive is a game that was not developed, no, the word I would use is "crafted". Carefully crafted by the expert hands at GW's Workshop. Though not without its faults, this game really is something special. I look forward to seeing how the judges view it at the #MSXDev early in 2019.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The accompanying documentation appears to have been written in another language and put through Google Translate. From what I can determine, a society purchased unknown technology that bought about a war for some reason. The 'armoured while dragon', Shoulder Blade, is the weapon of choice for you, the pilot. Your superior officers have planned a surprise attack on an enemy base in an attempt to cripple their forces. However, this information had already reached their lines, and they were already waiting when your team arrived.

Thankfully your heavy armour saved you from becoming one more casualty in this war. After recovering you decide to head back out in your Shoulder Blade. Why? I'm not sure to be honest, there is no reason given (maybe war makes people do crazy things? - Ed). Perhaps, you might be completing the operation on your own, you might be trying to escape the battlefield, or it might even be revenge. I know people tend to say 'you don't play these games for the story', but it is nice to have an understanding of the context behind your actions in the game. This story is an example of world building which the game continues to expand upon.

You control your mech with the keyboard or MSX controller. Your only actions are to move and fire, so buttons 1 and 2 will do the same thing. Pushing up twice will boost your mech into the air for a short jump. I found this to be rather fiddly and feel that the second button on the controller should have been used for this action.

Initially the controls feel a little awkward as you appear to control the crosshair more so than the robot itself. The manual explains AI controls, and as your robots darts left and right across the screen I imagine that is what's taking control. If you find yourself in trouble you can dash to the

left or right, though you are unable to fire while doing this. After a few plays most of the controls feel natural, though, as I mentioned before, a button to jump would have been a better option than tapping up twice.

The manual shows the stats of each enemy vehicle, displaying their levels of power and defence. It is worth keeping this in mind as you may find yourself surrounded by enemies, and if you can manage to pick off the weakest vehicles first then that's less firepower headed your way. While this is a fast moving action game there is an element of strategy needed if you're going to survive.

Space Harrier is the elephant in the room here, and it appears to have been an influence for the developers. I started this game expecting it to be a full clone of the Sega classic, but I could not have been more wrong. While the forward scrolling and approaching enemies appear to have been moulded from Space Harrier clay, the way in which you manage these enemies and the way you control your mech are very different.

The game only gives you a single life, though you can continue if you die. The bottom of the screen has meters for shield and thrust. The shield decreases as you get hit and the thrust will go down each time you jump or dash. They will build back up, though only while you are not using your guns. This leaves you in an uncomfortable position as enemies arrive in lots of two's and three's, with attack choppers supporting the ground units. You simply have to avoid them as best you can while these meters fill back up. Thankfully this doesn't take too long and you are able to resume blasting the bad guys.

The graphics are gorgeous and the scrolling is fast paced, giving a feeling of urgency as the enemies make their way towards you. The

colours are bright and vibrant, making full use of the enhanced palette of the MSX2. You can clearly identify what is approaching you well before it is within firing range. There aren't too many frames of animation used for each of the elements in the game, though the action is so fast paced you barely notice this.

The title screen music is quite a moody piece with a slight techno feel, which is perfect for this game. The in game track is also quite fitting, though I found myself ignoring it and focusing on the action. The sound effects do let things down somewhat. Explosions are standard fare, though shooting at an enemy (which you obviously do a lot makes your MSX sound like it's blowing a raspberry at you.

WHAT I LIKE

The graphics are gorgeous and fast paced. This is a really enjoyable game to play with a great soundtrack and, for the most part, decent controls...

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

… though they are let down somewhat by using double up to jump. I don't know why this doesn't bother me as much with the double left or right for a side dash. Maybe using button B and a direction to dash or jump might have been a better way to go about it. The gun sound effect is also quite grating.

VERDICT

Overall Shoulder Blade Overdrive is a great example of what the MSX hardware can do when a developer decides to take advantage of it (I think the entry into the #MSXDev also may have helped - Ed). If you like Space Harrier, or 3D shooters in general then plug this into the cartridge port and get ready for a wild ride!

SCORE				
000182570		01	01	0003

Jumping can be a little bit awkward

SCORE

"The graphics are gorgeous and the scrolling is fast paced, giving a feeling of urgency"

GFX	**92%**
SFX	**70%**
FUN	**86%**
STAYING POWER	**90%**
OVERALL	**90%**

- **CODING:** Troll Soft
- **INFO:** Download from https://www.msxgamesworld.com/gamecard.php?id=5334
- **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

SVETLAN_A7

I'm going to throw a few names at you to start this one. Space Invaders, Galaga, Galaxian, Moon Cresta. Have you played any of these games? If so then you've pretty much already played the oddly named Svetlan_A7.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

So Svetlan_A7, is a 2D vertical shooter with very chunky graphics.You have no idea what your goal is as there is no documentation with the game, hence no story to get that needed layer of context. With that said, who actually knows the storyline to any of the above mentioned games? Yes, you can pretty much assume you're a pilot whose job it is to take out approaching alien forces, but it's only an assumption. You could be getting mugged on the way to the space shops for all you know!

Your spaceship can be controlled with the arrow keys, with space to shoot if you are not using a controller. Bigger graphics means a smaller playing field, meaning precise control is needed to stay alive. If you don't have a lot of experience playing games of this genre then it can take time mastering the pixel perfect movements of your craft. Hearts will drop from the top of the screen from time to time, though they don't always seem to give you an extra life. Some documentation would really have helped here. The game will give you messages to guide you, warning you to look out behind you as enemies start to approach from behind. Little touches like these add some character to your spaceship and turn a blocky, generic space game into

something a little more engrossing.

To go with the chunky graphics, are basic sound effects that you feel certain you have heard before in other space shoot em ups. There is no music track, but it was rare for space shooters from the 1970's and 1980's to have one anyway. This game is not Ikaruga nor is it trying to be, so the lack of music is quite forgivable. So yes, you have been playing Svetlan_A7 for the past few decades without knowing it, though that doesn't mean this game has nothing new to offer.

WHAT I LIKE

The chunky graphics are actually quite appealing. I never thought I'd find myself writing that! The little hints and tips messages do add much more depth and some character to the game, perhaps even more would have helped even further? I found the gameplay just about right as it's also quite a nice feeling being able to get just that little bit further each time you play, while in other games you can be stuck.

Try to grab the hearts as they fall from the sky for… something special, I'm sure... Just don't know what though

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

This game doesn't really add a whole lot to one of the original gaming genres.

VERDICT

If you have the urge to blast away some aliens then you should give it a try. It doesn't add too much new to the genre, but does it really need to? You've played it all before, though it is still worth checking out if you're a fan of shoot 'em ups. Just be prepared to try and work things out for yourself.

Chunky graphics that can cause you to feel a tad claustrophobic

SCORE

"The chunky graphics are actually quite appealing"

GFX	50%
SFX	25%
FUN	70%
STAYING POWER	75%
OVERALL	**70%**

VIRUS LQP-79

Zombies Ate My Neighbours was one of my favourite Super Nintendo titles. Those who are unfamiliar with the game, it is a 2.5D shoot 'em up. The basic idea is to rescue your neighbours from a zombie apocalypse using all manner of weapons. The game was released about a decade before zombie apocalypses were cool! Why am I talking about a classic Super Nintendo game? Well, Virus LQP-79 (from here on referred to as Virus) has clearly been inspired by Zombies Ate My Neighbours, to the point where it even makes references to the LucasArts classic.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Your main character is the gun toting Amy, initially a harmless girl who was minding her own business until an incident at a nearby research facility. There is no mention of what was being researched but if I had to guess I would assume it was something a little bit sinister. Naturally the government denies all knowledge but Amy's neighbours started acting a bit weird. So what's a girl to do? Grab a gun and rescue the other survivors, that's

what! It will take Amy 32 levels to get through her neighbourhood and the zombie plague gets worse the deeper into the game she gets. Thankfully Amy is no one hit kill heroine, and the inclusion of a life bar will give you plenty of opportunities to escape the undead masses. Naturally this life bar can be replenished and the gun upgraded. Be careful though as it can overheat, so watch the meter in the top left corner. If it gets too low you will need to wait before you can start firing again. Once you have rescued your neighbours you are given a time limit to find and enter the exit.

The title screen features a moody tune to get you into the right frame of mind. You are on a mission to rescue your neighbours from the undead. There are no flowers or magical rainbows in this game! This is serious stuff! The tune that plays throughout is constant, but I enjoyed it. I was too absorbed in the gameplay to really notice it, which is a good sign. The music doesn't grate and it fits the game nicely, a much needed change from some other MSX games I have been playing. The graphics are basic, though colours are used to good effect, particularly on the zombies. Amy herself is red and white, looking not unlike a character from a Neo Geo Pocket Colour game. She moves smoothly across the screen, until she gets to the edge of it. Screen scrolling is jerky, as per most MSX games. This is a fault of the hardware, though other games have managed to hide this problem a little better. The jerkiness does mean that you will occasionally run into a zombie, though it doesn't happen as often as you might expect.

Controls are basic, with the standard directions and fire. There is no delay in your

movements and everything is on point. It's actually a fun little game and one I can see myself returning to every now and again. I am a bit of a sucker for overhead games though, I do admit. I even rank Legend of Zelda a Link to the Past above Ocarina of Time! Yes, I know that goes against conventional thinking but I make no apologies for it!

WHAT I LIKE

Virus is a simple game that is just really enjoyable! While earlier levels can be breezed through quite easily, later stages can be quite hectic as you find yourself constantly shooting and avoiding zombies. There is a pleasing strategy in not being able to rely on your gun the whole time and having to duck and weave while you wait for it to recover.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The scrolling is a little hideous, though I find that I can deal with it. The game is so much fun that I WANT to deal with it just to keep playing. If the developer is so inclined they can always attempt to refine it in a later release.

VERDICT

I highly recommend Virus. It is one of those games that will appeal to everyone, MSX enthusiast or not will enjoy it.

The first mission is a bit of a breeze, with few zombies causing you problems

Gotta fight my way through the approaching zombie horde to reach the neighbour

SCORE	
"Virus is a simple game that is just really enjoyable!"	
GFX	82%
SFX	90%
FUN	89%
STAYING POWER	85%
OVERALL	**87%**

■ **CODING:** Cobinee
■ **INFO:** Download from https://www.msxgamesworld.com/gamecard.php?id=5458
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

Yes, that is the Z from the Mazinger Z logo

The people down the bottom of the screen are clearly having more fun than you will be!

Cobinee likes his anime, that much has been made clear in other games he has released. With Z my mind immediately went to Dragon Ball. Is this game based on the second series in the Dragon Ball franchise? I tried it out and realised that this is actually based on the giant mech anime, Mazinger Z. While it's not a series I'm overly familiar with, Mazinger Z is one of the many anime characters to already have a few video games based on his exploits. With all the potential that a giant robot has to offer, it must be said that the choice of game style for Z is both interesting and disappointing.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

There is no story, as is the case with many of Cobinee's games. However, if you've played Lunar Lander or a variation on that theme, then you should have a good idea on what the goal of the game is. When you begin you find yourself dropping to the floor with space ships darting back and forth beneath you. I watched the intro to Mazinger Z on YouTube to get an idea of what it is you're actually trying to do in the game. From what I can gather Mazinger Z rises from an underground base and the ship lands on his head, with the pilot on board. That's the goal of the game, to land that ship onto Mazinger Z's head.

Yes, that's it! We have a game about a giant robot, and all this game wants you to do is land the pilot on his head. Once you do that you get to see an image of Mazinger Z, directly lifted from a Fujitsu FM-7 home computer game based on the series. After that you're back at the title screen to do it all over again, if you can stomach it. The controls are pretty horrible, with the ship sliding all over the screen. You move the ship with left and right, while the space bar operates your jets. You are given more than enough time to

land on Mazinger Z's head, so my tip is to just hover around the top of the screen until you see an opening, then just drop. Be careful to hit your jets before you touch down, as falling too fast onto the head will cause you to crash.

There's not much to say about the sound. A small segment of the Mazinger Z theme tune plays on the title screen and when you finish the level. Other than that you have the sounds of the jets and your ship crashing. What can I say about the graphics? Well, they're serviceable I suppose, though Mazinger Z's head is not pink.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There is nothing I liked about the game which is a real shame because I really looked forward to being surprised, turns out I was, just not in a positive way. Poor concept, rubbish controls, one life, the game ends too quickly. Should I keep going?

VERDICT

If you feel like punishing yourself you can download Z from Cobinee's website.

SCORE

"The controls are pretty horrible, with the ship sliding all over the screen"

GFX	58%
SFX	57%
FUN	39%
STAYING POWER	05%
OVERALL	**10%**

The following Atari 2600 game reviews have been put together by expert Atarian, Brian Matherne (with some mini reviews by John Davies). If you don't know Brian Matherne, where have you been? (Obviously, you have been playing Amstrad CPC games - Ed.) That's true, but moving right along, Brian Matherne is based in the United States of America and is a vintage gaming collector of the Atari Video Computer System (VCS, later known as the 2600), the Mattel Intellivision, GCE's Vectrex, and Milton Bradley's Microvision video gaming systems.

Currently, Brian is the curator of "The Most Comprehensive Atari VCS / 2600 Homebrew List" on the internet, which began in 2013. Most recently, he has assembled the largest ROM pack for the Atari Flashback Portable and is also the webmaster of VideoGameStores. There is no denying Brian Matherne knows Atari 2600 games inside out! For more info on Brian Matherne's video gaming projects, links are posted below:

Video Game Stores.net website

www.videogamestores.net – The largest list of Video Game Stores, Arcades/Barcades, and Conventions/Expos found anywhere online.

The Most Comprehensive Atari VCS/2600 Homebrew List

https://1drv.ms/x/s! ArXu52QZivTrgVbQayev1Wc1QprN (to download and open in MS Excel) Created in 2013 out of a need for an extensive list of Atari VCS/2600 homebrews, ports, hacks, demos, WIPs, prototypes, music,

reproductions (repros), etc. The list has received huge reviews by gamers who have used it.

AtGames Atari Flashback Portable ROM Pack

http://atariage.com/forums/topic/258970-atari-flashback-portable-faq-and-compatibility-list/

Brian compiled the largest ROM pack (1001 games) to download onto an SD card of working games for the Atari Flashback Portable (AFP).

ALF (TAZ HACK)
By: James Catalano & Scott Dayton
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

Remember ALF the 1980's tv series? He's back! In VCS form! You are ALF (aka Alien Life Form), you have crash-landed in a suburban garage on Earth. Your spaceship is beyond repair, you are ugly, short, posses a bad attitude and you love eating cats. What's an Alf to do? Eat as many cats as you can of course! In this platformer, guide Alf to collect, I mean eat cats while you wait to be rescued. Beware the government agents (red and green guys), they want to slice you up and see what makes you tick. Hit three of them and you lose one of your three lives. The abundance of cats on Earth are no secret and other enemies are also after this resource. Watch out for Evil Alf, Darth Coherent. He may just try to shake things up a bit. The level increases and the cats change after you eat 50 cats. Different coloured cats have different scores. Brown Cat is 50 points, Red Cat is 100 points, Blue Cat is 200 points, Green Cat

is 300 points, Evil ALF (purple) is 400 points, and the unknown cat is 500 points. You win bonus lives at: 10,000 points, 30,000, 50,000, 80,000, 110,000, 150,000, and every 40,000 points thereafter. The maximum number of lives that can be displayed on screen at once is four; the maximum you can have is eight. You can have one or two player options. The game sprites in the original game TAZ, have been changed to represent an ALF themed video game. James Catalano originally did the first game hack of the sprites and title screen. Scott Dayton tweaked the sprites and changed the title screen back to a black background along with his name and a little cat at the bottom.

New hack version of ALF, watch out for government agents and eat those brown cats!

Analysis

ALF is the same game play as TAZ, so it's just as much fun chasing the cats as it is chasing the food in the original game.

SCORE: 80%

Brian Matherne (2013 HAAG expo)

ALIEN ATTACK
By: Edward A. Smith
Reviewed by: Brian Matheme

You are defending the colony from an Alien Attack. Defeat 16 unique enemy waves of 6 aliens including mothership battles on levels 6, 12 & 19. Aliens will try to knock out your laser cannon and energy batteries. Your laser cannon will only last for a count of 60, so each wave must be annihilated within that time frame. You have a shield which can be activated and lasts for one second, but cannot be activated again for a further four seconds. Your laser cannon (or 3 laser cannons – depending on which option is chosen) is at the bottom of the screen. Move left or right and fire your laser at the enemies that are falling down, while you protect the 3 laser cannon energy batteries that are located below your cannon. Pull back (down) on the joystick to use your shield but use wisely as the shield drains the energy timer by 5 units and cannot be activated if you have less than 5 units of energy. If you defeat the level 19 boss, you save the colony and win the game. Each mothership must be hit 10 times in the center but be wary as they can fire heat seeking missiles. Your energy timer is not a factor on mother ship levels. The game is over, when one of three different things occur in the game: when the timer runs out, when the batteries are knocked out (6 hits), or when the cannons are knocked out (3 hits).

Analysis

The programming is very well executed for Edward's first homebrew game. You get great gameplay with precise controls and a cool title screen.

SCORE: 85%

MAPPY
By: Champ Games
Reviewed by: Brian Matheme

After completing Super Cobra Arcade, the Champ Games development team was busy working on their next project: A port of the Namco classic, Mappy. It's been a game that John Champeau has been thinking about making for over 10 years, and with the advances in technology, Champ Games has finally moved forward with the development. Mappy was an arcade game produced by Namco in 1983. Mappy is programmed by John W. Champeau of Champ Games. The game graphics were made by Nathan Strum and in-game music done by Mike Haas. A list of characters are featured after the title screen as seen above. Mappy even has a Top 5 scores screen for each of the levels of difficulty (Standard, Advanced, and Novice). The player controls Mappy, the "Micro Police", a police-mouse whose job is to collect valuables from a cat's house one has to surmise that he is retrieving stolen goods. In hot pursuit of our hero is a gang of five pink cats called Meowsky or "Naughty Folks" and a large red fat cat called Goro or "Boss The Big Bit".
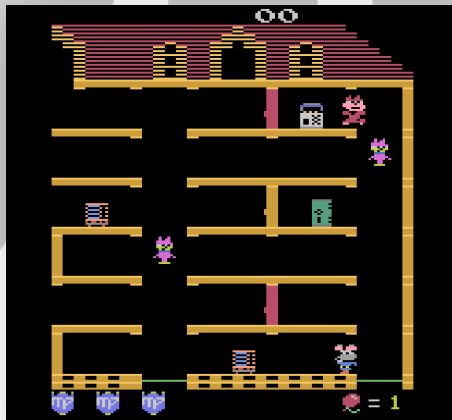
As you collect valuables you will score the following: Tape player 100, Television 200, Computer 300, Painting 400, & Safe 500 points. Other sources of points include bouncing on a trampoline 10 points, striking a cat with a door 50 points, 0 points if they hit a door on their own, microwaving cats 200 per cat and multiply by two if you get Goro, retrieving a treasure with Goro behind it 1000 point bonus, striking cats with a bell 300 for Meowsky, 1000 for Goro. Collecting the stolen items in pairs increases the bonus multiplier (2x to 6x). The multiplier resets each level and when Mappy loses a life. Levels 3, 7, 11, and 15 are bonus rounds. Each red balloon you pop is worth 200 points later. The last balloon, with Goro behind it, is worth 2000 points later. Bouncing on trampolines here is still worth 10 points. If you get all the balloons, you'll get a total of 5000 points plus a bonus of 5000 points. To completely clear rounds 11 and 15 require noting a difference between rounds three and seven. If you wait too long after the HURRY UP message, a green spinning disc with Goro on it will appear.

The best order is Radio (100 points), Television (200 points), Computer (300 points), Mona Lisa (Painting) (400 points) and Safe (500 points). If you collect all the items in order up to the Safe, the final Safe will be 500 X 6 = 3,000 points! If you collect all the items in order up to the Safe, the final Safe will be 500 X 6 = 3,000 points! By the end of the first level, this will earn you over 9,000 points.
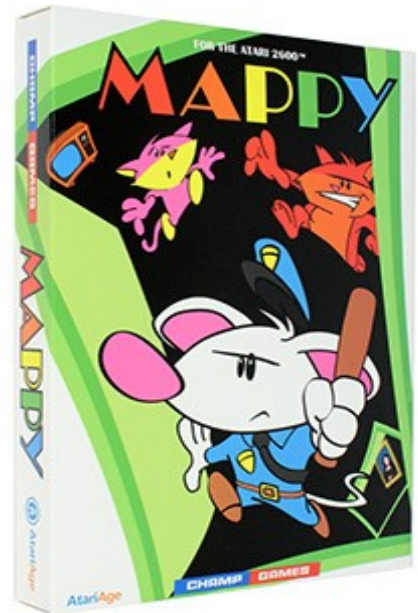
Analysis

Mappy has a promising future to be a huge hit, along with the past titles that Champ Games has released (Lady Bug, Caverns of Mars, Scramble, & Super Cobra Arcade). This is just another homebrew title pushing the limits of what an actual Atari 2600 can do and produce.

SCORE: 100%

ASTEROID RESCUE
By: Ross Adkin
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

Commander – your mission is as follows: we lost communication with the 'Explorer' spaceship yesterday shortly after it entered an asteroid field. We need you to travel in to the asteroid field and rescue any surviving members of the crew and retrieve the precious cargo which was on board the ship. This is an extremely dangerous mission which will require all of the skills that made you the best pilot in the force. In Asteroid Rescue, you pilot the rescue spaceship as it travels through the dangerous asteroid field. The aim of Asteroid Rescue is to avoid the asteroids and hostile ships, while maintaining your fuel levels, rescuing surviving members of the 'Explorer' spaceship and collecting gems. You score 1 point per second, 5 points per fuel tank collected 10 points per gem, and 100 for each surviving astronaut rescued.

Analysis

Asteroid Rescue is an awesome side scroller game and requires quick reflexes to dodge the asteroids and collect fuel and the gem bonuses.

SCORE: 88%

ALIEN REVENGE!
By: Edward A. Smith
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

The Aliens are back and this time they are pissed! This is a sequel to Edward's earlier game Alien Attack. Since the last attack, you have constructed a planetary shield defense, but the Aliens have discovered the orbiting power station that controls your planet's shield. You control the power station's lasers that will defend the station. Once again time is the most important factor. Depending on your difficulty setting you must defeat each wave within a certain amount of time. On novice setting you get 40 seconds and on expert you get 25 seconds. Also depending on your difficulty setting, your station cannot withstand more than 10 hits on novice and only 5 hits per wave on expert. As in the first game you must destroy all the aliens and defend the station. This time your shield can be activated every 4 seconds and you have 3 shields on novice and 2 shields per wave on expert setting.
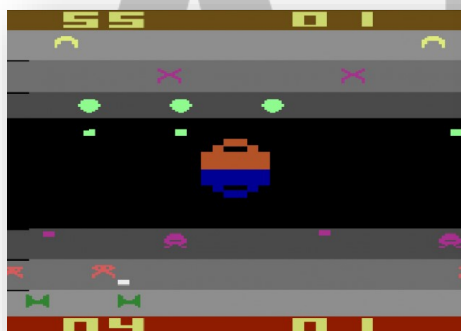
SCORE: 65%

ASTEROID BELT (TURMOIL HACK)
By: James Catalano
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

An Asteroids versus Turmoil mashup hack. James has changed the original game sprites within the game Turmoil, into asteroids. The objective is to zoom up and down the center alley and blast asteroids as they streak by. Keep shooting and keep moving to avoid a deadly collision with a speeding alien spacecraft. You begin Asteroid Belt with five ships, one in play and four in reserve. If you can blast all of the aliens in a level, you'll receive a bonus ship. You can hold up to six reserve ships at one time. Ships are destroyed by accidentally running into passing aliens.

Turmoil features a variety of speedy asteroids which travel back and forth across the screen at their own unique pace. The faster they move, the more points they are worth. There are five different Enemy Ships to blast. A collision will be deadly no matter which ship you hit.

SCORE: 70%

ASTRONOMER
By: Alex Pietrow
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

You are an astronomer and you are working at a telescope. You are tasked to observe a certain star for your research project. Point your telescope at the star and observe! But look out for clouds, as they ruin your observations. Other astronomers also want to use the telescope, so make sure to finish your observations before the time runs out. Otherwise you will be banned for wasting time. You score one point for each "Obs Bar" you fill before the game is over. Your final score will be shown in green at the bottom of the screen when the game ends. The score in red is the current high score.

Astronomer is a totally different type of Atari 2600 video game that you have never played before! Instead of blasting aliens from another Galaxy, or asteroids that are just floating around or destroying something, you are instead viewing a star for data. This sounds boring doesn't it? Along with the clouds interference and the timer running down to use the telescope, Astronomer is a very challenging game.

SCORE: 60%

BABY
By: Robert Raymond Holmes III
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

In the not so distant future aliens attack a game development studio and now there's a war between the Game Devs and the Aliens. The gun fighting leaves the two sides in a constant stalemate. You play as Baby, the studio's dog, and you have the only ability that gives humans the edge: Baby's cuteness. These aliens are completely averse to extreme levels of cuteness. Avoid bullets from both sides. Avoid the thing in the middle screen. Touch the human to get patted this gives you bonus points.
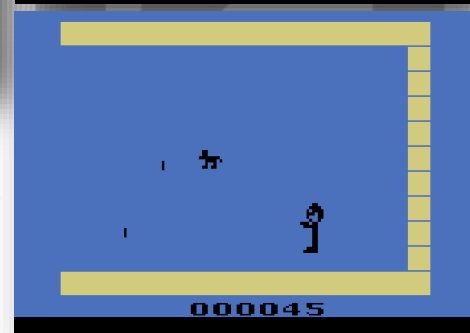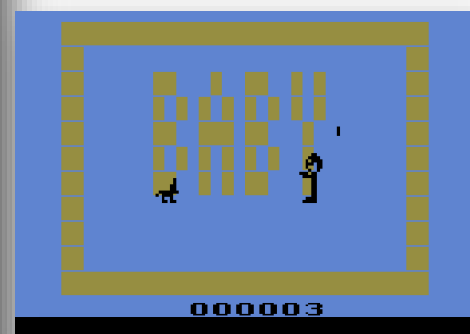
SCORE: 55%

HIGH SCORE SCREEN BURN SLOW BURN
By: B.J. Best
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne
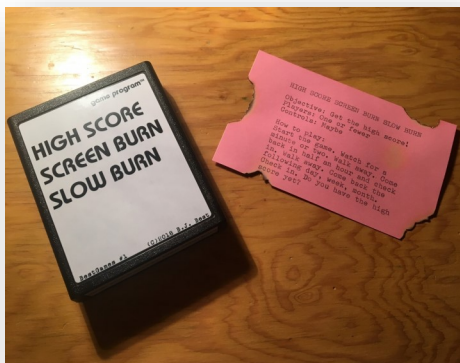
An experimental game where you play it by not playing it! Start the game. Watch for a minute or two. Walk away. Come back in half an hour and check in. Walk away. Come back the following day, week, month. Check in. Do you have the high score yet? The game AI controls the square as it bounces and moves around each room trying to find the exit door to the right. So, it's a game that plays itself – for the most part. The secret to the game is: you can control the object in the room, as long as the square is in a room with an object. Once in a room with an object, you can control it with the joystick and move it towards the square to get the points for it. Also, you can press the fire button and the object will change shapes. Rotate through the different shapes (and different beeps are sounded for each shape) to choose the one you want before running into the square. Once the square is touched by the object, points are rewarded, and the object disappears from the room. Now wait until the square goes into a room with another object. If you listen to the game, it will beep when the square does enter a room with an object. The big exciting change at 100 points is the change in the player's color. The points are also doubled once you hit 100 (and tripled plus another color change when you hit 1,000, etc.). The percentages are skewed towards the lower-point objects (lower sounds), so it can take a few presses to get a higher sound (higher points). The beeps are based on a C chord, so there are: low C, low E, low G, high C, and (after hitting 100 points) high G.

Analysis

The best non-game homebrew out there!
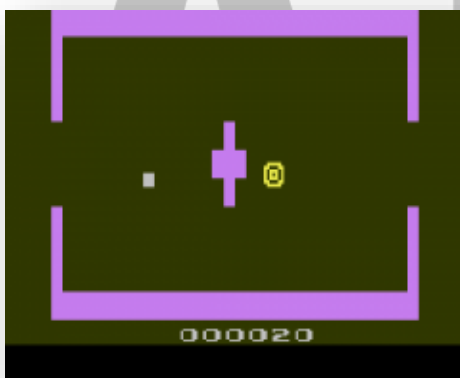
SCORE 89%

NEXION 3D
By: Brock Keaghey
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

In NeXion 3D, you are trapped on the planet Nexion with only a mapping unit and a blaster pistol. Find the key - then find the exit! Nexion enforcer droids will hunt you down and if you hear noises, they are near! Use your blaster to dispatch them - but beware, the Nexion generators will create more droids. This game started out as Berzerk 3D, but was changed to NeXion 3D. This decision was to avoid any legal issues, as this game got closer to this being available in cartridge format. NeXion 3D was in development from 2016 to 2018, and is scheduled to be released by AtariAge.com later this year (2018). The cartridges will be manufactured by AtariAge. Currently, the game is not available for purchase, as the box and manual are still being developed for its release. The demo ROM of NeXion 3D has been posted online and can be found in the AtariAge forums. Navigate through the maze to find and destroy the droid that holds the key. Use your fire button to pick up the key and then find the exit. When in proximity, your mapping unit will display the exit as a flashing blip. Once the droid that holds the exit key is destroyed, it will also blip on the map. After finding the exit, hit the fire button to use the key to escape. There is a map at the bottom of the screen to help you along. A compass is located at the top of the screen to show you your direction. There are a total of 24 levels to NeXion 3D.
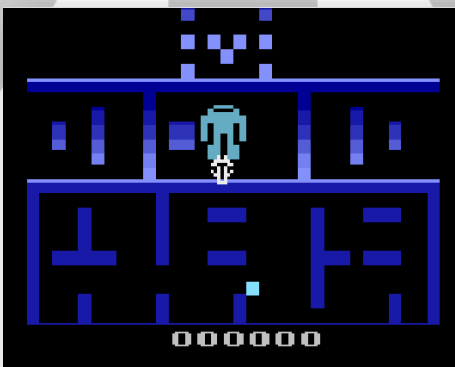
Analysis

As one of the first 2600 homebrews that is made in 3D, NeXion 3D is a solid game with excellent gameplay and good graphics. Sound is minimal, but adequate. The controls do take some getting used to, but they are easy to follow.

SCORE: 80%

PICKLE
By: Edward A. Smith
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

The classic sandlot game is now on the Atari VCS. Pickle is for 2 players and uses the joystick controllers. Players alternate between controlling the runner and the throwers. When the runner is tagged out while off base, the players swap roles. The first player to steal 11 bases wins the game. The runner must be tagged with the ball while off base. Then the players switch roles. While throwing, if the joystick is pressed up or down, the top and bottom throwers, respectively, will return toward their bases after throwing. Otherwise they will stay in place. Throwers cannot cross the midway line. Thrower cannot stall- must

throw every 12 seconds. Runner must steal a base every 60 seconds. First one to steal 11 bases wins. Runner's initial lead-off toward destination base is limited while that base's thrower holds ball (P0 difficulty B). Occasional random throwing errors will happen. Runner will occasionally "fall" (color will turn black and runner will be immobilized for 1 second). Option to allow "Pegs", where runner is out if hit by ball while off base (P1 difficulty A) Runner can side step in this mode.

SCORE: 75%

ROBO-NINJA CLIMB
By: Gauauu
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

Robo-Ninja Climb is a direct Atari port of "gauauu"s NES homebrew entry for the 2017 NESDev homebrew competition. It was sort of a self-challenge: Could he directly take the NES game logic code (most of which was written in C in cc65), replace the rendering, sound, and controls, and make the same game run on the VCS? Turns out the answer is yes! The majority of the game logic is the exact same code as the NES version. Inspired by both those endless climbing games for mobile phones, and a "Walaber"s Wall Jump Ninja, you try to guide Robo-Ninja as he climbs through 5 levels filled with spikes and lasers. After 5 levels, it will start at the beginning, increasing the speed every time! Press the button to jump. Hold left or right to

steer Robo-Ninja in mid-air (you can climb upwards by tapping jump, and holding back towards the wall that you're on). Press down to slide downwards. There are 3 items you can collect (a small colored square): Orange = Double Jump. Once collected, you can jump a 2nd time in mid-air, Purple = Climber. You can now press up to climb directly up a wall, and Red = Rocket Pack. Instead of jumping and holding walls, the rocket pack will propel you upwards.
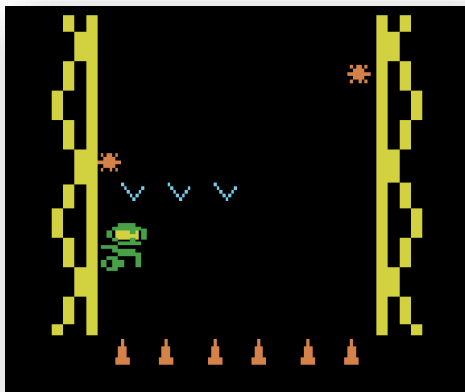
SCORE: 92%

SCRAMBLE

By: Champ Games
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

How Far Can You Invade Our Scramble System? Pilot your starship through a hostile, alien terrain featuring six unique stages. Monitor a limited fuel supply while you encounter various obstacles and enemies. Rockets, fuel tanks, flying saucers, and meteors are only some of the obstacles to challenge you within each stage. Armed with lasers and bombs, fight your way to the well-defended enemy base. Destroy the base to defeat the enemy and move on to the next mission! Scramble is a port of the original classic arcade game in which the player must navigate their ship across a side-scrolling terrain through six unique stages. Each stage has its own challenges and obstacles, including ground targets, rockets, fuel tanks, flying saucers and meteors. The player must

avoid or destroy these hazards while maintaining the ship's limited fuel supply. The objective is to reach the end stage and destroy the enemy's base while trying to get a high score. This is just another Champ Games homebrew title pushing the limits of what an actual Atari 2600 can do and produce.

SCORE: 98%

SKEE-BALL

By: Michael D. Salzman
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

You've played it in person at Showbiz Pizza Place or Chuck E. Cheese's and now it's been ported to the Atari 2600! That's right kids! It's Skee-Ball! Just without the tickets. And you decide if you want 9, 12, or 15 balls to roll, no more borrowing balls from the other lanes. Skee-Ball features 9, 12, or 15 ball play with scoring exactly like a real Skee-Ball machine. The top corners are worth 100 points, and from the center down they are worth, 50, 40, 30, etc. First you set your aim with the fire button, then the power bar on the lower left side of the screen becomes activated. Press up to throw. The larger the power bar the higher up the ramp the ball will go. However, if you miss the bar at its strongest it wraps around to its weakest and you'll likely throw a gutter. After the last ball is rolled, your final score will be shown on the "Game Over" screen at the bottom. Skee-Ball is the standard arcade game we all grew up with, and this version is very easy and simplistic in its gameplay.
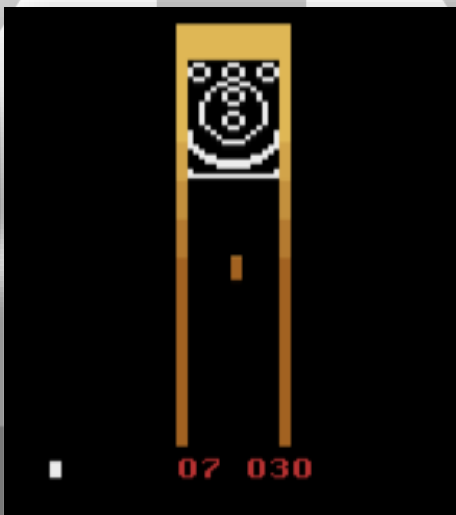
SCORE 80%

SPACE GAME

By: Karl Garrison and Maggie Vogel
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

You are the pilot of a spacecraft that patrols beyond the edge of human-controlled space. During one such daily patrol, you receive a frantic distress signal from Human Command Center requesting help to protect humanity from the merciless attack of the Kraal. Before you can respond, all communications cease. Your only link to civilization is gone. You are now alone in deep space, with the fate of humanity squarely on your shoulders. You must seek out the enemy-infested colonies, and save the humans by destroying the Kraal. The task is daunting, as the Kraal attackers are unpredictable and cunning. You must do everything in your power to save the human

race! Keep your aim true and defeat the Kraal! You are humanity's last hope!

Move your ship left and right and shoot aliens, while dodging their fire and smart bombs. Collect good powerups, and avoid the bad ones. There are 12 waves in the main game, and each new wave introduces a new alien. There are boss aliens after waves 3, 6, 9, and 12. Each of the aliens have different abilities, with the later levels having more challenging aliens. The infinite play and easy modes do not have waves, bosses, or an end apart from the player's death, and new aliens are introduced based on the player's score. Sometimes powerups get dropped from the location of the smart bomb after a group of aliens has been defeated. Some of these can be helpful, and some can be harmful. Only one powerup can be active at any given time. If a new one is obtained, it cancels out the previous one. Power ups also get lost when you lose a life.

SCORE: 95%

SUPER COBRA ARCADE

By: Champ Games
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

Super Cobra Arcade is a port of the original classic arcade game in which the player must navigate their ship across a side-scrolling terrain through eleven unique stages. Each stage has its own challenges and obstacles, including missiles, rockets, fuel tanks, flying saucers, meteors and more. The player must avoid or destroy these hazards while maintaining the ship's limited fuel supply. The

objective is to reach the end stage and destroy the enemy's base while trying to get a high score. You must pilot your helicopter through 10,000 miles of hostile terrain, invade the enemy base and steal the booty! Be careful not to destroy it! You only need to touch it with your helicopter and then safely carry it away. The tunnels are narrow and filled with danger! the enemy has set up numerous traps Along the way. You will battle rockets, guided missiles, homing meteors, falling mines, spinning glaive drones, flying saucers, and tanks!

Upon successful completion of your mission, you will return to the enemy base to do it all over again, but the difficulty will have increased: enemies attack faster and more frequently; your helicopter flies faster and uses more fuel, more meteors, drones and flying saucers, and more challenging terrain. There are 99 levels to defeat... do you have what it takes to lead the Super Cobra Force to victory? Another Champ Games homebrew title pushing the limits of what an actual Atari 2600 can do.

SCORE: 98%

TYRE TRAX
By: Lewis Hill
Reviewed by: Brian Matherne

This is a clock racer game where you need to complete the course in the shortest possible time. This game is inspired by those classic Activision games such as Grand Prix with the gradient skyline, racing against the clock, etc. The idea for this game came when the developer was out riding along the tow path of the local canals, having to avoid crazy old ladies with their yappy dogs, fishermen, rocks, etc. and thought it would make for a great Atari homebrew game. Eight game variations to play: Game #1 Summertime - nice and simple, learn to play (15 obstacles), Game #2, Sunset -a bit more challenging with more obstacles. (20 obstacles), Game #3 Winter - hard, (25 obstacles) - rocks start a bit closer as visibility is lower, Game #4 Night Time: More stuff, lower visibility, (30 obstacles), and Games #5 thru #8 have random obstacle generation for each of the previous four.

SCORE 91%

SPIES IN THE NIGHT
By: Jared Gray West
Reviewed by: John Davies

You play a spy who must sneak behind a dilapidated wall, across several screens, to a detonator which will blow up the lighthouse whose rotating lamp can reveal your position and get you machine gunned to pieces. You must time your runs and hide behind the wall

sections when the light shines your way. Sometimes the wall fragments are so low that you need to duck down behind them to avoid the fatal light. You make Chuck Norris look like the sugar plum fairy as you can somehow survive being machine gunned to pieces several times. However, your mission is time sensitive so if you dilly dally around time will run out and the mission will fail. Further missions add other hazards, like people trying to blow your head off, just to keep your job interesting. This is my favourite Atari 2600 homebrew games I've played this year.

SCORE 93%

BALLOON TRIP
By: Bluswimmer
Reviewed by: John Davies

Because you wear a funny hat when you flap your arms you can fly. You love green balloons so you set out to collect a bunch. You must avoid what look like low flying satellites or high flying sea mines. Whatever they are, they kill. Fly guy might go high but he's no tough guy. A satellite, or nasty fish bite, and it's sweet dreams fella, and goodnight. Tapping fire will flap your arms and you can also drift left and right. You gain points for flying and collecting balloons which

fill a meter. But even after scoring over a thousand points I never filled it up to see what happens. At 200 points the game gets faster. You can also start at a later level, 0-easy to 4-hard (faster, more killing stuff). This is a fabulous game that would be great for any high score competition.

SCORE: 82%

PLAGUE
By: Fehér János Zoltán
Reviewed by: John Davies

You're a guy wearing a cloak and top hat traversing a bleak and barren landscape of black blocks, bushes and pits everywhere. So many that you start to think you're playing an even duller version of E.T. But it's not all doom and gloom. Well it is but that's just the atmosphere of the game. It's a typical platformer with shiny stuff to collect and a surprising array of creepy black thingies, all out to get you. Some areas are in the dark and only the torch light around you reveals what's there. You have an energy bar and only get one life, but you can continue from the screen you inevitably fell down a pit. Messages like 'No Hope', 'No Cure', can be seen along the way, just to cheer you up. Quite a stylish game that plays very well once you get the hang of it.

SCORE: 85%

SWORD OF SURTR
By: Jeff Stermer
Reviewed by: John Davies

This reminds me of the classic Adventure with a viking theme and better graphics. Rather than a square block you play Haldor the Viking. He can choose either a bow or a sword from his crib and then go explore the impressive thirty plus flick screen landscape looking for The Sword of Sutr to complete his adventure. Objects can be found such as boots, a horn, a key, armour, gems and gold.

Enemy foe out for blood range from ravens and wolves to viking berserkers and spirits. There's a Dragon boat for sailing but beware of storms and sea serpents. Some friendly faces also populate the land namely a priest, a wanderer, a merchant and dwarves, along with harmless bunnies, this isn't a Monty Python movie, and sheep, sadly neither Shaun nor Timmy. Each screen looks unique and there's enough in this game to keep any adventurer happy and then some.
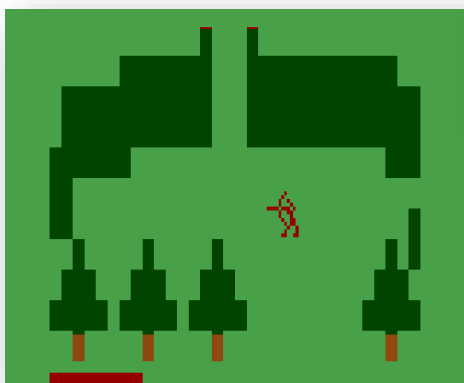
SCORE: 88%

BIRDS AND BEANS

By: Bluswimmer
Reviewed by: John Davies

I'm Literally gonna spill the beans here. You are what looks like a duck minding your own business when suddenly green beans start falling down from the sky. You can sling your whip at the beans to destroy them. Higher beans are worth more points. Armed with this whip you're able to save.... well... er... the ground, which is more important than it sounds. Indy would be proud. If a bean lands on your head you're squished. If it lands on the ground it makes a hole which your duck shall not pass, even with his passable Balrog impersonation. Stupid Gandalf! Other coloured beans also start to fall from the sky. shooting a white bean fills a hole in and shooting a blue bean fills all the holes in. The difficulty level ranges from zero to four. This is a wonderful puzzler/shooter hybrid that's a great time passer.
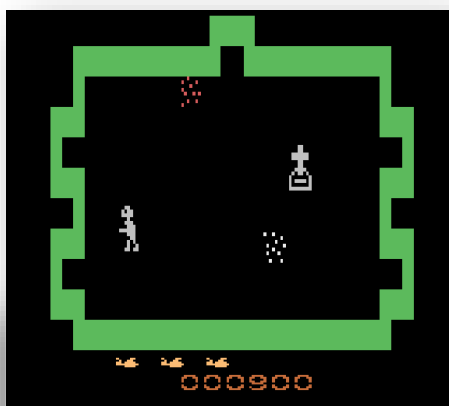
SCORE: 84%

BEEWARE

By: Fehér János Zoltán
Reviewed by: John Davies

You are a swarm of killer bees, and so you must kill. Luckily for you as soon as the game begins a bunch of panicky looking individuals flood onto the scene, from various doorways, who you only need to touch to send them to an early grave. Well to turn them in an actual grave stone actually. There are other swarms of killer bees around too which harm you when touched. But you do have an inexplicable secret weapon in the form of red lightning which can fired to wipe them out. You just need to line them up with the arrows on either side of the screen. After so many levels there's a boss in the shape of a giant bee. A few bolts of red lightning kills him and that's the end of the game. It's quite fun while it lasts but a bit on the short side.

SCORE 73%

SHEEP IT IP!

By: Dr. Ludos
Reviewed by: John Davies

You are a sheep who just loves getting high. One day you notice some mysterious black blocks floating across the sky even though you hadn't smoked anything with your buddies since last Tuesday night. Suddenly you realise

that you can achieve your dream state of getting as high as possible because you can use these black blocks to get higher and higher. It's a very simple concept. Jump up and grab a block. Jump up from that block to grab the next block up. Miss a block, you fall and die. Some blocks are moving, some are not. You can drift left or right but there doesn't seem much point. It looks and plays like something off the Google play store. Unfortunately after only a few games it gets boring very quickly. Won't be playing this one again any time soon.
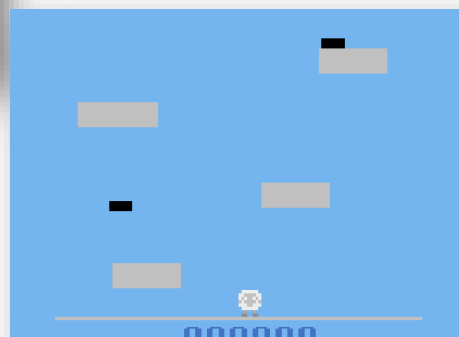
SCORE: 44%

MONKEY KING

By: Alex Pietrow
Reviewed by: John Davies

A single or multiplayer game with various modes of play. Each player is a monkey who must climb his tree and outlast the other monkey in order to be crowned Monkey King. Each section of each tree scrolls down the screen and either has a branch left, a branch right or no branch at all. You must press left or right to avoid the branches bonking you on the bonce, you can also move up and down the tree. There are falling coconuts to avoid and various power ups to collect too. But there is no poop flinging. The game ends when either monkey loses all their lives. Other game modes allow the winning monkey to carry on scoring more points. Single player games have passive and aggressive opponent modes. Again, at no point is any poop flung. A good game which becomes a very good game in two player mode.

SCORE: 87%
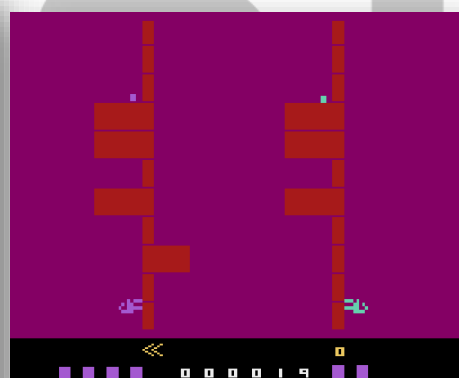
DUNGEON II: SOLSTICE

By: David Weavil
Reviewed by: John Davies

A Dungeon crawler where you must enter a temple, retrieve mistletoe and return it to a grove. You can be a wizard, faerie or warrior. You have hit points (HP, but alas no bacon

PERIL
By: VHZC
Reviewed by: John Davies

In Peril you must pilot your helicopter through numerous hazards such as moving blocks, lasers, missiles and spiders, to the exit of each screen. Hazards take one of your lives and send you back to the start of the screen. You score for exiting a screen, and this score is higher depending on how fast you finish the screen. Your helicopter is equipped with a gun which can be used to shoot switches which can turn things on or off, or enemies, which scores you a few points. Each level feels unique. It's quite addictive because you want to see the next level and the perils in it. Lives, level and score are displayed at the bottom of the screen. The look of the game and uniqueness of it's screens reminds me of a ZX Spectrum game called Rapscallion. It's quite challenging, addictive and a lot of fun.

SCORE: 90%

KNIGHT GUY
By: VHZC
Reviewed by: John Davies

Sadly not a decent sequel to erase the memory of Knight Rider the video game. Instead, as Knight Guy, you must progress through a number of flick screens solving a puzzle to exit each. You can move left, right and jump, up on the joystick, (ugghh!! A real nightmare!), and press fire to use any objects you pick up along the way. You start with five lives. If you touch a bad guy you lose a life but you don't return to the start of the screen so it's more like losing some energy. Unless of course you fall off the screen in which case you are returned to the start. There's no KITT to save your skin in this game. This is similar in many ways to 'Peril' but doesn't feel quite as polished. Plus flying around in a helicopter is miles better than having to walk. Jeez even a horse would have been helpful.

SCORE: 82%

sarnie), spell points (SP) and an inventory display which doubles as encounter options, fight, run or cast spells, selectable on bumping into something looking to sell you a timeshare, or just kill you. Creatures happy to do a meet and greet include wolves, goblins, dark faeries and crows (Luckily not the encrusted in your nostrils type). Only being able to see one

space in all compass directions is difficult at first but a breeze once you're used to it. The locations of objects and monsters are different for each game. This game seems to contain most of the elements you need for a decent dungeon crawler. Not too shabby at all.

SCORE: 80%

NOVA THE SQUIRREL

Nova The Squirrel is a true labour of for the talented coder NovaSquirrel. The game has been three years in development but good things come to those who wait! What Nova Squirrel has created is immediately recognisable as another Mario clone but dig a little deeper and you may just find a diamond in the rough which is the perfect metaphorical phrasing for this game!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Upon loading the game you are greeted with a simple title screen which seems a bit bland for such a well developed game. There is no title music either which is a bit of a let-down. This theme (or lack of theme) also carries through to information screens (of which there are many). This gives the game a slightly unfinished feel but then you start playing it properly and soon all is forgiven. In the game you control Nova Storm, she is a squirrel who finds herself in a strange land with a new-found ability to copy the skills of enemies she comes across. This bears more than a passing resemblance to Kirby but executes the mechanic brilliantly. There are many puzzles to solve to navigate the game successfully and you will need each of the 10 abilities on offer to do so. The game is huge with 5 Worlds, 33 Levels and 7 Bosses! This is not your average homebrew fare and the 3 years in development is quickly apparent as you come to appreciate the scale of the game and the excellent level design.

For an extra challenge, there is also a collectible hidden in every level which will keep you coming back time and time again to try and find every one of them. From the screenshots you would be forgiven for passing this off as another Mario clone but underneath the hood is a deep and rewarding gaming experience. If that was all the game had to offer it would be passed off as a great title but what makes this game truly exceptional is the fact that it is completely open source so you or anyone else can use the engine to create or edit your own levels. The engine itself takes a little getting used to but you'll soon find yourself getting to grips with it and with a GPL license you can use it to go on and create your very own NES games which you can release and if you're good enough perhaps even sell. That ability makes this so much more than a game. It has the potential to be the doorway into game development for aspiring devs of the future and therefore is truly special and something not to be missed.

The levels look familiar but the gameplay soon becomes unique

You will need all ten abilities stolen from your enemies to get through the game

WHAT I LIKE

The gameplay is deep and challenging. The scope of the game is enormous for a homebrew title. The level design is excellent throughout. There are enough secrets and challenges to keep you playing for months. The ability to create your own games takes this from good to wonderful.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The opening screens and lack of title or menu music are not up to par with the rest of the game.

VERDICT

Nova the Squirrel is a clear labour of love. The game has not been rushed and every level has been thought through from start to finish. There have been few releases on the NES in recent years which can hold a candle to this wonderful title and the ability to create your own games using the bundled engine make this a truly exceptional title which is not to be missed.

Hold B to run, or press B to attack. From the pause menu you can choose to run with a double-tap instead, allowing you to more easily attack while moving.

Clear instructions in a Mario World style

As the game progresses, problem solving elements start to appear and the learning curve is excellent

SCORE

"There are enough secrets and challenges to keep you playing for months"

GFX	88%
SFX	85%
FUN	95%
STAYING POWER	98%
OVERALL	**92%**

CHERIL THE WRITER

ZOMBIES IN PEPINONI? GOSH,
THIS IS A JOB FOR CHERIL!
BACK TO THE GOOD OL' DAYS
OF PARALYZING THE BAD GUYS
AND THEN SMASHING THEM!

Cheril the writer is one of the Mojon twins' 3 new releases for the NES in 2018. The game is a showcase for what can be done with their new MK1_NES / AGNES engine. This builds on all the fantastic work of the Spectrum MK1 engine which has been used by dozens of developers to create some of the best Spectrum games of recent years. With such incredible accolades to their name expectations were high for this one.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Cheril the writer is a platforming game with a twist. Instead of jumping over enemies or landing on their heads on the way to the finish line, the game takes a less linear approach and adds many problem solving elements to create a deeper and far more original playing experience.

You control Cheril (The Writer) who has gone on vacation to begin writing a new novel when the zombie apocalypse hits. However, these are not your average zombies. To defeat each one they must first be turned to stone which is done by hitting one of several buttons strategically placed throughout the levels. (That's right, you need to get these zombies stoned!) Upon pressing each one the player only has ten seconds to reach the enemy and crush them before they become deadly Cheril eating zombies again. This leads to some frantic platforming as you are against the clock and enemies can be multiple screens away. The problem solving elements kick in as sometimes you will need to tactically lure the zombies to an area of the screen where you can reach them more easily in ten seconds from the button.

Your task is to rid the world of every zombie so each level is only finished when they are all dead. Some exploration is required to find them all which again adds to the challenge and depth of the game. The graphics are the standard NES 8-Bit fare with nothing really different or special. Those aspects come from the playability of the game which as is the case with many games built upon the MK1 engine offer a solid and enjoyable platforming experience.

WHAT I LIKE

The game is original and feels fresh. The learning curve is challenging but enjoyable. The variety of exploration and quick, precise platforming is a winning combination.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The backgrounds are mostly bland with static rain which is understandable for what is essentially a demonstration of the capabilities of the engine.

VERDICT

Cheril the Writer is a fantastic addition to the NES library and one I will continue coming back to play through in the future. The Mojon Twins have contributed so much to keeping retro gaming alive and have encouraged new programmers along the way. This game shows that in addition to all of that they are still making excellent games that we can enjoy for years to come.

THERE ARE SOME
TEMPLES NEARBY.
THE OBJECTS THERE
ARE MISPLACED,
OR SO THEY SAY.
GOOD LUCK, CHERIL!
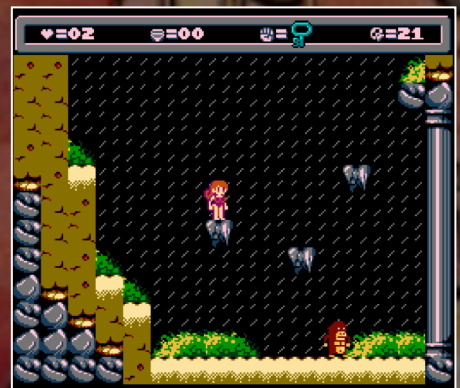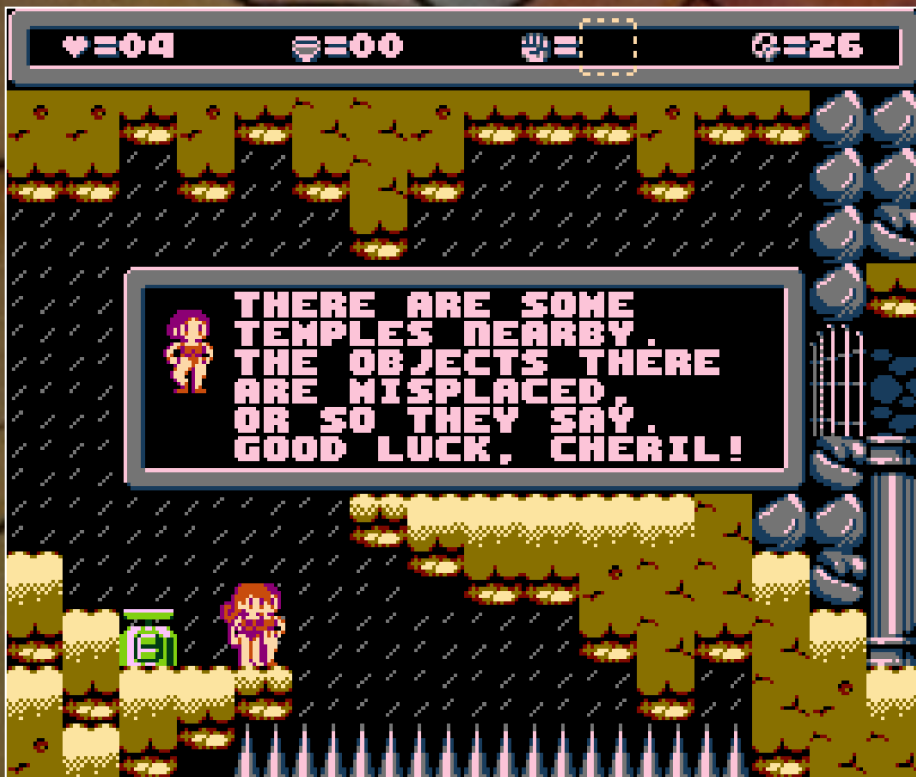
SCORE

"The learning curve is challenging but enjoyable"

GFX	75%
SFX	82%
FUN	87%
STAYING POWER	91%
OVERALL	**84%**

■ **CODING:** The Mojon Twins
■ **INFO:** Download from http://www.mojontwins.com/juegos_mojonos/yun-v-5-nes/ Donation recommended
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

YUN V5

Yun V5 is the latest version of Yun from the Mojon Twins. The game is coded using the MK1_NES / AGNES engine which the Mojon twins created. Hoping to inspire others as they have with the ZX Spectrum MK1 engine the Mojon twins have created Yun V5 to show just what the new engine is capable of and it really doesn't disappoint!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In typical Mojon twins fashion the storyline for Yun is very tongue-in-cheek. On this occasion Yun is a demon who has unexpectedly hatched from an egg and with nothing else to eat has found and eaten a tube of toothpaste unwittingly giving herself the power to blow bubbles.
She now owns a fast food restaurant and is looking to stock up on her supplies by capturing creatures in her bubbles. The game has borrowed heavily from Bubble Bobble but put the action into a sprawling platform environment and is all the better for it. Although the mechanic has been heavily

borrowed the execution is second to none. Within two minutes I was hooked. When I discovered I could ride my own bubbles to reach higher platforms I was blown away! (Pun intended.)

Yun V5 makes you feel like you are an invincible platforming God! You quickly master

the controls and jump flawlessly from platform to platform killing enemies at will and loving every minute of it. The music is excellent throughout and matches the quality of the gameplay. Included in the gameplay is an additional challenge of collecting all the stars, adding another element of staying power to what is already a fantastic game. On collecting every star you are rewarded with an extra level and the better ending. Even upon completing the game I found myself coming back for another go, constantly days later. Yun V5 deserves to be played again and again by anyone who enjoys 8-Bit platformers.

WHAT I LIKE

The game takes an age old gaming design and transforms it into a brand new experience that feels solid, playable and is rewarding throughout. The controls are solid and reliable and there are no cheap deaths or frustrating elements. The music adds to the ambience of the game completing a fantastic immersive experience.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

I would like the game to be longer as I can't get enough of Yun V5. The storyline is so abstract I find it hard to connect to the character or care about the mission so just make up my own in my head instead!

VERDICT

Yun V5 is amongst my favourite games developed in 2018. It suits the NES perfectly and if it was released at the time I have no doubt we would be referring to this as a classic. Whether it's to play through to the conclusion or to have a quick ten minute go, I'd recommend downloading it right now!

SCORE	
"The music adds to the ambience of the game completing a fantastic immersive experience"	
GFX	85%
SFX	90%
FUN	95%
STAYING POWER	92%
OVERALL	91%
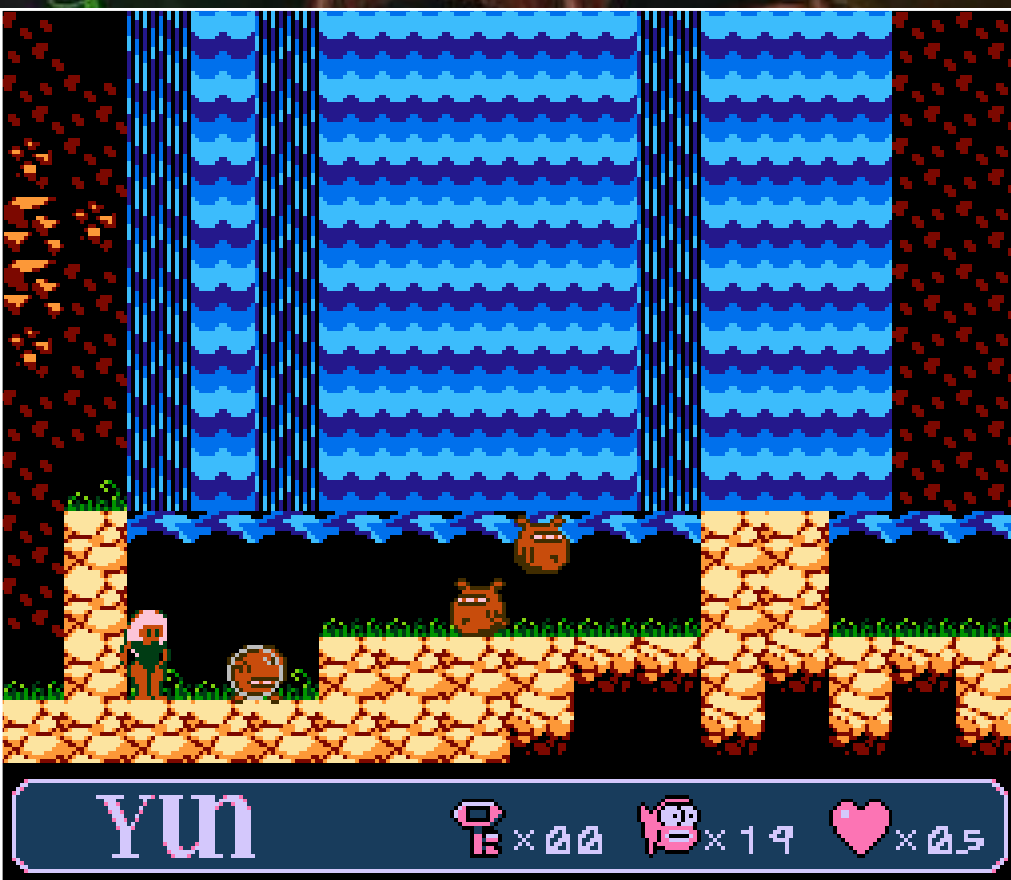
FLIGHT OF PIGARUS
by: Kagesan
Reviewed by: Andy O'Flaherty

Awesome! A vertical shooter! I love vertical shooters! In Flight of Pigarus (get it?) you control a flying pig on a strict time limit (perhaps the pig has limited fuel or something!) and have to get the highest score you possibly can. This is no nonsense blasting at its purest, and features some nice enemy variety, an effective power up system, and nice responsive controls. You can choose between 2 and 5 minute games, and the game ends when you either die or run out of time. Flight of Pigarus may be a bit short and basic, even by arcade shooter standards, but I enjoyed my time with it and wanted more... which can only be a good thing!

SCORE: 80%

GEMITAS
By: Cyttorak
Reviewed by: Andy O'Flaherty

Have you played the Master System version of Columns? It can be a bit hard to see can't it? Gemitas attempts to rectify this issue by redesigning the games' visuals to be more in line with the Mega Drive / Genesis version of the game. The results are astonishing quite frankly, and the game plays really well, bringing the gem dropping puzzle gameplay over completely intact. The larger visuals combined with the grid background actually make this easier and arguably better to play than the original game! However, Gemitas only features an endless play mode and is only a single player game, but despite the meagre content and some obnoxious music is an enjoyable title to play for any fans of puzzle titles.

SCORE: 76%

LITTLE SOKOBAN
Coded by: Jean Monos
Reviewed by: Andy O'Flaherty

The concept of Little Sokoban is a familiar one – push some boxes around in an enclosed

Angry flying pig destroys all in its path! (Flight of Pgarus)
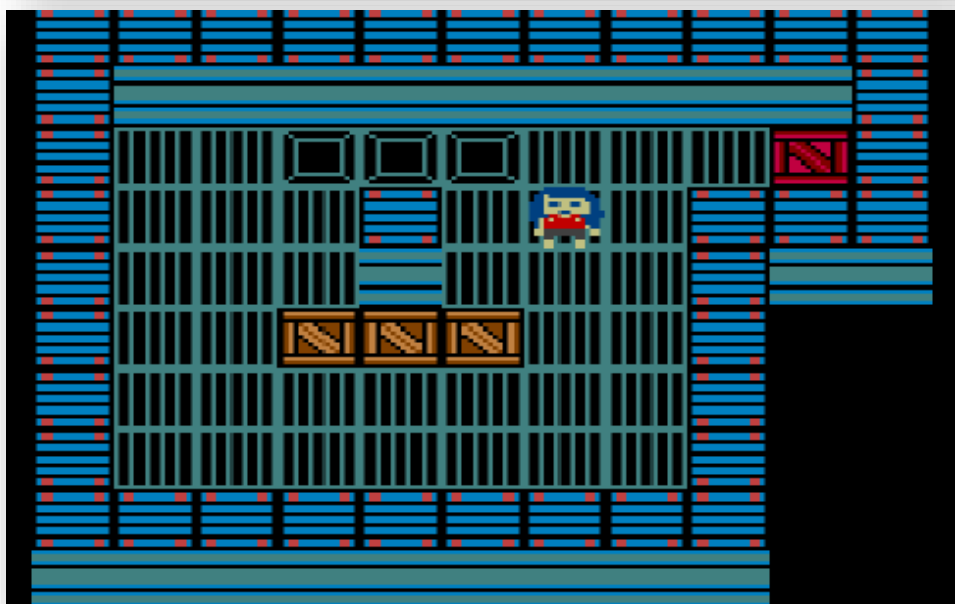
Sokoban pulled the short straw in the warehouse this week!

It's good to play a version of Columns that doesn't require a magnifying glass! (Gemitas)

space to solve the puzzles. Have you ever played 'Kwirk' on the Game Boy? No? Never mind. This is a straightforward puzzler where each room contains a number of pressure pads that have to be triggered at once to move onto the next stage. They are activated by pushing one of the boxes that litter the stages onto them, and the challenge centres around how to achieve this. The game starts easy enough with simple solutions, but doesn't take long until some advanced planning is required to not end up with a box in an immovable location. If you get stuck you can instantly reset the room as many times as you like, which perhaps makes an already short game entirely too easy. I was just getting into it when the credits popped up, damn it!. Some more levels would have been fantastic.

SCORE: 71%

SILVER VALLEY
Coded by: Mike Ruiz
Reviewed by: Andy O'Flaherty

Silver Valley is a remarkable platformer that tasks the player with destroying a cursed dragon that is wreaking havoc on the titular

Obligatory graveyard level - check! (Silver Valley)

Silver Valley. And how do you destroy this dragon? By collecting gems of course! Derivative classic video game task aside, the game seems to take its inspiration from the likes of Castlevania and later Wonderboy titles, and I have to say it completely blew me away! The game plays fantastically, has some beautiful visuals and catchy music, and really is a stunning achievement for a one-man development team. It even contains a Pac-Man style mini game! Despite the occasional glitch, this is one of the best homebrew games I have played on any format and I cannot recommend it highly enough!

SCORE: 92%

GALACTIC REVENGE
Coded by: Mike Ruiz
Reviewed by: Andy O'Flaherty

Galactic Revenge: Adventures of Olivia Gun is a comical top down shooter where you must take it to the aliens that emptied your fridge, killed you boyfriend, and worst of all stole you beloved Master System! The story may be tongue in cheek but the gameplay is no nonsense shooter action! Playing like Commando or Ikari Warriors in space, you move from area to area killing everything that

The inside of this spaceship is like the Tardis...

Reminds me of Smash TV for some reason… (Prisonnier II)

moves. The graphics are really well drawn, the music is quite catchy and the game plays really well. There is a nice variety to the locations and enemies (despite taking place on a spaceship), and also features some impressive bosses. Olivia can even change her clothes at certain points which alters her weapons. All in all Galactic Revenge is a highly enjoyable arcade shooter with great humour and bags of character. Don't miss it!

SCORE: 88%

PRISONNIER II
By: Offgame
Reviewed by: Andy O'Flaherty

Prisonnier II is a one V one strategy game, where the objective is to trap your opponent behind walls. Each turn the players can move one space in any direction, and then place a wall anywhere on the grid. Victory is achieved when your opponent can no longer make a valid move. The game can be played either against the computer or in 2 player mode, but to be honest the CPU is fairly idiotic so playing against a friend is almost certainly a must. The graphics serve their purpose, despite being fairly unremarkable, and there is no in game music. Prisonnier II's concept is solid enough, but as it is the game doesn't have much to offer. There are no CPU difficulty levels of any kind or progression for solo players. With a bit more to do this could have been great. Prisonnier III, perhaps?

SCORE: 69%

■ **CODING:** Frantisak Houra, GFX and SFX by Christian Kruger. Original game by Geoff Crammond.
■ **INFO:** 128K required, download from http://a8.fandal.cz/detail.php?files_id=7541
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Kieren Hawken

STUNT CAR RACER

The arrival of the 16-bit computers like the Atari ST and Commodore Amiga really saw 3D games come into their own. Possibly the most famous and highly regarded of these was MicroStyle's Stunt Car Racer. Programmed by the king of computer racing games, the legendary Geoff Crammond of REVS and Formula One Grand Prix fame, it was released in 1989 to widespread acclaim. But Microprose (owners of the MicroStyle label) felt that

there was still a little bit of life left in the 8-bits and persuaded Geoff, along with graphic artist John Cumming, to do a Commodore 64 port of the game too. Nobody even thought this was possible so there were a lot of surprised faces not only when it was released but also when they saw how accomplished it was. Some 18 years later the XXL team decided to convert the game to the Atari 8-bit, using the Commodore 64 version as a base, and even released the game for free!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Stunt Car Racer was completely different from anything that had come before it, it's like a racing game crossed with a roller coaster. Using a first person perspective, you race around a track high up in the air and must try not to fall off! If you do a giant crane has to hoist you back up and you lose valuable time. The idea of the game is to compete against opponents in a league style format trying to

get promoted to, and subsequently win, the first division championship. Each race is set over three laps and you get points for winning as well as setting the fastest lap time. The key to the game is to use your turbos effectively and make sure you don't miss the big jumps.

Crashing doesn't just lose you time though, it also damages your car. If your car gets to much damage, which is represented by cracks appearing on the screen, then unfortunately you have to retire and forfeit the race. If you damage the car really badly this handicap is also carried over into the next race too, which certainly makes sure that you'll be more careful with your car here than you are in most other racing games! Although this might make the game seem like its very much a simulator rather than a racer, the simple controls and short fast races are much more like an arcade game. I suppose it could be argued that Stunt Car Racer is one of the very games to truly bridge that gap between a driving simulator and a racing game.

You better make sure that other car is behind you when you finish the race

Get as much speed up as you can before hitting the big jumps
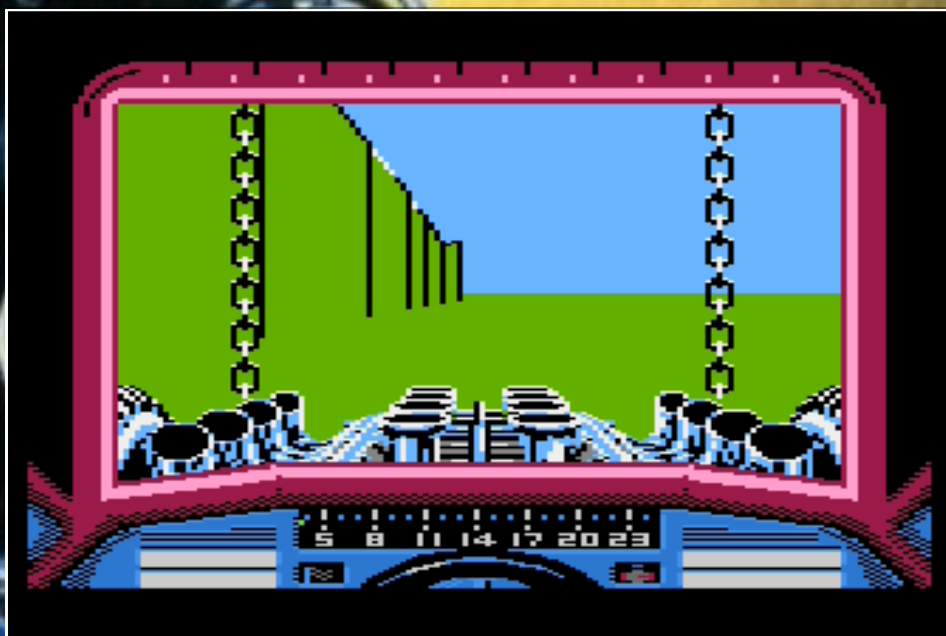
If you fall off the track a giant crane has to lift you back on!

unfair, especially when I also own a 130XE. I would like this to be release this on cartridge with a proper box and instructions too, but again, I can't really fault them too much for this as they would no doubt have to pay a hefty fee for the official license.

VERDICT

Without doubt Stunt Car Racer is still one of my favourite Atari ST games and a title that I spent a great deal of time with in my youth. This Atari 8-bit version is surprisingly close to the 16-bit original and is unquestionably one of the most technically impressive games released for the system. When you play games like this it's almost impossible to comprehend that this hardware was originally designed in the 1970s! If you own an Atari 8-bit and some sort of flash device then you should be downloading Stunt Car Racer the moment you finish reading this review.

WHAT I LIKE

The 3D wireframe graphics are utterly amazing here, they are both fast and smooth with seriously impressive frame rate. In fact it's actually faster and smoother than the Commodore 64 original that it's based upon! The HUD around the edge of the screen also looks really good and helps bring in some colour to the proceedings. The audio is also very good and kicks off with a great rendition of "The Race" on the title screen followed by some authentic in game effects. The controls are absolutely spot-on and this is a game that you will come back to time after time.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Do you know what? I'm not sure there's anything I didn't like about this game! I suppose I could moan about it needing 128k of memory, meaning I can't play it on my lovely XE Game System (my preferred model of the A8) but perhaps that would be a little

SCORE

"it's actually faster and smoother than the Commodore 64 original that it's based upon! "

GFX	95%
SFX	93%
FUN	94%
STAYING POWER	95%
OVERALL	**96%**

- **CODING:** Mariusz Wojcieszek & Terrence Derby , **SFX:** Ben Daglish.
- **INFO:** 64K Required. Download from http://www.atarimania.com/game-atari-400-800-xl-xe-jack-the-nipper_32059.html
- **REVIEWED BY:** Kieren Hawken

JACK THE NIPPER

First released for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum by Gremlin Graphics in 1986 with Amstrad CPC, Commodore 64 and MSX versions following, Jack The Nipper was a hugely successful arcade adventure revolving around the life of a very naughty toddler. Jack himself was actually based on the popular comic strip character Sweeney Toddler, who was created by the legendary Leo Baxendale and appeared in popular publications such as Whoopee!, Shiver and Shake, Buster and Whizzer and Chips. The game sadly never got an Atari 8-bit port back in the day so Mariusz and Tezz thought it was about time that was rectified. Having already ported a number of Spectrum games to the Atari 8-bit including titles such as Saboteur, Manic Miner and The Great Escape they definitely seem like the right people for the job here!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

As you might have guessed, you take the role of the titular Jack, a naughty young child who wants to break the world record for naughtiness. This is recorded the "naughty-o-meter" at the bottom of the screen along with your lives, inventory and nappy rash, which works like a health bar. He needs to carry out various wicked pranks on the unsuspecting inhabitants of his town, but if he comes into contact by angry adults he will be spanked. With each spanking his "nappy rash" meter increases until Jack ends up losing one of his five lives. Contact with the various monsters and ghosts that inhabit the town will also add to your nappy rash too. The various items that you come across on your travels can be picked up and then used to create mischief, part of the fun of this game is discovering what pranks can be caused and how you perform them. A lot of the humour in the game is very British and also quite puerile, so if you have a childish sense of humour you'll have no problem working out what each object does and what havoc can be caused. Some of the puzzles are very obvious though - for example weed killer being found near a nicely made up garden and super glue being suspiciously close to a set of false teeth.

WHAT I LIKE

There's no doubt that Jack The Nipper is a hugely amusing game and there is here to get your teeth into, this isn't a game you're going to complete quickly. The controls work well and there are no issues with things like collision detection here, all in all the game plays rather well. I also liked the recreation of Ben Daglish's excellent music that appears on the title screen, it's always good to hear the POKEY chip sing.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The graphics are pretty much identical to the ZX Spectrum original and while there is nothing essentially wrong with that as they were perfectly serviceable, they are all in monochrome and you do feel that with the colour abilities of the Atari they could have improved them a bit. The sound effects are also extremely basic here, again just like the Spectrum original, and I do wish they had given the option to have the music in-game too. I realise this was just a port but you do still hope it would use the more advanced abilities of the Atari computers a bit more.

VERDICT

In summary, there is no doubting that Jack The Nipper is a fun and enjoyable port of a ZX Spectrum classic that will bring Atari owners hours of fun. You just need to remember that this is nothing more than a port and not a game that's going to show of the technical abilities of the Atari computers. You should also take into account that the game is completely free to download too, so go and grab your Atari Max flash cartridge (or similar device) and take Jack The Nipper for day out!

The game starts off in your bedroom, which you have to escape to progress

SCORE	
"Jack The Nipper is a hugely amusing game"	
GFX	**70%**
SFX	**72%**
FUN	**87%**
STAYING POWER	**83%**
OVERALL	**79%**

- **CODING:** Mariusz Wojcieszek, **SFX:** Mariusz Wojcieszek
- **INFO:** 64K Required. Download from http://atariage.com/forums/topic/273060-new-game-released-skool-daze/
- **REVIEWED BY:** Kieren Hawken

SKOOL DAZE

Whenever you look at a list of the greatest ever ZX Spectrum games you will always find Skool Daze somewhere near the top. So when I heard that Mariusz had chosen to convert the game to the Atari 8-bit I couldn't have been happier! But rather than converting the Speccy original, he's actually picked apart the Commodore 64 versions instead, as both machines are 6502 based, but it's pretty much identical anyway, even when it comes to the graphics and sound!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

For those of you that have never played Skooldaze before, you control a naughty school kid called Eric who is trying to steal his report card from the headmaster's office so he doesn't get expelled and subsequently scolded by his parents. To complete your mission you must solve several puzzles in order to get the code to the safe and make your way home. You also need to search the various classrooms for objects that might help you along the way such as peashooters, stink bombs and a water pistol. You are not the only kid in the school of course, there are other pupils too who would like to nothing better than getting you into more trouble and see you punished by the teachers. Great news though, you can also turn the tables and get the other kids into trouble too. The best way to do this is to catapult a teacher and run away, as the moment the evil educators turn round they blame the first kid they see! Not only this though, you can also get revenge on your chums by giving them a beating at breaktime! Skool Daze was one of the very first open world computer games where you could basically stroll around as you please playing the game as you wish. So although there is an ultimate goal here, it's never actually enforced.

WHAT I LIKE

Without doubt my favourite feature of the game is the way you can rename the other students and teachers at the start of the game to mimic your own school you went to as a kid! This helps relieve years of built up resent for that horrible teacher who gave you a detention for messing about in French class. Skooldaze is also far deeper than many other 8-bit games out there, mostly thanks to the open world nature of it and the fact you can pretty much play the game as you like.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There isn't much you can criticise here really, I suppose you could argue that they should have made more improvements to the graphics and sound to use the abilities of the Atari. But personally I prefer to have the authentic looks and sounds of the original ZX Spectrum version. I must also add that that this isn't a game you can play quickly, so unless you have a few hours to waste this isn't the game you want to load up.

VERDICT

There's absolutely nothing else out there like this on the Atari 8-bit, so that alone makes it worth playing. But not just that, Skooldaze is, for me anyway, one of the finest games to be released for the machine to date! The only way Skooldaze will be beat on the Atari is if Mariusz also converts the even more amazing sequel - Back To Skool.

If you get caught doing something naughty the teachers will give you lines

The canteen is where all the kids congregate at lunchtime

SCORE

"There's absolutely nothing else out there like this on the Atari 8-bit"

GFX	78%
SFX	73%
FUN	98%
STAYING POWER	97%
OVERALL	**95%**

A full map of the school where all the action takes place!

PRINCE OF PERSIA

After discovering the Apple II 6502 source code for the original Prince of Persia had been recovered and uploaded to GitHub by the legendary author Jordan Mechner, Kieran Connell of the Bit Shifters group decided to take it upon himself to port this all time classic over to the BBC Master computer. Obviously the BBC computer shares the same 6502 CPU, but it was quickly decided they would need to target this at the master range as it would need the entire 128K of memory. Now this might seem like the game was an easy port, but far from it as the BBC's hardware had lots of other obstacles that needed to be overcome. I won't explain them all here but I seriously suggest reading the Bit Shifters blog on Git Hub if you want to know all the gory and very technical details!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Prince of Persia was a massive success on the other home computers and consoles it was released for and the BBC was probably one of the few mainstream machines of its era to not get a port, so it's great to see that this injustice has finally been set right! I don't think I need to tell you what a huge success Prince of Persia was as it went on to spawn multiple sequels and even a big budget Hollywood movie. Perhaps most famously, this game took Jordan Mechner's patented animation techniques, that were first seen in Broderbund's classic Karateka, to a new level and provided some of the most realistic moving character sprites that anyone had ever seen in a video game. If you didn't already know, Prince of Persia is a 2D action-adventure with platformer elements and also lots of emphasis on the fighting. It's a real mish mash of different genres, which is probably one of the reasons it felt so fresh and original when it was released.

The plot tells us that the Grand Vizier Jaffar has thrown you into a dark dungeon and plans to marry the girl of your dreams in exactly 1 hour. You're not going to let that happen are you? You must try to escape from the dungeon, take out Jaffar's guards, find your way through the Sultan's palace and then defeat Jaffar himself. You've only got sixty minutes to complete this mission and the clock is ticking, so you have very little time to waste hanging around and admiring the scenery (and you will because its jaw dropping awesome - Ed). Your many tasks include avoiding deadly traps, solving rudimentary puzzles, jumping across platforms

You have just one hour in order to complete your mission
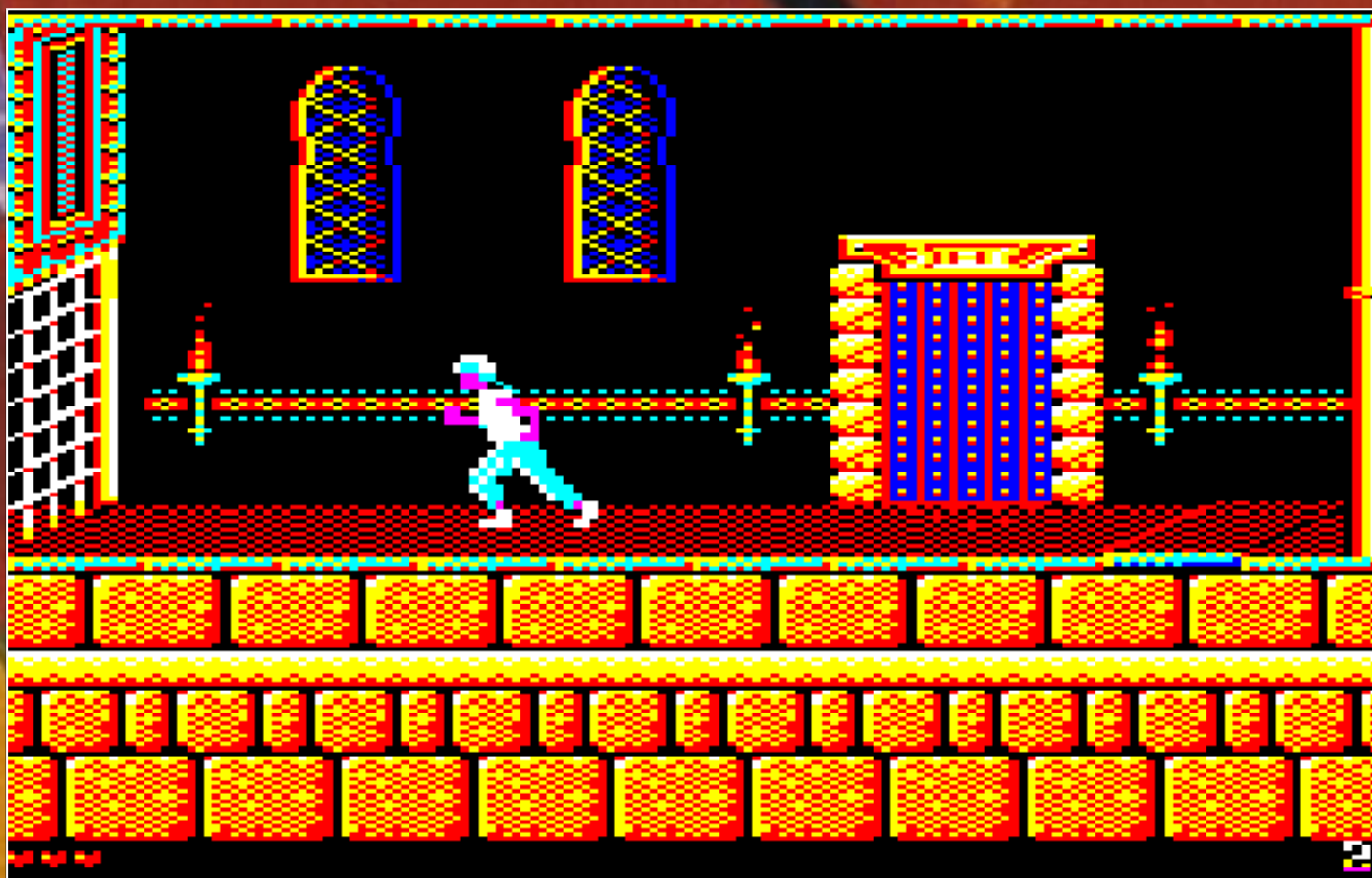
You have just one hour in order to complete your mission

and engaging in dangerous sword fights. Although the player has an infinite amount of lives you have to restart at the beginning of a level each time you die, which can get a little frustrating.

WHAT I LIKE

The recreation of the games original intro sequence is absolutely stunning, in fact it almost looks as good as the one you'll find on 16-bit machines! This intro is accompanied by some excellent music, in fact it's probably the best I have ever heard on the Beeb. These high standards are carried over into the actual game too as most of the graphics here are excellent as are the sound effects too. BBC Prince of Persia also controls extremely well, well if you have a joystick anyway, and this is certainly a game that provides a lot of depth.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE
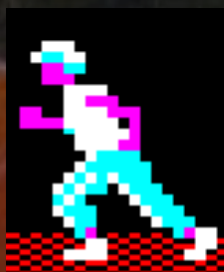
There are a few minor niggles here that detract somewhat but none of them are game breaking and certainly shouldn't put you off picking this up. Firstly there are the keyboard controls, which are a bit fiddly and will lead to some unfair deaths. Secondly I did find some of the colour choices on the sprites a bit strange, it's almost as if they tried to use as much colour as possible when it might have been better to keep things more simple.

The full-length intro sequence in this game will really blow you away!

VERDICT

All in all this has to be the most accomplished homebrew I have ever seen for the BBC Micro. It puts most commercial games to shame and really shows just what is possible when this computer is put into the right hands. The developers deserve nothing but praise for this and I really can't wait to see what title they decide to work on next!

SCORE

"The recreation of the games original intro sequence is absolutely stunning"

GFX	90%
SFX	97%
FUN	85%
STAYING POWER	94%
OVERALL	**93%**

- **CODING:** Richard Broadhurst
- **INFO:** Download from http://www.bbcmicro.co.uk/game.php?id=2719
- **REVIEWED BY:** Kieren Hawken

PHOENIX

Not many people know this but the original Phoenix arcade game was the first ever video game to feature what we now know as an end of game boss! A new variation on the Space Invaders theme, it was quite a few years before this became a standard feature in shoot 'em ups. Phoenix also inspired several other classic shooters of the time, such as GORF and Vanguard, to include one of their own. Phoenix was developed by Amstar Electronics, who were actually located in Phoenix, Arizona (which I am sure had an influence on the name) in 1980 and quickly snapped up by Centuri, who distributed the game in the United States. Taito then picked up distribution for Japan, which is surprising given that it was in direct competition with their own game Space Invaders game, but it also shows just how popular and successful the game had become. The BBC had several clones of the game released for it, most notably Alligata's Eagle Empire, but none of them quite got it right, so it's great to see somebody creating a definite version.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

As already mentioned, Phoenix is a single screen shooter very much in the vein of the legendary Space Invaders, but probably shares more in common with Namco's classic Galaxian. The game is made up of several stages that end in the boss / mothership stage and these repeat making it harder each time. The first of these stages plays very much like Galaxian in fact, with little aliens that both shoot and dive bomb you as you try to take them out. Then you move onto the flying bird stages where you meet the titular phoenix birds themselves and the action really heats up. These invading enemies have big flapping wings and can only be killed by shooting them dead in the centre. Hit them either side and it just removes one of their wings! This is an incredibly cool feature, especially as these wings will grow back if you leave them long enough. Then you face the final boss in the form of a giant mothership where you must shoot through to the cockpit and kill the pilot (something that was copied in GORF). This giant craft keeps descending on you, shooting all the time, meaning you have to take it out as quick as possible. Another very original feature of Phoenix is the shield, this can be activated by pressing down on the joystick and protects your craft for a few seconds at a time. While this is active you can't move or shoot back though, so it's purely a defensive manoeuvre. Another unusual feature for a game of this time.

WHAT I LIKE

Graphically the game is almost identical to the arcade. I've said it before and I'll say it again - the BBC's bright and bold colour palette is extremely well suited to re-creating these early coin-op classics authentically. Richard has also done a rather sterling job at getting the audio right too and both the sound effects and music are pretty damn close to the arcade original. These old arcade classics also offer tremendous replay value, as you repeatedly try to beat your high score, so this is definitely a game that you will come back to from time to time too.

The aliens arrive in formation before they start dive bombing you!

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

I think perhaps the only real moan I can make is that the released version still has a few odd graphical glitches that need cleaning up. I am sure these will all be cleaned up in due course though as the programmer as assured us that this is just a pre-release version and there will be another more polished one coming later on. I suppose you could argue that it's a bit slower than the arcade game too, but this doesn't really detract from the gameplay that much.

VERDICT
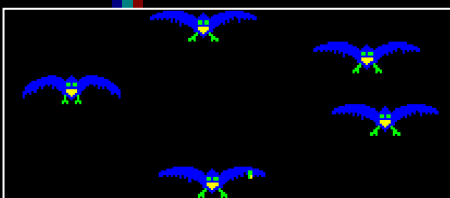
Phoenix has always been a real favourite of mine and undoubtedly one of the most under rated games of its era. This port is certainly not going to disappoint any fans of the original coin-op and is yet another superb arcade conversion to add to the BBC Micro's already very long list!

The loading screen does in fact denote this is still a beta version

SCORE

"Graphically the game is almost identical to the arcade"

GFX	87%
SFX	90%
FUN	94%
STAYING POWER	94%
OVERALL	90%

- **CODING:** Richard Broadhurst
- **INFO:** Download from http://www.bbcmicro.co.uk/game.php?id=2850
- **REVIEWED BY:** Kieren Hawken

CENTIPEDE

The original Centipede coin-op was very much used to promote the image of Dona Bailey, hailed as the first female arcade engineer/programmer, and the game was very popular with the fairer sex because of this. But in reality this 1980 coin-eater was very much the work of Atari legend Ed Logg - the man behind hits such as Asteroids, Gauntlet and Xybots. Centipede was also the game that made the quirky Atari trackball famous (later seen in Crystal Castles and Marble Madness), a controller that gave the player very quick movement around a small area, ideal for a fast action shoot 'em up such as this. The huge success of the game saw it converted to a multitude of home formats, both officially and unofficially, the BBC included. Perhaps the most famous version for the Beeb is the one from Superior Software, which was a more than competent clone of the coin-op. So you might ask yourself why the game needed to be remade once again? Well, programmer Richard Broadhurst, A.K.A. Tricky from the Stardot forum, was hungry for a more arcade authentic port of the game so set about making this new version to achieve just that. So let's find out if he pulled it off!

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

In Centipede the player has to defend themselves against swarms of insects and bugs including the giant Centipede himself, who must be destroyed in order to complete the level. This is very much an early example of a boss character in a video game as he is central to completing the level and requires multiple hits to destroy. You control what was always assumed was some sort of bug sprayer at the bottom of the screen (but is often shown in artwork as a gnome!) who can shoot as well as move around the screen. This movement is not just left and right, as you also have limited movement up and down, which is especially useful if the Centipede makes his way to the bottom of the screen. All over the play field are mushrooms which can be blasted out the way and will also cause the centipede to move down the screen faster as he bumps into them. The Centipede itself takes many hits to destroy, as I previously mentioned, and a key part of this is that you must take out each one of his sections. As you shoot him these will actually split off and even move down the screen independently so you need to try and be as accurate as possible. If any part of him manages to get to the bottom of the screen he grows back a section, causing even more chaos. The Centipede isn't the only foe to watch out for though as other enemies litter the screen, each with their own characteristics. The spider for example jumps around erratically, the fleas shoot down the

screen at you and the scorpions poison the mushrooms, causing the Centipede to mutate if he touches them. The Centipede and the other enemies also get faster moving as the game progresses.

WHAT I LIKE

When it comes to getting the look right Richard absolutely nailed it here. The BBC's bright colour palette is very well suited to replicating the similarly vibrant tones of the arcade original and, unlike all the previous versions of Centipede for the BBC, this one also plays in the correct aspect ratio too! It's not just the graphics that impress however - he also did a great job on the audio as well with a lovely title tune and nicely noisy in-game effects. The controls options couldn't be more accurate and comprehensive either as you can select between keyboard, joystick and trackball control. For a final flourish of arcade authenticity, there's a high score table present to preserve all your achievements.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There really are very few negatives that I can pick out here! The only thing I can think of is that it might have been nice if Richard had added a two-player mode, like the excellent Atari 7800 port. But this is a very minor moan and doesn't detract from an otherwise excellent game.

VERDICT

I have always been an absolutely huge fan of Centipede and also have a great affection for the BBC Micro from my school days – so this is almost a perfect mix! This is without a doubt one of the best 8-bit ports of the famous arcade game out there and a must play game for all BBC owners. What's even better is that it can be downloaded for free from the Stardot forum. So what are you waiting for? Grab that can of bug spray and get blasting!
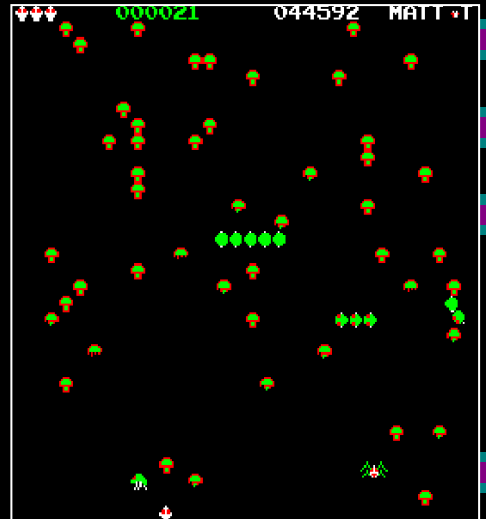
Watch out for the spider as it bounces around the play area
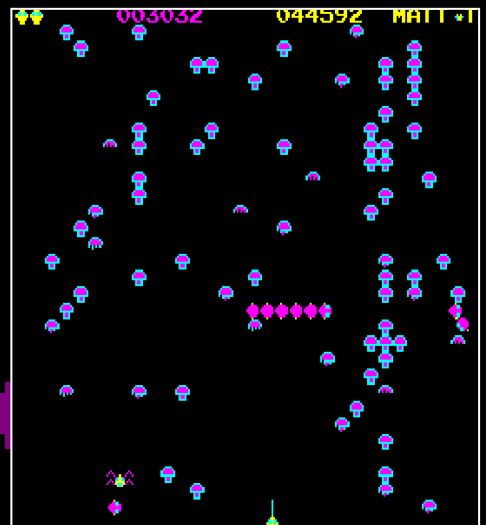
As you shoot the centipede it will split into sections, making life much harder!

SCORE

"When it comes to getting the look right Richard absolutely nailed it here"

GFX	84%
SFX	77%
FUN	94%
STAYING POWER	95%
OVERALL	**93%**

■ **CODING:** Lurkio
■ **INFO:** Download from http://www.bbcmicro.co.uk/game.php?id=2846
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Douglas McGregor

MAZE OF MADNESS

Maze of Madness is a text adventure created by Lurkio of 'The Oregon Trail' (1978) fame. This game however is more of a challenge than a game. I have combed the internet and found only one person claiming to have solved the puzzle. Apparently there is some sort of trick to solving this maze but for the life of me I really don't know what it is! I managed to find one person who had managed to figure it out and he assured me that the solution is "Cruel!"

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Upon loading the game you are greeted with some mysterious music which sets the tone for the game. You are then introduced to the dungeon master who greets you as follows: "I'm the most fiendish Dungeon Master the Cursed Lands have ever known, and yet you just march into my lair and try to ransack it?! I suppose you thought it would be an 'Adventure'. What arrogance! What folly. "The only reason you aren't already dead is that I thought it might be amusing to watch you desperately try to escape my protean maze before your strength gives out. Oh, and I'm going to get my minions to beat the hell out of

you first. "There! The dungeon just rebuilt itself, especially for you. My minions will throw you in now… "You look around and find yourself in a maze of twisty passages, all alike. You see exits in all directions…"

You are given 20 moves to solve the maze with the usual text adventure directions of N,E,S,W, Get, Drop etc. I'm a hardened text adventure enthusiast and I have completed dozens of text adventures over the years such as the Zork games, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Planetfall etc. but this one really had me scratching my head. There seems to be no rhyme nor reason to the path to follow and each time you find the same item which you cannot use and see the same 2 characters who you cannot interact with or follow. To say I'm baffled is an understatement. I've spent hours trying every possibility and can't figure it out. The game is quite witty and I enjoy the premise. Everytime you die you are given a solution of what the maze actually was but then it regenerates like the World War 2 Enigma Code from . Perhaps I'll need to emulate Alan Turing and build a super computer to solve it as my brain is clearly not up to the task.

WHAT I LIKE

The premise of the game is intriguing and makes you want to solve it. The limited moves keep you wanting just one more shot at solving it.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

There is really nothing else to the game. There are not multiple room to explore or items to experiment with.

VERDICT

Maze of Madness is an aptly named game as I can feel my sanity slipping away while playing it! Perhaps it should be referred to as more of a cruel torture device than a game. Mocking you throughout as you fail over and over again. I'm sure there is a very clever and witty way to solve it which gives the gamer a great sense of achievement but is it worth the immense levels of frustration along the way? For me I'm afraid it does not and I have no plans on attempting it again.

```
I'm the most fiendish Dungeon Master the
Cursed Lands have ever known, and yet
you just march into my lair and try to
ransack it?! I suppose you thought it
would be an "Adventure". What arrogance!
What folly.

The only reason you aren't already dead
is that I thought it might be amusing to
watch you desperately try to escape my
protean maze before your strength gives
out. Oh, and I'm going to get my minions
to beat the hell out of you first.

There! The dungeon just rebuilt itself,
especially for you. My minions will
throw you in now...

You look around and find yourself in a
maze of twisty little passages, all
alike. You see exits in all directions.
>>                                    17
```
What I wouldn't give to escape this maze and give the Dungeon Master a Dragon Punch to the face!

```
strange rune carved into the wall.


Enormous gears grind and shudder...

There! The dungeon just rebuilt itself,
especially for you. My minions will
throw you in now...

You look around and find yourself in a
maze of twisty little passages, all
alike. You see exits in all directions.
>> _                                  21
```
Each time you fail you are tormented with the solution of the maze you were just in before it regenerates and you start all over again
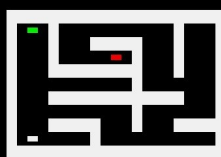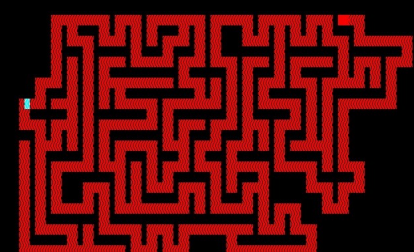
Press a key if you are foolish enough to enter the
MAZE OF MADNESS

The game does give you a fair warning. Don't say I didn't warn you when you've pulled all your hair out!

```
alike. You see exits in all directions.
A white rabbit appears and rushes off
eastwards, muttering something about
being late.
>> E                                  11

You limp ahead and find yourself in a
maze of twisty little passages, all
alike. You see exits in all directions.
>> E                                  10

You limp ahead and find yourself in a
maze of twisty little passages, none
alike. You see exits in all directions.
>> E                                   9

You limp ahead and find yourself in a
maze of twisty little passages, all
alike. You see exits in all directions.
>>                                     8
```
I have no idea what to do with the white rabbit but I enjoyed the Lewis Carroll reference

```
Eh?
You glimpse Jamis Buck skipping through
the maze effortlessly.
>> W                                   6

You limp ahead and find yourself in a
maze of twisty little passages, all
alike. You see exits in all directions.
>> S                                   5

You limp ahead and find yourself in a
maze of twisty little passages, none
alike. You see exits in all directions.
>> E                                   4

You limp ahead and find yourself in a
maze of twisty little passages, all
alike. You see exits in all directions.
>>                                     3
```
Jamis Buck is the author of 'Mazes for Programmers' I wish I could ask him for ideas!

SCORE

"The premise of the game is intriguing and makes you want to solve it"

GFX	**N/A**
SFX	**N/A**
FUN	**50%**
STAYING POWER	**50%**
OVERALL	**50%**

- **CODING:** John Blythe
- **INFO:** Download from http://www.bbcmicro.co.uk/game.php?id=2340
- **REVIEWED BY:** John Davies

THE DARKNESS OF RAVEN WOOD

Code + Graphics by John Blythe ©2016
Slim Character Code by Robin Nixon

The Darkness of Raven Wood is a horror themed graphical text adventure (Aka. Interactive Fiction) with an impressive number of illustrated locations.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Set in 1862. You receive a letter from your childhood friend Raynard who now lives in Raven Wood a neighboring village to the one you both grew up in. The new head of Raven

I feel like Griffin Dunne on the Yorkshire Moors already

That stuff they say about Northerners being chatty. It's cobblers!!

Wood manor, Lord Elgan Wood, has recently arrived to carry on his dead father's legacy. Since his arrival, strange things have been happening. Several children and a priest have gone missing. Strange creatures and a snow storm have beset the village. Raynard's last message pleaded with you to return and help him. When you arrive snow is falling in July, the villagers are staying indoors and Raynard is nowhere to be seen.

As with most text adventures to play it you need to know various commands to travel around, manipulate objects and interact with people in the game world. This game uses the compass directions, UP, DOWN, IN and OUT for movement. You can USE, EXAMINE, GET, TAKE and DROP items. INV brings up your inventory. SAVE unsurprisingly saves your game, but there's only one save file you can use. You can also TALK to people. The parsers vocabulary is much larger than this but finding the commands you need to use is part of the fun.

The Initial title screen has two options (1) Instructions and (2) Play the game. On pressing (2) a secondary title screen appears with two more options to either (1) Play a new game or (2) Load a saved game. I'm not sure why there wasn't just a single title screen with the three options together. Anyway, on pressing (1) the game does actually begin. You start off outside The Bleeding Wolf Tavern, Not quite The Slaughtered Lamb but it might as well be. It's snowing and your carriage is there but the driver's done a runner. Cheers pal. You can go in the tavern where there's a barman, villagers and beer. On attempting to chat with people it seems you're better off interacting with your beer rather than anything human.

I left the tavern and ventured east where there was a village square containing a fountain and an equally talkative stranger. The square was a crossroads. After examining a few things I decided to go South. Another crossroads on a trail. A graveyard west, the trail continuing south and a forest east. I had to check out the graveyard. Turned out it was an abandoned church with a creepy guest lumbering around outside. I decided not to hang around for dinner and went back east.

I went further south along the trail and eventually somehow ended up in a dark forest where some wolves were sniffing the air. I waited for them to go away. Turns out I'm not exactly Cesar Millan, the dog whisperer, and ultimately paid the price. So this game plays just like all those fabulous text adventures I played aeons ago. A fantastic nostalgia fix. There is a slight pause when you move from one location to the next but it's not surprising when you learn that the game has 50+

locations all with illustrations and the code fits into just one SSD file. This is thanks to some incredible compression and decompression of the illustrations by Lurkio and Tricky.

The illustrations themselves are absolutely gorgeous. Photoshop with a tablet was used to create them. They were then converted to BBC format with Image2BBC. In some places the same illustrations were used. Not something I'm a big fan of even if it is supposed to be a maze that's easy to get lost in. Location descriptions are excellent giving the adventure a solid, creepy, hammer horror style atmosphere. There is no music or sound effects which is not exactly shocking for this genre. The silence actuals lends itself to this type of game. Things are even more spooky when all you can hear is the sound of the computer loading in data.

WHAT I LIKE

The atmosphere generated by the location descriptions and back story is excellent. The quality of the illustrations is top class and it's great that every location in the game has one.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The characters in the game are not quite as alive and interactive as say 'The Hobbit' and those duplicate location illustrations are a personal bugbear that I just can't shake.

VERDICT

A thoroughly enjoyable old-style text adventure with remarkable illustrations, to accompany the text, both in quality and quantity. Recommended, especially for lovers of interactive fiction.

SCORE

"The illustrations themselves are absolutely gorgeous"

GFX	91%
SFX	N/A
FUN	78%
STAYING POWER	67%
OVERALL	79%

Interviewer: Kieran Hawken

Mark Nunan (pictured right) was the co-founder of Abbex Electronics, an early 8-bit games publisher who are most famous for titles such as All or Nothing, E.T., Spookyman and Cosmos.

8-bit ANNUAL (8BA): First of all, can you tell me about your background before Abbex and how got into video games?

Mark Nunan (MN): I had no background, I was a student who had just completed A' levels. I had done a couple of small money making ventures, such as taking £500 of 25p crowns minted for Charles and Diana's wedding to Singapore, where I sold them for £2000. They were made into Perspex paperweights for the tourist market, comfortably financing my trip there.

8BA: Can you tell me about how Abbex was formed and your plan for the company?

MN: I was doing a business studies degree at Middlesex University alongside a computing module. This led to me starting to write some business software programs for the Commodore Pet computer. Another student called Martin Ford sold a couple of these packages to local businesses and proposed starting a business. Our first company was called Micropower Business Applications (MBA) but never sold another package; I was far more interested in the idea of games for the home computing market and so I set up another company just for that. MBA actually evolved into an agent for the first portable computer in the UK, the Osborne and, laterally the Newbrain, the original BBC computer. I really thought that portable was the future of business computing although at 24lbs the Osborne was not overly portable. We sold quite a few though.

8BA: Where did the name come from and how did the logo with the tortoise come about?

MN: The tortoise was all about the hare and the tortoise, I identified with the tortoise as I saw him as logical, shy but relentless whilst I resented the hare who was a bit of a cocky smart alec. So I made the tortoise cooler and faster
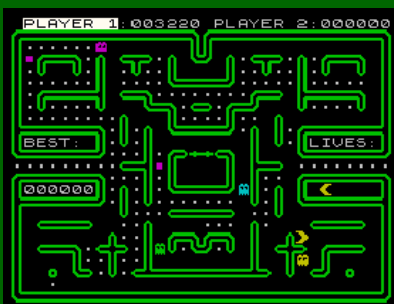
Spookyman for the ZX Spectrum,1982

with the help of one of the guys from the Art school at the University. The baseball hat came from the USA where I had been in 1980.

I bought the company off the shelf as a ready made company with the name, but we decided it was a great name so kept it. The Games People strapline was something I came up with to focus on games and not computers, particularly business computers.

8BA: Did you code yourself, if so what games did you program?

MN: As I already said I did code but as soon as I met Costa Panayi I realised that I was a long way from being good enough. I concentrated on game ideas, graphics and sales.

8BA: How did you go about finding programmers in those early years?

MN: We spent a lot of time going through programmes that we were sent; there were hundreds of them and a lot of very poor ones. There were also stars such as Paul Reynolds who if memory serves was only 15 when he produced All or Nothing – which was definitely my favourite of the games we produced. We eventually were working with up to 20 programmers.

8BA: Abbex advertised a lot in magazines of the time, was this the main source of your sales?

MN: Very early on advertising was the only way to sell games particularly the wonderful Popular Computing Weekly which was fantastically productive. We would receive loads of orders in the post every morning, usually with cash; which became an issue with the bank manager who could not understand

Krakatoa for the ZX Spectrum, 1984

how we got hold of so much cash with no retail outlet when we were students – it was hard enough even opening the account in those days. At the same time we started attending exhibitions which were very productive. I remember one in Manchester in 1982 where we spent three days being handed £10 notes non-stop for Fausts Folly and Cosmos. Then it all got a bit corporate and we were selling in WH Smith, Harrods, distributors and 16 countries around the world. We got a 3 storey office in Bedford employed managers etc and stopped making any money. We did look at buying an office in a place called Canary Wharf in 1983 but thought it was too far out and was too decrepit.

8BA: Many of Abbex's games were clones of popular arcade games, was this a choice of yourself or the people coding them?

MN: I wanted a wide range of games as I was convinced people would want a broad selection to play and I wanted to maximise the impact of our advertising without spending a lot of time developing new concepts. Great ideas were in short supply so we decided to do similar versions of already very popular games – to be honest we were too naïve to know much about copyright and didn't really worry about such issues. It was all a bit Wild West then with things moving so fast that if you didn't get on with things it was too late, very much don't think, just do.

8BA: Can you tell about how you came to produce a ZX Spectrum version of the Atari 2600 game E.T.?

MN: In late 1983 were sponsored by the government to go to the MIJID exhibition in Nice France and represent the growing British home computer industry – unknown to Her Majesty the exhibition was a subset of a pornography exhibition, which gave a rise to all sorts of new ideas for games which never came to fruition. We knew Atari was going to be there and one of the programmers had done a version of their new game. We launched the game in the UK with the idea of pulling it if Atari got upset. When we showed it to Atari they ignored us and didn't care. They went on to piss us off when we left our stand to talk to a Daily Telegraph journalist for a bit. Atari decided to move our stand and replace us with their own. We came back very confused and indignantly kicked them off, turning down their offers of cash. An hour later a French TV crew appeared asking about Atari Games. Our French was not up to much but we showed them ETX which made them relatively happy – I don't think Atari ever noticed.

8BA: Did you ever get in any legal trouble with Atari for copying their game?

MN: No, but I probably will now after you publish this!

MARK NUNAN

E.T.X. / The Extra-Terrestrial Xargon for the ZX Spectrum, 1983

8BA: Nearly all your games were for the Spectrum, why was that?

MN: Not strictly true, we also did games for the VIC-20 and the Commodore 64 and of course the VTech Laser, which I try to forget about as it was the worst business decision ever!

All Or Nothing for the ZX Spectrum, 1984

8BA: Can you tell me about how the deal with Laser Computers came about and why you turned down Amstrad?

MN: We were contacted by a number of companies with regard to creating ranges of games for new computers that were to be launched. This was not really what we did but Vtech were a huge Asian company that had a solid computer called the Laser which they were proposing to sell at a price point that we thought would blow the market open. So we agreed to write six games for Vtech. The computer they proposed selling was way above the price they told us and did not have the spec we were given, it was murdered by the Oric and others - I believe I still have the only games that were ever written for a computer that never sold. We didn't really turn Amstrad down as no one had ever heard of them, so it was no big deal. We had any number of approaches. It was only later we realised what we had done. We never talked to Lord Almighty Sugar.

8BA: Why did you chose to make most of your Spectrum games 16k compatible when others were targeting the 48k?

MN: This was one of my biggest errors. I really thought the 16k would out sell the 48k and I will always feel guilty about Cosmos in particular as we persuaded Costa Panayi not to do a 48k version, even though he desperately wanted to. It was a fantastic game but the graphics and depth possible with 48k would have made it one of the best games ever. As it was, we got murdered in the charts by Timegate from Quicksilva, which I never thought was nearly as good. Sorry Costa!

8BA: Speaking of Costa Panayi (founder of Vortex Software), how did that come about and did you know at the time that he would go on to pretty big things in the industry?

MN: Costa was an absolute star. When I first met him he truly blew me away. He was miles ahead of everyone else out there and what he did on Cosmos in only 9k was truly amazing. He stopped any illusions I had that I could be a programmer, but at the same time he showed me what was possible too. I bought all his games afterwards and always followed his career closely.

8BA: Tell me about your early success that saw the company evolve very quickly and move from your bedroom into swanky new offices?

MN: To be honest it was all too fast. We were doing a business studies degree and had enough money to truly enjoy student life so there was not too much downtime. We had a lot of willing assistants recruited from our course so we had a great camaraderie and a can do attitude, which was great, but meant we charged into things without planning as well as we might. We also used our law professor to do any legal contracts, our accounts professor to do our accounts but it was a shame our marketing professor declined to help and the computer guy was furious we stopped doing business software. This was cheap but probably meant that we did not benefit from the advice that proper professionals would have given us.

8BA: Was it the failure of that deal that killed the company? How did the end come about?

MN: Yes and no. We lost a packet on that venture but for me it was all becoming too corporate. I never went into computer games with an idea that it would become a 9 to 5 career, it was meant to be fun. We had staff, offices, and investment budgets so we were not making a fortune and it was very stressful. They were also companies coming into the market with massive marketing budgets and proper capital. For me the buzz had gone and I was already moving onto to other things. So I sold the company and left to tour the world. I cannot remember who we sold to (it was Prism Leisure - Ed.) I know that I was bored with the whole deal and just wanted to move on - the managers, Martin and common sense had taken over and no one was on my side any more. They failed to understand that we needed to be bold to stay ahead - this is one reason they went all safe with clones of popular games and just milking what we had.

8BA: What would you have done differently in hindsight?

MN: Probably everything! Put Cosmos onto
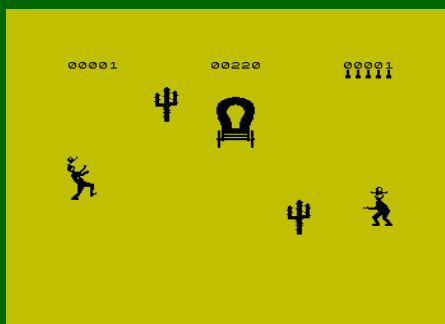
High Noon for the ZX Spectrum, 1983

Cosmos for the ZX Spectrum, 1982

Pilot 64 for Commodore 64, 1983

48K, drank less beer, been nicer to Mr Sugar, locked Costa Panayi up somewhere safe, not done the clone games and spent more on marketing. But it was fun and I learnt a bundle, including the fact that anyone can do anything if they put their mind to it.

8BA: What have you done since Abbex?

MN: Just about everything! I did a stint at the London stock exchange, traded bonds on Wall Street and became a corporate banker. That was not really me though so I set up a chain of restaurants in the city (Harry's Bar), started a publishing company, got into dance music and clubs and got into manufacturing by buying a failing French manufacturer of CHP systems. By 2014 I was manufacturing everything from compressors, car parts, beer pumps, screws and so on but with a turnover of nearly £40m I felt the same as I did in the later days of Abbex – too corporate, no fun. So I sold everything except for my current company Sarginsons Industries, which manufactures lightweight components for the automotive industry with a particular emphasis on electric vehicles, and started to enjoy life a little.

8BA: What are you most proud of from your Abbex years?

MN: Just doing it! In retrospect it was barking mad that I should start a software and hardware company whilst at uni, but ignorance is a virtue sometimes. I always try and keep that approach to everything I do – the answer is yes, now what's the question? Still charging!
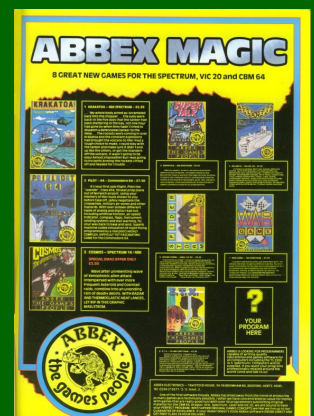
Thank you to Mark Nunan for taking the time to give us this interview.

RICHARD BROADHURST

Richard Broadhurst (pictured top left) demonstrating some of his BBC games to BBC Micro and retro gaming enthusiasts at the Wakefield RISC OS Show, 2015

Written by Richard's in his own words with George Bachaelor.

I am a BBC Micro "beeb" coder in my spare time. Back in the day I wrote some games and demos but only tried to get Jeltron published. I was writing it with a friend, Gil Jaysmith who did the Spectrum ports of Repton 1 and 2, but after getting it "signed", we moved apart and never finished it. I have always tinkered with the beeb, but didn't get serious again until I started working on Carnival. Since then I have written AstroBlaster (with speech), Phoenix (in public beta – needs final optimisation), Frogger (which supports the arcade colours if you have a VideoNuLA), Space Invaders, Centipede (supports the beeb's track-ball), Scramble (pixel software scrolling) and am currently working on Moon Patrol (again with VideoNuLA support). My main aim is to show what
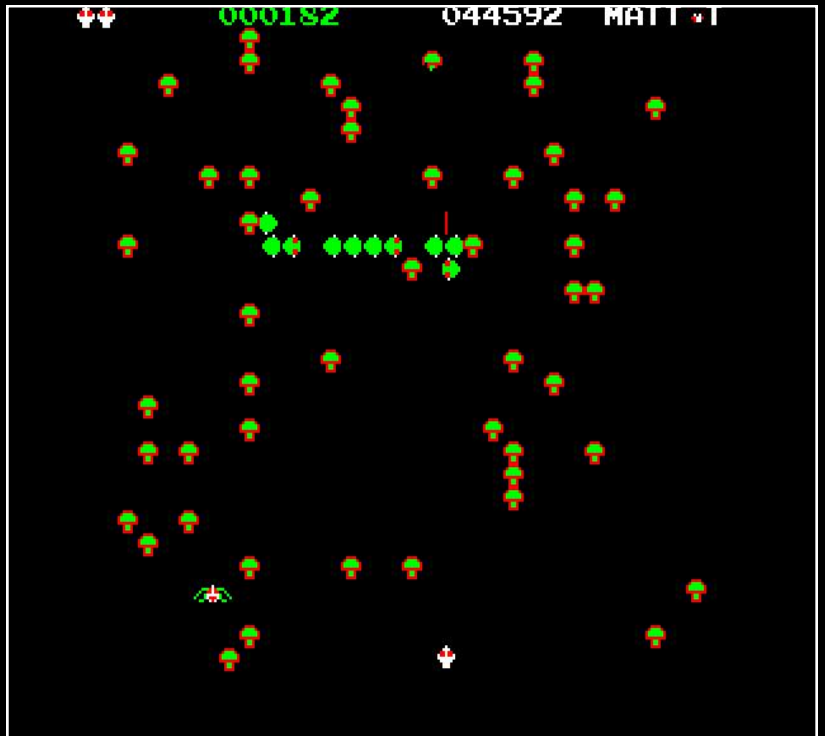
Centipede on the BBC Micro

4 Player Warlords

can be achieved on the beeb and to that end, all my games run at 50Hz and are flicker free.

From my youth on a black and white "pong" home console where I had to play against myself, through Space

Invaders, Atari VCS to the eight bit home computers and arcades, I have loved the simple yet engaging games that can be learnt for 10p but rarely ever mastered. I worked in the games industry on tools, games and core tech for 15 years and for the last 10 years

have been helping to design graphics chips for PowerVR.

The arcade games that I create are all developed from scratch, usually grabbing the graphics from MAME and the sound is converted if I can find something suitable, otherwise, it takes me ages looking at waveforms as I don't have a musical bone in my body. Writing arcade games for the beeb is a great match for me as I love coding and the golden age games. I worked in several arcades as a teenager and still have many bits and pieces from those days, including many ROMs from destroyed machines.

I have also written emulators which run on the BBC Micro for Exidy's Circus (aka Acrobat TV) and RipCord as well as Atari's Warlords (4 player with paddles) and Sprint (under Kee games). These are all 6502 games so that I only need to emulate: sound, graphics including sprite hardware, timing and controls. These emulators load the original ROM's and patch them to use my data and drive their game loops from my code or vice versa. This really suits me as I love doing the "tricky" bits but don't have the game design creativity to make my own games and it also cuts out the less interesting (to me) bits of next life, new game, high score table etc.

I think that the beeb's educational background was both a blessing and a curse; blessing because it means that anyone from the UK aged between 40 and 50 used one at school and curse because its price stayed high and it wasn't really considered a games machine even though it was very capable. I find it amazing that a machine expected to sell 10,000 units eventually sold 1.5M and allowed the development of the first ARM chip

which is now the most widely sold processor ever with over 100 billion sold; what a legacy.

You can usually find me hanging out as Tricky on the *. forums stardot.org.uk/forums.

Videos of my games and demos can be found on YouTube with a search for Richard Broadhurst.

To download for free or play my games in browser, search for Broadhurst at bbcmicro.co.uk.

Jeltron images, on the BBC Micro above

Rip Cord on the BBC Micro
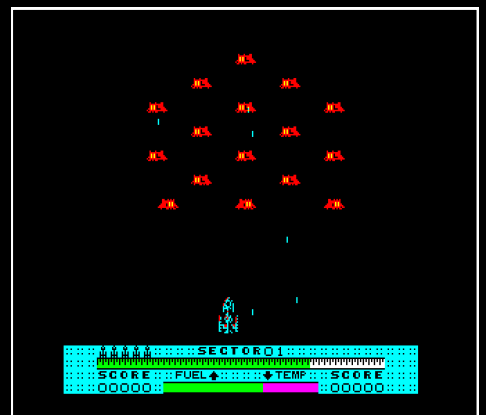
AstroBlaster supports the TMS5220 speech chip that fits in a beeb and was standard on the USA models. This gives all the in-game speech of the arcade machine, but for those without this chip fitted, I have added sampled attract mode speech and some in-game samples to add atmosphere.

Sprint 1 Emulator, on the BBC Micro

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Paul Rose interview aka Mr Biffo of Digitiser fame
Questions by George Bachaelor and Andrew Fisher

Chances are retro gaming enthusiasts have heard of Paul Rose. He has been known to a generation of British gamers as 'Mr Biffo'. The twisted mastermind behind the vast majority of Digitiser, the legendary teletext games magazine - Teletext remember that thingy on old tv's that was cool before the internet? No you probably won't. Anyway, Paul Rose has been in the gaming business for over 25 years. When he's not writing about video games on his Digitiser2000 blog or in Retro Gamer magazine, 'Mr Biffo' is a successful children's TV writer – with BAFTA nominations to his name and everything. Furthermore, he's written for tons of magazines, including a long-running column for Edge. In 2017 Paul put together 'Mr Biffo's' Found Footage – a challenging, surreal and boundary-pushing comedy series for Youtube. Now he has turned his attention to crowd funding Digitiser: The Show. We talk to Paul about Digitiser: The Show kickstarter campaign and how much 8-bit gaming content there will be in it exactly?

Welcome to 8-bit Annual 2019 Mr Biffo!!!

8BA: Being an Aussie I don't know much about what has happened overseas regarding tv and the like, so after reading and watching the video on your kickstarter page the first thing that comes into my mind is why do you think video games TV shows have ended up in such a poor way in comparison to the 1980's / 1990's?

Paul Rose (PR): I think there was a mainstream excitement around games in the 90s that has been watered down in the decades since. The Mega Drive/Super NES war caught the public's imagination in a way that no console has done since. Home gaming was finally console quality, and it felt like it had come of age. You had icons like Sonic, Mario and – later – Lara Croft who could appear on magazine covers in an easily marketable way. I don't think we have those huge icons of gaming anymore either. Plus, the games are a tricky proposition for broadcasters and TV companies. They don't really understand them, they often don't know how to cover them in a way that works on TV, and – for some reason – gaming is still seen by the media as quite nerdy and uncool. Which is ridiculous, I know, given how many people play them, but I honestly don't know many TV execs who are avid gamers, and really get it. That's as much the issue as anything else.

8BA: The next thought on my mind about this project is the words 'crazy ambitious'. It's one hell of a project. It sounds like there will be too much to fit into one episode, is it really possible to do Digitiser: The TV Show?

PR: Yep. I know exactly how we fit it in. I've put together a breakdown of the episodes, and really… it's no more ambitious than any other magazine show. The difference is, something like Top Gear or The Gadget Show has a massive budget compared to ours. Fitting it in isn't the challenge. Affording it all is! But I'm confident that we know how to achieve it, so long as our audience doesn't have an unrealistic expectation.

8BA: Digitiser: The TV Show kickstarter goal of 7000 pounds was reached in a matter of hours and the final amount achieved was 1,086 backers pledging £44,526 to help bring this project to life. It would suggest that you have connected positively with a large audience that feels the same way about the current plight of video gaming tv shows, why do you feel you can make Digitiser: The TV Show a proper retro gaming tv show?

PR: Well, I've played games my whole life. Plus, I've been a games journalist – on and off - for more than 25 years, and I've worked in TV for the last 20 years. Far be it for me to blow my own trumpet, but I've been pretty successful in both those fields. I know what works for gamers, but I also know what works for TV (even though our show won't actually be on TV, but we're treating it as if it were). I've got a pretty unique set of experiences and skills, but really… I've got a vision for the show that I've had rumbling around in my head for a very long time. I can't guarantee it'll be a show for everyone. Those who know me already know I've got a pretty off-kilter sense of humour, but first and foremost it's important I make a show that I want to see. I think that'll come across on screen.

8BA: You have stated on your kickstarter page "It's time we got the sort of gaming show we've always wanted, but which broadcasters are too scared to make - and that Youtube isn't offering". How do you propose to get Digitiser: The TV Show onto people's tv's ? Will you be releasing the show through Youtube or have you lined up a TV broadcaster like Netflix, the BBC or ITV or Sky or something?

PR: It's entirely aimed at Youtube. We have been approached by an experienced TV producer, but ultimately I declined the offer because I need to make this on my terms. It's pretty easy now for people to watch Youtube on their TV, so really I just see it as another platform , but one which is entirely creator led.

That said, if Netflix or somebody contacted us with a view to properly funding a second series, and they weren't going to interfere, I'd be a fool to turn it down.

8BA: You have stated on your kickstarter page that it will initially be a season of at least six regular 20-minute-ish episodes, with a secret episode for backers, plus a special episode that will be filmed before a live audience. When is the first episode planned for airing ? Will each episode be seen on a weekly basis or some other time frame?

PR: I think they'll go out weekly, but I'm planning to release some shorter videos in the months beforehand, which will hopefully tide people over. I can't really say yet when it's going to air. We're tentatively aiming for the autumn, but there are a lot of moving pieces we need to co-ordinate, so that may slip a bit.

The next three questions come from Andrew Fisher a contributor to 8-bit Annual and freelancer for Retro Gamer.

8BA: Which comedy shows, writers and performers would you say had the biggest influence on Digitiser's style?

PR: Wow. Where to begin? The two biggest were probably The Young Ones and Monty Python, but I have to say it's hard to credit them as an influence because it was more like they offered reassurance that my sense of humour was 'normal'. I already had a strange sense of humour by the time I saw those shows, and it hasn't really evolved much. Really, the biggest single influence on my own writing style was my co-writer in the early years of Digi, Tim Moore. I learned so much from him.

8BA: What have been the major pitfalls and problems of crowdfunding your projects?

PR: The biggest headache is how much time it can take to fulfil all the rewards. It's mainly myself and my other half dealing with all of that. I don't particularly enjoy it – I'd rather spend my time being creative - and I confess that it's slightly frustrating when you see that somebody pledged a certain amount, but a chunk of it needs to go towards manufacturing and shipping a t-shirt! I don't resent people for wanting stuff, but really… the ultimate reward is the end product.

8BA: What was your favourite ever reader letter / e-mail to Digitiser?

On Set, Day 1: Digitiser, the TV Show. Left to right: @LarryBundyJr @Octav1usKitten @mrbiffo @GameplayJenny @PaulGannonShow and some guy in the back holding an Amiga is @MrPSB

PR: Hmm. Good question. We got all sorts of strange ones. We had one guy who used to send us polaroid photos of his nude wife. We also ended up contacting the police over the increasingly deranged letters from one particular reader, who eventually sent us something smeared in excrement. It's hard to single out one letter. I used to love getting all of them. It was the best part of the working day, realising that people were reading our work.

8BA: What we all want to know at 8-bit Annual is how much 8-bit content will there be in Digitiser: The TV Show ? If each episode is only about 20 or there about minutes long will there be a regular spot for 8-bit gaming on the show?

PR: To be honest, the eps will probably be closer to 30 minutes. There won't be a regular spot for 8-bit gaming, but it'll certainly be covered as much as later formats. We're not going to be featuring games in the way that other Youtube channels do. It won't ever be as bland as a 'Let's Play', or just showing some gameplay footage. We're primarily an entertainment format, and the goal is to always be entertaining first, and a show about games second. Games are just the jumping-off point for fun.

8BA: You mentioned on your kickstarter page that you will be playing Way Of The Exploding Fist while being strapped to some electrodes. Firstly is that safe and advisable? Secondly have you thought about any other crazy concepts involving other well known legendary 8-bit games? For example like donning a motorbike helmet and revving up a motorcycle jumping over buses as if you were playing 3D Stunt Rider?

PR: Hah! The electrodes thing was just an example. I can't say we'll be doing that for definite. But we might be. And yes, while we'll be doing some dangerous stuff, we'll always ensure it's been health and safety approved. We're currently looking at our budget and seeing what's feasible in terms of big stunts. Our priority is to make sure the studio-based segments work though.

8BA: What other plans and ideas will you have for 8-bit gaming enthusiasts? Do you intend to cover systems as far back as the Atari 2600 ? Will you be looking at the MSX and some of its games and followers ? Will you be taking a look at the success of the Spectrum Next Kickstarter and discussing where that is heading with its founders Jim Bagely et al?

PR: Yep. I was a 2600 owner, so we're definitely going to be featuring it. And possibly the MSX. We might mention the Spectrum Next – though, again, it won't be a 'dry' feature. We'll find a way to do it that's ridiculous and funny.

8BA: Will you be covering the 8-bit wars of the early 1980's not just the wars that rages in bedrooms and school yards but also in the boardrooms of Amstrad PLC (Alan Sugar), Commodore (Jack Tramel), Sinclair / Spectrum (Sir Clive) and MSX (Bill Gates / Microsoft & Kazuhiko Nishi?)

PR: I can tell you that in one of our first episode we will be covering the 8-bit war between the Spectrum and Commodore 64!

8BA: There are many 8-bit events all over the world each year. Spain is gearing up for a number of retro events throughout March and April of 2018. Will you be attending any of these such events and showing in Digitiser: The TV Show just how crazy people are for 8-bit games 30 plus years after?

PR: The only retro events I've got scheduled for this year are Revival in May and the Play Expo in August. Never say never though!

8BA: The C64 has many demo party and game competitions all over the globe, with many being held in Germany each year. Will you be taking a look at the C64 and how big the community remains to this day?

PR: I'm not sure we're going to cover the community, but you can be sure that the Commodore 64 will feature in a big way. Rest assured that there will be no stone left uncovered when it comes to retro formats!

Last words from Mr Biffo on the closure of Digitiser on Teletext, 2003. Teletext remained operating until 2012 according to online web source, Wikipedia.

AETHERBYTE STUDIOS ON INFERNO

Aetherbyte Studios - Andrew Darovich and Paul Weller
Questions by George Bachaelor

8BA: Inferno, what is this new MSX game and when did the project begin?

Andrew Darovich (AD): Originally, the game was intended to be sort of similar to Hydlide (MSX 2, by T&E Soft, 1985). I had wanted it to be a top-down action game, however, the art wasn't coming out like I wanted, so the development group decided to try side-perspective art. It looked a lot better, capturing what I wanted a lot better. So, we decided to turn the game into a side view action game.

8BA: Who worked on the development of the game?

AD: I did the majority of the development. Assistance was given from another MSX group called, The New Image (TNI). I used their 'Guyver 5', sound engine and they assisted with getting me up to speed with MSX hardware in terms of program layout, and various MSX related details. This was the first MSX thing I worked on, so their help was much appreciated and very important to the development of the game. We (myself and

Paul, our art expert) did a lot of internal testing, he also had some friends help test the game.

8BA: What were the deciding factors on putting the game together in terms of GFX, sound, playability, gameplay, story?

AD: I initially wanted SCC sound, but that would have involved finding SCC chips and would have complicated the cartridge and increased the cost to make the game. So, I settled on using FM with the ASCII mapper. The FM music turned out nice, so I'm happy with that. Graphics wise, I knew from the start that I would like to do 'Screen 5', because of the color options and limitations. Many of my favorite MSX games are 'Screen 5', based. The top down wasn't coming out like I envisioned, but switching to side view let us depict a darker environment really well, allowing for larger enemy sprites. This gave the game much more character. Either way, the game was always intended to be a 45-60 minute game that provides a handful of levels and is completable in one sitting. We wanted something similar to the older computer flip-

screen games. Something that has some exploration and action, but isn't long and drawn out. The story was decided before the game even had 1 line of code, or 1 pixel of art completed. It is a pretty straight forward story! In the future, we would like to expand on this engine and create a new game with some new features.

(8BA): What problems were encountered in the game development?

AD: The biggest problem was slowdown. We had to come up with a creative way allowing the screen to refresh quickly, because the sprites are all very large and a lot of redrawing occurs. The large sprites made the level design difficult at times. They can create slowdown, and can also create very annoying screens where it becomes too crowded. In the future, I will use smaller sprites so we have more screen 'real estate' to work with and simpler code. The player sprite is drawn in 3 pieces and it is a bit annoying to deal with.

8BA: Then getting the game ready for release - where was it shown and what was the feedback?

AD: I showed it locally at some conventions in Cleveland, OH, (USA) and other areas nearby. The feedback was generally positive. People really liked the art / theme, and that it reminded them a lot of Rastan Saga (arcade slash em up, Taito, 1987). People also seem to really like how the music turned out, I tried to take people's negative feedback into consideration as well to make sure the game was not too difficult. Some criticisms I received from others said we needed to add many more new features. For this feedback, I assured people that there would be more MSX titles from us and I would definitely enhance the engine for future games. Trying to add things into Inferno would have been a bit too difficult. Now that the game is done, I have already looked at some ways to revamp the game engine. I am looking forward to doing this!

8BA: Putting Inferno game together in physical form. How was this done? What were the Challenges involved?

AD: This was a difficult process. Getting cartridge shells was not as easy as I thought it would turn out to be. I wanted red ones of good quality as I know there are some very poor quality cart shells out there, but I could not find the good quality cartridge shells that I wanted! We ended up finding a friend locally to create resin shells. This was a slow process. To speed up the process in the future, we are also looking into 3D printing from a different friend, to get nice quality 3D shells. All of the other cartridge options

Stunning looking graphics and sprites

Andrew Darovich - MSX Developer

available are overseas for us and it is not cheap or the right option for us economically. So, having a local / USA based source is good for us moving forward. The PCB design itself was done by Koichi Nishida at Nishida Radio. He is a very talented individual, his assistance was very enjoyable, he is a fun person and his experience is greatly appreciated. He created an MSX game in the 1980's, and never put it on a cartridge. Inferno's PCB was first tested and deployed using his original game, "Ilevan". He then designed Inferno for us! It is awesome that we got to work on this together. It allowed for the physical release of two MSX games! You may still be able to find hand made copies of his game directly from him at Nishida Radio: http://tulip-house.ddo.jp/digital/ilevan/index.html. As for the case and artwork, it was fun finding a talented artist to do the manual and cover artwork! I am hoping we can work with him on future games as well. I also wanted to make sure we had nice boxes that were similar to older MSX clamshell boxes, so I found plastic clamshell cases to use. They look nice on a shelf and allow for a larger artwork and manual, so the entire package looks really nice! We also made a comical 1980's style commercial for the game that can be found on YouTube! We filmed it in the woods behind my home. You can find it on our Aetherbyte YouTube channel.

Watch out for those huge spikes, don't fall in

NOBUAKI WASHIO GW'S WORKSHOP

Questions by Nathan Sands

In 2017 I contacted Nobuaki Washio, the main driving force at GW's Workshop. Mainly known for their MSX Games and their recent achievements in the MSXDEV 2017 competition, they are highly regarded 8-bit gaming developers with awards such as 2nd placing in the MSX classic competition with Draconic Throne (reviewed in this Annual) and 1st place in the MSX freestyle division of MSXDEV 2017, with the title XI∧∃X (Zevimodoki), a Xevious tribute game. This interview was meant to appear in the 2018, 8-bit Annual but unfortunately there was no room left to include it, so here it is.

SHORT FIRE QUESTIONS

Hobbies?
Watching birds.
Visiting churches, shrines and temples.

Likes?
Everything of my wife.

Dislikes?
Concombre (Cucumber) and chocolate.

8BA: Hey Nobuaki Washio, thanks for agreeing to this interview. Icebreaker question, what was your childhood like growing up? What was your first contact with video games?

NW: I was born in Osaka, Japan in 1972. I think my growing history does not have any special episode to talk to you. My first video game experience was TAITO Invader game, the first consumer video game in Japan, but it does not have deep meaning in my own history.

8BA: When did you first learn to code? What was the first game you ever produced?

NW: I got my own first computer MSX CF-2000 when I was 10 years old in 1983. In those days, my father worked in Matsushita electronics. So his boss seemed to force the employees to buy it for their children. I was just one of such Matsushita children. I wonder the boys around me had their concern onto only playing the games. I didn't like that my parents cost money for my enjoying video games. Therefore, soon after the MSX came to my house, I started to self-educate MSX BASIC. That had been just a closed hobby for me for a long time. My first production opened to the public was "Triumph" for MSX2 in 1991. It was sold not by my own hands, but my classmates who noticed its commodity value, with some improvement by them.

8BA: What were you influenced by when growing up? What made you have a

Shoulder Blade (2018)

passion for the MSX?

NW: 1983 is not only the year I got my first computer, but also the memorial birth year of Namco's classic shoot 'em up masterpiece, XEVIOUS. That gave a strong impression upon me, I had hundreds of trials to make the clone with MSX BASIC in my childhood. That is also the main direct reason why I built Xevimodoki game for MSXdev'17.

8BA: Out of all today's modern engines like unity, unreal engine ECT. Why do you program still for the MSX? What advantages do you think this computer still has in today's modern society?

NW: Speaking of only me, any modern gaming platform is too big as a hobby on Sundays. MSX can treat only very restricted resources. That also means what I must do drawing graphics, preparing sound, etc. It is much less than the modern platform. And I love such a feeling; my own code touches Z80 directly in assembler language. However, I have nothing to discuss with the others via my crazy affection. Affection is just affection, and I know I am irrational.

8BA: How did GW's Workshop come

about? Who is the other key contributors to the firm?

NW: The name of "GW's-Workshop" is just a pseudo private brand name I usually make use of when I create something on digital media. There is no deep meaning.

8BA: You started producing titles like Morningstar and Shooting star between 1996-97. Tell me what they are about? Are they just "joke programs"?

NW: There were two reasons. One, was that I was a college student with enough free time in those days. I freakishly re-studied Z80 assembler and became eager to make something. Two, was the Internet. In short, I needed something to distribute in my homepage. That's all.

8BA: Let's talk about the multi-talented skills you have, you can code in 4 different languages, how did that come about? Have you got any tips or tricks for anyone wanting to learn MSX code?

NW: I just keep doing what I like and avoid what I dislike. That's all. If somebody asks me, "How can I learn MSX code?", I will just

say "Stop! Ridiculous!"

8BA: When composing music for the MSX, how do you do it? What has been the best piece you worked on and why?

NW: I have no obvious points to show about that. Just playing the keyboard, writing MML as prototype, and embedding the data for my own made BGM driver onto source code. Recently I like the prince theme of Draconic Throne. It was one of the tunes my old friend composed for my first game Triumph. I think the Draconic Throne version performs full-functionally of BGM driver I make use of in my latest 3 games.

8BA: Let's talk about Draconic Throne. How did you come up with the concept and how long did it take to program? What was the biggest problem with Draconic Throne when coding?

NW: One day I read an article about what we call "light novel" on the Internet. It said not a few reader refuses stories in which a hero or heroin gets his or herself into a fix. It also said a note of caution is needed if the author wants to write hard knocks: Attention! This story includes hero's gethsemane. Ridiculous! However I felt a part of truth: ordinary people may require compathy to the Almighty. Generally, video games need a certain level of difficulty. I wondered I dared to give the almighty to the player. That is my first sudden idea of Draconic Throne. To express his almighty, I implemented too strong dragon breathe, barrel-roll trick, and a unique condition of the player loss. Yes, this game has the unique condition of player loss: any bullet doesn't hurt your dragon, but the game will be over when he is driven into the left side of the screen. This concept comes from an episode of a famous Japanese Manga, Hokuto no Ken or Fist of the North Star. In the episode, a dark hero Raoh declares that he never retreat against Fudoh of the mountain before the battle with him. Raoh draws a line under foot by his own, and then orders his soldiers to shoot him if he retreats. The line he draws is the left edge of the screen on this game. In short, both Raoh and the dragon cannot be defeated by anything. I mean only his own pride lets himself lose out. Anyway some people seemed to think that this game is under the influence of Game of Thrones. That is incorrect. In fact, I didn't know about the novel or the TV drama till I read such reviews about Draconic Throne on the Internet. I took 6 months to develop the game. There were few problems all through the development. Because my brain had been enough warmed up by the previous development, Zevimodoki. If I dare to say, this game was originally designed as a vertical scroll shooter in fact. I tried to design characters for it but it was very difficult, especially for enemy troops. Through these trials and errors, the current character of cavalry was perchance generated. It made me notice that it is better to change the scrolling direction vertical to horizontal. That was the biggest turning point of the development.

8BA: XIΛƎX (Zevimodoki) won the MSX freestyle competition, how do you feel about this? What was your reaction when you found out?

NW: Simply, that was a fortunately least for me... or an unfortunately accident for MSX scene. At the beginning of 2017, I didn't quite have any intention to join in MSXdev'17 by

Draconic Throne (2017)

Zevimodoki. My motivation of the development was only an homage to XEVIOUS, as I talked to you. IMANOK, a famous MSX developer in Spain and an old friend of mine, noticed my development via my YouTube channel, and then strongly recommended me to join in the contest. Once I refused his proposal. Because I had thought that the work for MSXdev freestyle should be something for MSX2 or higher with its full-function or extended-function. As you see, Zevimodoki requires only minimal MSX2, besides it uses SCREEN 4 mode just like MSX 1! However IMANOK kept persuading me. At last I was prepared to be in disgrace for my mis-judgement of choosing technology and posted the game to MSXdev'17. As a result, few MSXers in the world seemed to have interest to the freestyle category. I had only one rival, but it obviously looked half-baked. Those are the reason why I call that an accident. Of course I feel deeply thankful to IMANOK. He gave me a great chance to get the contest prize. However honestly I am a little ashamed to admit that. What I did, was just to get an empty seat.

8BA: What can we see coming from GW's workshop and yourself in 2018? Any big news you're willing to reveal this early on?

NW: I change my mind a lot. I don't know the current development called "MSX sword action" will be completed or not.

8BA: Finally thanks again for doing this interview Nobuaki Washio, however, to finish off this interview tell us the weirdest or strangest fact about yourself or GW's Workshop?

NW: I also respectfully

thank you for your having an interview to me. I'm just an irregular comet, now cruising near-by the MSX scene. It may suddenly fly away, and then may come back in the future or not. I can't make any promises about my MSX activity, but I can just say I will surely send an invitation to the beta test to anybody giving me a comment to my video on my YouTube channel; https://www.youtube.com/user/vrmghost.

XIΛƎX (2017)

Buddhagillie (2018)

INTERVIEW: SOREN BORGQUIST

Questions by George Bachaelor

Twitter @Sokurah

In 2017 I had not heard of Danish coder Soren Borgquist. It came about due to my involvement with artist Lobo undertaking the front cover artwork for 8-bit Annual 2018. This interview was meant to be included within the 2018, 8-bit ANNUAL but we ran out of space. So back then when I undertook this interview, I quickly learned, Soren Borgquist is a prolific 8-bit, Spectrum coder. He was dabbling with Z80 code back in the day with 'Speccy's', but he never really did much with it, other than a demo towards the end of the 1980's. He came back onto the Z80, 8-bit scene, when he released 'Dingo', on the Spectrum in 2011. Dingo was Soren's very first Spectrum game, however he had been coding retro games since 2004, more precisely, retro remakes of classic 8-bit games for play as PC games - you can find all of his games on his website http://www.tardis.dk.
After Dingo, he went on to code another Spectrum game, 'The Speccies', released in 2013, a sequel followed a couple months later, called 'Speccies 2'. In 2016, Soren released Vallation, on the 48K Spectrum. It is a stunning conversion of a C64 game originally produced by Jason Kelk (TMR / Cosine). If the 48kb version was called "stunning", in 2017, he went one better, releasing a 128kb, physical version (tape) of Vallation, which is "crazy good". Soren has agreed to spend some time with us talking about Vallation and coding his other 8-bit games.

8BA: Welcome Soren Borgquist, so glad to be speaking with you about 8-bit coding. Judging by the introduction you have a great wealth of coding experience under your gaming 'joysticks', what advice can you give to someone who is just starting out on their 8-bit coding journey?

Soren Borgquist (SB): The best advice I can give a new coder is "don't postpone starting until you have found 'the best tools in the world' – ask what tool people use, choose some and just get going". Perhaps you will find something even better down the line later. My mantra is "just get things working first, then optimize if needed". Too many people are obsessed about whether an instruction take 4 or 6 fractions of a second to execute, or if they can save 2 bytes by doing something differently. You shouldn't worry about those things if you're just starting out.

8BA: Soren, you always seem to be coding something, you have been releasing games very steadily over the years, but this is all in your spare time is that correct?

SB: Yes. I have a full time job and all my development is done in my spare time. I'm not married and I don't have kids, so my life is pretty uncomplicated, but being a huge movie and craft beer enthusiast it's not always easy to find the time for coding ... but somehow I manage anyway.

8BA: Soren, what is the inspiration for you to be coding games for an 8-bit machine, such as the Spectrum, from 2011 onwards?

SB: I bought my first home computer in spring '83 – a 16K Spectrum. The Spectrum is my favourite computer and I always dreamed about making games, but I didn't know how to and I didn't understand much about what I read in books about z80 – and certainly couldn't visualize how to translate that into games. But in 2011, after having coded PC games for 7 years, I decided that I wanted to try and code a game for the Spectrum. It was interesting to see if the experience I had from the PC was usable on a Spectrum – and it was.

8BA: Soren, what equipment and tools have you been using to code your Spectrum games? Has it always been the same since Dingo or have you been trying new ways of coding your games?

SB: I stick with what works, so I'm (more or less) still using the same tools as I did when I developed Dingo in 2011. Back then, I asked people about what they preferred for z80 development – and predictably - got very different answers. So I tried one thing. After a few days I didn't really like it, so I switched to something else which worked better for me and I've been using that ever since. I ended up with Pasmo as the assembler, ConText as the editor and ZXSpin as my emulator (which was already my favourite). For graphics, I'm using an old version of 'Paint Shop Pro' and 'SevenuP' for converting to Spectrum format. Just settle on something and get going. You can always "trade up" later if you find better software. My coding style is very simple – it was called "great old school coding" by a hacker - and it didn't really change when I went from coding for Windows to the Spectrum. I just have a modular way of doing things and even though

the language changed, my way of structuring code stayed the same. I don't know if other people do it the same way, but this seems to work for me.

8BA: In your eyes, how has coding changed from when you were dabbling with code back in the 1980's in comparison to today ? What are the striking differences you have noticed most?

SB: Two primary things have changed. The tools and the way of getting information. In the old days coding for old computers was cumbersome and it was hard to get information. Today the tools – for any platform – are much more powerful and the information you want much easier to find because of the internet.

8BA: When I read interviews with other coders, they often mention they use or create their own game engines. Do you do this too or use what is already in the old games already?

SB: I don't use other peoples "engines" - I "roll my own code" as one would say. The only exceptions being sound routines and the odd small routine ripped from somewhere else, but most things is my own code. I find that it is best to know precisely how everything works and you don't necessarily do that if you haven't written it yourself.

8BA: I think everyone wants to know about Vallation. You remade a C64 game that essentially looks and plays like a Cybernoid clone. Did you start from scratch, did you use the C64 code, what was the process of getting the C64 version of Vallation over to the spectrum?

SB: I played the C64 version of Vallation within a day or two of its release and immediately thought, "This is great - I'd love to remake that". It just clicked with me. I played through the game several times and made a map of the game using screenshots and then began work on the sprite routine from scratch within a week or so. The first few screens were manually constructed using temporary graphics and DATA statements. Then, when I had some basic tile drawing in place I would code a full-fledged Windows level editor for the levels, which (eventually) allowed me to place tiles and define enemy paths etc. Then I constructed each screen manually using that. I never had access to any source or data from the C64 game.

8BA: What was the hardest part of coding Vallation on the Spectrum? What part of the coding gave you the most headaches?

SB: The hardest thing to code was the enemies and turrets that shoot at the player. That was not easy to make and caused quite a delay.

8BA: Soren, you released a 128kb version of Vallation in 2017. Just how much more work did this take to code in comparison to the 48kb version? Does the game use the full 128kb?

SB: Right after the release, we decided to work on a 128K version with more maps, tiles and enemies, as one of the critiques about the 48K version was a lack of variety. I estimated that we could finish it in 3 months – and the coding –was– done in 3 months, but the artist didn't have much time to devote to it

so it ended up taking almost a year and a half to get the 128K version finished. A lot of variety was added but I had envisioned more than what it ended up with, and in the end the game is "only" 61 KB in size. So the 128K version is about 50% bigger than the 48K version.

8BA: Soren, is there any unique coding techniques you use in any of your Spectrum games, that may be of use to other people out there getting into coding?

SB: I do not think so – my coding style is pretty straight-forward. It's very modular and I will make one small part at a time, then expand on it once I have that working. I don't think there's much to learn there.

8BA: Soren, your latest Spectrum game, 'Sqij', is originally a C64 game from 1986, that was ported over to the ZX Spectrum in 1987 and was given the title of "worst Spectrum game ever". As a coder what 'sucks you in', to code / remake the games that no one else wants to?

SB: I like games that are a bit obscure. There is enough remakes of Pac Man, Space Invaders, Asteroids and Donkey Kong. But if you can find a good original(-ish) idea or a good game that is a bit obscure, then it can be fun to bring that up to date. But being obscure isn't enough, it has to "click" with you too and I find that that is the most difficult factor of making games. What clicked with me in this case was the interesting story about the Spectrum version and the fact that the C64 version actually was a pretty competent game that would work well on the Spectrum, so I thought it would be fun to convert that.

8BA: Soren, are you going to continue remaking old games for the Spectrum or have you plans to one day create an original Spectrum game?

SB: Actually, I'm currently working on an original game for the Spectrum Next, but I'm sure I'll do more games for the regular Spectrum too. Hopefully something original, but the biggest problem is just getting a good idea and they don't come along often.

8BA: Soren, have you thought about cross platforming your spectrum games
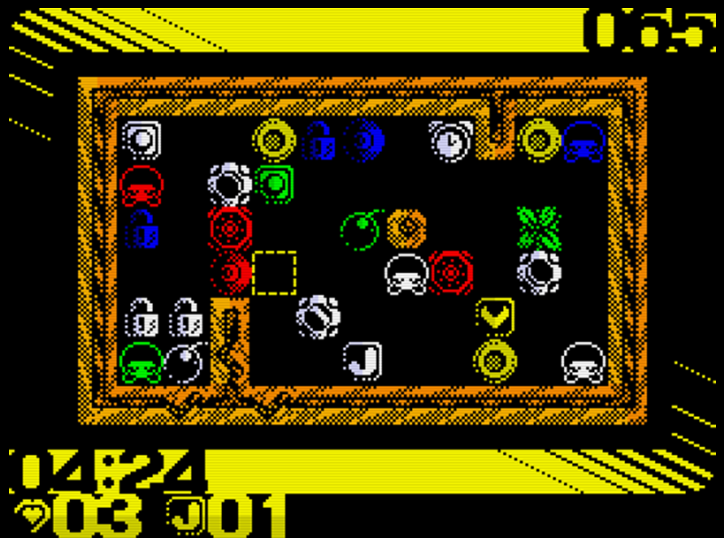
over to other systems such as the MSX, BBC, Amstrad CPC, etc etc?

SB: Short answer: no. I know it should be relatively easy to port my games to the CPC and I'd also love to work on a game for the Sam Coupé or the Enterprise (sticking to the z80 CPU), but I just don't have time to start looking into other platforms too.

8BA: Soren, what are your 8-bit coding plans and goals for 2018 ?

SB: The Spectrum Next game I'm working has top priority - it doesn't have a name yet, so unfortunately I can't say what it will be called. What I can tell you though, is that it's inspired by Atic Atac, but it's not a remake and the setting is sci-fi. After that I have another one planned too, but that should keep me busy for a while. After that, who knows.

Soren, from everyone at 8-bit ANNUAL, we thank you for your time in undertaking this interview, providing an insight into your experiences coding on the Spectrum.

Vallation (2016)

Speccies (2013)

ANDY JOHNS

NIXY THE GLADE SPRITE

Nixy The Glade Sprite is one Spectrum game that has received so much love in 2018. It's also caused a major ruckus in the 8-bit Annual offices because it's sooooo good (since when did we have an office, we all communicate online - Ed), "arrghh" you were meant to kept that a secret! Without any further ado, here is the Nixy The Glade Sprite interview with Developer Andy Johns. As for you Mr Editor, I need to have a word in your office…...

8BA: Greetings Andy, thank you for your time, it is much appreciated. What is the Andy Johns 8-bit story? Where did 8-bit gaming start for you?

Andy Johns (AJ): Well, I got into home computers back in 1981 when my Uncle gave me his ZX81. Even back then I was making games for my own enjoyment, nothing very complicated but it's when I started to get interested in computers and gaming. I then had a Spectrum 48k, Sam Coupe (big mistake) Amiga 500 and then onto the PC.

8BA: How did you get into 8-bit game development?

AJ: From those early days I knew that I wanted to make games so I made sure I learned all I could. Years later I

would realise my dreams of being a game developer when I landed a job with Electronic Arts, UK Studio. 25 Years later I'm still in the games industry and I've learnt so much, but the call of the Spectrum has always been there and I am often found playing some of the classics. Then I came across Arcade Game Designer (AGD) by Jonathan Cauldwell and I immediately saw that this was the way for me to make all those ideas a reality.

8BA: What are your list of games that you have developed?

AJ: For the Spectrum so far I've written 5 games, Monty's Honey Run, Monty and the Temple of Lost Souls, Ooze, Nixy The Glade Sprite and now Nixy and the Seeds of Doom. I've also got quite a few prototypes on the go which may or may not pan out.

8BA:Nixy the glade sprite has caused a bit of a commotion with the 8-bit annual review team as they love playing the game. How was Nixy born? Where did the idea come from? Were you inspired by other games?

AJ: Nixy came about after a long period of coders block. After Ooze came out I was having a hard time coming up with ideas that I thought would top it. I was walking home from work with a friend when came up with the idea of a character who was travelling through a garden. This quickly evolved into Nixy and the garden became the Glade. From there the ideas just came thick and fast. I quickly found an art style I liked and the game just flowed out.

8BA: I have noticed even the so

called hardened shoot em up gamer freaks love playing Nixy The Glade Sprite. Why do you think that is? What makes this forest setting platformer about once beautiful flowers turning dangerous and once friendly mushroom people going on the attack, so enjoyable to play in your eyes?

AJ: At heart it's an old-school platformer, which is my favourite type of game. I would like to think that people like it because of the way it looks, the little details, the way Nixy skips about, everything about the look and feel of the game. I am really happy that it's gone down so well with people...it makes it all worthwhile.

8BA: How long did it take to develop and what were the problems you encountered along the way? What were the most difficult parts of development to overcome other than the limited amount of memory?

AJ:I think from start to finish it was about a month of development. But it was such an easy game to make. The hardest part of making Nixy was spreading the gameplay out over the limited number of screens that I could afford. AGD games are notoriously small because of the memory restrictions but I think in the end I came up with a good amount of gameplay and fun.

8BA: The game plays and looks so professionally done, It makes me wonder were any special mechanics or techniques being used?

AJ: That's a great compliment, thankyou. I like to focus on the details and finishing touches. I rarely create a block or sprite which doesn't get changed or tweaked at some point during development. I try to push myself a little further every project. Everything has to be just so,

8BA: Is Nixy constructed of parts from your other games or is it a totally new engine that you have come up with?

AJ: Nixy was completely new. It was made using AGDX which is a branch of AGD 4.7. Allan Turvey has taken AGD 4.7 and added so many new features which makes it so much easier to make great looking spectrum games (no wonders we can never get Allan with two l's to reply for an interview he is always tinkering with AGD for good not evil - Ed).

8BA: The music is brilliant throughout the entire game, who worked on this aspect and how was the music created?

AJ: The music was taken from an online AY music library and the authors credited in the game. Both tunes were written nearly 20 years ago...so finding the authors would be problematic at best..however I hope

LIVES:3   BLOOMS:0
FIND THE GAIA STONE

they would be happy with how well they fit the game.

8BA: What can we expect to see in Nixy 2: The Seeds of Doom and are the same people who worked on Nixy: The Glade Sprite, be working on the sequel?

AJ: Nixy and the Seeds of Doom is a continuation of the story, it explores new environments, with new enemies and hazards to navigate. The game and art were all done by myself. David Saphier is once again coding the intro and menus, Allan Turvey has been hard at work adding new features to AGDX which have really helped push the boundaries of what AGD can do. I've found a new musician to help create original music for the project and the very talented Andy Green is in charge of the loading screen. I really think this will be a worthy successor to Nixy.

8BA: With the upcoming Nixy sequel soon to be released, do you plan on adding more titles to the series?

AJ: I am sure there will be at least one more Nixy game as i've already started to play around with a few ideas..there maybe also be a ZX Next version.

8BA: What are your favourite spectrum games?

AJ: My favourite Spectrum games are Manic Miner, that's the first game I saw running on it and it blew me away. I had to have a Spectrum after seeing that. I also love Lunar Jetman and Wanted Monty Mole, the

classics...so many more to mention and choose from.

8BA: What advice would you give to anyone planning on creating their own game?

AJ: Plan your game out from start to finish, what's the story?, what's the game play?, make sure the ideas work together. Make sure it's fun! Dong go head first into making pretty graphics. If a game is fun with blocks and blobs it will be even better with nice sprites.

**** NIXY IMAGES / ASSETS FOR USE WITH INTERVIEW provided by Andy Johns ****

LIVES:2   BLOOMS:0
FIND THE GAIA STONE

THE SHADOWS OF SERGOTH

This interview was also meant to be included in the 2018, 8-bit Annual but once again due to lack of space, and the fact that the game had not been released at that time, we decided it best to include the interview within the 2019, 8-bit Annual.

Shadows of Sergoth Coding Team

Chris94: Specification, game programming, graphic design, level design and translation.
Kukulcan: Game story, game scripting, game intro programming and level design.
Ced: Game story, game scripting and graphic design.
Rayxamber: Sounds and music.
TJ/GPA: Sounds and music.
Maxit: Translation.
MiguelSky: Translation.

8BA: What can us about The Shadows of Sergoth game on the Amstrad CPC?

Chris94: It's an old-school dungeon crawler like "dungeon master" but for the Amstrad CPC 6128, or any CPC with at least 128kb of RAM.

8BA: Who are the coders / coding team behind it?

Chris94: Kukulcan coded the intro, and I am coded the game.

8BA: What was the inspiration for the game? Who came up with the idea? Who put the concept onto a 6128?

Chris94: I started alone on this project, so it was originally my idea. I wanted an

equivalent of "Dungeon Master" on Amstrad CPC, but not necessarily a RPG. I was not sure if it was really possible with a machine so limited. There are some dungeon crawlers on the CPC, but they are slow and most of them are mouse based, not the best idea of gameplay on CPC. I took ideas from "Dungeon Master" of course, but also the "Eye of the Beholder" series, "Lands of Lore 1", "Might & Magic 3 to 5", or more recently "The legend of Grimrock". But I brought some new ideas, like the illusions for example.

8BA: When did it the The Shadows of Sergoth project begin?

Chris94: I had the idea 12 years ago, but I abandoned it quickly. I began again two and a half years ago, and I hope to finish it early 2018 (yes it has been released - Ed).

8BA: Have the coding team worked on other 8-bit games, if so what are they ?

Chris94: I made "CPC Aventure" with Demoniak in 2005. Kukulcan made a lot of games, not only for CPC, and he participates each year to CPCRetroDev. T&J also made some games and demos, and he just released an adventure game named "La java du privé". CED, our graphic artist, regularly make demos. But they'll probably talk about their project better than me.

8BA: Is Shadows of Sergoth the first CPC game of this kind or have there been others?

Chris94: No, there's a least "Bloodwitch" on two screens, "Bard's Tale", "Le maître des âmes" (Master of the souls), and some others I don't remember the titles.

8BA: The demo video release in 2017 was incredible, the game released in 2018 has received high praise from CPC gamers - just how did you get the smooth, fast 3D scrolling?

Chris94: After the game release, I'll try to explain it all. First, it's a false 3D, but a real 2D. I just paint some walls or floor sectors when I detect them in front of the player. There is no 3D calculation here.

The game is entirely written in assembly code, and the code is extremely optimized. I disable interrupts and I bypass the RST &38 (Assembly) when I display the scenery to gain some precious cycles. When a wall or a floor sector is already on the screen, it is not refreshed on the next frame. I just modify some pixels on the side walls. And when I invert the floor at each step, I only modify 20% of its pixels! That's why between these two pictures below, I refresh less than a quarter of the screen.

But the most important : the walls and the floor are not normal tiles, they are coded. For example, to display this part of the ceiling: I use this kind of code:

Ligne	Adr. déb.	Adr. fin	Ecran de décors, parties sol et plafond
1	C000	C02B	
2	C800	C82B	
3	D000	D02B	
4	D800	D82B	
5	E000	E02B	
6	E800	E82B	
7	F000	F02B	
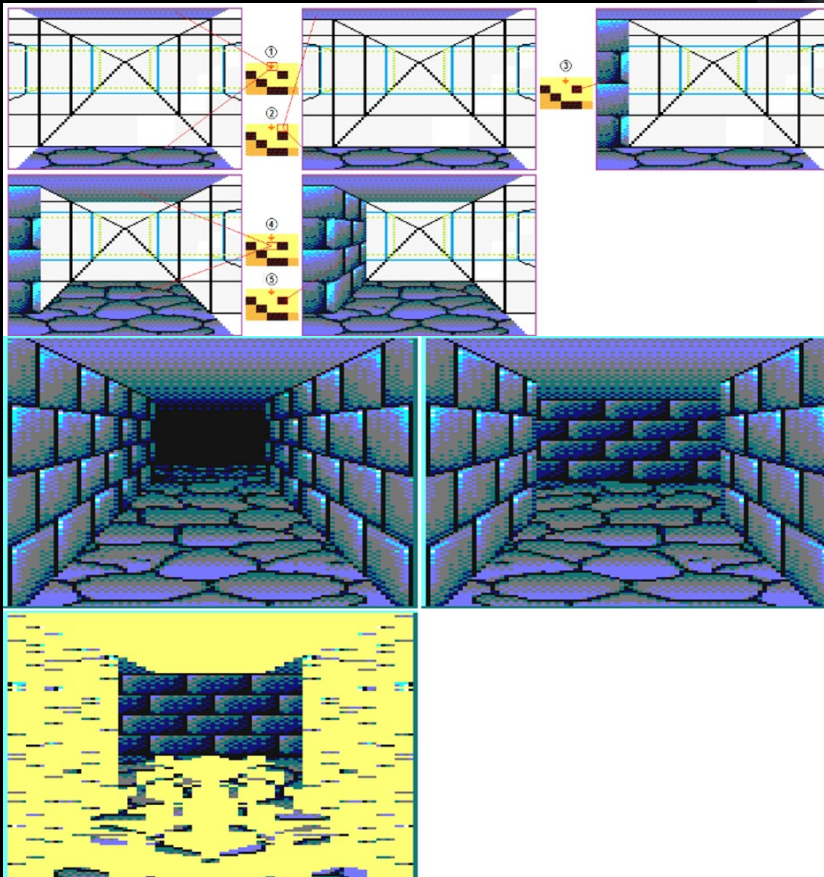
```
SECTEUR_C1    LD DE,&D0E0

              LD H,D          ; HL = &D0D0
              LD L,H
              LD (&C000),HL
              LD (&F000),HL
              LD (&F002),HL
              LD (&F004),HL
              LD H,E
              LD L,H
              LD (&C800),HL
              LD (&D800),HL
              LD (&D802),HL
              ...
```

I use Excel 2013 to import the tiles, to encode the colours, and to generate the assembly code. But I still have to optimize the code generated. This game would be almost impossible to write manually.

8BA: Who coded the awesome GFX? Were there any special coding tools or graphic artist software used?

Chris94: I made the game HMI, the objects, the icons, the bats and the snake, all the easy things if you prefer. And I used Paint and Paint Shop Pro. CED made the rest, that is to say the awesome! And he used Photoshop.

8BA: Is The Shadows of Sergoth going to be FREE to download or will it be released on tape and cassette only?

Chris94: We'll probably sell an illustrated box with a floppy disk and a game manual. But the DSK files for emulators should be free.

8BA: What type of problems have you encountered in coding The Shadows of Sergoth?

Chris94: First, it's incredibly hard to make. You can't code this game with conventional methods, there's just not enough CPU for that. ThenI had to make tools, to invent real time compressors for the text and for the dungeon level, to write and rewrite the game engine at least 5 times, to constantly find a way to optimize the code more. But the most difficult : the game part only is huuuuuge! made of 46000 plain assembly line! and it should finish at 50000!!!

8BA: How many levels does the demo show and how many levels will the finished game consist of ?

Chris94: The demo has 3 dungeon levels, but they are not the final ones. And the game will have 16 levels.

8BA: How much of the game is completed ? What are the remaining coding tasks to complete?

Chris94: The intro is almost finished, it just needs some minor corrections. For the game,

I have to make 8 to 10 more monsters, some puzzles and design the levels. We also need an animation for the end. Of course, we need time to test the game and find bugs, even if I test it regularly. But a coder never can find all his own mistakes, that's why tests exist.

8BA: How happy is the group with what you have done so far ? Does it need any rework or has everything gone to plan so far?

Chris94: I need to finish the game before declaring victory, but I am really happy with the first positive returns about the demo :-). After playing the full game it sure is a success and now it will be appearing on the Amiga late in 2019 - Ed.

8BA: What are you using to code with to make such an incredible CPC game? Is it your own engine ? Is it from CPCtelera or something else?

Chris94 : Personally I use Winape and Excel macros.

8BA: How do you think the gameplay of The Shadows of Sergoth compares to other games but on machines with much greater capabilities than a 128kb Amstrad CPC?

Chris94: The gameplay is my absolute priority. That's why there's no annoying mouse, like in the other dungeon crawlers. But how to pick up an object on the floor without a mouse to click on them? How to easily manage an inventory without a mouse to move or equip objects? Not easy without good examples. For the objects on the floor, I had the idea from "Questlord" on Android. No mouse there either, but a box in the inventory to pick up the object on the current square, or to throw an object on the ground. For the inventory, I had to make it the more intuitive possible. When the player clicks on a potion or some food, it's to consume it of course. When he clicks on a weapon or some armour, it's to equip it, or to remove it if it's equipped. If an object is already equipped and the player wants to equip another object, no problem, they are interchanged.

The player push the fire button in the current scenery, what does this means? Well, if there's a lever or a button just in front of the player, it's to activate it of course. If there's a message, it's to read it. Else, the player just wanted to use the object in his hand. What is this object? A weapon? Ok let's fire. It was a spell? Ok let's use it. A key? Ok, let's try to use it if there's a lock just in front of the player.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO CLIVE TOWNSEND OF SABOTEUR FAME

Questions by George Bachaelor

8BA: Hello Clive. Many thanks for agreeing to this What Happened to Clive Townsend interview, I greatly appreciate you giving up some of your time. What is the Clive Townsend story? How did it all start for you in 8-bit gaming development?

Clive Townsend (CT): As soon as I saw my friend's ZX81 I knew I wanted one. I'd completely missed the existence of the ZX80 so this was an amazing new thing to me. We typed in listings and created our own programs, and I was saving up to buy one when the ZX82 was announced. I immediately started designing graphics for it - all of which were wasted because I'd not planned for the Spectrum's unique attribute system. When I finally got my hands on a Speccy I made some games in BASIC and took them to a local shop to see if they would sell them for me. They said Yes - but pointed me in the direction of Durell, a local software house. The boss there, Robert White, liked my graphics but suggested I learned machine code to make the games faster to play. I spent my school holidays hanging around Durell's offices and learning assembly language, and the boss agreed there was a job for me when I left school. Despite the temptation I actually chose to go to college instead - but after a year I realised the job offer was too good to refuse. I left college and started working on Death Pit for the ZX Spectrum. In my spare time I was also working on a ninja game called Ninja Darkness, and when the boss saw it he asked me to work on that full-time instead. Death Pit was never quite as polished as the other Durell games, but was finally released by Monument Microgames in 2018. And Ninja Darkness went on to become Saboteur!

8BA: How many games did you code for 8-bit machines?

CT: Speccy: Death Pit, Saboteur, Saboteur II, Garfield - A Winter's Tail, The Reaper (sorry). Game Boy: James Pond II. Game Gear: Rise of the Robots (sorry again). Game Boy Color: Cool Bricks, Thunderbirds. And some demos for potential deals, such as The Punisher, Cool Spot, and Joe and Mac. And plenty of unfinished original games such as Lykos and T.A.C.

8BA: How did the Saboteur idea come about?

CT: I was always a fan of the martial arts, and trained in judo and karate as a child. I spent many weekends climbing trees and doing what would later be named parkour. And when I was indoors I watched all the Jackie Chan and James Bond films. But when the 80's craze for ninja films started I was hooked. Ninjas were everywhere, it made sense to combine my love of ninjas with a Bond-style plot. Admittedly, the limited memory on the 8-bit machines meant that many ideas were dropped, but fortunately the remakes have given me a chance to put that straight.

(8BA): Just how successful was Saboteur for you? Where did this success take you?

CT: I don't know the exact number of units sold, but Saboteur was very popular. It put me on a respectable salary and earned me several bonus payments. Within two years it enabled me to buy a 3-bedroomed house whilst still a teenager... It sounds cheesy, but the real reward is seeing how Saboteur 1 and 2 are remembered over three decades later. Last June I went to Pixel Heaven in Poland, and met loads of people who said that playing Saboteur inspired them to become programmers, artists, or musicians. Copyright laws for games were very lax over there until the mid 90s, so everyone had played Saboteur 1 and 2, but hardly anyone had bought or even seen a genuine Durell tape! Apparently it would have cost their parents a week's wages to buy just one cassette... So I missed out on royalties, but the cash couldn't compare to the chance to encourage new game creators. Cheesy but true.

8BA: Why was there never a Saboteur III released? The franchise was hugely successful after all?

CT: I've had Saboteur III planned for a very long time. It's been adapted and updated over the years, from a small Speccy game to a huge 3D game. Unfortunately, it was costing tens of thousands of pounds to market each game, and my boss decided it was getting too risky. One failed game could have cost the company a small fortune. I did, however, start on a side-scrolling version of Saboteur III for the PC several years later, and then an unfinished 3D version. I spent about a year creating some playable levels and an entire 3D engine with RGB lighting, all in software. But 3D graphics cards were just becoming popular and I'd run out of funds so Saboteur III was put on hold again. I'm now working with SimFabric on the Nintendo Switch version of the Saboteur remakes, so if they sell well there's a chance that we'll work together on a 3D Saboteur III at last!

8BA: Who did the awesome artwork for the game both in game and for the box art and advertisement in the magazines?

CT: Most of Durell's adverts and cassette covers were created by Tim Hayward, normally known for his wildlife paintings. I think his exceptional artwork made Durell games stand out on the shelves and reflected the quality and passion we tried to put into every game. The in-game graphics for Spectrum, Commodore 64, and Amstrad CPC were all done by me, sketched freehand on squared paper. The dogs' running frames, however, were based on a book by Eadweard Muybridge - a pioneer in photographing animals in motion. Due to memory constraints I didn't store the direction of dogs when they were off-screen, so you'd sometimes return to find that a dead (sleeping?) dog had turned to face the other way. My solution was to make the animation frame symmetrical - which is why the dogs now look as if they've been made into a rug.

8BA: When did working on 8-bit machines stop for you and where did you go initially?

Saboteur 1 remake (PC, Mac, mobile, Nintendo Switch)

CT: When Durell decided to focus on business software, I made several demos for people who said they had conversion work available. Unfortunately, they didn't always have an actual contract for the work, so many of the demos were wasted. My girlfriend at the time was a gymnastic coach, so I ended up working with her - but still created demos for fun in my spare time. I wish I'd finished 'Lykos', an alien werewolf game, as I had 2 levels virtually complete. And I wish we'd got the deal for The Punisher...

8BA: What is the Clive Townsend story after that? Did you remain in game development?

CT: A few years later my mum moved to Birmingham, and while visiting her I saw an advert for a game programmer in the local paper. I ended up working at Data Design, initially on James Pond II: Codename Robocod for the Game Boy, and then several other games on Game Gear, Master System, Megadrive, and PC. I then worked in London for a while, then back to Birmingham. While in London I met two brothers, Damon and Anatole Branch, and we decided to set up Pukka Games together. We created a new 3D engine from scratch and an incredible game called The Ravaging. Sadly Telstar closed their games division and the product was never finished. Pukka still produced some games for the Game Boy Color and Game Boy Advance, most notably a Thunderbirds game for each. I had the honour of doing a business presentation for Gerry Anderson - a personal highlight for me! As the Game Boy market became more expensive we closed down Pukka and everyone moved away. But mobile phone games were in their infancy, so they were a perfect platform for me to work on without needing a large team.

8BA: What has brought you back to new Saboteur game development?

CT: During the Pukka days I ended up sharing a flat with another programmer, thinking it would be a great opportunity to work on a remake of Saboteur for the iPhone. After numerous false starts writing in xcode, then Marmalade, then Java, I decided to be 'platform agnostic'. So now I work in a made-up language called EZcode. For quick testing I press a button and my code is converted to Java. When I'm happy with it I press another button and it generates a Unityscript version. So if a new language comes along I don't need to re-write everything again - I just teach EZcode to speak the new language. Using this system, I thought it would be quite quick to make Saboteur! and Saboteur II again, but then I got carried away...

8BA: What has the new Saboteur involvement meant and has it been successful?

CT: Both Saboteur remakes have been a labour of love for me, each taking over 6 months of full-time work. There was so much I wanted to put in the original 8-bit games, and I finally had a chance to do them justice. Saboteur has become seven times bigger, with new maps, gameplay, graphics, and plot. It tells the story of the original Ninja and what happens to him between Saboteur and Saboteur II. And I finally had the chance to make the CPC version how it should have been - not just a Speccy port. And Saboteur II itself has been expanded, but still with the same retro style. For thirty years people have

been asking questions about the sequel so now I had a chance to answer them. So once again there are many more locations and secrets to find. And both remakes have storylines which lead towards the future, and set the stage for Saboteur 3, 4, 5, and 6.

8BA: Where to now for Clive Townsend? Will you ever get back into coding development for 8-bit machines again as it has become very popular once again?

CT: Probably not - I'd rather focus on developing the story for Saboteur SiO, Saboteur Zero, and Saboteur III. But they'll all be in an 8-bit retro style. Saying that, I've recently made remastered versions of Saboteur 1 and 2 for the actual ZX Spectrum, published by George Cropper. It gave me the chance to fix some small errors on the loading screens too - things that have bugged me for 30 years! I've also created some chapter graphics for Andy Remic's film, Memoirs of a Spectrum Addict, so that's kept me busy with speccy graphics. And the Switch version of the remake has tons of retro graphics. So I've not done much 8-bit coding but my attention to colour clash has been re-awakened! The next thing for me is to complete Saboteur SiO and then Saboteur Zero. Both will be full of retro graphics. I can't stay away :-)

Clive's 8 quick 8-bit Questions:

8BA: First 8-bit machine?

CT: ZX81 briefly, then ZX Spectrum.

8BA: First 8-bit game you played?

CT: Probably something on the ZX81, but the memory that stands out is Arcadia by Imagine Software, it was on a TV in WH Smiths, it really impressed me with its colour & fluid movement.

8BA: First ever 8-bit code or game you developed non-commercial?

CT: A tarot card program! I wrote it on the ZX81 but then redesigned it with graphics for the Speccy.

The original Saboteur 2 on Amstrad CPC

8BA: Fav 8-bit game you have ever played?

CT: My favourite game was made in 2014 by Stew Hogarth for the Spectrum. Teddy Tea Leaf lets you play the part of a thieving teddy bear, creeping around and avoiding some funny and very clever AI. If only it had more levels.

8BA: Fav 8-bit game you ever worked on?

CT: The Game Boy Color version of Thunderbirds was fun to work on. As well as multi-layered parallax scrolling it contains loads of palette trickery!

8BA: Fav 8-bit game GFX you've ever seen? & Fav 8-bit game music you ever heard?

CT: I'm not telling you. But anyone who completes the Saboteur remake on level 9 will be given a clue. Decipher the clues and it will lead you to a secret area where you'll actually see my favourite graphic and hear my favourite music!

8BA: Fav 8-bit gaming experience?

CT: Being told when I started college that there's no point studying Art AND Science. "You'll never get a job doing both". Then leaving college to write games ;-)
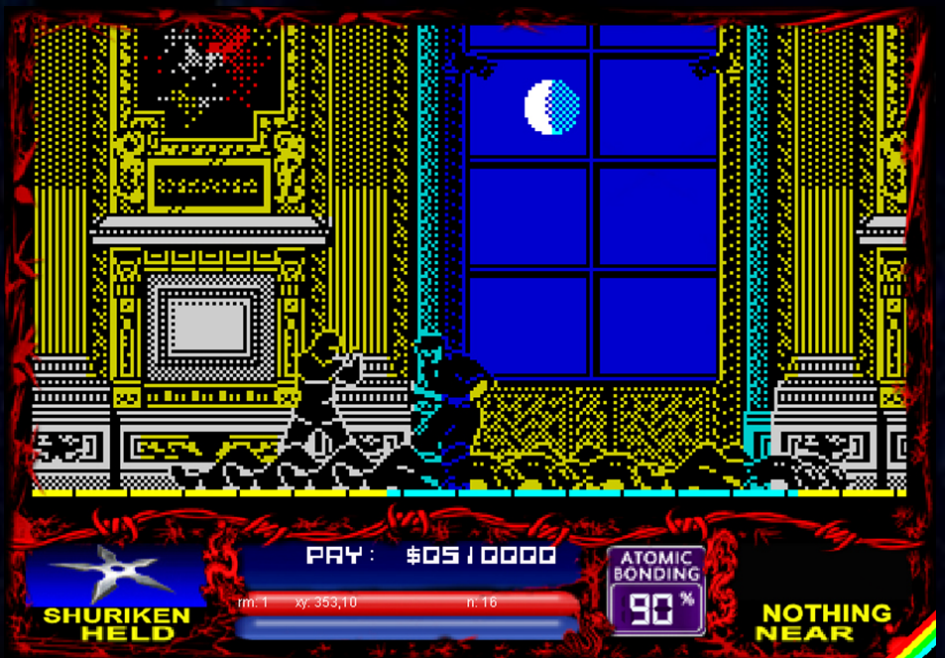
Saboteur SiO (PC, Mac, mobile, Nintendo Switch)

MARK HARDISTY

8BA: Who is Mark Hardisty?

Mark Hardisty (MH):
I'm originally from Sheffield. I have a fondness for the city's gaming heritage after spending the majority of my teenage weekends riding the bus into the centre and treading the same route around the various game shops and arcades. I made a weekly pilgrimage to Just Micro which has left me with an indelible love for Gremlin Graphics.

8BA: How did you get into 8-bit gaming?

MH: We owned a Philips Videopac machine for around a year, and before the keyboard gave up, I spent hours hunched over those early basic pixelated games. That was my first experience of 8-bit gaming, but my first real 8-bit computer was the Acorn Electron.

8BA: What's the story of how and when you got into publishing 8-bit books?

MH: I'd run a few gaming festivals in Sheffield, and as part of those I'd made contacts with several people in and around the games industry past and present. One of those was Ian Stewart, the founder of Gremlin Graphics. The more time I spent talking with Ian and looking deeper into the Gremlin story the more I felt that the story should be told. I approached Ian in 2014 for his permission (and help) to start writing, and he agreed. Two years (and lots of coffee) later I chatted with Sam Dyer of Bitmap Books about his success in creating the Bitmap Books label and he offered to publish A Gremlin in the Works.

8BA: What books have you published and what do you hope to achieve with these books?

MH: A Gremlin in the Works has been my magnum opus! It consumed three years of my life culminating in around 800 pages of words and pictures about Gremlin Graphics. It's been great to receive such warm words about the book, and I felt it was very important to document Sheffield's contribution, past, present and future to the games industry. I stopped adding content to the Gremlin story at the end of 2017. Since then I've self-published a book that contains 8 and 16-bit inlay artwork, cunningly called INLAY and I'm now working and publishing a series of magazines on classic text adventures. Everyone needs a hobby.

8BA: What sort of perspective do you want to get across in your books a feeling of retro nostalgia or

a modern take on 8-bit gaming or something else?

MH: There's an obvious whiff of nostalgia around the books, it's something we all crave isn't it? But the Gremlin book is important to me for reasons given before. It was the emergence of an industry and I wanted to ensure that Gremlin's contribution and the contribution of the people who made the company was told. On the flipside, INLAY and The Classic Adventurer magazine are unashamedly self-indulgent, and an excuse for me to write about games I enjoyed playing as a kid.

8BA: Is there a team behind the books or is it primarily just yourself and how does it all come together?

MH: A Gremlin in the Works was brilliant edited by Mark Green, formerly of Nintendo and NGamer magazine. He was the glue that held the project together and brought my rambling words to life. It was a huge undertaking to wrestle interviews with over 70 people into one coherent narrative. Sam Dyer of Bitmap gave me his support and also contributed with lots of design ideas. I'm hugely grateful to both. I've done all of the work on INLAY and The Classic Adventurer, though people such as Gareth Pitchford, Tim Gilberts and a few others have pitched in with ideas, proof-reading and the like.

8BA: What can we expect from you in the future? what plans do you have in the pipeline?

MH: I'm currently working on the fourth and final issue of The Classic Adventurer. There could be more, who knows? It is a niche genre, and interviews are difficult to arrange as most of the original authors have left the scene.

8 Quick 8-bit Questions:

8BA: First 8-bit machine?

MH: An Acorn Electron. I got it for Christmas in 1984.

8BA: First 8-bit game you played?

MH: Probably something that came bundled with the Electron. I have distinct memories of Hopper or Snapper that was part of the package. Acornsoft, Orlando (Nick Pelling) in particular made some cracking arcade clones for the BBC and Electron.

8BA: First ever 8-bit magazine you read / bought?

MH: Crash. My mum got me a second-hand ZX Spectrum from another family member, so I bought the Newsfield magazine using hard-earned money from a daily paper round.

8BA: Fav 8-bit game you have ever played?

MH: Elite by David Braben and Ian Bell. It's the reason I pestered my mum for an Electron. It's truly the British Mona Lisa of video games, a masterpiece that stands the test of time and a masterclass in programming that has more drama, tension, atmosphere and immersion in 22K that GTA does in gigabytes of disk space.

8BA: Fav 8-bit magazine / book?

MH: A difficult one. There's a brilliant chapter on Elite in Francis Spufford's Backroom Boys, I really enjoyed Magnus Anderson's Grand Thieves and Tomb Raiders for its British focus, and Bitmap Books ZX Spectrum Compendium is a visual feast for my ZX Spectrum-tinted eyes.

8BA: Fav 8-bit game GFX you ever seen?

MH: I'd have to go back to Elite again. From the moment I saw the spinning wireframe Cobra Mk 4 in its opening sequence I was hooked.

8BA: Fav 8-bit game music you ever heard?

MH: Agent X on the ZX Spectrum is a technical marvel. I still have no idea how Tim Follin achieved it through the one-channel beeper. Favourite on a machine that could play music? Probably Monty on the Run by Rob Hubbard on the C64. Gremlin competed with Ocean for games with the best music, with Rob and Ben Daglish turning out some cracking tunes.

8BA: Fav 8-bit gaming experience?

MH: Am I going to sound exceptionally boring if I say Elite again? Sorry! Its impact cannot be understated on a 10 year-old boy with a fertile imagination.

Photography by Chris Daw

CPC RETRODEV MINI INTERVIEWS

Unknown Design team members: Alvaro Jover-Alvarez, Jordi Amoros-Moreno , Cristian Garcia-Romero

Development Team: Unknown Design
Game Name: 77 Attempts

8BA: What occurs in the Game?

Unknown Design (UD). You reincarnate Alex, a nice creature who has lost his beloved, the queen of gravity. The evil villain 'Attempo' has kidnapped her to absorb her powers and reverse the gravity of the planet. Attempo is on vacation and is the perfect opportunity for our hero to go and save his beloved. Attempo's evil henchmen will try to stop Alex, who will have to be quick to avoid all the traps set by the despicable Attempo.

8BA: What did you set out to achieve with the game?

UD: We really like fast paced platform games, we wanted to create one on a very different environment as Amstrad is. In addition, we observed that playing with gravity and precise jumps is not something very witty in Amstrad games,
so we opted to try something new from a concept that works very well on current platforms.

8BA: Please show a small sample of the raw Code and what it is doing.

UD: This code tells us if an entity (e.g. our hero, an enemy), is colliding with a specific tile (i.e. small piece of the map). Specifically, it allows us to specify any 2 functions that calculate points (like f(x) that we learned in school but we are really using something like f(x, y), being x our entity e and a position relative to the entity) and with those functions, we have the points to check if they belong to the same tile we are checking.

```
;;=========================================
;; Function that checks if given entity
;; is colliding with tile.
;; INPUTS:
;; IY: entity
;; HL: pointer to function to calculate
;;   first point
```

```
;;  DE: pointer to function to calculate
;;    second point
;;  A: tile ID
;;  B: offset
;; OUTPUTS:
;;  A: 0x00 if no colliding
;;   0x01 if colliding
;;  HL: tile IDs which entity is colliding
;;  H: First point to check
;;  L: Second point to check
;; DESTROYS: AF, BC, DE, HL
;;=========================================
entityIsCollidingWithTileGeneric::
 ld (first_function), hl    ;; first_function = HL = First function to calculate first point
 ld (second_function), de   ;; second_function = DE = Second function to
calculate second point

 ld de, #generic_selfmod_code  ;; | DE = generic_selfmod_code addr
 ld (de), a      ;; | *DE = *(generic_selfmod_code) = A = tile ID (i.e. we save tile
ID)
 inc de       ;; | DE++ = *(generic_selfmod_code + 1) (i.e. next byte where we can
load data)
 ld a, b      ;; | A = B = offset value
 ld (de), a      ;; | *DE = *(generic_selfmod_code + 1) = A = offset value
 dec de       ;; | DE-- = *(generic_selfmod_code)
 ld a, (de)      ;; | A = *DE = *(generic_selfmod_code) = tile ID
       ;; \ Save tile ID and offset value and at the same time, swap values to
avoid the use of stack
       ;;  for save temporally the value of offset

 jr generic_start

 generic_selfmod_code = .   ;; Self-modificable code memory begin
 .db 0x00      ;; 1 byte reserved for tile ID
 .db 0x00      ;; 1 byte reserved for offset value

 generic_start:

 first_function = . + 1
 call #0x00      ;; Calling first function that will return 1 point

 ld de, #generic_selfmod_code  ;; DE = generic_selfmod_code addr
 ld a, (de)      ;; A = *DE = *(generic_selfmod_code) = tile ID

 call entityIsCollidingWithTileCall ;; Calling function to check collision with the
point calculated before
```

```
;; Function does not end here (if were possible) because we need to know both ID tiles which entity is colliding

push af        ;; We save A (i.e. 0x00 if previous call have not found collision and 0x01 if did)
push bc        ;; We save B (i.e. tile ID which entity is colliding and can be the same or different that input A)

ld de, #generic_selfmod_code  ;; DE = generic_selfmod_code addr
inc de        ;; DE++ = generic_selfmod_code + 1 addr
ld a, (de)    ;; A = *DE = *(generic_selfmod_code + 1) = offset value
ld b, a       ;; B = A = offset value
dec de        ;; DE-- = generic_selfmod_code addr = tile ID

second_function = . + 1
call #0x00     ;; Calling first function that will return 1 point

ld a, (de)     ;; A = *DE = *(generic_selfmod_code + 1) = tile ID
        ;; Making this instruction after call because that functions
        ;; that returns points destroys A register but no DE
        ;; and for that reason it is made 'dec de' before the call.

call entityIsCollidingWithTileCall ;; Calling function to check collision with the point calculated
before

pop hl         ;; HL = tile ID which entity collided before (H) & trash (L)
ld l, b        ;; L = tile ID which entity have collided now

cp #1
jr nz, generic_end
 pop de         ;; pop needed, if not, will fail due to how call/ret works (pop in DE for no reason)
 ret

generic_end:     ;; Last collision check did not collided with the tile ID that was our function input (A)

pop af          ;; A = collision result in first call to collision function check
```

TOD Studios team members: Juan Miguel Castillo Zaragoza, Luis Fernando Pérez Pérez, Daniel Ponsoda Montiel

Development Team: TOD Studios
Game Name: Legend of Steel

8BA: What occurs in the Game?

TOD Studios (TS): The game is a dungeon crawler where we control a brave warrior who must find and destroy a relic that gives immortality to monsters that threaten humanity. In order to do so, he must reach the deepest part of the dungeon where they hold this artefact.

8BA: What did you set out to achieve with the game?

(TS): We wanted to make a kind of game that would go beyond the typical style. We were looking for a theme that wasn't already seen too much in Amstrad. And of course, a game that we would enjoy developing it and playing it. As we love role-playing games, we were excited about the idea of bringing the orcs to the CPC while making a very entertaining action game created with passion. Finally, we are very proud of the result.

8BA: Please show a small sample of the raw Code and what it is doing.

(TS): We have developed the game 100% in z80 assembler, so it may not be very easy to understand for those who are not familiar with this language. With the maximum dedication, we have written well

organized and optimized code that implements (among other features):
- Double buffer.
- Horizontal and vertical hardware scrolling.
- Vertical rupture: Two video buffers on the same screen (top section for the game and bottom section for the panel) this allows smooth scrolling as we don't need to redraw the panel at each frame.

- Framerate independent movement.
- Extensions to the functionality of CPCtelera such as:
- 4x8 Tilemaps without affecting the system interrupts.
- Partial drawing of tiles (useful for scrolling).
- Integration with Arkos Tracker 2 (currently, CPCtelera supports only Arkos Tracker 1).
- And much more. All this running at 50 fps.

We show the collision detection routine. Despite being an assembler code, it is very compact and optimized and can be explained with relative ease.

```
========================================================
=;; Macro used in collision_check for each possible collision situation
;;
========================================================
.macro collision_checkPart
 ld a, (hl)    ;;
 inc hl       ;;
 inc hl       ;;
 add (hl)     ;; a = B.x + B.width

 ex de, hl    ;;
 ld b, (hl)    ;; b = A.x

 sub b        ;;
 dec a        ;; a = (a - b) - 1
 jp m, #noCollision  ;; if (a<0) then there is no collision
.endm

;;========================================================
;; Checks if two bounding boxes are colliding
;; INPUT:
;; DE = pointer to the bounding box A
;; HL = pointer to the bounding box B
```

```
;; OUTPUT:
;; A = 0 -> they are not colliding
;; A = 1 -> they are colliding
;;========================================================
collison_check::
 collision_checkPart  ;; (Checks B at left of A)

 dec de       ;; At exit of last call A is now B
 dec de       ;; just decrement 2 times to point to the begin
 collision_checkPart  ;; (Checks A at left of B)

 inc hl       ;; At exit of last call, A and B are swapped again
 dec de       ;; decrement DE an inc HL just once to check Y coordinate
 collision_checkPart  ;; (Checks B on top of A)

 dec de       ;; A and B are swapped again
 dec de       ;; decrement DE 2 times to point to the begin
 collision_checkPart  ;; (Checks A on top of B)

 ld a, #0x01    ;; At this point we are sure there is a collision
 ret       ;; return 1

noCollision:
 ld a, #0x00    ;; There is no collision
 ret
```


Development Team members of Gameroid. Left to right: Carla Maciá Díez, Ángel Jesús Terol Martínez and Raquel González Romá

Development Team: Gameroid
Game Name: Redsea

8BA: What occurs in the Game?

Gameroid: Barbanegra is a well known pirate in the 7 seas for his great amount of adventures and the treasures he has been getting in each one of them. One day when he woke up he discovered that his crew was trying to sabotage him and take away all his treasures. He can't allow this so he needs to fight to get rid of all of them!

8BA: What did you set out to achieve with the game?

Gameroid: We wanted to achieve two things with this game. The first one, as students we wanted to learn about the low level programming and how the Amstrad CPC works. And for the second one, we wanted to make a game with a catchy gameplay as our referents: Cabal and Outlaws. Unfortunately, due to time issues we couldn't implement all the functions we wanted, but we hope you enjoy playing Redsea.

8BA: Please show a small sample of the raw Code and what it is doing:

Gameroid: This function is what the game uses for checking every time the player kills an enemy if the counter of enemies in that level has reached 0, in other words, if the player has completed the level. If so, then checks the actual level to know if the game needs to load the next level or if it has finished the game.

```
get_Enemy:

        ld a, (enemies)
        dec a
        jr nz, not_finished          ;; If not 0, player didnt kill all enemies
        jr z, finished
        jp m, finished

        finished:
        ld b, a
        ld a, (level)
        sub #6
        jr nz, no_final_win

        call init_win
        ld a, b
        ld (enemies), a
        jp pl_next_level

no_final_win:

        call init_nextLevel
        call pl_next_level            ;; Win level -> Reset game

        not_finished:
        ld (enemies), a               ;; Update enemies to kill
        ;call draw_Score
ret
```


Ahaaaargggh me mateys, you won't take me, you scoundrel pirates!

Winner of Opera Prima award at CPC Retrodev:

Carlos Pérez Peregrin

Congratulations Carlos on winning the inaugural Opera Prima award for first time Amstrad CPC game release. What more can you tell us about how this all happened?

Carlos Pérez: I wanted to do something after watching all the CPCtelera coding videos from Professor Fran that I found online. I was curious about the Amstrad CPC's mode 2. I feel it was undervalued and rarely used in gaming, it really should have been used more in gaming in the 1980's. So for my first game I wanted it to be different, I really wanted to make a game using mode 2 graphics display. Originally I was planning a language menu in mode 1, but there was no memory left. With CPCtelera coding tools it was all very easy to get into mode 2. The CPCtelera is a great engine to use.

I am not a student, but live close to Alicante, in Spain. I only started to learn and use CPCtelera last summer (2017), so my experience and results would be quite similar to those of the university students who entered the contest.

Well, I have been a programmer since 1994 and I work with many languages, so it was quite easy for me to learn how to use CPCtelera quickly. Although my C skills were a little rusty, especially with pointers. Graphics is my weakness. Mode 2 is the opposite of mode 0. The ratio is 2:1 instead of 1:2. Prior of rgas tool I used a squared notebook to draw my sprites, I divided each cell by half for mode 2.

I used rgas tools from some original artworks for my game. The spaceship, the planet and final boss in Earth Defender are taken from those sources. The loading screen is a free pic of the moon and I imported it using rgas and a tool from cpctelera, called img2cpc. The hardest part of using mode 2 is making the graphics, because the pixel ratio is 2:1

So a normal editor won't work, because the sprites need to be wider than the final result, but fortunately rgas tool has a mode 2 editor, so you can draw the sprite as the final result. I don't know why Mode 2 wasn't used for CPC games in the past, perhaps developers just didn't have the knowledge of it to even consider it as an option when creating a game? I also suppose Mode 2 wasn't used in commercial CPC games because software companies and developers wanted the CPC games to be more colorful. But as you can see CPC games can look pretty cool in 2 colours!
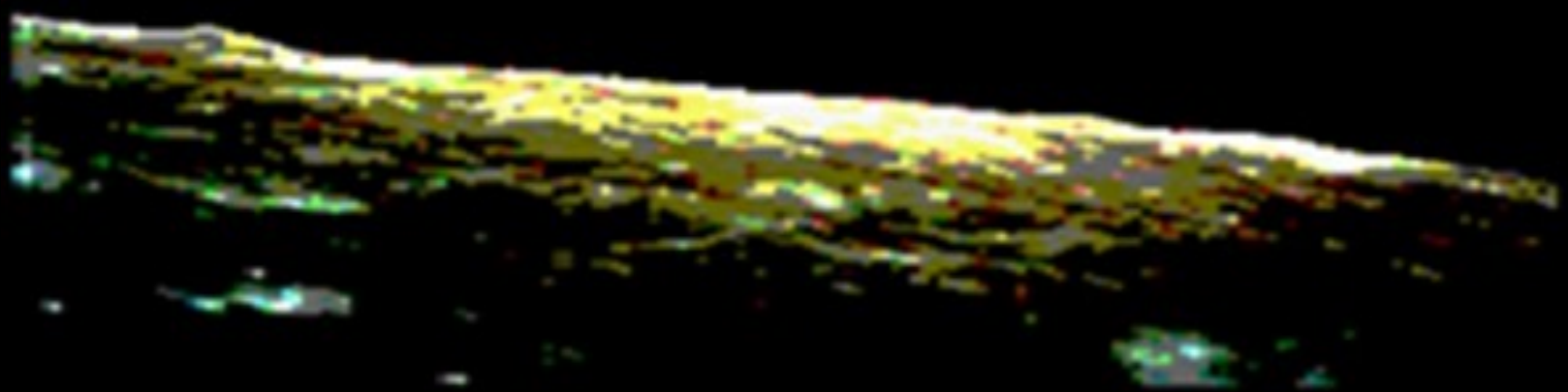

Defending your Earth in 2 colour Mode 2 never looked and played so cool

Carlos Pérez Peregrin receiving his Opera Prima award at #CPCRetrodev2018 from Professor Francisco José Gallego Durán

Double-Sided Games launches its retro range with a conversion of indie game *L'Abbaye Des Morts*. ANTONIO SAVONA (@tonysavon) talks to Merman about how the conversion came about, what he is adding and some hidden features.

8BA: What made you take on this C64 conversion?

Antonio (AS): I was actually developing another game, also with graphics by Saul Cross – *Guy in a Vest*. At some point Saul mentioned that he had done the graphics and the music for this conversion and that he only needed a coder for it. We agreed on putting *Guy in a Vest* (which is a more ambitious project) on hold for a couple of months, to complete *L'Abbaye des Morts*.

8BA: Did you add any new features to the C64 version?

AS: We tried to keep the gameplay identical to Locomalito's original, but at the same time we wanted to add our touch to the Commodore 64 version: visual and aural components have been enhanced/improved with respect to the original, courtesy of Saul Cross' mastery and, while the map is substantially identical to the PC version, there are a couple of "extras" that I can't give away. It's up to the player to find them.

8BA: How closely did you stick to the Spectrum-style artwork?

AS: Not at all. The fact is that the original is Speccy-like and the Spectrum version is a perfect repro of that style already. We thought it would not make sense to produce yet another copy for another platform. The game looks and sounds the way you expect from a proper Commodore 64 game.

8BA: Have you played the original or any of the earlier conversions?

AS: I had played the original before I took on the assignment, and, of course, I played it even more during the development, to make sure the conversion was faithful. It is a very simple game, but it really shines where a platform should: the difficulty

curve is perfectly balanced, it has a high replay factor and it is incredibly rewarding when you complete it. I think it is a little gem: so much so, that it does not need fancy graphics and sound. That is why we tried to preserve the original gameplay as much as possible: we think Locomalito did an outstanding job in that department and we didn't want to alter what we believe was perfect.

8BA: Many of your games feature excellent sampled sounds and speech, did you use them in this title?

AS: Well, the original doesn't have any of that, and I don't think in-game speech would have improved the game in any way. In fact it might have even spoiled the gloomy atmosphere. But, as you said, I always try to put some digi somewhere, and there are so many other places where speech can be used in a game, outside of the main action. Briefly: yes, I did. But, again, it's up to the player to find out where it is.

8BA: What has been the most difficult part of the conversion?

AS: Technically speaking, the game is very simple: just a flip screen platform affair. There are many different enemies, but the AI is quite straightforward for all of them, they are mostly pattern-based, so not a big deal there either. There were a couple of minor challenges, like making the sprite multiplexer co-exist with the music: that's a straightforward task, but not if you want the music to play with the same speed both on NTSC and PAL systems, because the multiplexer doesn't allow you to use an NMI for the music playing routine, as you would normally do. I think I found an interesting solution for that (or maybe it's a very common one that I ignored that existed). The other challenge was squeezing everything in a single load, because I personally wanted to have a tape version. The game might be simple but it's by no means "small". There are 5 charsets, some 400 sprite-frames, a hi-res bitmap splash screen, many different enemies requiring bespoke AI-code and much, much more. To cope with that, the game uses a lot of dynamic

Brother Antonio, the Cathar monk

compression so that only the stuff that is needed at a certain moment in time is unpacked and available in RAM. This approach extends to the graphics, which means that to unpack assets for the next room while there's stuff on screen, without causing any glitches or delays, is not trivial.

8BA: Who else worked with you?

AS: Saul Cross did music, GFX and SFX, and the publisher, Double Sided Games's Jérémie Marsin did pretty much everything not code related. Also Oliver Cappelaere helped a lot with testing.

8BA: How closely have you worked with original designer Locomalito?

AS: Not much personally, other than introducing myself. The publisher did before I stepped in for doing the actual coding, and describes him as the kindest chap in existence. I'm just a humble admirer of his work.

8BA: What tools and hardware did you use during development?

AS: The usual suspects: it's Kick Assembler for coding, while Spritepad and Charpad are our tools of choice for sprites and backgrounds. Occasionally one needs to rearrange data or to do something that goes beyond Kick Assembler's excellent scripting facilities, and I do that in Python.

8BA: Why do you continue to support the C64?

AS: To be completely honest with you, I don't really know. I

With questions by Merman

ANTONIO SAVONA

Who wants to play Hangman?

Antonio Savona in 1989 (left) and in 2014 (right) resuming his C64 coding career

The beautiful high-resolution title picture

know that I came out of retirement few years ago because I wanted to prove to myself that I could finish something I had started in the 80s, but the plan was to do it and that should have been it. Instead, it's been "I'll do one last game and that's it" ever since, and even now I'm already here planning the next "last" game. I guess that whatever it is that brings you in, it's the community, even more than the machine that keeps you in. I love the Commodore 64 as much as I did as a kid in the 80s, but it's the wonderful community that formed around it that keeps me going. It used to be a competitive environment but today it's just a bunch of great people supporting everything you do, just for the love of the machine. It's a nice place to be, I guess, and it's nice to play a role in it.

8BA: How long have you been programming C64 games?

AS: I started as a kid in the late 80s, but never published a commercial game. There was a major title I was working on that was supposed to be published by an Italian software house. But I was 16, I didn't know how to focus on a project, and I had no idea what I was getting myself into. So I dragged

the project for one year until I lost interest both in the game and in the C64, which by that time was no longer in its heyday anyway. I resumed Assembler programming 25 years later! So I guess you could say I've been programming C64 games for more than 30 years, but the truth is I took a quarter-century break.

8BA: What lessons from your previous games have helped you this time?

AS: The main lesson I've learned is something I kind of knew already, but it's been confirmed by this project: level design is the most important component in a game, together with controls. I spent so much time designing and testing the levels in my previous games, but here everything was done and I really understood how much is taken off the development time if you don't have to take care of that. In a sentence: conversions are way easier to program than the original games. On the practical side, I couldn't reuse much code from my previous games: I had never done a platform game before.

8BA: What would be your dream game to

convert to the C64?

AS: Some great unconverted arcades of the early 80s, or even some lesser-known titles from the same era. If I have to call out a name, I think *Rock 'n Rope* would be the one. Another ridiculous idea that came to my mind is to port *Dragon's Lair* using the FMV technology I developed for *Planet Golf* and an Ocean-type cartridge. That would be crazy and completely useless, but definitely great fun.

8BA: Do you have any other titles in development that you can reveal?

AS: As I said, *Guy in a Vest* is the game whose development I'll resume right after I finish *L'Abbaye des Morts*. It's a run 'n' gun game set in the 80s, with plenty of action and over-the-top one-liners. It's like *Serious Sam* meets *Contra* on a Schwarzenegger movie set. A lot has been done already, but it's a fairly large game and an ambitious project overall, so it won't be out soon.

8BA: Are you strictly a retro gamer or do you play modern titles too?

AS: I'm afraid I'm strictly a retro gamer. Not by choice or "religion", it's just that I don't have much time to invest in everything that came out recently or to "learn" a new game, so whenever I feel like playing something I resort to the safety of the oldies.

8BA: Finally, which is better, C64 or Spectrum?

AS: I guess it depends: when it comes to games, applications, ease of programming, graphics, sound, custom chips, peripherals, keyboard and software library, the C64 is undeniably the better computer. But the Spectrum's thin frame is great for using as a doorstop.

To order on disk or cartridge, visit the website at: https://doublesidedgames.com/shop/

The tape version is available at Psytronik (www.psytronik.net). Also available is *Realms of Quest V* for the VIC-20 by Ghislain de Blois, due in the second half of 2019. Follow him on Twitter @hitfan2000.

♥ 3   ✚ 3   Pestilent Beast

The impressive fire-breathing dragon

CARL-HENRIK SKÅRSTEDT

With questions by Merman

Carl-Henrik Skårstedt has worked in the games industry for over 25 years and is currently part of Yacht Club Games (creators of hit indie platformer *Shovel Knight*). But it's a much loved strategy game that has inspired him to write a new C64 title – *SPACE MOGULS*. Carl-Henrik talks to Merman about the project and what might come next.

8BA: How long have you been programming the C64?

Carl-Henrik (CH): I don't remember exactly when I started, but I made a demo in machine code in 1985. I created a bunch of demos until 1989 or so when I started programming Amiga, and I didn't really look back until around 2013 when I figured it would be fun to try some 8-bit programming again. I've mostly been running on emulators and didn't have enough focus to finish anything until I started on *Space Moguls*. In between the old demo scene days and now I've been working as a programmer in the game industry, so bringing my experience making games for 25 years back to the machine where it all started is magical to me!

8BA: What are your favourite C64 games, from the past or more recently?

CH: There are so many games I can't really pick a favourite, but I remember having lots of fun with *Blue Max*, *Fort Apocalypse*, *Jet Set Willy*, *Son of Blagger* and many others back in the day. I think what got me inspired to start working on a game for myself was Pond Software, I really like the *Bear Essentials* setting. But if I have to choose one that I enjoyed thoroughly it is probably *Paradroid*.

8BA: What tools are you using in your development process?

CH: *Space Moguls* started with tools, a few years back I got tired of writing the same tool code each time I started a new job so I decided to start over again and open source it. When it was

ready for testing I figured I'd make a 6502 assembler which turned into a much larger project (https://github.com/sakrac/x65). Being able to maximize the assembler for *Space Moguls* has been really helpful! While working on the assembler I got stuck trying to understand the Apple II GS executable format so I ended up making a symbolic disassembler as well (https://github.com/Sakrac/x65dsasm). In order to debug code I also created a debugger that runs in windows, which I have since hooked up to Vice's remote monitor feature so I can see what is going on (https://github.com/Sakrac/step6502). I will

probably rebuild the debugger in Win32 after I finish *Space Moguls* (it is currently an MFC app). I couldn't figure out a better way to make sounds effects so I made a simple sound effect tool that runs on a C64 (https://github.com/Sakrac/BDoing). I use Visual Studio Code to edit code, manage the project file and build the game. The command line window makes the editor very flexible so I don't need to run multiple things just to iterate on the game. For the disk version I'm using Exomizer for compression and Dreamload for loading. I use Vice for quick and easy testing before running on real hardware.

8BA: Are you testing on real hardware as well?

CH: Yes! I have a PAL and an NTSC C64C, a 1541 that doesn't work but I can load the game with either SD2IEC or Ultimate 1541 II+, the cartridge version obviously runs on U15412+ and EasyFlash. Unfortunately I don't have a good TV at home so most of my hardware testing happens at work, but I also have a Reloaded Mk.2 in a breadbin at home for quick tests.

8BA: Whose idea was *Space Moguls*?

CH: As far as the game design I think that idea comes entirely from Ozark Softscape, I'm just adding my touches to an already great design! As far as deciding on which game to make, I've never really got into strategy games and *M.U.L.E.* just seemed like a clear and simple project to learn from. My

original idea was based on *M.U.L.E.* with more graphics and colours. I also had thoughts about bitmap graphics and hex tiles so I think I hit those goals. As far as the name goes, I had so much trouble coming up with a name I asked Twitter to come up with something. Eventually I read an interview with Danielle Berry Bunten, the designer of *M.U.L.E.*, claiming that Electronic Arts wanted to name their game *Mars Moguls* and the team didn't like that but that theme fit my game very well!

8BA: Will you be supporting the 4-player interface?

CH: It is there already, joysticks show up as port 3 and port 4 in the game! Supporting the 4 player interface was one of the easiest things I've done in the game, it just works. The game also supports the SuperPad 64 and Inception joystick adapters. You don't need a 4-player interface to play the game with four players though, all players can share a single joystick for the development phase (when placing droids on the map) and all the screens where players play together can be played with a keyboard. If you don't have any joystick available there are two different keyboard layouts to try (one uses WASD controls and the other works with a joystick in port 1 which conflicts with some buttons on the keyboard).

8BA: How closely does it follow its inspiration, the classic strategy game *M.U.L.E.*?

CH: I decided I wasn't going to play *M.U.L.E.* while working on *Space Moguls* just to avoid being too close, but I've allowed myself to watch playthroughs and looking at articles about the game. I think it plays fairly close but I've also added more things to the game. I hope I've hit a good balance of keeping the old and mixing in some new! I think people will be able to recognize the original ideas and then it is just a question if they like my changes.

8BA: What have been the most difficult parts of programming the game?

CH: The trading screen has definitely given me the greatest challenge. It looks very simple but there is so much going on... There is no single thing that is difficult but everything working together at the same time! Apart from that everything has been going smoothly from day one, although I didn't expect it to take quite so long to get here.

8BA: You are publishing through Protovision - how supportive have they been?

CH: Protovision have been supportive and provided some feedback but mostly left me alone to build the game at my own pace. I'm relying on them to handle the physical and downloadable side, and that will be an interesting process to be part of.

8BA: What formats - tape, disk, cartridge, download - will the game be available on?

CH: It will be available on Disk and Cartridge, it will also have a downloadable version. A cassette version is not feasible though. The disk and cartridge versions will have the same content but there are some loading times for the disk version.

This town on Mars offers shops (to equip your droid) and a pub

8BA: Will there be any extras in the game box?

CH: The box will have fun extras! We've had a lot of fun thinking these things up.

8BA: Stein Pedersen is providing music, what do you think of his work?

CH: In addition to Stein Pedersen we also have Ole-Marius Pettersen helping out with music! I think Stein is great, and I enjoy his demo scene work a lot. We worked together on *Pocahontas* and *NBA Hangtime* for Sega Mega Drive and SNES at Funcom Oslo in the mid-Nineties, it was quite the demo scene crew working together! I think of him mostly as a programmer but he's making great music too :)

8BA: Early development has been documented on Twitch, was this fun to do?

CH: We had lots of fun, this was me showing what I'd been up to in my spare time for the last year to my work colleagues! It showed me a lot of gameplay issues I'm addressing now, and hopefully the next group to give the game a try will have a better understanding of what is going on. I don't think anyone at Yacht Club played a lot of games on C64 or with joysticks so that was interesting too.

8BA: You are part of Yacht Club Games, the company behind *Shovel Knight*. Are they planning any more C64 games?

CH: I'm working on technology for newer hardware at Yacht Club Games, and programming C64 is more of a personal thing. There will be some involvement for *Shovel Knight 64* from the team, but *Space Moguls* is all me :) Anything that is officially YCG is a full team effort, so *Space Moguls* isn't a YCG thing, it is just my side project.

8BA: More importantly, was the C64 version of *Shovel Knight* just an April Fool's joke?

CH: The joke is that we've been talking about *Shovel Knight 64* as a platformer where *Shovel Knight* would play as a 3D game in the style of an early Nintendo 64 platformer, but we're serious about turning it into a C64 game! The game is still very early but planning for a cartridge version allowing for many large animations and detailed backgrounds. Now that I'm nearly done with *Space Moguls* I can return to *Shovel Knight* again.

8BA: Are there any other games you would like to create for the C64?

CH: Apart from making *Shovel Knight* on C64 I'm interested in making a more original strategy game, taking inspiration from games like *Settlers*, *Archon*, *Colonization* and other games in addition to *M.U.L.E.* but that is some time from now! I have lots of ideas :)

SPACE MOGULS is on sale through the Protovision website at: www.protovision.games/

The all-important trading screen, here for buying and selling food

SARAH JANE AVORY

The Commodore 64 has reached Level 36 and gained much Experience. The amazing thing is that new games continue to be released for the format, with as much enthusiasm and art as the classic games we know. In the forest of Twitter, our intrepid writer (a Level 43 scribe, with a high Intelligence stat) meets a mysterious stranger – SARAH JANE AVORY. Sarah is the author of the BRILEY WITCH novels and is now programming a C64 roleplaying game based on the books.

8BA: Sarah, when did you first get a Commodore 64?

Sarah Jane Avory (SJA): Well, I can't remember the exact date, but soon after they came out. I had a VIC-20 at the time and had started to learn machine code, but when the C64 was launched, I wanted one of those.

8BA: When did you learn to program games yourself?

SJA: I taught myself to program soon after buying the VIC-20. At the time, I couldn't afford a tape-deck, so I couldn't play any games. Instead, I read the programming section of the manual, and that interested me greatly! Once I knew machine code existed, I bought a 6502 book and devoured the info in that!

8BA: When did you start writing novels?

SJA: I started writing soon after buying a disk drive for my C64. It came with the word processor EasyScript, and I wrote many stories with that (none of them any good). Over the years I'd messed around

with an idea for a fantasy trilogy, writing that on my first PC. A few years ago I managed to complete the first book (Bond of Terror), and went on to write the remaining two books (The Vixen Trap & Fall of Darkness). But Briley Witch Chronicles is a relatively new series, started November 2012. I went on to write and self-publish 10 books of Briley, and I'll probably return to writing and write some more once I get some spare time.

8BA: What led you to self publish your own work. What have you learned from this experience?

SJA: Well, I'd seen others do it, so I decided to give it a try. Once I had the right tools in place, it became easy. I had to learn a bit about Kindle formatting, but that didn't take long, and now my utility takes care of everything for me. Now I just have to write the books, and uploading to Amazon is a painless experience. The hardest thing is promotion as I'd rather be writing than promoting, but then I do it just for fun, so I'm extremely relaxed about everything.

8BA: Could you describe the scenario behind the Briley Witch series, without spoilers?

SJA: Briley Forester is a modern girl with all the mod cons at her convenience, a loner who loves the solitude of programming due to events

Sarah Jane Avory. Writer and coder of Briley Witch books and C64 game

in her past. But when a certain event happens, she finds herself stranded in a backward Anglo-Saxon-esque world where she has absolutely nothing. To add to her problems, she discovers not only has she become a witch in the new world, her cat Smokey has plenty to say to her, and she encounters some folk who despise witches with a passion, including herself! And to top it all, a dark evil exists to further add to add to her problems.

8BA: The RPG you are working on is drawn from the novels – are you starting at the beginning, and how much of the books will be in this game?

SJA: I'm starting close to the beginning of the first book, at the point

Briley and her cat Smokey explore the forest

The Spirit of a Witch is the first book of Sarah's Briley Witch Chronicles, on which the game is based

The superb map screen showing the land to be explored

where Briley returns to her modern home. The plan is to add the first four books of the series, allowing me enough storyline to code at least a sequel, if not two.

8BA: Smokey the cat is an important character in the books, does he appear in the game?

SJA: Oh, I couldn't code the game without Smokey! I love him so much! He's a big part of the game, so much so he's with Briley most of the time, giving advice here and there… I'll be adding the option in the game to chat with him, and he'll remind the player what task they are performing.

8BA: How do you find developing for the

The in-game menu includes REMIND, giving hints on what you need to do, and FOXES (a hidden bonus item found around the land)

C64 on a modern computer, and what software / hardware do you use?

SJA: It's so much easier these days! Back then, we coded on the C64. But those were fun days… I'm using the VICE emulator, but everything else is my own. I have my own build system with an integrated 6510 macro assembler, my own sprite editor, and my own character/map editor. It's great to have my own tool-chain; I can add new features whenever I like, and it's all been designed to make life as easy as possible.

8BA: Will you be self-publishing the game, or working with one of the dedicated homebrew publishers out there?

SJA: As you might already be aware, Protovision will be publishing the game.

8BA: How far through the game are you, and any estimates on when it will be finished?

SJA: Well, the game is based upon days, with events taking place as Briley performs her tasks. I'm currently working on Day 17 of a planned 26. So I'd say I'm about two thirds of the way through. As for when it'll be finished… Well, there's still plenty to do, so sometime in 2019 I would say. I'm not in a rush, taking my time to do this right.

8BA: What games have influenced how this game plays?

SJA: Japanese RPGs have influenced me quite a bit! The whole idea behind Briley Witch Chronicles was to code a Japanese-style RPG for the C64. I could've coded the game in a similar fashion to the Ultima games, but I wanted to do something different, something to challenge me.

8BA: Do you have any favourite RPGs on computer and console?

SJA: I'd have to say Ultima III is my old-time favourite. Spent many an hour playing that. On the Mega Drive I enjoyed several RPGs, including Sword of Vermilion and Exile.

8BA: Do you still have any retro consoles or computers other than the C64?

SJA: Sadly, I don't have any retro consoles or computers. Right now I'm using an emulator (VICE) to run my game. My old C64 (along with a VIC20, C1541, A500, A600) was trashed a long time ago when I moved house, thinking I'd never need them again. I had no idea people were still so into the C64! It came as a pleasant surprise! But… oh, I wish I'd kept everything!

8BA: What tips would you give someone wanting to develop a retro RPG?

SJA: Well, it's a lot harder and longer than other types of games, so keeping one's motivation is the key! You just have to keep going, day after day, and before you know it, you'll have quite a lot done! Oh, and the most important thing: have fun doing it!

You can find out more about Sarah at her Amazon author's page: https://www.amazon.co.uk /Sarah-Jane-Avory/e/B00CYHDT8M/
And follow her on Twitter for the latest on the RPG's development:https://twitter.com/ SarahJaneAvory

8-BIT ANNUAL DEV CONTEST 2018

by George Bachaelor

As part of the 2019, 8-bit annual book, I held an 8-bit game development contest on social media websites, Facebook and Twitter, called #8BITANNUALDEV. The contest was open to anyone, of all ages, genders and skill levels. The contest was open to all and every 8-bit machine including Amstrad CPC or Plus / GX4000 models, Sinclair Spectrum, MSX, Commodore, BBC, Acorn, Tandy, 8-bit Nintendo or Sega consoles, Sam Coupe, Atari and any other 8-bit machine not mentioned.

Entrants could code on their own or in teams if they wished. To enter you did not need to be a pro at coding. There were no restrictions to how many or what type of 8-bit game or 8-bit related content that contestants had wanted to put forward for the contest. Games from other contests could be entered, but all games and entries must be the original work of the developer. As it was a no restrictions game development contest, entries could be a new game, an old game, a game in progress, a game that was started years ago but never was finished, it could be 8-bit music, 8-bit art, or anything else 8-bit related. To decide on the winners and placings, three categories were assigned 1) Basic 2) Advanced 3) Anything Goes.

Basic category = Any game developed with Basic. This includes using tools and other people to help you.

Advanced category = Any game developed with assembly / machine code or other.

Anything Goes category = Anything other than a game, that showcases your and you're machines 8-bit capabilities. This can be of anything produced on an 8-bit machine such as music, loading screens, sprites, general / random
works of art and scene demos of any kind.

In total the contest received the following statistics:

11 Entries for the BASIC contest.
4 Developers for the BASIC contest.
2 8-bit systems covered in BASIC contest.
3 Entries for the ADVANCED contest.
3 Developers for the ADVANCED contest.
4 8-bit systems covered for the ADVANCED contest.
3 Shoot 'em ups for the ADVANCED contest.
1 Entry into ANYTHING GOES contest.

The following is provided in the developer's own words:
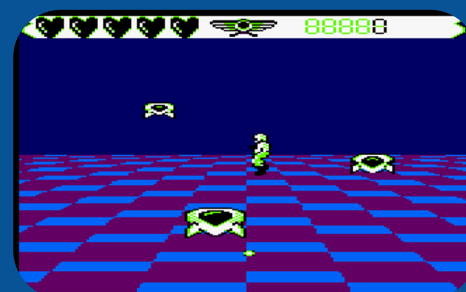
BASIC CATEGORY ENTRIES

Space Phantom

Released: December, 2018
Developer: Jose Javier Garcia Aranda (Author of game and 8BP library)
Country: Spain
System: Amstrad CPC 464 and CPC 6128

A 3D arcade style, shoot 'em up. It took around three months to complete. "Space Phantom" is a 3D game inspired by the classic space shooter "Space Harrier", by SEGA. You are a space hero, equipped with a jet-pack flying across the universe, killing meteorites, space hawks, spaceships, and even a dragon. The game has three phases and an epic end. It is made in LOCOMOTIVE BASIC using my 8BP library. 8BP is an open source library which provides a new set of commands that extends LOCOMOTIVE BASIC language to build games. It provides up to 32 sprites, collision detection, multi directional scroll, sprite routing, animations sequences, tile map, in-game music, pseudo-3D, and much more.

One of its main programming features is the use of advanced Pseudo-3D technique included in 8BP. A common relevant feature of all my games is the use of "massive logics" programming technique, created to get the maximum performance to BASIC games. This technique is deeply described at 8BP library manual. This game is open source and my aim creating this game is to share an example about how to program games using 8BP library, divulge the "massive logics"

programming technique and provide AMSTRAD CPC lovers a way to easily create

OVERALL STANDINGS FOR THE #8BITANNUALDEV 2018

BASIC CATEGORY ENTRIES

Rank	GAME	8-bit SYSTEM	Developer
1st	Space Phantom	Amstrad CPC	Jose Garcia Aranda
2nd	Pink Pills	Amstrad CPC	Sebastian Braunert
3rd	Mike The Guitar	Amstrad CPC	Sebastian Braunert
4th	Nibiru	Amstrad CPC	Jose Garcia Aranda
5th	3D Racing One	Amstrad CPC	Jose Garcia Aranda
6th	Anunnaki	Amstrad CPC	Jose Garcia Aranda
7th	Fresh Fruits & Vegetables	Amstrad CPC	Jose Garcia Aranda
8th	Mutante Montoya	Amstrad CPC	Jose Garcia Aranda
9th	Mini Invaders	Amstrad CPC	Jose Garcia Aranda
10th	Mini Pong	Amstrad CPC	Jose Garcia Aranda
11th	The Wall	Vic 20 +3K	Menedék Programozó Klub

ADVANCED CATEGORY ENTRIES

Rank	GAME	8-bit SYSTEM	Developer
1st	Tragical Chase	CPC, MSX, E128	Keith Sear
2nd	INQ & SUQ vs NIGHTMARE	MSX	Nobuaki Washio
3rd	Earth Defender	Amstrad CPC	Carlos Pérezgrín

ANYTHING GOES CATEGORY ENTRIES

Rank	GAME	8-bit SYSTEM	Developer
1st	Finally (Iyoiyo)	C64	Menedék Programozó Klub

their own games. Library and programming manual can be found at:
https://github.com/jjaranda13/8BP
This game can be found at:
https://github.com/jjaranda13/8BP/tree/master/GameExamples

Pink Pills - Manic Moritz And The Meds

Developer: Sebastian Braunert
Country: Germany
Category: Basic
System: Amstrad CPC

Story of the game. Good old Moritz, best dog in the world, is ill and always in the pet clinic. He gets lots of pills and injections. As a result he has illusions and strange dreams. He dreams about hunting for bones, and weirder still he dreams about being hunted by crazy postmen, bloodsucking vampires and all sorts of weird creatures. When he has collected all

LIVES 7   MORITZ CPC! BONES 0

bones, he has to meet 'THE DOCTOR' in the tardis. Will Moritz find his way out and enjoy a 'HAPPY END'? It was my first try to create a game on the Amstrad CPC and I wanted to make the game colourful. I first created the game on the Spectrum and it took me ages and I now have dozens of versions of it on the 'Speccy'. For the Amstrad CPC version I used 'Multiple Platform Arcade Game Designer', also known as MPAGD by Jonathan Cauldwell. I was inspired by my dog Moritz, who is seriously ill. He has to take a lot of meds. Diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, his prognosis was bad and he could have died years ago. I started to cope with it in a 8-bit manner. In real life, with lots of meds, the vet has helped to heal my good old Moritz. Best thing is Moritz is still alive. I always work in team when coding, so I got a lot of help: Uwe Geiken made most of the sprites, Andy Green made the loading screen. Music was taken from: Wally, Andy Coding, Mr. Nut, DJ Andy, Alex Rostov, nq, Sauron. It only works because Kees van Oss and

especially Shining were doing their magic! There are two versions of the game one without a timer and one with a timer. I have entered both my games into the Basic category of this contest as I feel that I am not an advanced coder. I understand some may feel that MPAGD may be considered advanced but I am still learning and have lots of help from more experienced coders.

Mike the Guitar

Developer: Sebastian Braunert
Country: Germany
Category: Basic
System: Amstrad CPC

It took me two months to "code" the game (the speccy original - the CPC version took me one month). I used 'Multiple Platform Arcade Game Creator', also known as AGD by Jonathan Cauldwell to create it. I had a lot of help: Uwe Geiken made most of the sprites, Andy Green created a fantastic loading screen. I used the music of lots of musicians: LaesQ, Monorhom, nq!, rnR T.A.D. 7D9. Most importantly credit to Kees van Oss and especially 'Shining' who helped me to find the bugs and add the music. Story of the game: Mike the little guitar has but one ambition - to play a solo. In particular he wants to play "Smells like teen spirit" by Nirvana, his favourite band. But the jealous instruments and old "Ludwig Van" want to stop him, by hiding all the plectrums behind

the walls. They forgot one plectrum though, and Mike soon noticed that every time he played a plectrum, somewhere else a wall breaks and he can take the next plectrum. The game was inspired of a scene of my other game "Pink Pills". In this scene Moritz runs on a note sheet. I was fascinated about the idea to use note lines as platforms. Later I was searching for some cool music for another project. I found a "Smells like teen spirit version" I loved. When I heard the music I had an "epiphany"! I only had to create, what I saw.

Nibiru

Developer: Jose Javier Garcia Aranda (Author of game and 8BP library)
Released: October, 2016
Country: Spain
Category: Basic
System: Amstrad CPC 464 and CPC 6128

"Nibiru" is a side-scrolling action game in the tradition of games like R-Type or Nemesis. The name comes from ancient Sumerian

legends, which talk about an extra-terrestrial race called "Anunnaki". Their original planet is "Nibiru". You are the pilot of a space ship and you must defeat the planet Nibiru and its leader, "Gorgo", an almost invincible Millenarian reptile. You must destroy the galactic birds that live on their moons and once you reach the planet you must face their dangers before you can fight with Gorgo. This game took me around one month to develop.

3D Racing

Released: April, 2018
Developer: Jose Javier Garcia Aranda (Author of game and 8BP library)
Country: Spain
Category: Basic
System: Amstrad CPC 464 and CPC 6128

3D Racing, is a car racing game projected in a 3D environment. You must train on the first circuit, avoiding puddles and driving off the road. Then you will compete with other cars, and drive during the night. It took me about a month to develop and is made with LOCOMOTIVE BASIC using 8BP library.

Anunnaki

Released: March, 2016
Developer: Jose Javier Garcia Aranda (Author of game and 8BP library)
Country: Spain
Category: Basic
System: Amstrad CPC 464 and CPC 6128

"Anunnaki" is a vertical shoot 'em up. Takes its name inspired in ancient Sumerian legends, which talk about an extraterrestrial race called "Anunnaki". They visit our planet and created humans. You are an Anunnaki

leader "Enki" and pilot a spaceship. Your mission is to conquer the planet Earth and enslave the humans. Anunnaki consists of 3 levels that you must overcome, avoiding enemies such as meteorites, space hawks, ships, "arkarons" (extraterrestrial space monsters) and a rocks corridor full of mines.

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Released: April, 2017
Developer: Jose Javier Garcia Aranda (Author of game and 8BP library)
Country: Spain
Category: Basic
System: Amstrad CPC 464 and CPC 6128

"Fresh fruits & vegetables" is a platform-scrolling game in which you are a fruitman, a funny character who must gather all fruits, avoiding a lot of enemies.

Mutante Montoya

Released: February, 2016
Developer: Jose Javier Garcia Aranda (Author of game and 8BP library)
Country: Spain
Category: Basic
System: Amstrad CPC 464 and CPC 6128

"Mutante Montoya" is a classic maze game. Its title is inspired by the great old game named "Mutant Monty" by Amsoft, 1984. This game was the first I did, using the first version of my library 8BP (8 bits of power). Later, I migrated the game to 8BP version 26 in order to improve certain technical aspects. "Mutante Montoya" consists of 5 levels that you must overcome, avoiding enemies such as soldiers and monsters. Once you reach the princess you kidnap her and ask for a good ransom! This game took me about one month to develop.

Mini Invaders

Released: December 2016
Developer: Jose Javier Garcia Aranda (Author of game and 8BP library)
Country: Spain
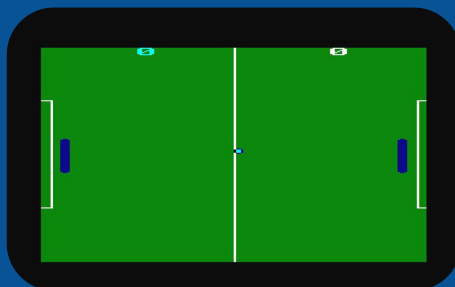**Category: Basic**
System: Amstrad CPC 464 and CPC 6128

"Mini invaders" is a remake of the classical "space invaders" game. It took me about a day to develop and is made in less than 3KB BASIC using my 8BP library.

Mini Pong

Released: December, 2016
Developer: Jose Javier Garcia Aranda (Author of game and 8BP library)
Country: Spain
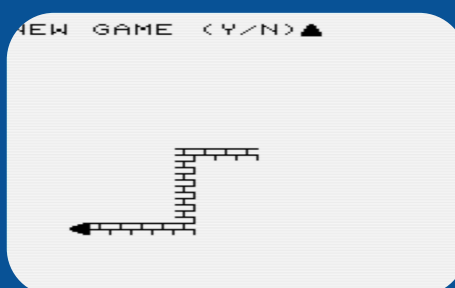**Category: Basic**
System: Amstrad CPC 464 and CPC 6128

"Mini pong" is a remake of the classical "PONG" game. It took me about a day to develop and is made in less than 3KB BASIC using my 8BP library.

The Wall

Developer: Menedék Programozó Klub
Country: Hungary
Category: Basic
System: Commodore VIC-20, with +3k memory expansion

The game's goal is to cover the biggest part of the screen with a wall. Think of it like game called Snake. Score: 1 wall-block = 1 point. Development time: only few afternoons. Members of our programming club is 8 people: one IT system administrator and 7 grammar school students. Average age: 18 years. The game is inspired by the minigame "The Wall" from the C64 classic "Lazy Jones". We just want to try the capabilities of this machine.

ADVANCED CATEGORY ENTRIES

Tragical Chase

Developer: Keith Sear
Country: Japan
Released: October, 2018
Category: Advanced
Platform: CPC, MSX2, Enterprise 128

8-bit multiple platform developer, Keith Sear (also dabbling in 68000 code too).

MSX2 Version

Enterprise 128 Version

Traigical Chase is a silly little mini game based on the ChibiAkumas - 'Akuyou1.666', Game Engine. Some tweaks to the engine have occurred. I added a time limit and 'Score Target', and a new infinite play level loop has been created where 'Waves' of enemies will approach, with different backgrounds, color schemes and shooting directions in a single block of level code. The game is played as the 'Yume' Character, and most of the graphical elements like sprites and loading screens have been reskinned with the Yume character. The gameplay is intended to be less 'Bullet hell' and more like the Space Invaders / Phoenix type of gameplay... in theory the game will play forever, there is no way to 'Win', so the player should just aim to get a higher score, or reach a higher level or 'wave number'. The main noticeable differences to the uniformed players that exists between the three versions, is that the Amstrad CPC and Enterprise versions have 4 colours while the MSX2 version has upto 16 colours. The title of the game Tragical Chase comes from the very expensive and overrated 1991, PC-Engine shooter game, called Magical Chase.
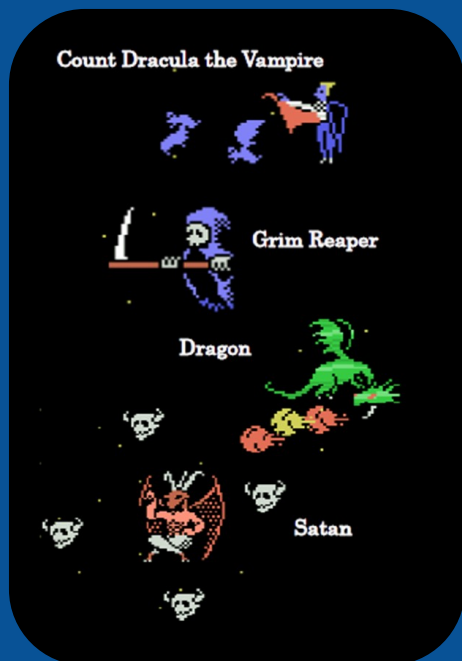
Inq & Suq vs Nightmare

Released: July, 2018
Developer: Nobuaki Washio
Country: Japan
Category: Advanced
Platform: MSX

A single player, 16kb, MSX game, for the Advanced category. This sideways scrolling shoot 'em up took 3 months to develop. The game is about an immortal character called INQ who catches dreams (bubbles) and kills off evil enemies in the night while trying to beat his sister SUQ, to determine who is the greatest demon of the night. Nobuaki Washio says the game is "not directly related to, but INQ & SUQ is inspired by 'NiGHTS into Dreams', from SEGA, 1996". Points of interest about the game: The game consists of seven stages, called NIGHT. After NIGHT stage 08, the game is an endless loop. The difficulty is increased in every loop. It will be maximized in the 12th loop. The Challenges he faced to create the game included:

1). The horizontal variable-speed smooth scrolling and a big boss character on it.
2). Each data-transfer to VRAM; such as bit-shift scrolling, writing out screen buffer, and sprite rotation for pseudo-bypassing sprite limitation on a line, is dynamically assigned to VBLANKs.

Count Dracula the Vampire

Grim Reaper

Dragon

Satan

Earth Defender

Developer: Carlos Pérezgrín
Country: Spain
Category: Advanced
System: Amstrad CPC

Earth Defender took me three months to develop. The plot - you find yourself in the year 2070. The International Outer Space Organism (like an international space station) has detected a serious menace. Some galaxies away, an enemy fleet is coming towards our planet. The solution is to train gifted children to become the next soldiers in this future war. You are one of them. I was inspired to create this game because of the book 'Ender's Game' by Orson Scott Card and also because I wanted to see for myself how easy or not easy a game could be made using 'CPCtelera' coding tools. The challenges I faced started with memory limitations The game was created specifically for the #CPCRETRODEV game contest and the main requirement for memory in the contest is that game entries must be 64kb, no more. Since that contest I have added small changes to my game. These include the following:

● Spaceship sprites redesigned (from original artwork by http://www.meowx.com/).

● New Background on Level 3.

● "Glitches" at the end of Level 3 to distract the player.

● Random colours between Level 3 & 4 to show changing from virtual to real world.

● Different palette (blue & yellow) for level 4 to 6 to remark player is now against real enemies.

● Optimize printing texts, now progress bar on level 3 doesn't stop playing.

● New Loader to start game in English or Spanish at user's choice.

ANYTHING GOES CATEGORY

Finally (Iyoiyo)

Developer: Menedék Programozó Klub
Country: Hungary

Category: Anything goes
System: Commodore 64

This is an opening screen and a flyer from our semi finished game called, Finally (Iyoiyo). The game will be an action-adventure game, placed in Edo-age Japan. The goal is to become a shogun, or become the most powerful oni. Development time so far is 200 hours. Members of our programming club is 8 people: one IT system administrator and 7 grammar school student. Average age: 18 years. We want to finish this game before Christmas 2018. As this is the only entry into the Anything Goes category of the contest, I congratulate the 8 members of the Hungarian based, Menedék Programozó Klub, for their winning entry.

EARTH DEFENDER VERSIONS

Earth Defender was entered into the #CPCRETRODEV first, the full review of Earth Defender can be found in the #CPCRETRODEV section of the book. What I have done is show how the two versions differ between the #CPCRETRODEV and #8BITANNUALDEV versions.
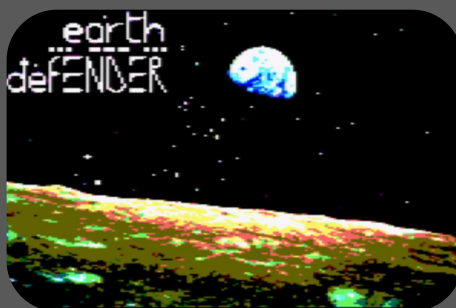
New, brighter and slightly modified loading screen for #8BITANNUALDEV version
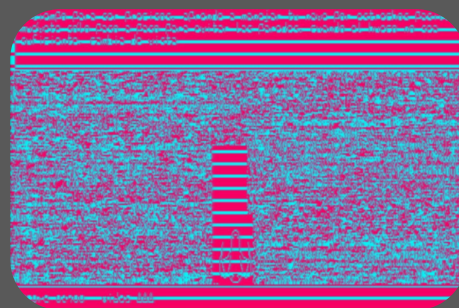
More colourful transition from level 3 to level 4
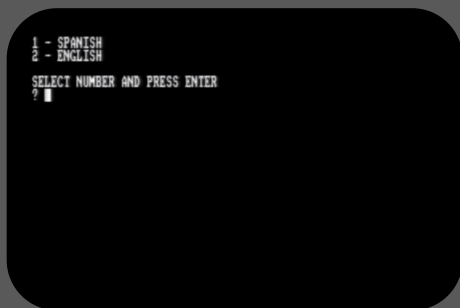
New loader on #8BITANNUALDEV version

Improved spaceship appearance, level 1

New colours and ship

■ **CODING:** Jose Javier Garcia Aranda
■ **INFO**: Free with this annual
■ **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

SPACE PHANTOM

(WINNER OF THE #8BITANNUALDEV 2018)

Congratulations to developer Jose Javier Garcia Aranda. Using his 8bp coding tools, Jose has demonstrated in Space Phantom, just how amazing his BASIC coding knowledge is and how to get the most out of the Amstrad CPC's Basic language.
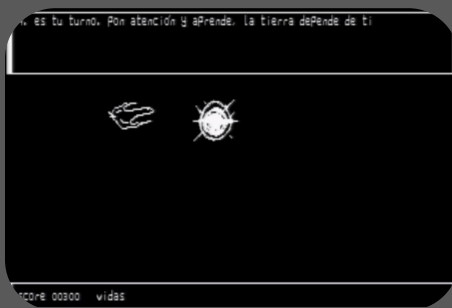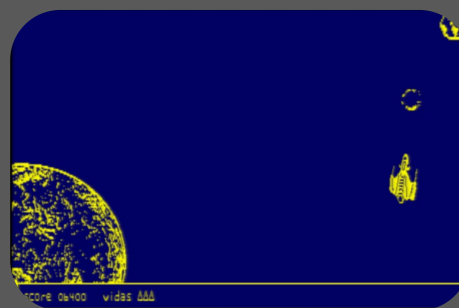
PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

You are a space hero, equipped with a jet-pack flying across the universe, killing meteorites, space hawks, spaceships, and even a dragon. The game has three phases and an epic end. A Space Harrier clone, in this 3D space shoot 'em up, you have one goal and that is shoot to kill, while you fly to thrill. Enemies generate randomly on the screen, just shoot away lining up your targets while you avoid being killed. The gameplay allows full screen movement in any direction of your character and enemies.

Level one starts with Meteorites.

WHAT I LIKE

The opening Star Wars like movie credits sequence was a little bit dodgy but it still looked cool. The music changing on different stages of the game was cool and stopped it from becoming annoying. It had the nice effect like in the movies, when you hear the music changing so as to announce a bad guy or some form of unexpectedness. In game sound effects worked well too. While only three levels, there was enough in each wave of enemies to keep you entertained. The difficulty felt right and so did four lives, perhaps though it is a little too easy. Graphically it is very colourful and captures that Space Harrier type of look quite nicely. Your sprite moves quite smoothly around the screen and shooting down enemies is easy.

The left and right combat movement took a bit of getting used to, but no problems there really. Explosions looked the 'biz' and so did the animation when you got killed. When you play a shoot 'em up, all you want to do is shoot, that's exactly what you get here - press the fire button down and shoot away!

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Annoying at times was the generation of enemy where you were positioned on screen that ended in certain death. Level two took quite a bit of loading, it wasn't overly long as such, just felt like it was too long watching all those dots on screen appear before you could begin play. When you died early on - in level two, you had to repeat the level. No way was there enough levels to play, it needed more, more, more!

Then quickly introduces phoenix like space hawks.

VERDICT

It offers a wonderful colourful variety of space themed enemy, over three distinct levels. A very solid 'Space Harrier' type game created in BASIC. The only thing that is missing to make it greater is more levels. A very polished and professional presented BASIC game, that is a lot of fun. The best BASIC game I have played so far coded in the 8bp series of game releases coded by Jose Javier Garcia Aranda.

From the developer - Jose Javier Garcia Aranda

8bp allows anyone to code any type of game. 8bp is not an engine but a library and gives you more freedom with your coding. With 8bp you can create platform games, screen based games, scrolling games, 3D games etc, basically, whatever type of game you want to create. All the code is BASIC. Fully written in pure Locomotive BASIC and executed without compilation, all you need to do is run after coding it. The difference between 8bp and some other coding tools where you compile code is that commands in 8bp are 'RSX' commands, internal asm code. 8bp provides a large set of powerful commands written in asm but all the games are pure BASIC. That's why you see my games look better than just ordinary BASIC. It's so easy anyone can do it, just follow the guides I have put together in the manuals and documentation on my website and you will be having fun!

SCORE

"Graphically it is very colourful and captures that Space Harrier type of look quite nicely."

GFX	**77%**
SFX	**77%**
FUN	**87%**
STAYING POWER	**80%**
OVERALL	**82%**

■ **CODING:** Sebastian Braunert, **Loading Screen:** Andy Green, **Music:** Shining
■ **INFO:** Free with this annual
■ **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

PINK PILLS

Pink Pills: Manic Moritz and the meds, is Sebastian Braunert's second CPC game he has coded with multi platform development tool, MPAGD (Arcade Game Designer) and coincidentally he has received second placing in the #8BITANNUALDEV, Basic category. This game is entirely based on Sebastian's, cute, real life dog, Moritz.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

Moritz, he is the best dog in the world but unfortunately he is not well. The vet has pumped him full of meds and as a result he has been having illusions and strange dreams. In his mind he finds himself being hunted by crazy postman, bloodsucking vampires, even sharks and octopus. The only way out is to collect all the bones scattered around in each level of this one player platformer and make your way to the Tardis to transport him onto the next level in his mind journey so that he can finally meet the real "DOCTOR" in the tardis and have a happy ending.

WHAT I LIKE

Music is what makes this game so enjoyable, it's not often said on CPC games in particular games from the 1980's, but this is definitely one of those games where the music is so much more than the rest of the game. 9 lives that's cool, you should be able to complete the game.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

The frustration of completing some levels. Just when you think you have collected all the bones along comes and enemy and wipes out all your "Moritz CPC' energy bar. You seem unable to escape or limit the damage.

VERDICT

It's old school platforming with quite a few negatives, but they aren't catastrophic, I am sure many out there have played much worse. I don't loathe it, it's quite enjoyable and fun at times, with a puppy dog charm about it. The music is a stand out, a new tune on each level keeps you invested in playing for longer than you think you would, play it just to hear the tunes.

Moritz the sickly dog looks very ill, collect the bones scattered around the screen and then down to the Tardis bottom left to pass through to the next screen

My favourite screen of the game, Moritz dog paddles underwater to collect his bones while avoiding cool looking sea creatures in the form of sharks and octopus. The screen flips to the left for more underwater action to the tunes of yellow submarine

SCORE

"Music is what makes this game so enjoyable"

GFX	74%
SFX	98%
FUN	73%
STAYING POWER	76%
OVERALL	**77%**

■ **CODING:** Sabastian Braunert, **Music:** Shining, **Loading Screen:** Andy Green
■ **INFO**: Free with this annual
■ **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

MIKE THE GUITAR

Not a whole lot of Amstrad CPC games are created with the tools of AGD (Arcade Game Designer), strange because a plethora of Spectrum games have been created with it, so when one comes along for the CPC, I take notice.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The setting for this old-fashioned platform game is as if it were being played between 1983 - 1985, is a flip screen, blue coloured musical sheet. Mike's one and only goal in life is to play a solo! His favourite band is Nirvana, so he wants to perform "Smells like teen spirit", whoever said little guitars don't have big dreams! But those old fuddy duddies "Ludwig Van B." to be precise and a bunch of old musical instruments want to stop Mike the guitar from achieving his dreams. Grinches aren't just for Christmas time as Mike finds out, the music industry has its own grinches that have put a number of plectrums behind walls making them trapped.

However due to old musical grinches having poor memories they forget to lock up one of the plectrums meaning that when Mike plays the guitar with the first free plectrum, somewhere else a wall will break down allowing Mike to reach another plectrum. There are 8 plectrums to be freed. Once achieved, Mike must get to the loudspeaker so he can connect and play his favourite song. During the game there are items that look like pink pills, these are batteries, when collected they give Mike's guitar more strength to survive the enemies and make his dreams come true. During the gameplay the musical instruments will move side to side, but Ludwig Van B will follow you till he
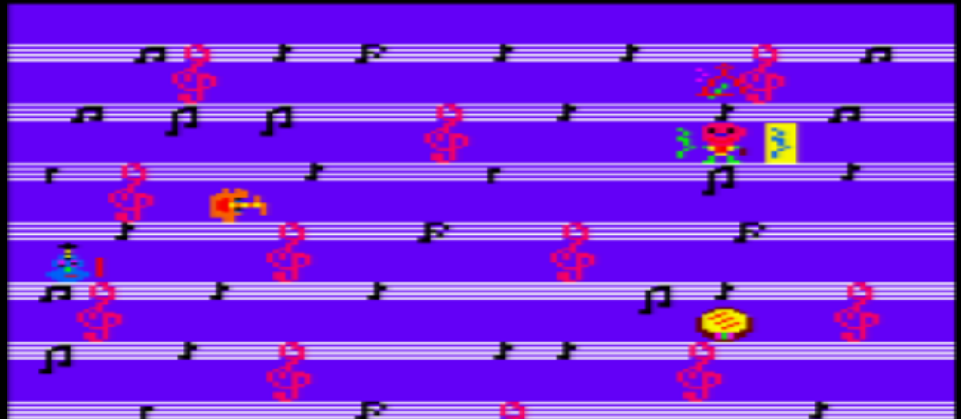
Once you free one plectrum another wall breaks down and you can free another plectrum, 7 more to go!

catches you and he is pretty quick on his old feet.

WHAT I LIKE

The music by Shining. I was in contact with developer Sebastian BRAUNER, during his progress of the game when it had no music. What Shining did with the music is crazy good, the opening loading screen music is unexpected and hits you right between the ears with pleasure. The in game tune is also very good. The background, sprites and graphics are cool for the nature of this game. Points for originality of concept.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Guitars ready? Move Mike to the top of the screen to reach the free plectrum, but watch out for Ludwig Van B in the middle, his old feet move like he's walking on water!

The gameplay is not so good. There are colour clash issues, the movement up and down the musical notes is not as smooth as I would have liked, you can get stuck very easily and then caught by one of the moving instruments too easily. Ludwig Van B is also a menace, he seems to move too fast for such an old foe, I mean he basically hunts you down till he catches you and you can't seem to get away from him, you really have to be quick to get to another screen to stop him following you. I know I may be sounding a bit harsh but there is nowhere enough batteries to collect to increase your energy.

VERDICT

I rather enjoyed the game, but it just has too many negatives that spoil it for me. It's a damn fine achievement for a game created with AGD but it's just seems to lack that essential enjoyment element of fun….aaargghh, it could have been really damn cool!

SCORE	
"What Shining did with the music is crazy good"	
GFX	72%
SFX	92%
FUN	70%
STAYING POWER	73%
OVERALL	73%

■ **CODING:** Keith Sear
■ **INFO**: Free with this annual. Available on Amstrad CPC, MSX2 and ENTERPRISE 128
■ **REVIEWED BY:** CPC4EVA

TRAGICAL CHASE

8-bit coding for Keith Sear only happened recently, within the past three years to be exact. It all started with the Amstrad CPC. A satirical humor, bullet hell shooter, called, Chibi Akumas: Invasion. It was the second only ever bullet hell type of game to have appeared on the Amstrad CPC in its 34 year history (the other, Dragon Attack, was also released earlier in the same year, 2016). Since then Keith has released a sequel to Chibi Akumas: Confrontation, on the Amstrad CPC and has gone on to release Chibi Akumas on other 8-bit platforms such as the MSX2, the MSX Turbo-R +V9990, the Amstrad GX4000 and the Enterprise 128.

Keith hasn't just created games, he has also been very busy teaching others how to code and make games on just about any 8-bit system - 6502 or Z80 based, via his YouTube tutorial videos and Patreon backer special rewards. For the #8BITANNUALDEV contest, Keith has demonstrated his ability to code a game on three different 8-bit platforms. While

he says that 99% of the game core is unchanged from the original V1.666 engine of Chibi Akumas and is basically a 'mod' on the original game, thats ok with us, as we acknowledge the time and effort that goes into any coding and consider his work to always be packed full of features, even this 'mod' is cool. Congratulations to Keith Sear on winning the Advanced Category of #8BITANNUALDEV 2018.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

"Yume Yuusha" is in a pinch! After wasting a huge amount of money buying junk on internet auction site "C-Bay", she finally has all the collectable crap she could ever need... unfortunately she still has one problem... paying off the debts on all her credit cards! With financial ruin looming, and the threat of "Repossession" an impending dooming... Yume is forced to do the unthinkable... actually work for a living! Playing as Yume

you must help her defeat enough monsters on each stage, to earn the cash she needs to cover her debts before they become due, saving Yume from having to see her prized cartoon toys taken away by those mean and ugly debt collectors!

Tragical Chase is a multi directional game known as a "Wave Shooter", similar in regard to Space Invaders or Phoenix. Each Wave is completed when the player reaches the "Debt target" by collecting enough score. Each wave has a time limit, and a life will be lost if the time runs down to zero. Some special waves (Boss wave, and power up waves) do not require the target to be met, and will end before the time ends, or the debt target is met. The game has an infinite number of waves, as they will loop with ever increasing difficulty. The target of the game is just to see how long you can survive. Every fifth wave a "Crucifix" Power up will arrive, which will power up your fire (until maxed), and restore your hearts and smartbombs!

Racking up more debt, means killing more enemy, what's not to like about that?

Love the presentation of the enemies, they won't take long to blast as you keep your power ups between levels. MSX2 version

WHAT I LIKE

Ok so it's essentially the same game as Chibi Akumas but it's still fun to play. It might only be a 'mod' but its still has features you won't see in many commercial games from years gone by. Imaginative opening movie like cut scenes and story line followed with a cool end of game screen. Left and right horizontal gameplay as well as up and down vertical gameplay. Plethora of enemies to shoot at. Power ups and smart bombs, selecting if you wish to have in game continues when you die and how hard or easy to make the difficulty, so really, what's not to like?

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

Not enough smart bombs! Only three per life. The MSX version has red bullets while the CPC version has white, that has always bugged me with the CPC version having the same colour bullets as the enemy. I realize it's a small hate of mine but it makes so much of a difference to the CPC version of the game. Perhaps some end of level bosses for each level like in Chibi Akuam's 1 & 2, I loved those big boss battles, I think it would have been fantastic here but I understand coding takes time and I am sure Keith is busy enough. There are some boss battles just not as many as compared to the other games in the Chibi Akumas series.

VERDICT

It was a very close call on deciding who would win the advanced game category of the #8BITANNUALDEV contest. All three games of the advanced categories are shoot 'em ups, so essentially you have the same style game. Tragical Case edges ahead as the winner, due to it's humorous qualities, its cut scenes to involve you in the story, the release of the game on multiple 8-bit platforms, the smoothness in the gameplay, the shoot 'em up addictiveness and the inclusion of its many features and its longer staying power of infinite number of levels.

8-bit multiple platform developer, Keith Sear (also dabbling in 68000 code too)

SCORE

"Ok so it's essentially the same game as Chibi Akumas but it's still fun to play"

GFX	85%
SFX	81%
FUN	92%
STAYING POWER	90%
OVERALL	**88%**

■ **CODING:** GW's Workshop
■ **INFO**: Free with this annual
■ **REVIEWED BY:** Paul Monopoli

INQ AND SUQ
VS NIGHTMARE

Sibling rivalry is at the core piece of this story of Inq and Suq vs Nightmare. They are twin demons with an appetite for dreams, and a desire to smite nightmares. The game requires you to take control of Inq and compete with your sister, Suq, to determine who is the greatest demon of the night.

PLOT AND GAMEPLAY

The game presents itself as a standard, side scrolling shooter with both characters present on the screen. The player takes control of Inq and attempts to collect the bubbles that float up from the houses. These represent the dreams of the people who live within them. Suq will also be trying to capture the dreams from under your nose, and she doesn't mind using a few dirty tricks to beat you to the punch.

Suq will attempt to bump you if you get too close or shoot you if you get in front of her.

She makes an effort to catch the floating dreams and will knock you out of the way to do so. Thankfully you can get the edge on her by shoving her aside or shooting her. For the record, knocking her into oncoming enemies is immensely satisfying.

Yes, naturally the game has enemies coming at you as you fly through the sky. Exploding balloons, bats and more litter the sky as you attempt to collect the floating dream bubbles. Warp gates, which increase your speed, also float by towards the top of the screen. This creates a problem, as you want to stay near the bottom of the screen to collect the dreams but you also want to get ahead to catch up with the nightmare bosses.

The nightmare bosses take on the form of a Jack O Lantern, a witch, a headless night called Dullahan, Dracula, the Grim Reaper, a dragon, and the dark lord himself, Satan. When they appear you need to maintain your speed, as they can escape our demon duo. The bosses present a new challenge, as you not only have to keep collecting dreams

before Suq, you also have to hit the nightmare more times than she does. If you are successful then you move on to the next stage.

The game comes with a PDF manual, though I found it lacking. There is no explanation of what happens when you collect the dreams and the consequences of contact with an enemy, or enemy projectile. From what I can ascertain, dreams captured by Inq and Suq are recorded on 2 bars in the top right corner. Contact with an enemy seems to make the bars decrease, so from that one can assume that you lose a collected dream each time you are hit.

MSX 1 games can be simplistic affairs, and the palette offered by the system is limited. With that in mind, the developer of this game has put in a huge effort to make the game appear as colourful as possible. Inq and Suq are coloured in blue and pink respectively, and they look rather playful. This is offset by the black background and creepy looking nightmares, which give the player a haunting

The graphics and animations really push the MSX hardware

The characters have some special abilities at their disposal

feeling of flying through the dark night sky. The standard jerky vertical scrolling that is a known standard for MSX games has been carefully hidden by the smooth character sprites. You notice it if you look for it, but you should probably be enjoying the game instead of looking for any faults. The controls feel accurate and, while there is no force feedback with MSX controllers, knocking Suq feels rather satisfying. Pressing either button on the controller will shoot at the enemy, though holding the button down will cause Inq to hold up a shield in front of him until the button is let go. Suq shooting at you while your shield is up will cause Inq to absorb and scatter the shot in front of him, causing huge damage to oncoming enemies. The only frustrating aspect of the control scheme is that shooting causes Inq to be pushed back slightly.

WHAT I LIKE

The story of the game is original and beautifully depicted with its graphics and sprites. Your characters and enemies may look rather simplistic yet they personify MSX coolness. The music fits the night time theme of the game, and it's a great achievement for a 16kb MSX game. Sound effects are standard, with the shots sounding like 8-bit magic effects you might have heard in plenty of other games. The important thing is that they don't take over from the background music, allowing you to enjoy it more while you played and added more fun to the standard shoot 'em up experience.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE

I thought the manual could have been improved upon, there were some areas I wasn't sure what was actually going on. I would also have liked to have seen a two player mode, I felt the game is basically screaming for it to be included, but at just 16kb you can understand why it isn't there!

VERDICT

Overall, Inq and Suq Vs Nightmare, is a fun little shoot em up with a difference. Even though I am not really a fan of the genre, I found the competitiveness between the siblings to be an enjoyable, fun and a unique gaming experience, in that it offers a multiplayer gaming experience without the need of another person in the room. It's an entertaining little shoot 'em up that is presented in a bright, colourful way, even though the name and darkness of the night setting suggests otherwise. The scrolling flaws of the MSX hardware are so carefully tucked away that you barely even notice them.

A cute little cut scene sets the tone for the game ahead

SCORE

"The music fits the night time theme of the game, and it's a great achievement for a 16kb MSX game"

GFX	87%
SFX	91%
FUN	90%
STAYING POWER	80%
OVERALL	**85%**

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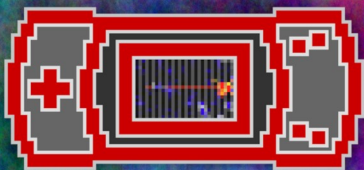
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