

May2020

Issue 29

THE SPECTRUM SHOW

Magazine

C-TECH

REALLY ALL BAD?

BANDERSNATCH

THE GAME LEGEND

PLUS:

STONECHIP AMPLIFIER
CHEETAH SWEET TALKER
AND MORE...



Includes material not in
the show



NEWS FLASHBACK

GAME REVIEWS

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HARDWARE

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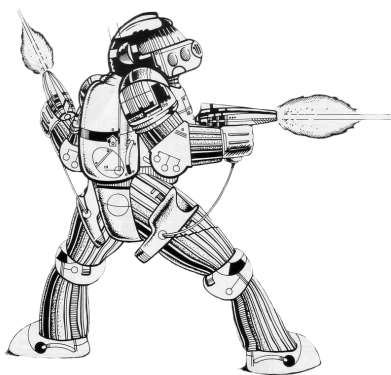
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Welcome to issue 29 of The Spectrum Show Magazine. Thank you for downloading and reading.

What a crazy few months this has been, not only for the UK, but also globally. I hope everyone prevailed well and that we can soon get back to some kind of normality. It may be a long slow journey though, and someone said, on some social media site, that us retro guys should fair well. We never go out and we are forever using Isopropyl alcohol to clean things!

I would have thought being locked in would lead to more creativity and more time to do things, but for me it was the opposite. Working from home meant everything took longer (meaning extra hours), shopping took longer, daily routines vanish so things like day to day walking around work is replaced by sitting in a chair, so additional time is used up taking exercise. All this lead to less spare time.

It also means all of those wonderful retro events have been cancelled, which is a great loss. I am missing visiting them and meeting up with people. Perusing the games on offer and grabbing plenty of arcade gaming action.

But let's look on the bright side.

After years of waiting, I finally got my hands on something I have been chasing since I first sold my original back in the late 80s; the Lo-Profile Keyboard. Not only that, but a few weeks earlier, thinking I would never get the Lo-Pro, I bought another hard to find keyboard, the Transform keyboard.



Now I had two keyboards both in much need of some care and attention. Both had broken motherboards inside them and both needed a good clean. I stripped them both down (filming both for a Patreon video) and sent the motherboards off to Mutant Caterpillar for repair and cleaning.

The motherboards were back shortly after and just when I was hoping to put them back together again and re-live my youth, the house move threatened to happen (at long last) and

everything was packed into boxes. Then Corona thing happened causing more delays, including the house move.

Most of my things are still in boxes, including the Spectrum Next, which I was hoping to get some time on.

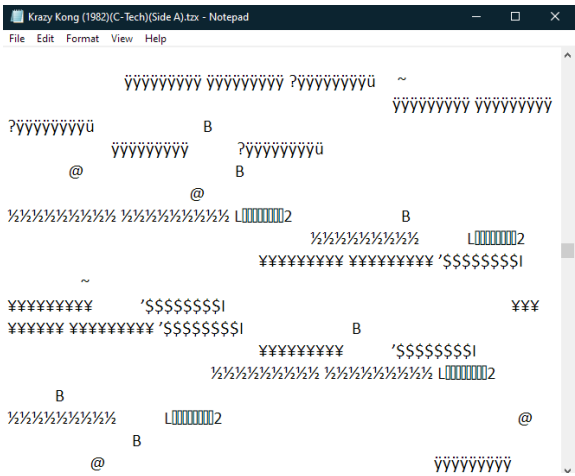
There are a lot of things happening around the Next at the moment, and the one that stands out for me is RAMS. This is a very basic version of a MAME-like emulator for the Next, and allows users to play a few early arcade games like Donkey Kong and Pacman.

There is a lot of scope here to add a multitude of older games, and it will be exciting to see where it goes.

Back to this issue then, and the C-Tech article again raised the question of the mystery third level in Crazy Kong. Does it exist at all and the game bugged? Is it not there at all and C-Tech lied?

From my very, very basic technical knowledge, I can see what I think is the third level while going through the TZX file with a text editor.

Because the game uses UDGs, you can clearly see the screen layouts in ASCII form, providing you wrap the text or re-size the text editor screen. There is a third level, but it is beyond my skills to get it out, even just to see what it looks like. From the image below, I think the Bs are the ladders and the string beginning with L and ending in 2 are conveyer belts.



There are obviously some colour and layout data that means the spacing is not accurate when viewed like this, but it is there.

If anyone with better knowledge than me wants to take up the challenge, go for it. Be the first to see the mythical third level.

The Post Show

For my Patreon supporters I put together a kind of test video that seems to have got a thumbs up. It is a small show that reflects on the last main episode and includes behind the scenes stuff, un-used material, thoughts and extras. I will be aiming to put one out after every episode from now on.

Episode 100

Wow, what a milestone to hit. I can't believe I started all this in 2012, and it's still going strong.

I had planned to end the series with episode 100, and have thought seriously about this. It is a nice one to end on, but I still have more pieces of hardware and ideas to share. I still have the same enthusiasm I had when I started, so there are at least another ten episodes planned.

Looking back over this magazine too is a bit of an eye-opener. There are over 350 game reviews included. That is a lot of work!

Email

I have held off setting up a specific email address for the show and magazine, due to unwanted, unsolicited spam. However, I decided to give it a try and see how things go. If I get flooded with garbage, I will be forced to shut it down, but for now, you can email me with submissions, reviews, features, articles etc. at: TheSpectrumShow@outlook.com



Want to support the show and this magazine?

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RISE OF BUDGET

The advent of budget titles has seen a large increase in companies setting up and selling cheap games. This year though, say Gallop, the budget market is set to hit 75% of all sales, which is a spectacular achievement. Bruce Everis of Codemasters says its about time. He claims people are no longer willing to pay three times more for their games.

Also happy is Ashley Hilderbrandt of The Power House who says full price publishers can no longer get away with producing run-of-the-mill, over priced titles (just like he did at CRL).

Disagreeing with the rise of cheap software is, surprise surprise, Electronic Arts who claim there will always be a market for premium quality software, and that programmers cannot make money from budget titles.



BUDGET BUGS

Two adventure games released by Mastertronic have serious bugs, which seems odd because the original full priced games were fine. Kentilla, originally released by Micromega has two bugs, one stops the player from getting the dagger and the other prevents Elva from killing Darg Vool.

Mastertronic are refusing to admit any problems with Kentilla, but do admit there is an issue with an Amstrad game Rigel's Revenge.

They have agreed to replace any games found to have problems.

CRL LEAVE BUDGET

CRL have moved out of the budget market after its own budget label, Power House, was recently bought out. Managing Director Ashley Hilderbrandt (so that's where he went after screwing up my game submission!) has not commented on the buyout details, rumoured to be a considerable sum, but did say the software house would still continue to produce games as normal.

CRL themselves are also remaining tight lipped about what the money will be used for, or if they plan to start another budget label themselves.

FREE Z88s

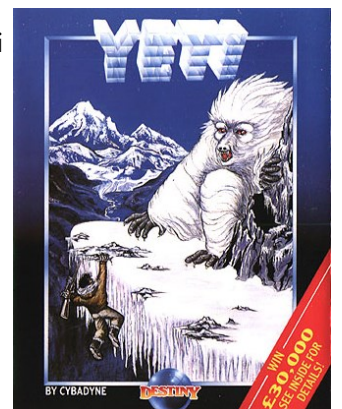
Clive Sinclair has given 10 free Z88 mini computers to Imperial College London, to try and kick start some support for the device. He hopes that third year software engineers will be attracted to it and start to produce worthy titles. The Z88 had a disappointing start in the UK and is still waiting of the US to agree to sell it. Clive remains optimistic about the portable device.



YETI SEARCH

In conjunction with an expedition to find the Yeti in the Himalayas, Destiny Software are releasing a game that will yield a prize of £30,000 if the creature is discovered. Strangely to win you don't even have to own or play the Yeti game!

All you have to do is send a short description of what you think the creature will look like, and the one nearest will win, that is, if it is found at all.



The game will be released in March for the Spectrum with the Commodore version following later.

MASTERTONIC SNIPE

In a surprising move, Mastertronic has secured some high profile licences and beating the bigger labels in the rush to sign big money earners.

Because they have a deal with Japanese label Technos already, they have rights to every release from them, including arcade games. Technos were responsible for the arcade hit Double Dragon. Even though Taito published it, Technos actually wrote it.

By cutting out the middle man, in this case Taito, it means they can get the licences for hit games probably cheaper than they would otherwise, and they also have a deal with Technos for the next two years.

To confuse things a bit more, these games will be released on the Melbourne House label, currently owned by Mastertronic.

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OLYMPIAD

Atlantis Software 1984



As you can tell, Olympaid '86 is one of those track 'n' field games but this one has some interesting events and a different method of control to that normally found in such games.

There are 5 events, Weight Lifting, Canoeing, 200m Sprint, Shooting and Discuss and each has their own control methods, although they are not as complex as you might think.

The weight lifting event kicks things off and to control the action you use a small round dial at the top of the screen. As the arrow spins around inside it you just have to press the Q key when it's pointing at the marker. With a bit of luck this should be easy to manage, getting you the full 80 points.

The screen is fairly sparse and everything happens in silence unless you complete all lifts and then you get a helicopter flying past.

The next event is canoeing. Here you use O and P keys to guide your canoe. At first I tried to follow the route but it isn't a route at all, you just have to avoid hitting the randomly placed rocks. I was reading too much into the game. Avoiding rocks is tricky though because the collision detection is very tight. The graphics are large in this section with a bit of animation, but this is a glorified Horace Goes Skiing really.

The next event, the 200m sprint, took me a while to get right. Using the same spinning gauge control you have to maintain a high speed to qualify. Firstly the control is not accurate and hitting the marker does nothing to the speed. You have to hit the key just before it reaches it. Secondly once you are at full speed you still have to keep hitting the key

The runner is drawn fine and has decent animation, but again everything is done in silence apart from the helicopter at the end.

Next we have the hardest of the events, shooting. You get to control a cross hair but it almost impossible to hit the things as the fly across the screen. I tried several tactics; staying in the middle, staying at the top etc. but because they are random it's very hard to hit the required amount.

Onto the last event then and discuss. This uses the spinning gauge but has an additional gauge for angle. You press once to get the power on the first gauge and press again to get the angle on the second. This is usually easy enough to get right.

And that's the game. If you did well enough you might get a medal but I never manged it, the shooting always let me down..

It's a bit of an average game really. I like the move away from button mashing but it's not one I'd come back to.



STAR WARRIOR

Visions Software 1983

Your spaceship is in constant need of energy crystals to keep it going through the vastness of space. To get these crystals requires you to navigate through various stages.

First, as with any shoot-em-up, there are swooping aliens, all dropping bombs. This is the standard left right fire controls and reminds me very much of Imagine's Arcadia.

Once you clear this level, which is just a matter of positioning your ship in the right place as they re-appear at the top of the screen, we get the next one.

Here you have to dodge meteors and try to get to the bottom of the screen. You can use left right and thrust here but don't try to fire. This just ends the game for some strange reason.

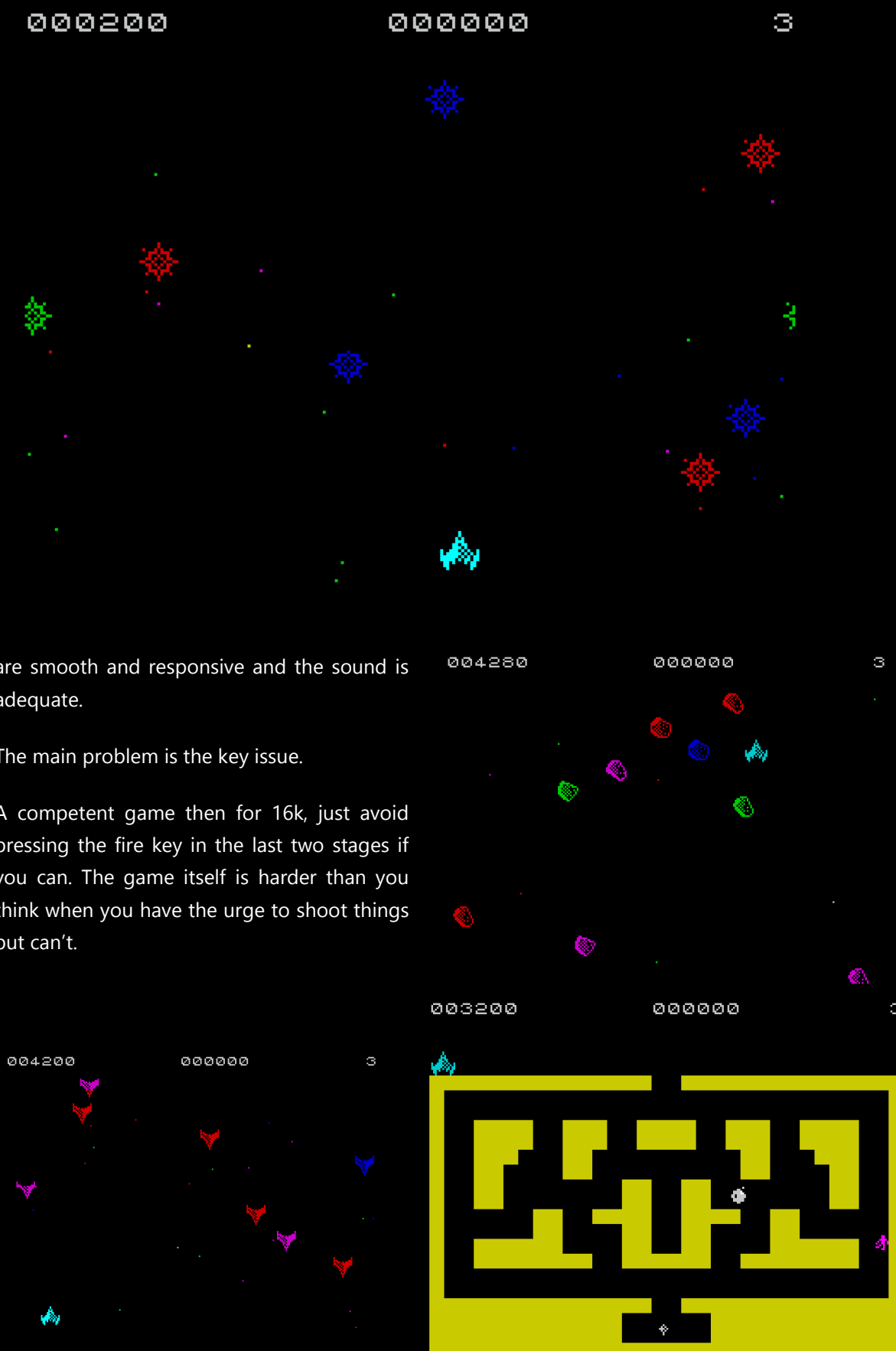
It would have been better to either leave the firing in place, but not let it destroy meteors, or just have no action when you pressed the key. The game should not set the keys up and have one of them quit the game when it was used previously for something else.

When you get to the bottom of the screen you are then thrown into a maze game with what the inlay claims is a psychotic cyborg. Here you have to get to the crystals and avoid being killed, and yet again, pressing the fire keys quits the game – very, very annoying.

If you do manage to get the crystal back to your ship, then it's back to the first section but with different aliens.

Rinse and repeat.

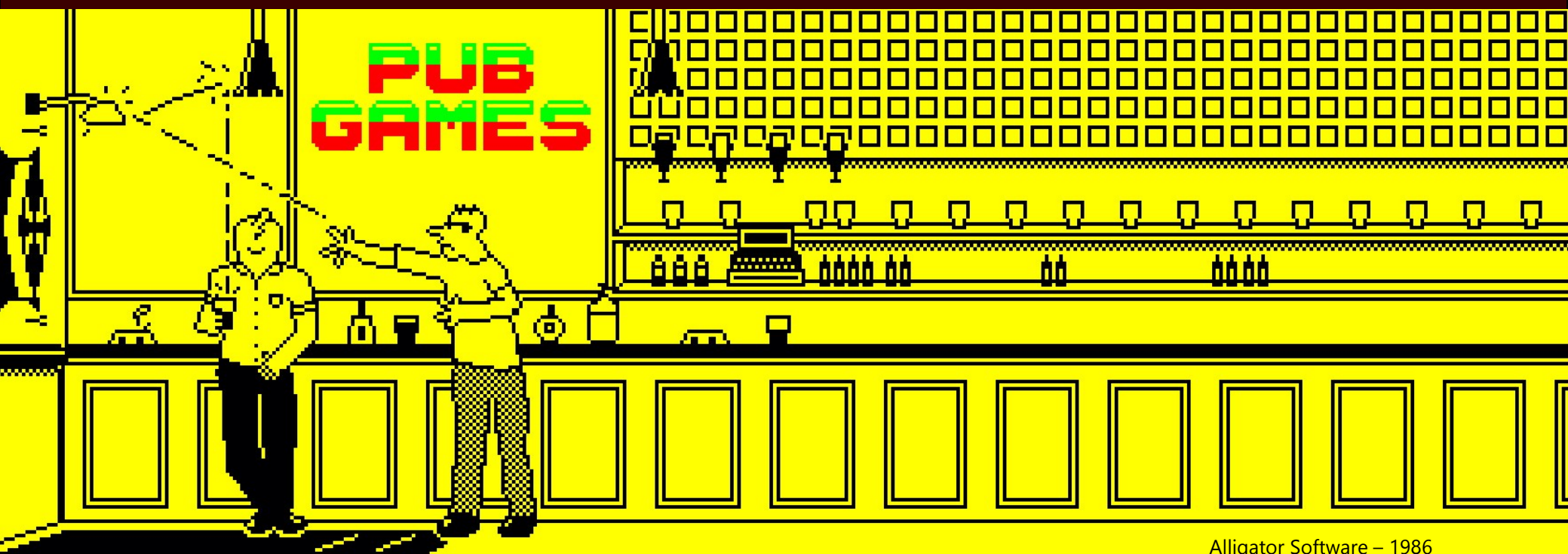
The graphics are nice for a small game, they



are smooth and responsive and the sound is adequate.

The main problem is the key issue.

A competent game then for 16k, just avoid pressing the fire key in the last two stages if you can. The game itself is harder than you think when you have the urge to shoot things but can't.



Alligator Software – 1986

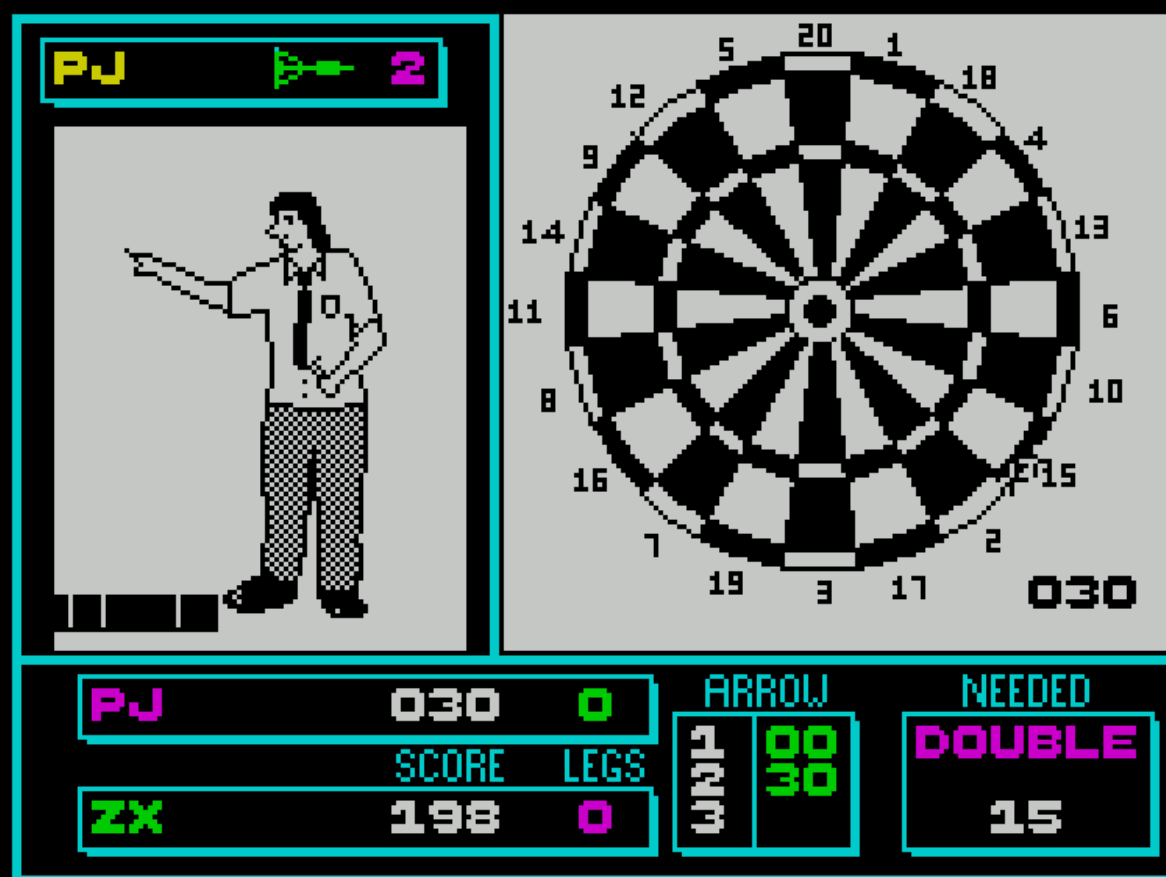
This game was written by Rich Stevenson – a guy I had the pleasure of meeting at the Revival 2018 event, and real nice guy he is too. I didn't find out until afterwards that he had written this though, otherwise I would have asked about a few things.

Pub Games consists of 6 games that used to be common in pubs, but now you'd be lucky to find any, maybe with the exception of Darts, and this is the first of the games.

Before we start on the individual games though, it is best the concept is covered first. The whole series of games can be played in two ways, either individually as a practice game (you do not get a final score), or all games back to back. To play the latter, you have to play through every section of every game – something I did for this review to show you how it keeps the names and scores of both players – because this is a two player game.

Now onto the game themselves, and first up is darts. There are many dart games on the Spectrum, and sadly this is one of the best.

You control a cross hair that moves around randomly, circling another randomly moving pint. This is tricky to get used to, so games can be quite long. When you think the random cross hair is near the target, you hit the throw key and your dart player animates to show the throw. The dart then appears on the board, hopefully near your intended target.

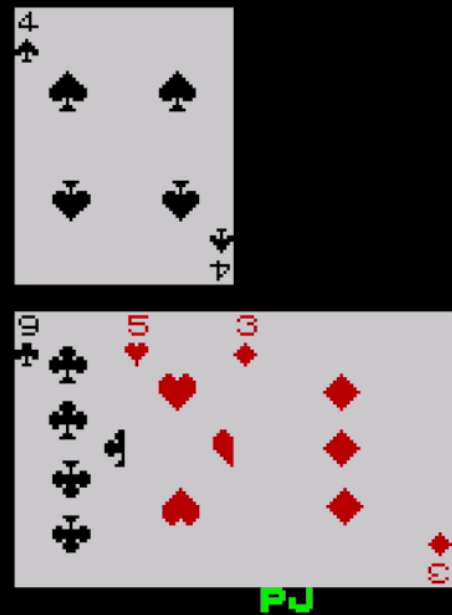


The game counts down from 501 and you have to play through several games before getting a final score for this section and moving on via multi-load.

The sound is almost non-existent which is a shame really, there is the odd beep now and again, but very little else.

When you complete the darts, it onto Bar Billiards. Again there are similar games around, but





there are no instructions with this one, making it tricky to get anywhere.

Moving the angle of the cue is done in fixed steps, which makes playing almost impossible. Not knowing how to play, it seemed the scores randomly increased and decreased. Again, very little sound.

Next we have dominoes. A fair game, but I think the rules have been tweaked as you can't place a domino across another to form 'T'. The usual rules apply here, and there are control instructions on screen, which help.

Reaction to key pressed here is sometimes delayed, so you have to be patient.

Next comes table

football.

Here you control one of the teams, but control is only given when the ball is in the area of the players. This means you can only control one line at a time, which is tricky.

You can move the players up and down and also change their angle, so they can be up, down or forward, this provides a means to kick the ball.

This mechanic is very awkward and difficult to get used to, and the ball can sometimes bounce around the table for ages. The ball movement is also continuous, so no slamming in a long shot from defence.

The ball also moves straight through players, even if they are in the down position, which doesn't make sense. Eventually someone will win and we can move to the next game, Pontoon.

Yes, we all know how to play this game. You can bet at the start of each round and the game plays out just as you would expect.

Next, another card game – poker. Again, it plays as you would expect with runs, doubles, triples ect. Nothing special, and games like this seem to have been added as padding.

The last game is skittles. This plays pretty much like bowling. A target moves at the back of the skittles and you control the ball. When you think they line up to get a good result, you hit the key. The ball moves down the alley, hits the skittles and you get a score – all in silence.

The only sound you get, which was a complete surprise, is when you get a strike. At this point a sampled voice scream 'strike'.

Finally, at the end of the game, if you have played through properly, you get the final scores and a nice image.

Overall I have mixed views on this. I suppose it could be fun if you had a friend to play it with, and you'd both had a few drinks, and it was 1986 – when there was little in the way of home entertainment. Looking at it now though, I think it is showing its age.

Sorry Rich!



Sanchez 2018

The mayor's daughter has been kidnapped and someone has to rescue her from the evil villain and the Gear Gang. It just happens to be you! After selecting which of three characters to play, it's time to fight.

You set off through the streets to get her back and to face anything that gets in your way.

This is, as you may have guessed by the title, a beat-em-up. A genre I am not keen on, but this game may just change my mind.

The music, graphics and presentation are excellent and sets the ground for the rest of the game.

As with typical beat-em-ups, you move into a screen, fight a few people and then move on, slowly making your way to the target – in this case the Mayor's daughter.

You have the usual kicks, punches and jumps, all of which is explained in the handy tutorial the game has included.

The backgrounds are very well drawn and look stunning. The artwork is amazing. The characters are also well drawn with smooth animation and movement.

Control is excellent making the game a joy to play, and letting you concentrate on the objective rather than struggling with numerous buttons.

Another important element of beat-em-ups is collision. It has to be good or the game just loses so much. Luckily in this game it is really well done and you never feel frustrated when playing.

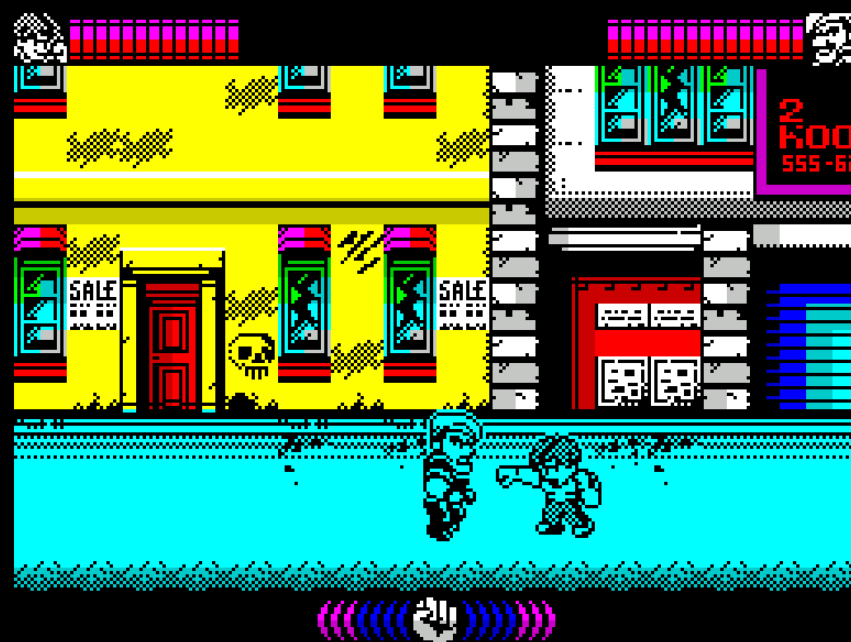
There are various end bosses to fight as well,



taking a lot of hits before you can dispatch them.

Overall, this is a superb game. It's easy to play, that looks fantastic and sounds brilliant.

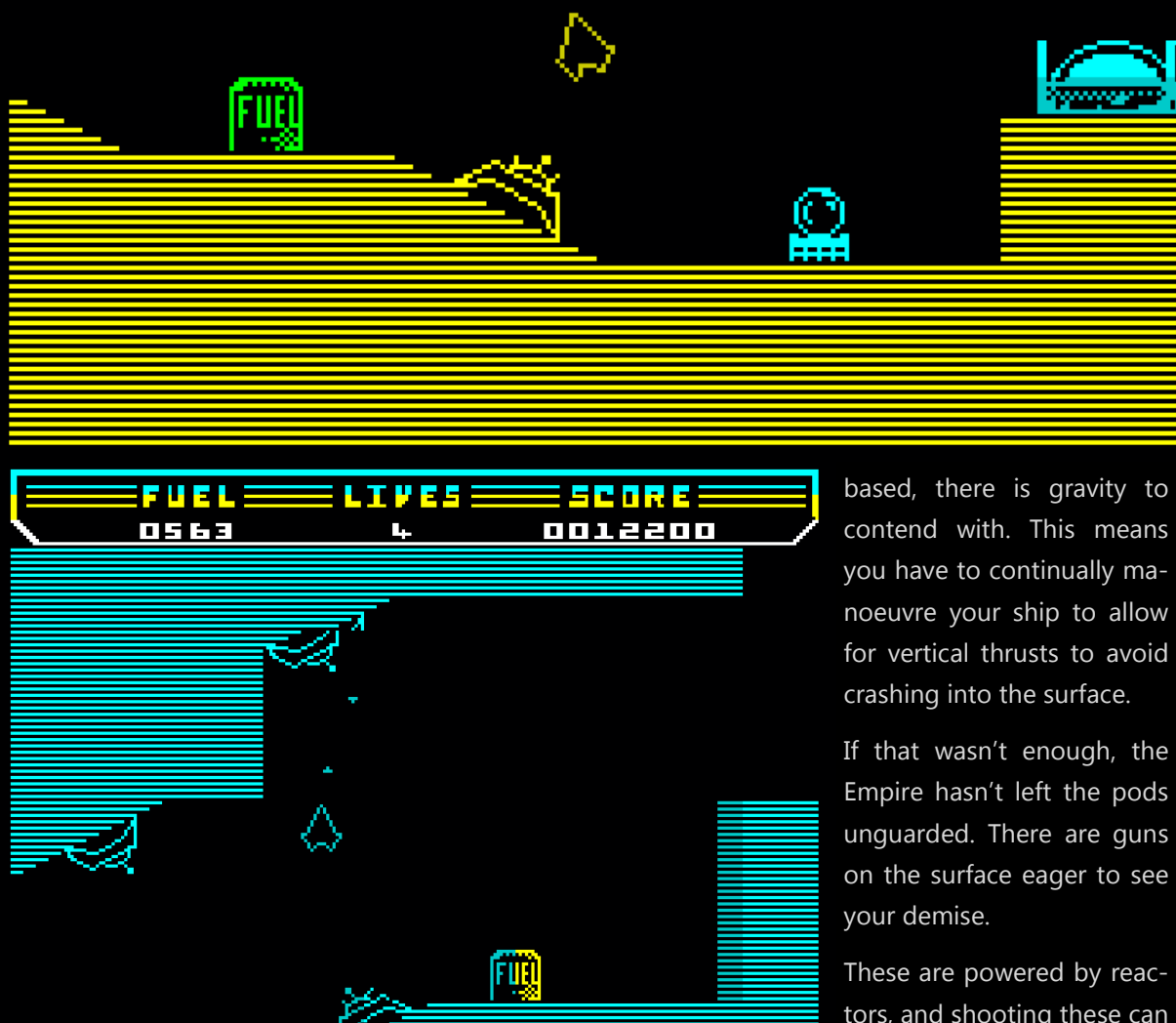
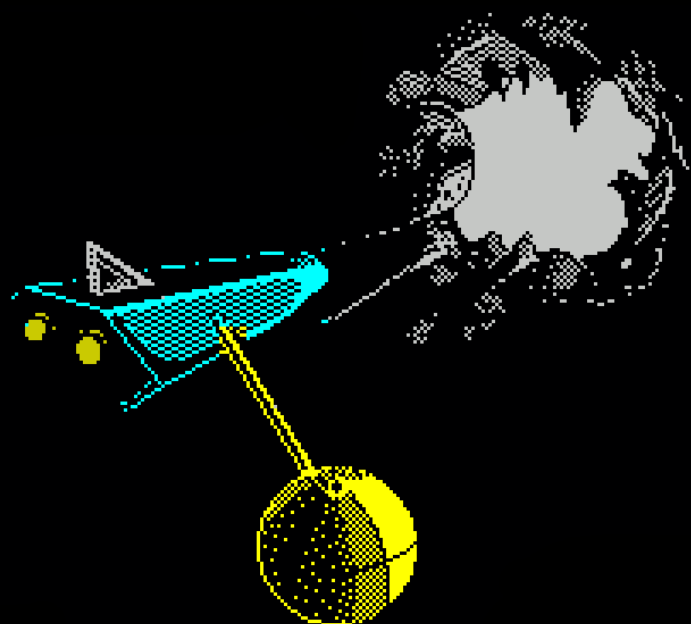
Highly recommended.



THAUST

Firebird Software 1986

FUEL **LIVES** **SCORE**
1434 3 000000



The resistance is about to launch an attack on the intergalactic empire but needs power in the form of Klystron Pods. You have been paid to steal these from the empire's storage planets, and so starts the game.

You control a ship with rotate and thrust commands, rather like Asteroids, but being planet

based, there is gravity to contend with. This means you have to continually manoeuvre your ship to allow for vertical thrusts to avoid crashing into the surface.

If that wasn't enough, the Empire hasn't left the pods unguarded. There are guns on the surface eager to see your demise.

These are powered by reactors, and shooting these can disable the guns, but shoot

too many times and the reactor will explode and end your mission.

You can shoot the guns too, which is a better approach in some cases.

You have limited fuel but this can be replenished by hovering above a fuel tank and using the pickup key.

As well as all this, there is of course the landscape to avoid. This gets more dangerous as each mission starts, going underground into caves and narrow tunnels.

Accurate control is essential to get anywhere in the game, which was released on many other formats as well as the Spectrum.

The graphics are designed to look like vectors, and make the game stand out from many other sprite based offerings.

To collect a pod, you have to get close to it, and then press the pickup button. If you are successful, the pod will then become attached to your ship via a cable. This though affects the inertia of the ship, which is another thing you will have to contend with.

The ship flies very differently when you have a pod in tow, rather like towing a caravan on ice!

The pickup button also acts as a shield if you need it.

The game is challenging. Learning the new control system doesn't take long, but then the planets keep getting harder and fuel limits less. This will keep you busy for a long time.

Sound is very limited, which is a shame. There is only sound for appearing when the game starts and completing the level. No sound at all for thrusting, firing or even crashing. This means the game will be pretty much silent.

Simple idea, simple controls and a very challenging game. Some may even call this a classic.

Certainly worth a go if you enjoy this style of game.



A GAME OF LEGEND

In the early days of the Spectrum, one of the more famous game companies was Liverpool based Imagine Software. Their last game has slipped into Spectrum legend.

At the back end of 1983, the once mighty Imagine Software were starting to struggle. At this time, hoping to get some publicity, they agreed to be one of the main focuses of a documentary covering the software market on the run up to Christmas. This documentary, Commercial Breaks, is essential watching for anyone interested in the early Spectrum years, and it can be found on YouTube.

Money was running out for company that had brought out Arcadia, Ah Diddums, Jumping Jack and Zoomm, possibly due to over spending on flash cars and motorcycle teams, possibly due to bad management, possibly due to the decision to put all their hopes on two games. The truth may never be known, but they did leave behind a lot of things and people that can tell their story.

The company was working on two major games to try and break free from the growing dept. These games became known as "Mega-Games" and adverts were published in various magazines. Luckily, they were in development at the time Commercial Breaks was being filmed. The games were Psyclapse for the Commodore 64 and Bandersnatch for the Spectrum.

The so-called mega-games would go beyond normal games, they would have features never before seen in computer games, so the hype claimed. To accomplish all of this, the Spectrum version would have to include a hardware add-on which would increase the price, but would inevitably lead to more problems.



Amongst the team at Imagine working on Bandersnatch were John Gibson, Ally Noble, Ian Weatherburn, Steve Cain, Karen Davies and Fred Grey. Many appeared in the documentary, with John taking a lead part as the head programmer.

The adverts began to appear in February 1984, teasing that something special was coming. A few months past and the adverts changed to a progress report, making light of the hard work that was going into these games, thrashing the waiting public into a frenzy. They promised so much. Underneath it all though, Imagine were now in very serious trouble.

The advert asked us "Can you contain your patience?". The answer was yes, but Imagine did not have time to deliver their promise.

Another month passed and the next advert changed to announce reinforcements had arrived. Were things not going well or was it just another marketing ploy?

By the middle of the year the adverts again changed, this time to just a white page with two logos. This in itself ended up being an iconic advert, at least in my opinion. Progress on the actual game though was obviously not happening.

Game players were excited though, if all the promises were true, Bandersnatch would surely be a brilliant experience. Sadly the game never made it, and neither did Imagine. But what about the game, was it everything the company had promised, or was it just hype?

John Gibson, the lead programmer on Bandersnatch, whose previous games included Molar Maul, Zzoom and Stonkers, when interviewed did acknowledged the game was not all hype, and that it would have been revolutionary at the time. It was a 176k game, and this extra memory would come in the form of a 128k add-on.

The hardware, or at least early versions, could be seen in the Commercial Breaks program, but



to make them cheaply enough meant ordering large quantities from the East. Imagine at this point did not have the funds to do this, nor did they know how many were likely to sell at the higher price. This left them with more problems.

At the time Imagine went bust, only 50% of the game had been written, according to John, and they had used up all of the memory already. This meant a major re-think about the design of the game. The additional memory was reported to have put the game price up to £60. This was at a time when games were selling for just £5. Things were starting to stack up against Imagine, resulting in their demise.

So what was this game, what was it like?

According to the recovered mock-ups of the game box contents, courtesy of Mark R Jones, the game was a massive arcade adventure set on an asteroid. The domed city was connected with glass tunnels and you could interact with various characters.



John Gibson recalls a fat bouncer character, a large dune-like worm and a smaller worm-like creature. These are born out in various images in the advert, mock-up manuals or art work recovered.

The interaction took the form of speech bubbles, and each character would give clues and information to the player.

Bandersnatch was to be what we call to-

MEGA-GAMES -- THE FREE FORMAT GAME CONCEPT

Conceived by:-

D.H. Lawson
E. Evans
D.I. Weatherburn
J. Gibson
M. Glover

General Concept:-

The idea is for the player to enter a bounded world where everything is possible and you can achieve different aims according to the sort of game which you enjoy playing. There will be no concessions to an ordinary computer game.

day, an open world game. The player could make their own path through the game map, and all items, objects and scenery could be interacted with.

The player could, for example, try to kill as many things as possible, or go on quests for treasure, the way the game was played would be down to the player rather than set objectives.

The game area is a mining colony inhabited by a small number of beings with a limited and vicious police force – the game concept documents call it a 'Blade runner' atmosphere with thieves, gamblers, miners and renegades dressed in 'Blakes Seven' style clothing.

You play a wanted criminal, tracked by the galactic police, but what you do is up to you.

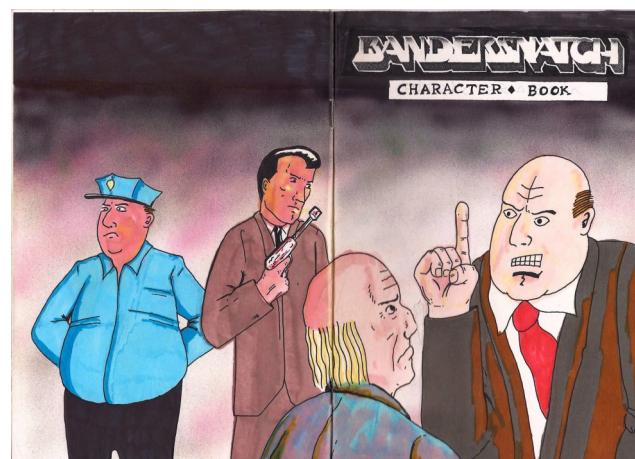
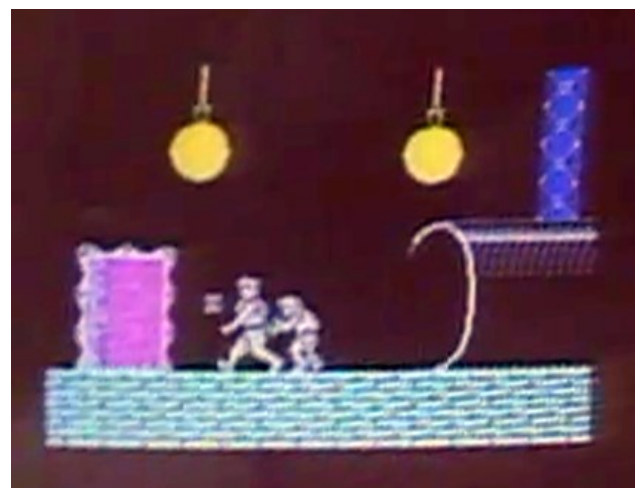
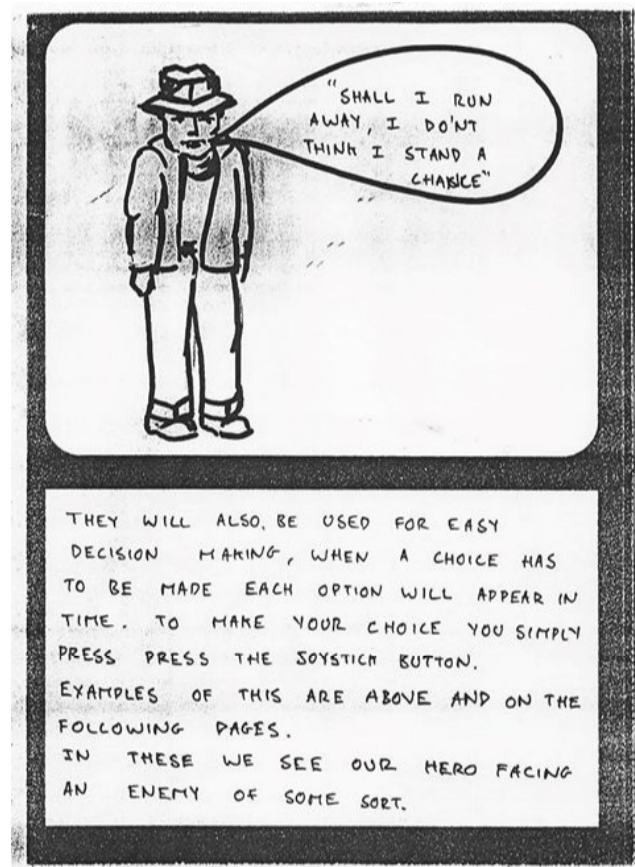
A bold idea for the Spectrum.

As time marched on, it was clear Imagine and the game were in trouble. They tried to persuade Sinclair to buy the whole company along with the games, but there was no deal to be had. The company accounts were in a mess and the directors were arguing and looking to move on as quickly as possible. Several court orders were in place and the only hope now was the Mega-Games.

Sadly it was too late.

The games were never finished and all we have is the short glimpses from the documentary, interviews with various people and the box scans.

But what happened next?



BANDERSNATCH—continued...

Prior to Imagine going bust, a company called Finchspeer was set up by Dave Lawson and Ian Hetherington. Did they know something was about to happen? The company's aim was to acquire all of the collapsed Imagine's assets and games, including the mega-games. Imagine Software was split in half.

Finchspeer offered jobs to the teams behind the mega-games while the remaining staff were left high and dry. They then began work of the Sinclair QL version of Bandersnatch for Sinclair Research, a game never to be released, but parts of which went into a new game and a new company – Psygnosis. Their first game was Bratacas – credited as being very similar to the original Bandersnatch.

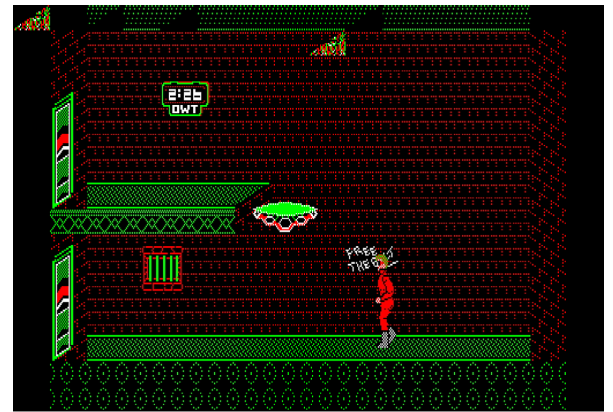
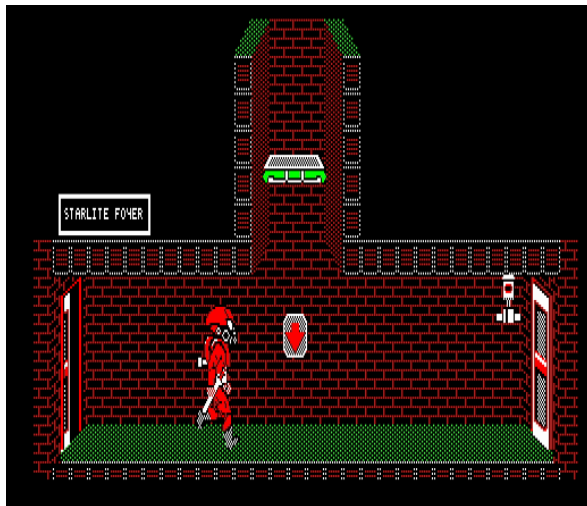
The QL version of Bandersnatch was recovered from development Microdrives in 2017 but the game is only partly complete. It can still be loaded and a few screens visited, but it is not stable and easily crashed. Compare this to the Amiga Bratacas (which is impossible to control by the way), and you can see the similarities both in gameplay and graphic style.

Steve Cain and Ian Weatherburn setup Denton Designs and took some ex-Imagine staff with them including Ally Noble and Karen Davies. They were approached by Ocean Software and subsequently produced Gift From The Gods – a game many claim to be very similar to Bandersnatch. After all, it was near enough the same team, especially with John Gibson involved.

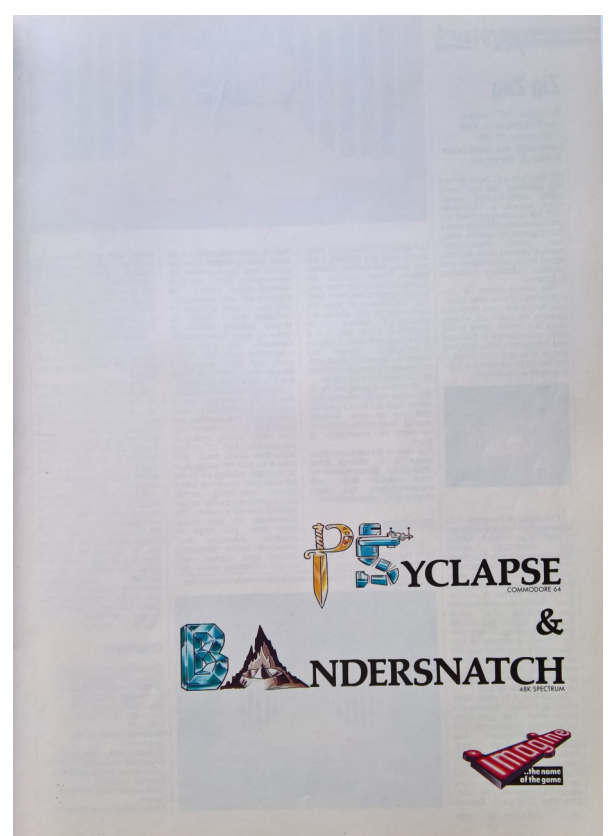
It was so close to Bandersnatch that Psygnosis made threats to sue them, but later backed down.

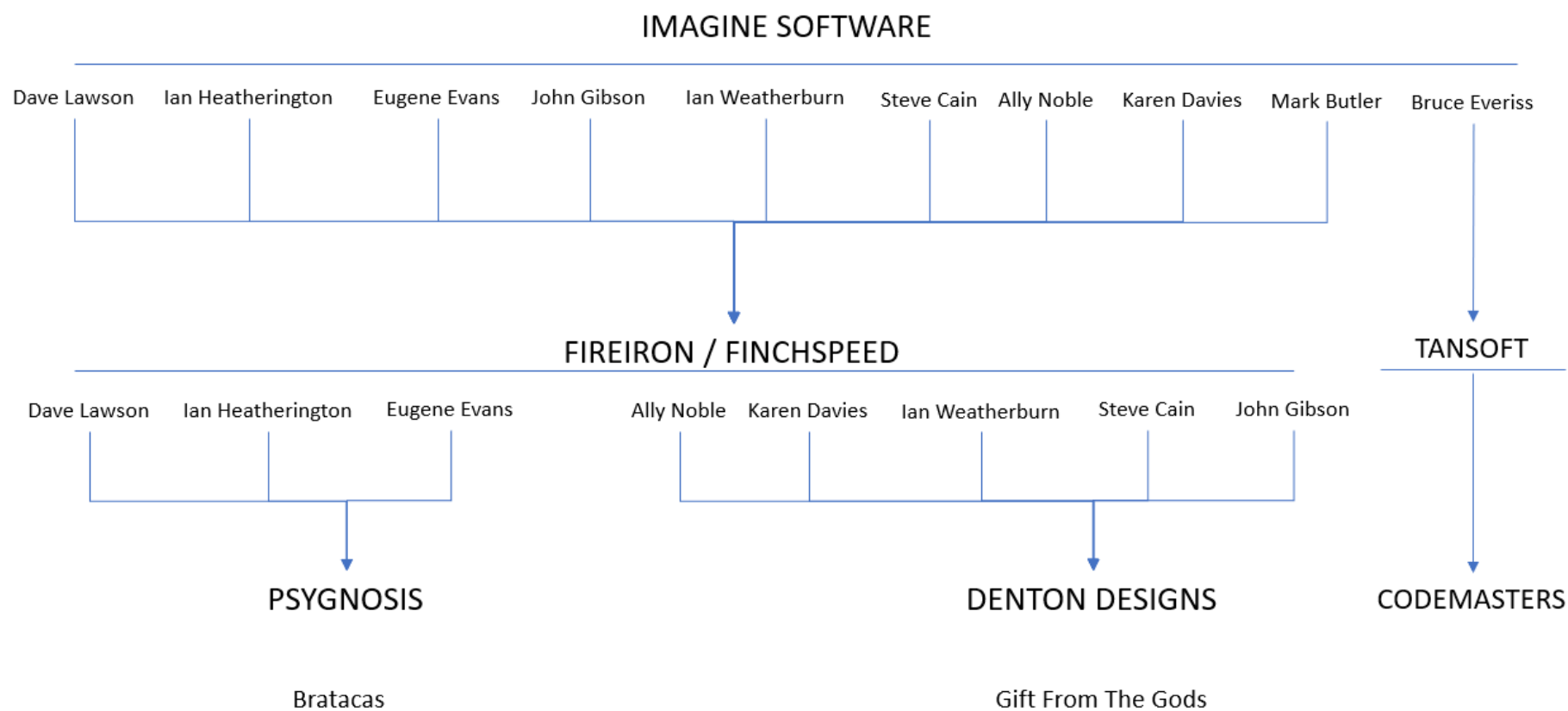
It seems the two factions from the defunct Imagine Software set out to re-create Bandersnatch, and to some extent both managed it. They could not use the exact game or name, as this belonged to the liquidator, but they used ideas and routines originally planned and implemented in the game of legend.

Bandersnatch will probably always be something of folk lore. We will probably never see it, but it did spawn some good games and companies from the ashes of Imagine.



Left: Amiga Bratacas. Above QL Bandersnatch





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DOOMSDAY CASTLE

Fantasy Software 1983



This is the 2nd game featuring Ziggy, the wanna be game character that somehow just didn't make it.

The introduction text is amusing, featuring elves that lose rings and then to replace them, create 6 large magical stones and then lose them, and so it goes on. Millions of years later though, the stones turn up in Domsday Castle, owned by the nasty Scarthax. He is using them to control the universe, and so a hero is needed. Step forward Ziggy.

The instructions go into comic detail about the inhabitants of the castle and are really worth reading.

The game has 25 halls connected with 49 passages and each hall has 4 exits. Exits have to be shot to open, but once passed through, they are sealed forever.

Each hall has an anti-chamber that will contain a crystal to power your shield or one of the stones. To complete the game you have to get all 6 stones and enter the anti-chamber of the exit room.

That is a massive task and the game is pretty difficult.

Each hall has two Garthogs bouncing up and down, firing randomly and these are really annoying.

There are also Urks, creatures that float down from various holes in the roof and can take various forms.

A large Googly Bird sits on top of the anti chamber and will fly about every so often, firing diagonal bouncing shots all over the place.

To get a crystal you have to blast the doors. You only have a limited amount of energy

though, and you soon run out. To replenish you have to shoot the Urks.

Is that all clear? It does become easier to understand when playing though, so don't let this long complex description put you off.

One you get a crystal, you then have to go through the same door-shooting process to move on to the next hall.

The graphics are large and smooth, with some nice animation, and the sound is very familiar if you have played any of the Ziggy games, like The Pyramid.

Control is good, but I think the size of the graphics makes it difficult to manoeuvre and easy to get shot. This forces the game to be harder than it needs to be.

I played a few times, only managing to get to another hall on one occasion. At this point you are thrown into a corridor first. Here you have to wait for a set amount of time, dodging the enemies, some of which are indestructible. Eventually the door will open and let you move on to the next hall.

Each hall is the same, but with different creatures so there is an incentive to see more of them.

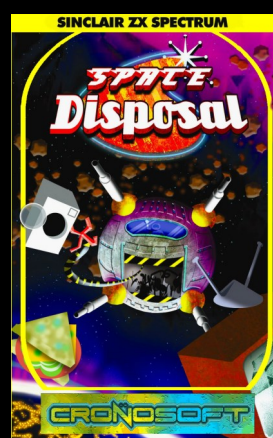
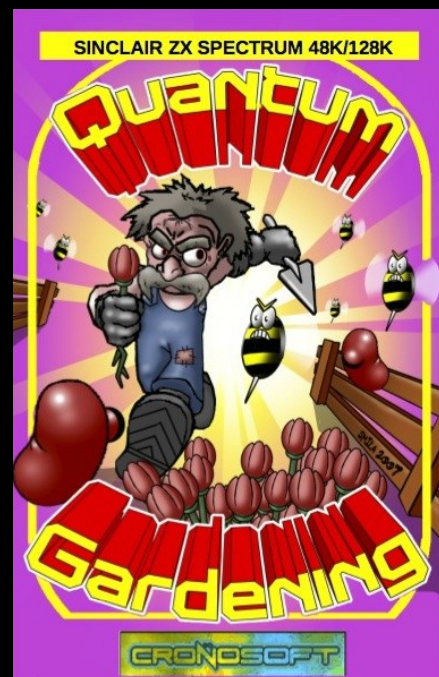
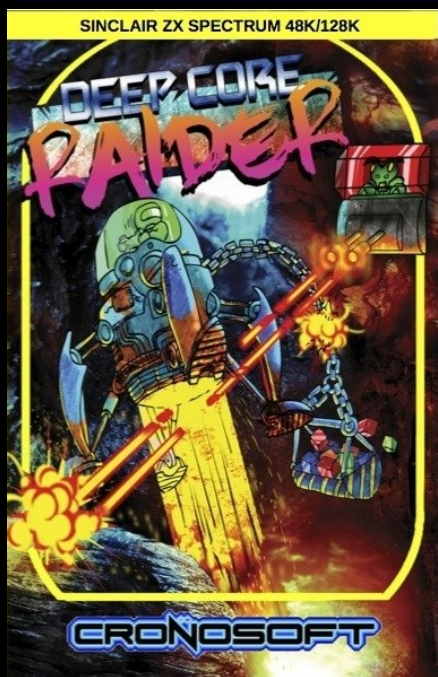
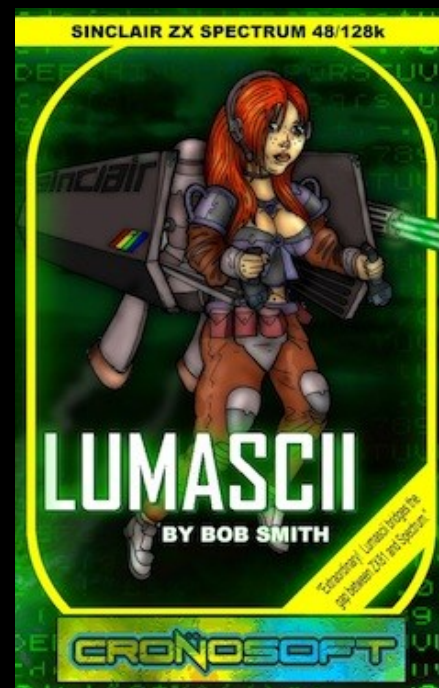
The game could have been much better had it not been so hard, at least that's my opinion.

If you like this type of thing, give it a try, but for me, it was not as good as I remembered it being when I bought it all those years ago.



CRONOSOFT

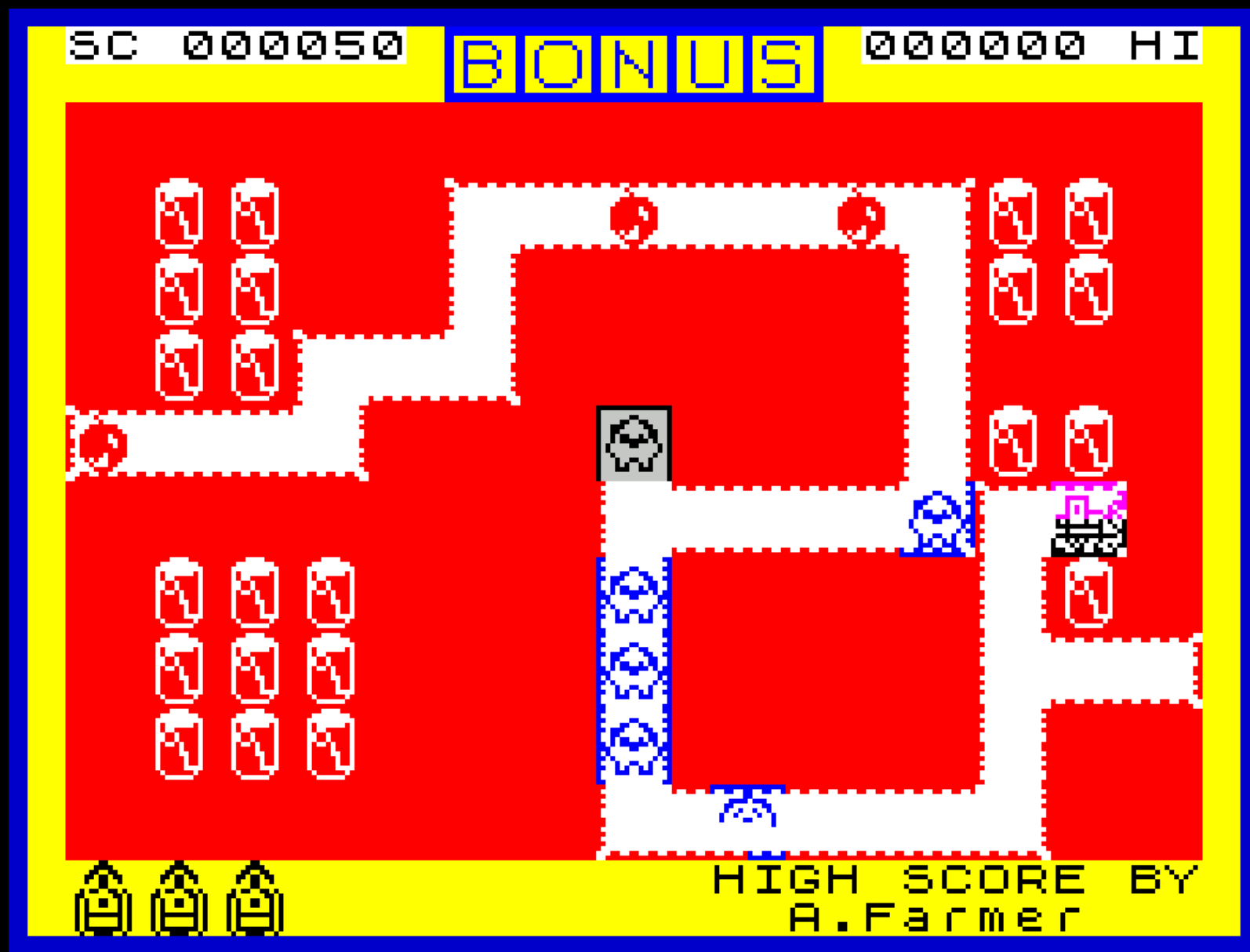
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<https://cronosoft.fwscart.com>

HARD CHEESE

DK Tronics 1983



Hard Cheese is a kind of DigDug affair, but instead of digging tunnels, you drive around the screen in your tractor collecting Coke tins. You also have to avoid the chasing monsters, but you do have the option to fire a projectile at them.

There are no instructions with the game, so I just had to try various things to see what happened.

When you fire a square block (not sure what it is supposed to be) it moves around the tunnels you have created and kills anything it hits, however, if it hits you, you lose a life. This means you have to be very careful where you use it.

You can move to the next screen either by killing all the monsters or by eating the cheese when it appears which should kill all the monsters anyway.

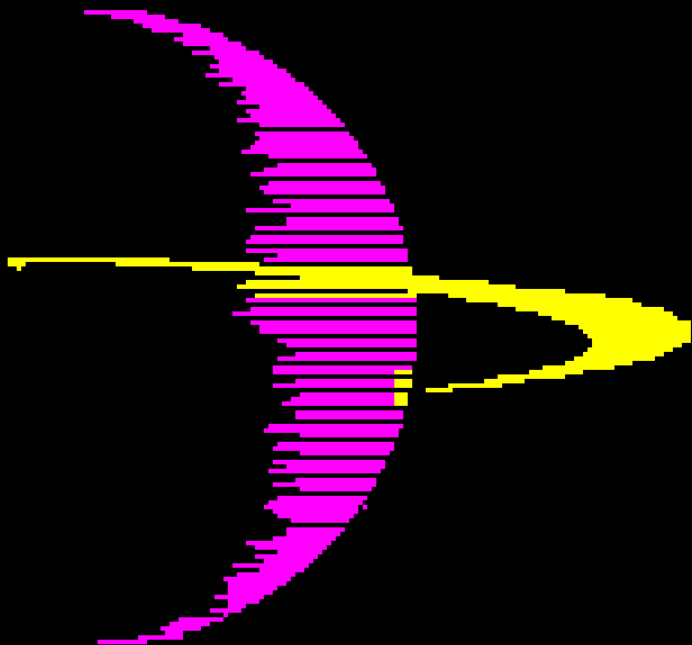
The action is fast and frantic and the graphics move in character squares, but that is fine for this style of game.

Sounds is well used and reminds me of Maziacs. There are also a few

beeper tunes that play when you start, lose the game or get to the next level.

Overall it's not a bad game, quite fun to play and if you like Dig Dug style games, then certainly give this one a try.



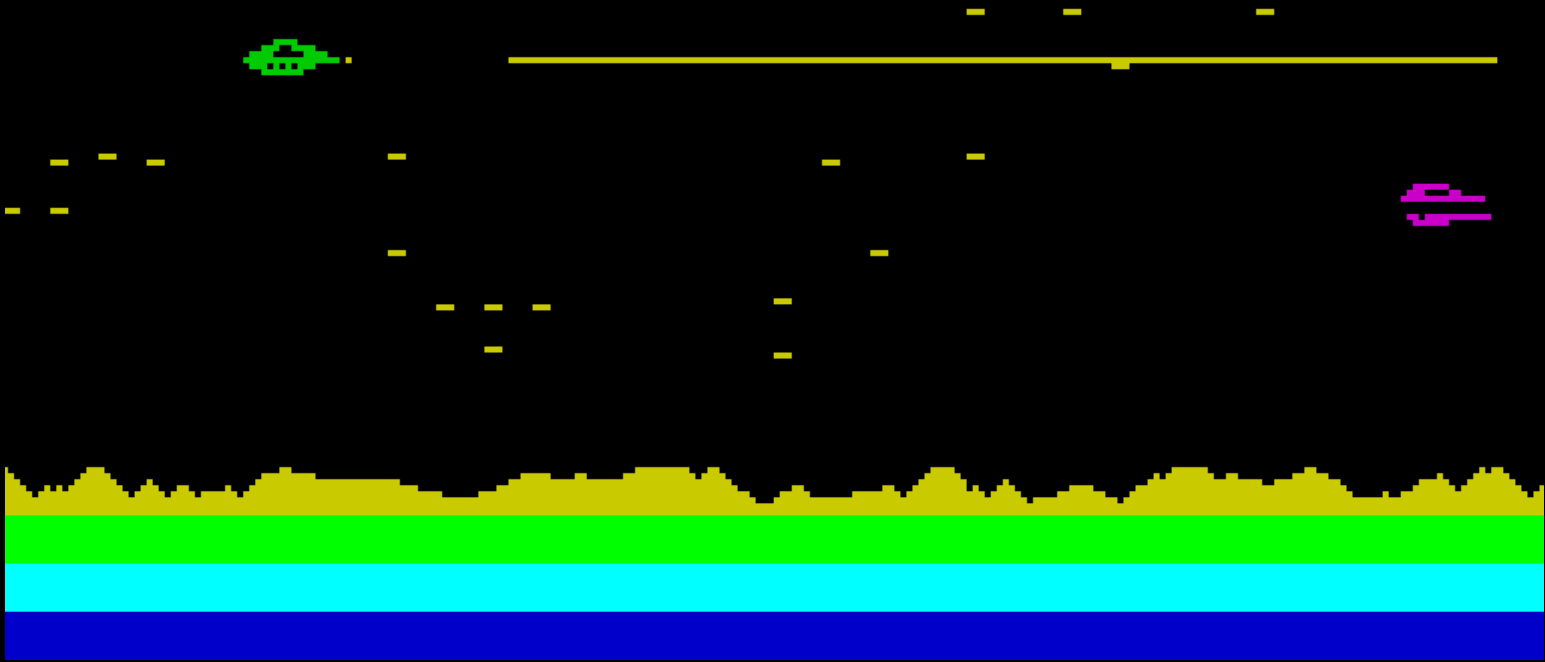


PHASORCHASE
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BULLETS



LEVEL 1



Returning from a patrol you encounter alien ships and you have to blast them to pieces. Of course you do, it's a shoot-em-up!

Small blobs, that are according to the inlay, asteroids, move across the screen. These you have to dodge or risk losing a life. At the far right is the magenta alien ship. It doesn't look that threatening though.

You can move up and down to dodge the asteroids and when you are in line with the ship, shoot it. It's as simple as that.

However, the inlay states the controls as Q A and ENTER, this is wrong, the actual keys are 1 Q and SPACE for fire. Also, a note for emulators, you must set the keyboard to issue 2 or the fire key wont work. It took me a while to work that out!

This made the game look broken to start with, and I just kept losing

lives, but eventually, you'll get it working.

It's a simple dodge and fire game, but even that is simplistic. When you fire a line is drawn across the screen, the game pauses, checks to see if you hit anything, and then carries on.

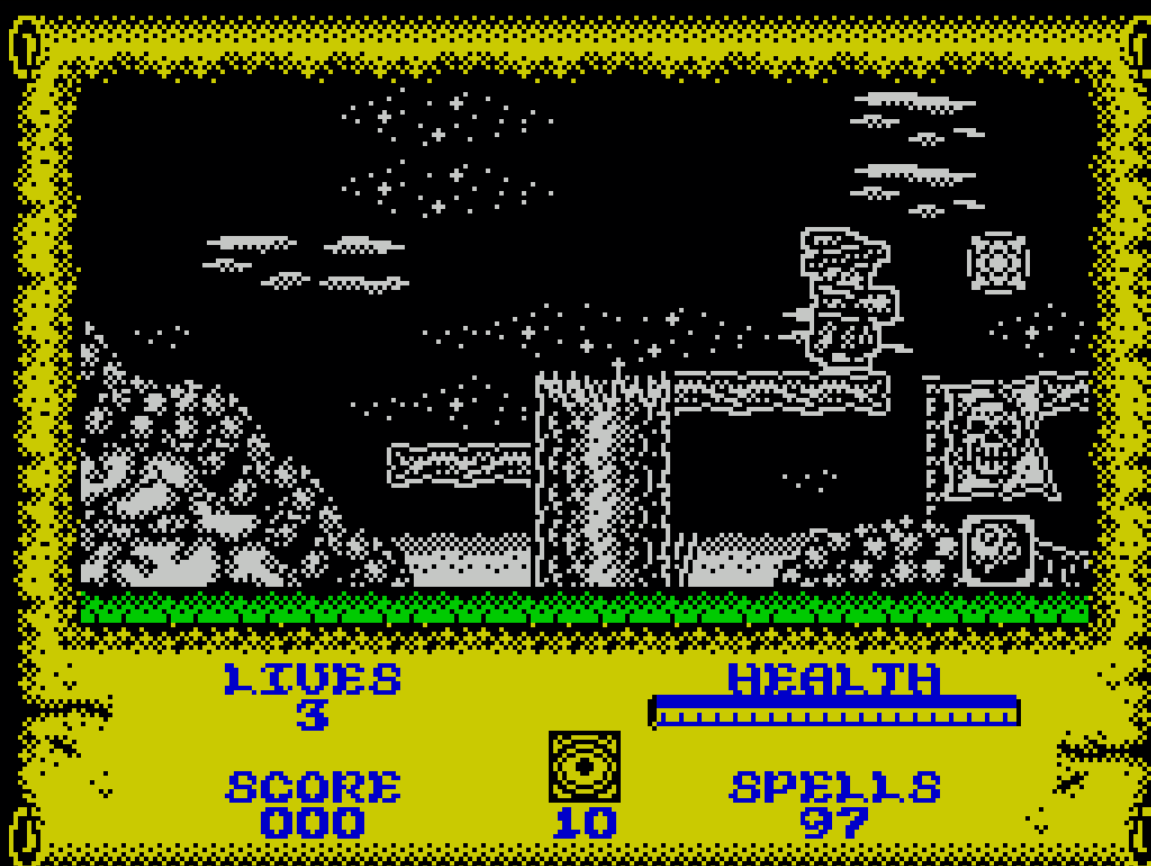
The graphics are bland and move in character squares. The sound is OK I suppose, mainly beeps and blips with the usual beeper effects for explosions.

Each enemy ship has a different amount of hits required to destroy it, and this increases as the levels move on.

An early game then, that certainly shows it's age.

WIZARD WILLY

Cartoon Time (Codemasters) 1990



This is not, as you might think, another Miner Willy game, instead it's an arcade adventure platform game.

You have to save Fifi the fairy from the emperor's fortress. To do this you have to jump through multiple screens across different areas including enchanted forests, stairways and the castle itself.

You start off in the forest and there is some nice parallax scrolling here. The platforms can be walked behind or jumped on and there are many things to collect. However, this is trial and error. Some give you immunity, some give you more energy and some give you more lightning. The spinning orb thing will kill you so never touch that.

The magic eyes are important. You have to collect all ten per level to be able to progress, so make sure you get them. You can see how many are left in the control panel.

There are flying monsters to take care of, and you can do this by firing lightning at them. These though can be tricky, as they appear at the top of the screen and head straight for you. You have limited lightning too so use it wisely.

You can climb the trees from behind to reach higher platforms, or jump using the branches. The levels are fairly short and after a few attempts I got the end of level one without too much trouble.

The end of level boss was fairly easy to get rid of, but by this time I had lost a few lives

and didn't get very far in level 2.

To see more of the game I used a poke for infinite energy.

Level 2 is much the same game mechanic and enemy movement but with different graphics. Some of the jumps on this level were really tricky too.

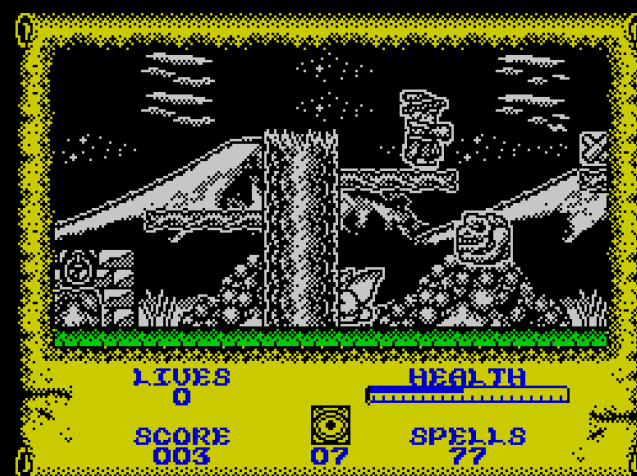
The end of level boss is the same as level 1 and soon you'll be on the third level.

Overall, a nice little game with great graphics. The backgrounds are sometimes animated and very detailed, and the sprites are well drawn, even if you can't tell what they are.

The scrolling is smooth, and it's a good game to play.

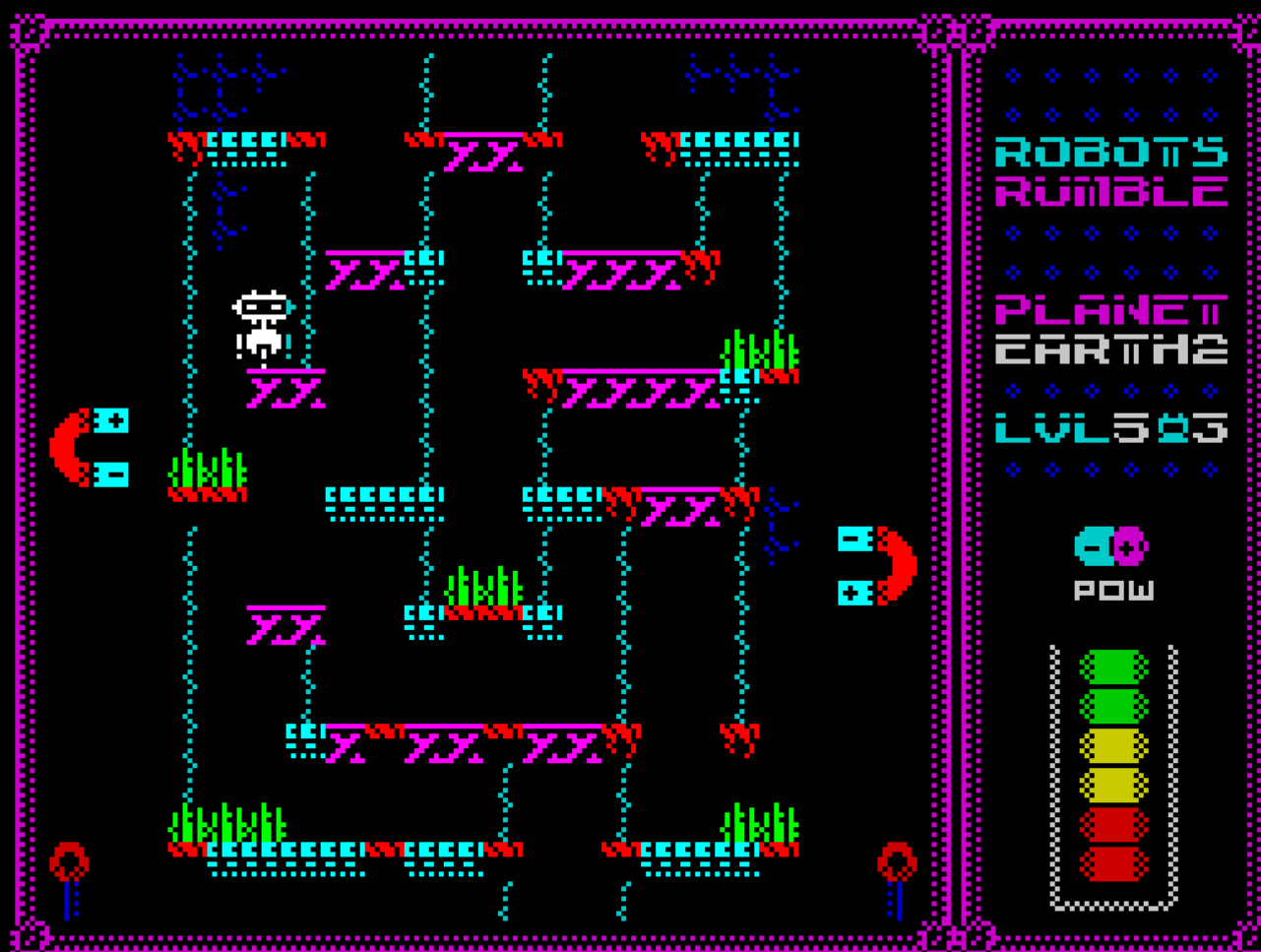
Sound is a bit limited with only a few zaps when something happens and no music when playing.

A challenging game that is worth trying out.



ROBOTS RUMBLE

Miguelito 2018



This clever little game was written using Arcade Game Designer, but steers clear of the usual platform games produce by this excellent tool. Instead we get an addictive platform puzzle game.

You have to guide robots, one at a time, down the screens, eventually taking them to their demise.

You can only move them left or right using huge magnets on each side of the screen. When the magnet lines up with the little robot, it is attracted to it and moves, and using this mechanic, you can guide them down the platforms.

If your robot lands on some kryptonite, the green stuff, your robot is sent back to the top and your missions fails.

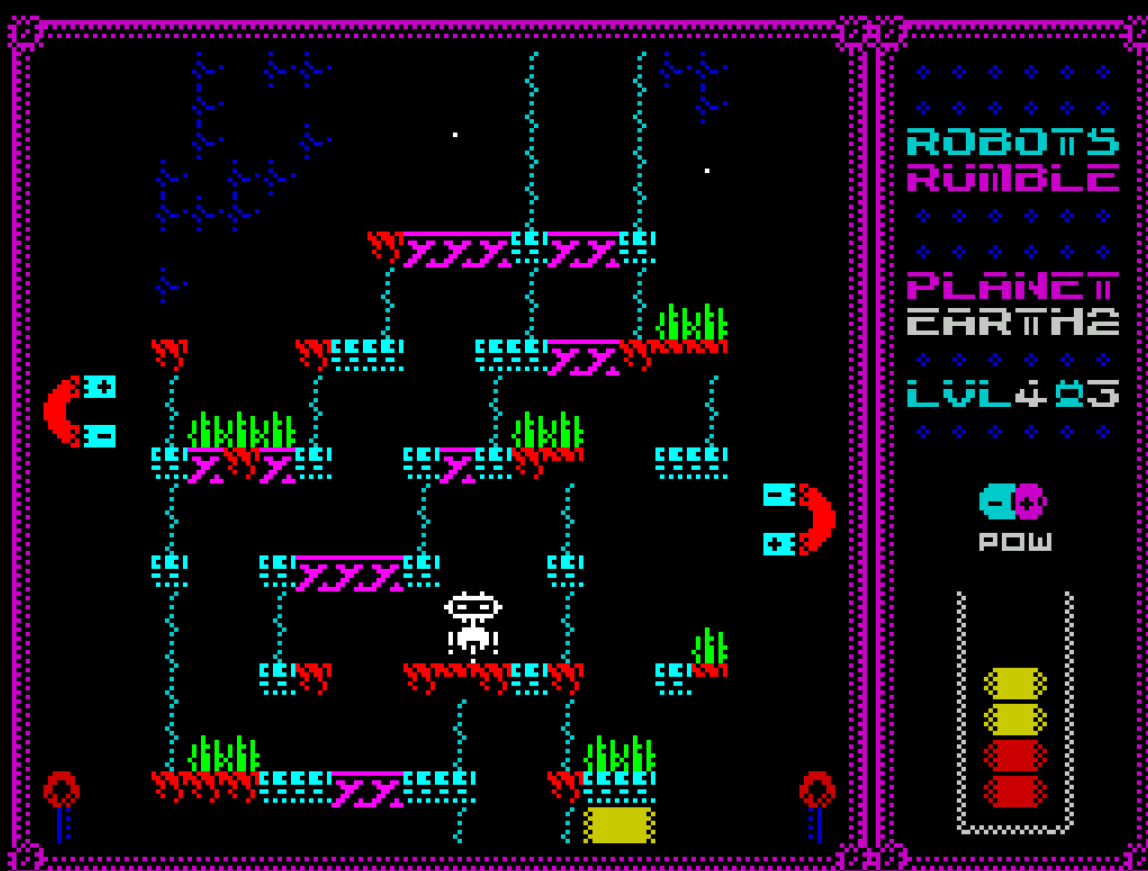
The magnets have a limited charge too, so you can't hang around.

Later levels promise glass floors, lifts and teleports too, so there is a lot to contend with if you want to complete this game.

The graphics are well drawn and everything runs smoothly as you would expect from an AGD game.

Sound is used well, with 128k machines have music during the game.

Overall, a nice little game, well designed and something you should have a go at.



C-TECH



Legendary - for all the wrong reasons

C-Tech software, or to give them their full name, Control Technology Software, was setup in 1982 by Shirley Fenton and Richard Cheetham, both 21 year olds who had recently finished university. The company started as a small mail order software house providing games for the ZX81. In those embryonic times most mail order titles were much the same quality and left a lot to be desired. These though were the very early days, and the industry was growing and evolving almost daily.

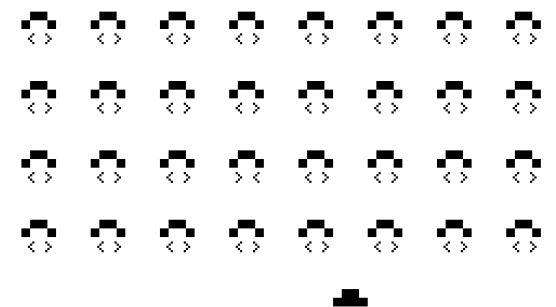
As the market changed and better games were coming along, the Spectrum arrived. Most companies, even single coders, moved to the new machine and began the cycle of learning its secrets again. Control Technology followed suit, but the results were not that impressive.

Let's set the scene first though. People were learning, discovering new ways of doing things, and it was very common to release games written in BASIC. These early games used UDGs (User Defined Graphics) that moved in eight pixel steps, and all movement stopped to play sound effects using the BEEP command. As time moved on people began to learn machine code and within six months, the software scene had changed dramatically. Newer games had 16 x 16 pixel sprites, smooth movement and advanced sound ef-

fects. It was this advanced stage that Control Technology could not grasp, and their games suffered because of it.

Researching Control Technology surprised me. They produce a lot of games not only for the ZX81 and Spectrum but also for the Atom and Vic20. Their games were often renamed, possibly to avoid copyright, and added to multiple compilations.

Back to 1982 then, and they were happily sat alongside other young companies selling average ZX81 games like Invaders and Breakout. In July of that year, they announced they were moving into the Spectrum market, and were working on some exciting new games.



ZX81 Invaders

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The following month, they began to advertise their first foray into the Spectrum world with a compilation, the Spectrum Arcade Pack 1. Why a company would start a new area of development with a compilation is anyone’s guess, and mine is that the titles were not suitable for single release.

The games included in the Spectrum Arcade Pack 1 were Avalanche, Lunar Lander, Missile Command, Pattern and Plano. Avalanche, Pattern and Plano are missing in action, but we can at least see the others as they appeared on a differently named compilation later.

Lunar Lander

The game available separately on WOS is not the one from C-Tech, and I don’t know why it’s labelled incorrectly. The game takes a long time to initialise, and when you finally get to it, the wait was definitely not worth it.

This is a poorly written BAISC game and follows the usual Lander objective; to land your module using left, right and thrust with a limited amount of fuel. The graphics are typical type-in quality and the module jerks about uncontrollably. The sound is just the BEEPer that stops program execution to play.

A truly terrible attempt and the sort of game that is added to a compilation to pad it out.

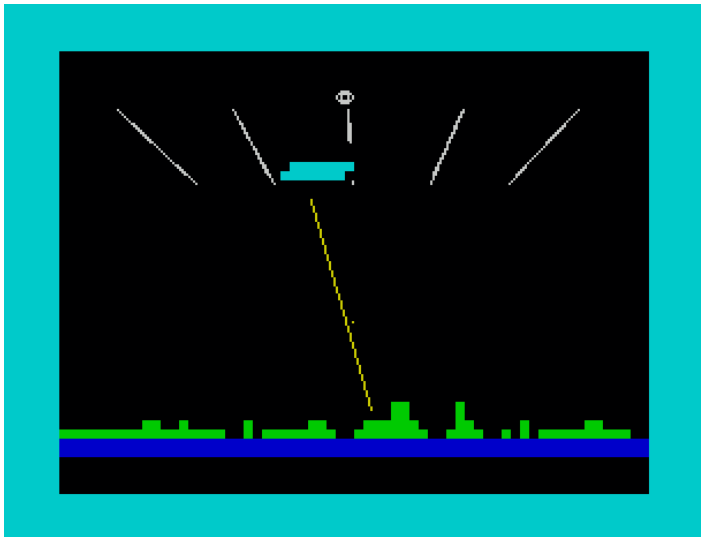


Missile Command

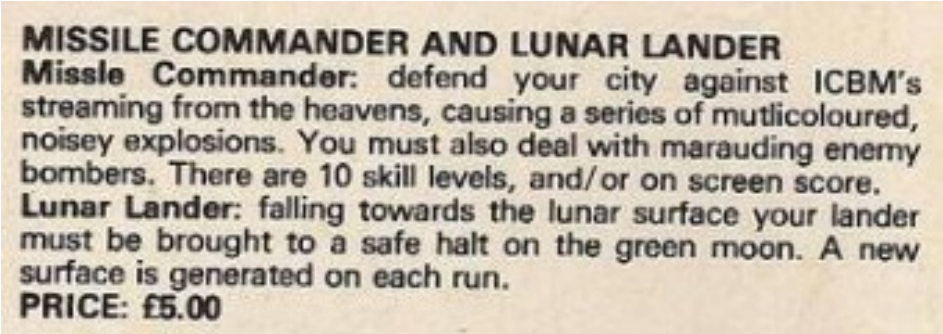
This was, as the name suggests, a clone of the arcade game, and a pretty bad one. For a start the border continually changes colour, which does really start to annoy you, and even gives you headaches. The inbound missiles are drawn really slowly, no smooth movement at all and the cross hair moves in character squares. Firing does not send a missile skyward, instead it produces a beep and an attribute flash around the cross hair.

The cities you are supposed to protect are just blocks, and look like coloured-in ZX81 character graphics, and you don’t get the feeling you actually want to save them. The whole thing is awful, and if you hadn’t spent money on it, laughable.

Should you lose all your lives, then game goes into an epileptic-fit-inducing beeper symphony of crap music.



Moving on one month, September 1982, and more games arrived along with a request for users to send in their games. Now it all starts to make sense. They were publishing user-created games on compilations to make it look more appealing, as though you were being given a bunch of quality games on one tape. Instead you got a bunch of substandard games written by random people who had the bizarre belief that their games were actually sellable.



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SPACE INVADERS
This is not a "variant", this is just like the real thing, with four types of crawling invaders, defenses that crumble as they are hit, UFO's for extra scores, Onscreen scoring and H.S. scores. This game is brilliant!

GALAXIANS
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C-TECH

Polecat

This was described as a completely original and ingenious maze game, but instead we just got a game where the enemy homed in on your position. The main character was a rabbit head (not sure where the rest of its body went!). Your task was to guide the disembodied head in search of carrots. These could be located at the top of the screen. Meanwhile, homing in on you was some kind of mini-kangaroo thing that is supposed to be the polecat.

You have to eat the carrots and avoid the chasing polecat, and try not to get shot by the farmer guarding the carrots.

This is a BASIC game that has flickering graphics, poor control, terrible sound and is dull to play. The tunes drive you mad and add nothing to the game other than delays. The key layout is bad to use so I had to break into it, search through the BASIC listing and change the keys. Trying to navigate a maze game with the cursor keys is a nightmare.

Breakout

I think we all know what to expect with this game, and based on the previous examples I was expected a badly written BASIC game. That's just what I got.

Running in at a massive 3 kilobytes of pure BASIC, this typical breakout game is nothing special. It works is a slow kind of way with graphics and sound that are poor. There were hundreds of similar games like this though, some available as type-ins, but it did pad out the compilation.

Bomber (AKA City Bomber)

This one doesn't even auto run! Once the BASIC is loaded, you have to enter RUN to play it. That is terrible, and making a game autorun is very simple, there is no excuse for this at all.

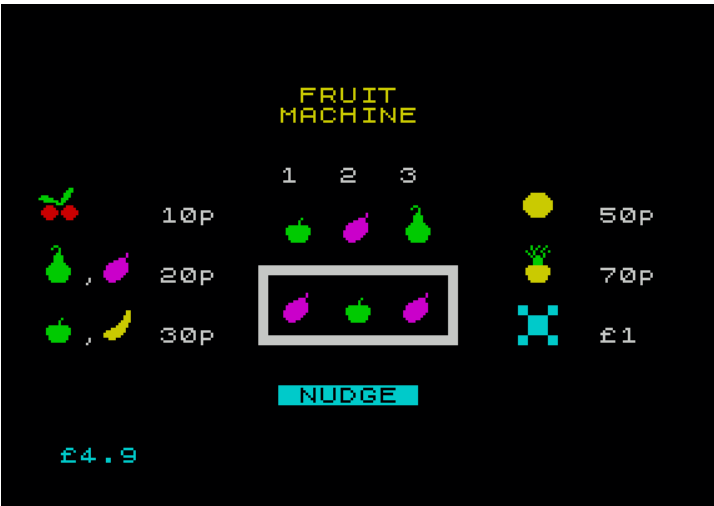
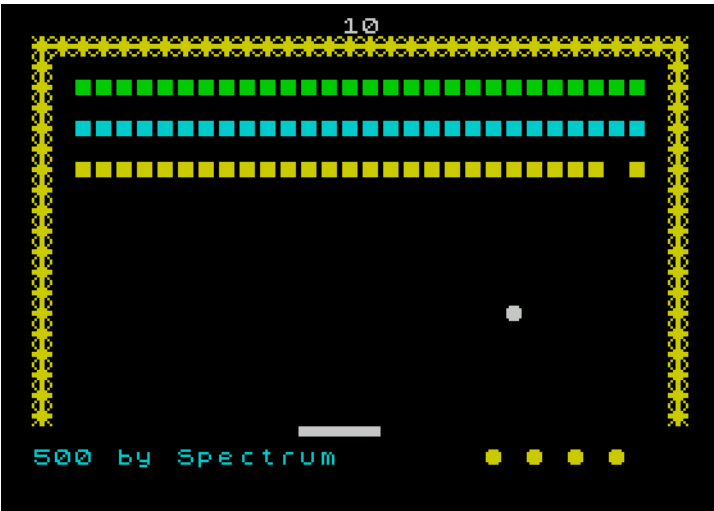
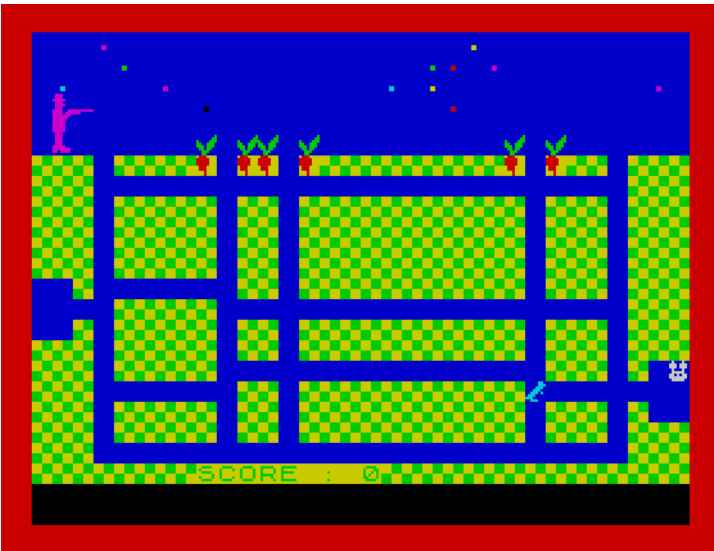
This is a 4k BASIC game, and again there were hundreds of these types of games in magazine listings. There is nothing that makes this stand out in any way, it doesn't do anything different or offer any change in gameplay to all the others. I can't believe C-Tech were selling this.

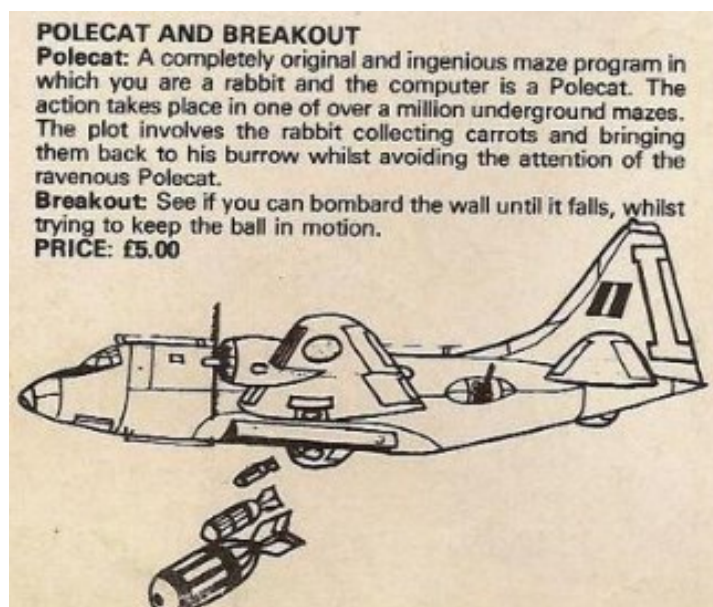
Fruit Machine

A game that could be (and probably was) typed in from a magazine. This is a non-autorunning BASIC game that adheres to the rest of the titles in that it is BASIC, slow and terrible.

For a BASIC game, free to type in, this wouldn't be bad, but to buy it seems crazy.

There are HOLD and NUDGE options, and that's about all I can say...



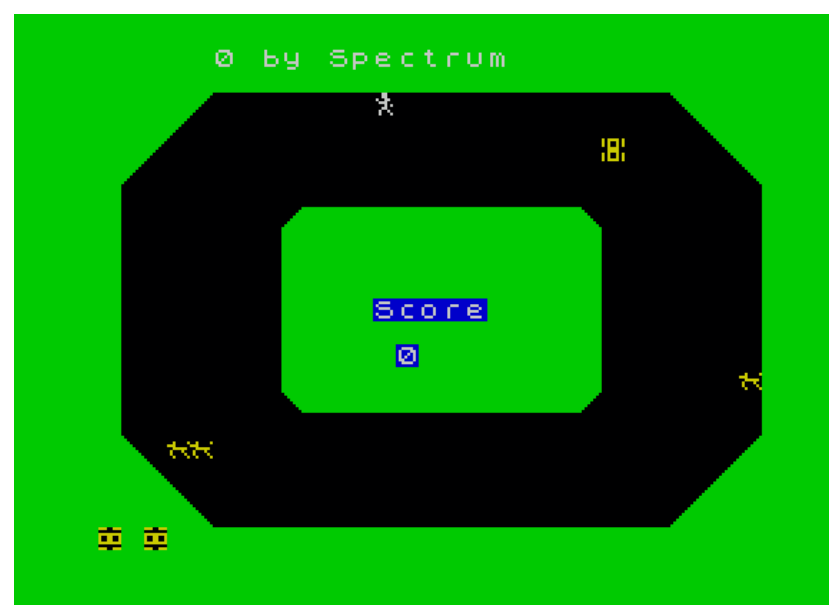


Crazy Race

Yes, another BASIC game running in at 4.7k. The listing even has a different name in the code, Death Driver, and at the end of the listing there is code to save it out with the name Carrera. This indicates it has been through several hands before arriving at Control Technology.

It seems you have to drive around a circuit knocking over people and dogs while avoiding other stationary cars. I am not sure how this was acceptable, even back in the early eighties. To have a game where the aim is to kill people and dogs would have surprised parents.

It's fun for about 30 seconds, if you don't think it's a bit sick having to kill people and dogs by knocking them down, but like the rest, it's slow and boring.



Subhunt

The game starts and nothing happens. You have to press a key which then produces flickering submarines moving across the screen very slowly. Another key press and we get instructions before finally arriving at the game.

Your helicopter moves constantly across the screen and below are two submarines moving through the water gradually getting higher in the water. You have to drop depth charges and try to hit these submarines. You can move up and down to try and get a better shot.

The subs gradually move up and when they reach the top, they will destroy your helicopter using what looks like lasers.

This is just a BASIC (in both senses of the word) game that you would typically get in magazines. Do you see a pattern emerging here?



At this time in the Spectrum's life, other companies were selling machine code games with slick graphics and machine code sound, not hastily thrown together badly written BASIC games.

C-TECH

November 1982 arrived and we see Control Technology shoving all previous games into one package, named the Spectrum Video Pack. We also see the name change, to the shorter C Tech. They also began to advertise Dragon software too, so there were a lot of stirrings going on, on the run up to Christmas. As the festive season dawned this marked the appearance of two new games, heavily advertised and heavily hyped; the now infamous Krazy Kong and Panic Island.

Let's just take a quick look at the text of the advert to see if, when played, the game lives up to the claims.

Krazy Kong

An unbelievable video game from C-Tech.

The programs begins with a full colour Kong jumping across the screen causing the stairway to tilt out of place, then your man must run up the ladders avoiding Kong's barrels to rescue the girl.

The final scene has lifts and fireballs all in full colour, sounds and with M/C subroutines.

Before you can play the game, you have to load it, and even this is problematic. It asks the player to turn on CAPS LOCK manually before continuing. This can be achieved by the programmer using a simple POKE, but not in this game! Next is drawn some girders already at an angle, so Kong doesn't actually cause them to tilt as claimed.

Next, a very badly drawn gorilla moves across the screen in 8 pixel jumps accompanied by terrible BEEP sounds, and then back again to the left. Finally the game loads and nothing happens. You have to press a key for things to begin, but it doesn't tell you this. Now the game starts and it is truly embarrassing.

The control is awful, unresponsive, delayed and awkward. There are different keys for moving and jumping so you have one key to move right and another one to jump right. This not only makes trying to jump over barrels difficult, but also lining up ladders nearly impossible.

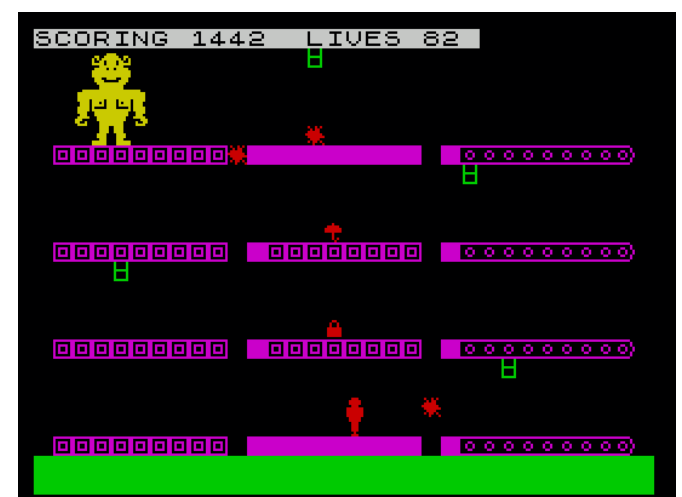
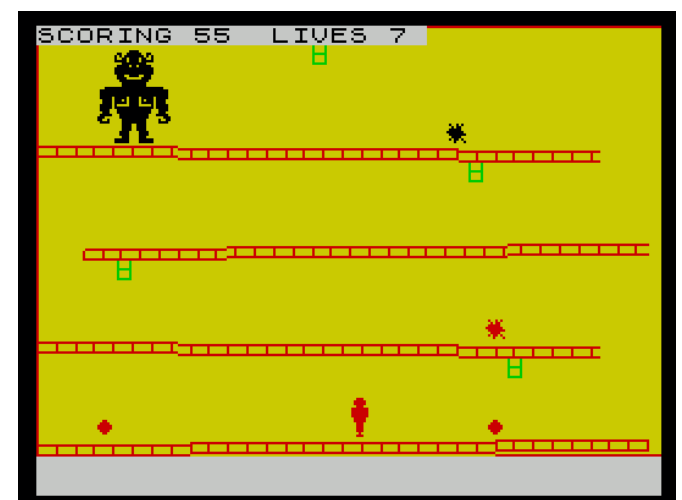
Barrels and fireballs rain down, and in some cases, up, and the collision detection is so bad it's laughable. Many times a fireball passes straight through you, others you die for no apparent reason.

There is a ticking sound that plays throughout, but little else, and the colour scheme is bad for the eyes. Getting up the first ladder is a thing to celebrate, as many players failed to even do this, and the player does not climb them, as claimed. To get to the girder above you position yourself under a half built ladder (to avoid colour clash) and press UP. Your man then teleports to the girder if he isn't hit by an invisible barrel or fireball.

Many players gave up on the first screen, concluding the game was unplayable; and it is, but for more reasons than the first screen alone.

The original advert claimed machine code subroutines but this changed to 100% machine code in later ads. It also claimed 3 screens of high resolution graphics, so was this true?

Upon getting to the top of level one and press the UP key, you are taken to a second level. This level is much easier to negotiate and has a different colour scheme. Getting to the top of this and the player awaits the advertised third level with lifts and fireballs. Sadly the game is bugged and you cannot actually get to the third level. Instead you are thrown back to level one. Thinking this could be some kind of screen repeat mechanic, I poked in 200 lives and set off again, getting past the first level and to the top of the second. Yet again, you are sent back, and this happens every time, at least up to the forth encounter where I got fed up and gave in.



Now I discovered something interesting during this feature; the game on the compilation with Panic Island is different to the one released on its own. The scoring and lives are in a different place. Could this mean this version may let you get to level 3? Alas it seems it is even more broken than the first release and you can't even get to level two.

A totally frustrating game that many suspect is compiled BASIC and one to keep away from if you want to keep your sanity. We shall though, come back to this later in the story.

Panic Island

A game that has the SCROLL prompt on the opening screen does not bode well for the actual game, and it doesn't disappoint. You have to move around an island collecting treasure and avoiding zombies. If you make a zombie collide with a tree it will kill it, and the zombies have no real intelligence, they just home in on your current position.

The background is white, you are depicted as a large red head and the zombies look like tiny skull & crossbones. By moving around you have to make them collide with trees while trying to collect the yellow pieces of treasure.

Oh dear! What a terrible game. It keeps playing a tune for some reason and when you do kill a zombie, the game stops to tell you. The screen clears, you get a message, and then you can carry on playing. These constant interruptions ruin the game, not that it can actually get any worse.

When you collect enough treasure, the game stops to tell you!

What a poor game, it's just a standard chase game written in BASIC and one to avoid.

For the last 8 months or so, C-Tech had full page adverts in Your Computer magazine but as 1983 arrived, they vanished. Had they gone bust? Alas no, they were back in February, this time with a full colour advert and three new additions to their catalogue.

Gorfian Invaders

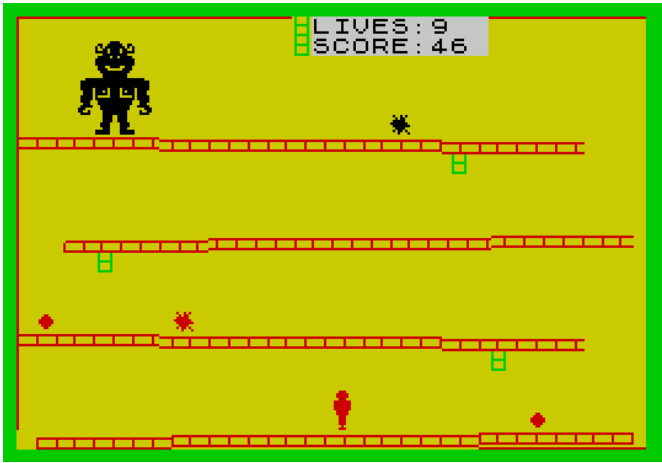
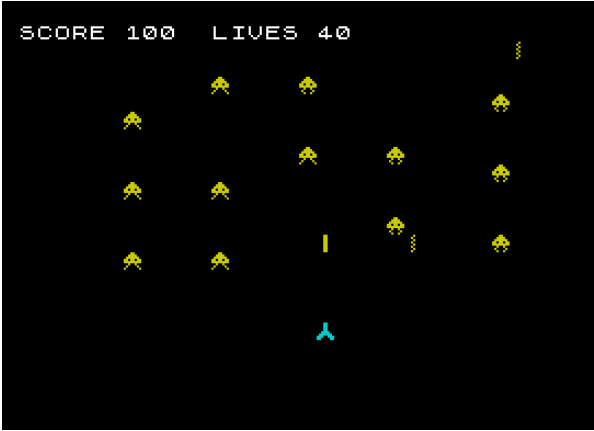
This is a cross between Space Invaders and Gorf I suppose. There are long periods of black screen with no prompts as to how to carry on. Suddenly the game asks you to press S to start, but even this simple task is broken, you have to press CAPS shift and S to get to the game.

Small jerky graphics bounce about wildly with bad sound and awful controls. All of the things associated with BASIC games.

The left key moves you up as well, putting you in danger. The right key just moves you right, so something is wrong somewhere. You can press the down key to get your ship back to the bottom but as soon as you move left you go back up.

The advert claims four screens of action but I couldn't get past the first. Using an infinite lives poke the second level has three red undefinable things and finally you get to the laughable mother ship.

This again, is a terrible game.



```
*****
Well done....CONGRADULATIONS!!
You have killed a ZOMBIE
and gained 100 points

Oh No ...Dont look now
but here comes another
```



C-TECH

Frogger

Let's start with the positives first. The new batch of C-Tech games had really good inlays. Right, now that's out of the way, let's get to the game.

Its BASIC and running in at 8K in size. I didn't expect too much, but it is one of the better C-Tech games to be honest.

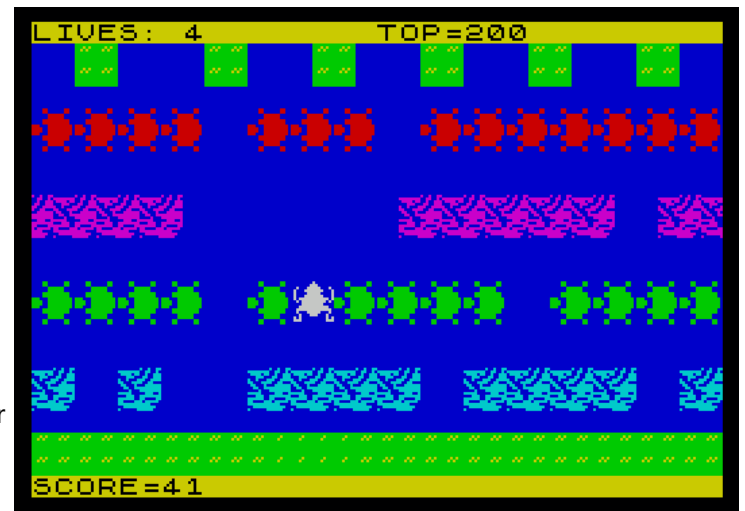
The control is awful though, and can take nearly a second to respond, which often is the difference between landing on a log or falling to your death in the water.

The game is split across two screens, firstly the road with various cars and if you manage to get to the top, the second stage loads, but it takes forever. I timed this and it took over 15 seconds before the second part was playable.

Here you cross the river using the logs and turtles, but the graphics are large and undefinable. Everything moves in character squares, but does represent the arcade, almost.

Movement is in character jumps and sound is very poor. Getting the frog into the actual space at the top of the screen is at times impossible due to the movement.

It's a bit of an improvement from the previous games, but still very poor.



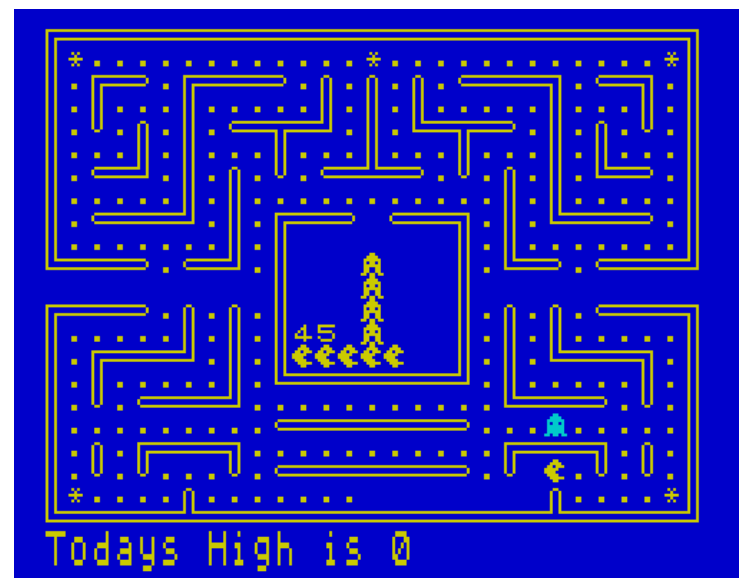
Specman

According to the advert.. this is probably the best version of the game, and I think we all know this is going to be a Pacman clone. Yes, it is, and a pretty bad one, certainly not the best version by a long way.

Control is terrible, the graphics and sound are awful and the game stops to play sounds. You can get the sudden death syndrome because when you die, the ghosts do not reset and can reappear right next to you. If you play on any of the higher levels, meaning there are more ghosts chasing you, it's almost impossible to make any progress.

The ghosts just home in on your position with no intelligence or randomness so all in all, this is rubbish.

March 1983 arrived a another full page, full colour advert, this time in a different style and also featuring a new game, Centipede. They also bundled Specman and Frogger together into a compilation at this point, following their long tradition.



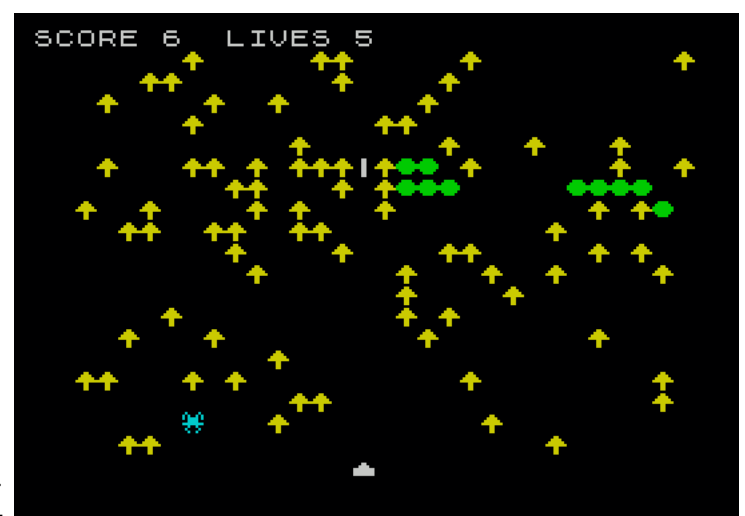
Centipede

This game as a dull and tedious introduction you have to sit through. No getting out of it by pressing keys, you are forced to watch the word Centipede appearing dot by dot.

Once into the game and we get a normal run-of-the-mill centipede clone. Despite the instruction saying you can move up, no keys seemed to do that. You need to be careful when loading this game though, there are two versions on the tape, one is 16k, the other is the 48k version. The 16K version does not let you move up and down and there is no spider and the sound effects are limited. For the better version, make sure you load the 48k version.

Graphics are character based but do move quickly and the sound is ok on the full version. Control is responsive and this is the best C-Tech game so far. At least it's not BASIC and it is playable.

It is tricky to play and certainly a challenge.



Not going well

Around May 1983, game players were discovering the delights of Krazy Kong and articles appeared in magazines showing their displeasure. Undeterred C-Tech marched on doing very little. A few months slid by and in June 1983, C-Tech launched their new inlays and bundles, Super Centipede and Painter. Super Centipede is the same game as the original 48k Centipede released earlier.

Painter

Strangely, the actual game on the compilation tape is called Time Bomb and not Painter.

You control a man who has to disarm bombs in the correct order and this means just running into the numbers in sequence and making sure you do not cross your own path. A different take on Light Cycles, but this is just a BASIC type-in game.

Jerky graphics, bad sound and dull gameplay. In fact I have plenty of actual type-in games that are better than this.

Around this time they also announce, in full page glory, a brand new game called Rocket Raider. C-Tech themselves claimed it would beat Arcadia (from Imagine Software) and Penetrator (from Melbourne House) off the top spot.

Rocket Raider

This new game was at least playable, and is, to be honest, not a bad game at all. It's a cross between Defender and Scramble, seeing you fly around an alien landscape having to kill all the little red aliens.

There are rockets that launch upward, just like Scramble, but the movement of your ship is more like Defender in that you can turn around and go back in the other direction.

At your disposal are lasers and bombs. The bombs are useful for destroying the fuel pods and like Scramble, you have to keep your fuel up or you will crash.

Movement is in character squares, but the gameplay is good enough to almost hide this, and at times you are grateful for this, especially when navigating tight caves.

Sound is used well with some nice effects and response to key presses is acceptable.

This is the best game C-Tech put out and not surprising when you look at the author, Nigel Alderton, who later went on to write Chuckie Egg, Commando and Ghosts n Goblins.

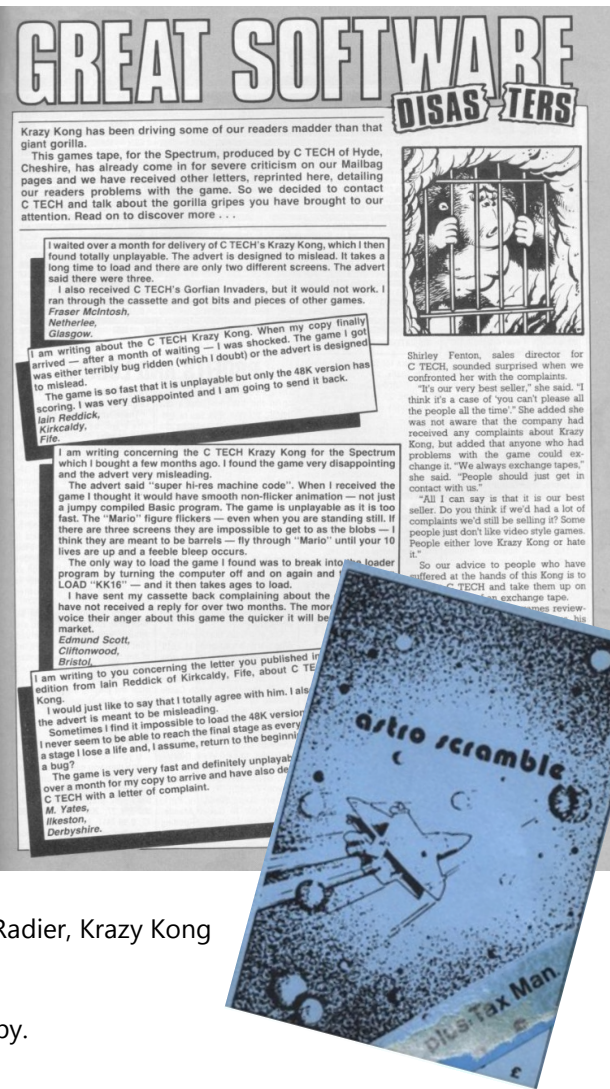
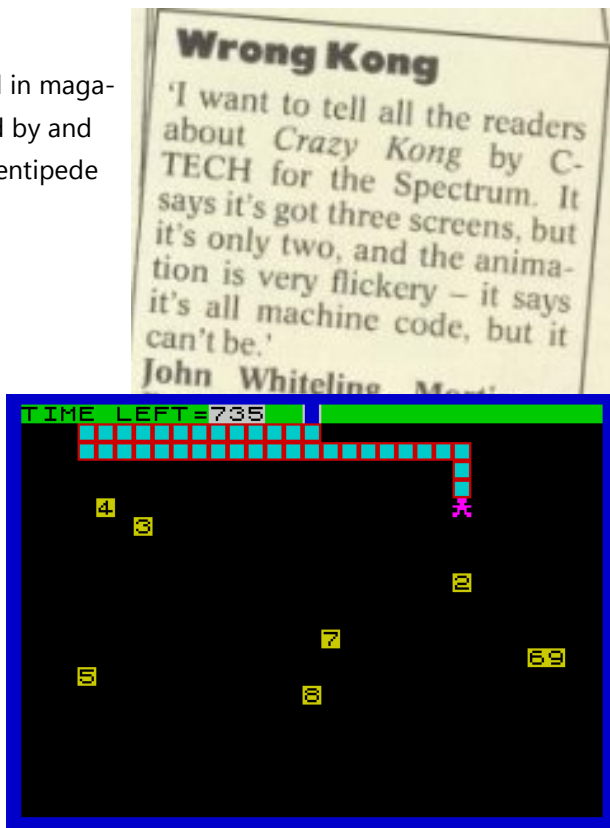
More letters appeared in magazines, still stating that Krazy Kong was unplayable and that adverts were misleading. In September C&VG magazine pulled together these complaints and put them to C-Tech. In response, Shirley Fenton brushed off the complaints claiming the game was their best seller, and further went on to threaten the magazine, saying C-Tech would stop advertising if they published any letters complaining about the game. C-Tech had never placed adverts with C&VG!

Along side Rocket Raider, they also announced a game called Knocker Blocker. A game that sees the player knocking in nails before monsters catch them! This game was never released, or at least not by C-Tech.

That just leaves one mystery, a game called Astro Scramble. Although listed on several websites as being a C-Tech game, I could not find any adverts for it. There is a tape inlay that says it came with something called Tax Man and the inlay does look like the adverts for Gorfian Invaders.

By the end of 1983, C-Tech adverts had dried up. They produced no more games, pushing Rocket Raider, Krazy Kong and Panic Island into a compilation, although I have no evidence of this.

The company silently slipped away in gaming history, leaving their game for others to judge them by.



Rocket Raider

C-Tech Software 1983

You are piloting a spaceship through deep space when you are attacked by a force of mutant alien craft. They retreat to a planet which you can see on your long range scanner. You decide to go down and investigate.

You discover a planet scarred by four trenches, flying into them you find colonies of mutant invaders, fuel dumps, missile installations and drifting orbiting mines. Using your bombs and streams of laser torpedoes you must annihilate the enemy installations.

That's the story, short and sweet, and this gets you into a game that is a sort of cross between Defender and Scramble, with bits of Subterranean Stryker thrown in.

You start above a planet that consists of rugged landscapes and caves. On the surface you will encounter missiles that launch upward (like Scramble) fuel pods you need to destroy keep your craft flying and horizontally moving aliens.

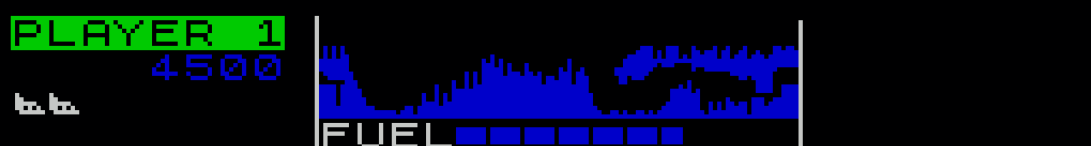
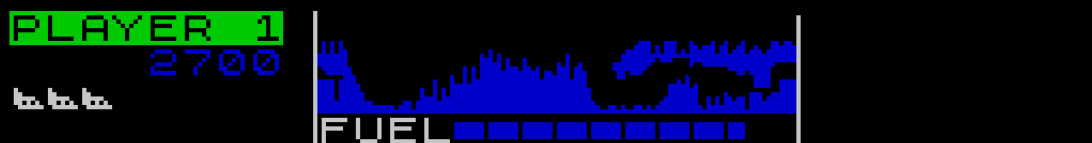
At the top of the screen you have a radar to help navigate and you move around the game map looking for and bombing, small red aliens.

The land scape scrolls both left and right, so like Defender you can swap movement directions, but it does move in character based jumps. This does though, help navigating tight caves where some of the aliens are hiding out. If you are not holding the thrust key, you will stay still, but still use fuel so it can be a gamble.

Sound is pretty poor, with very little in the way of lasers or explosions. There is a hissing sound when you run out of fuel, but that's about it. This is though, remarkably, a 16k game.

Once all the red aliens have been destroyed you move onto a new level with a new landscape and it all starts again.

Not a bad game actually, and probably the best C-Tech game.



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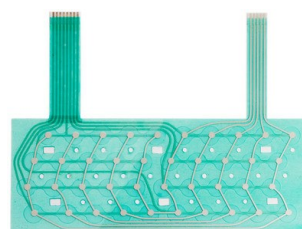
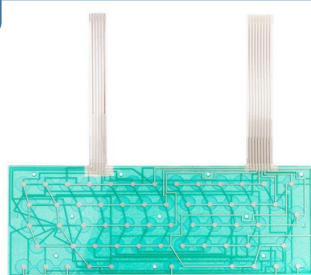
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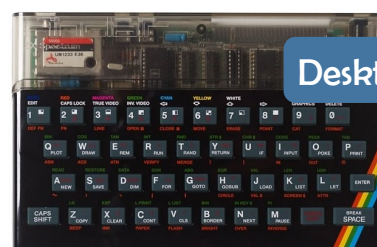


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128K ram
Integrated divMMC double SD card interface.

Two joystick 9 pin ports

RGB out

Composite out

HDMI option - not active at the moment. RGB to HDMI adapter can be used.

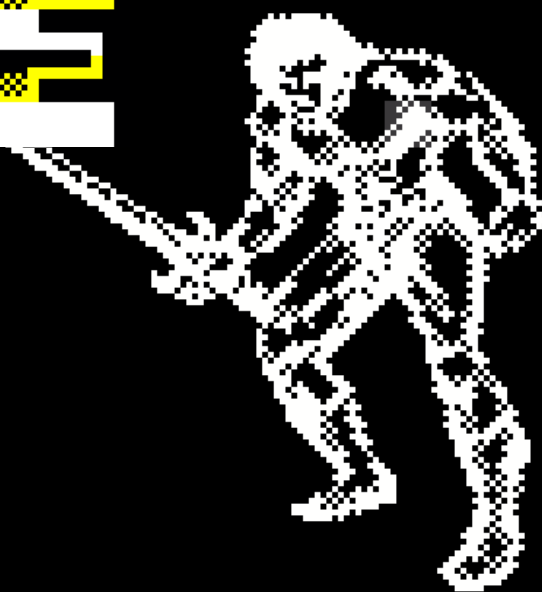
Power button

Reset switch button

More colours available for cases, mats and faceplates

GOLDEN AXE

Virgin Games 1990



Golden Axe was an arcade game released in 1989 by Sega. Taking the role of one of three characters, the player had to battle their way from left to right across a scrolling landscape to take vengeance on the evil Death Adder.

Each character has a different weapon and a different magic spell, which was basically a smart bomb. These can be replenished by kicking a dwarf on certain screens. Not sure this is acceptable behaviour now!

The game in the arcades was great. Looking excellent with good sounds and addictive gameplay.

The Spectrum version was released in 1990 by Virgin Games and attempted to include most of the arcade features.

First choosing the character you want to play accompanied by some nice AY music, and then defining the controls for both players, yes this is a two player game, but you can play it alone.

The first thing that strikes you are the graphics. With clever use of the Spectrum's

limitations, the graphics look really colourful and are easily recognisable. They do move in

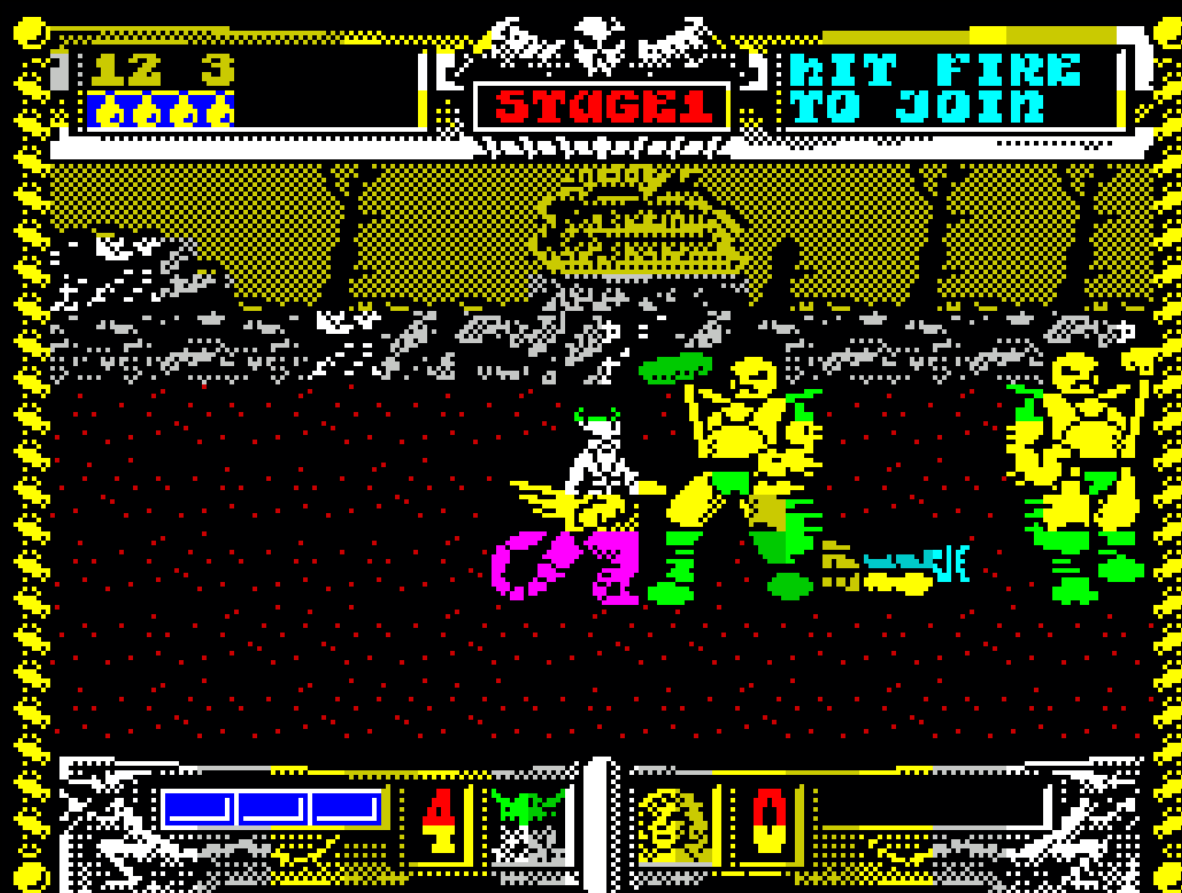
jumps though, but this allows the use of those colourful sprites.

The fighting moves are close to the arcade with axe swinging and leaping but obviously less smooth. In fairness though, the authors have done a brilliant job.

Each enemy takes a few hits to finally get rid of, then it's on to the next wave.

Early in the game you come across an enemy mounted on a weird beast, and good players can knock him off and then jump on themselves. This gives you more damage and makes taking out the bad guys easier.

As you progress the enemies get larger and more difficult to beat and the difficulty I think, is the same as the arcade machine.

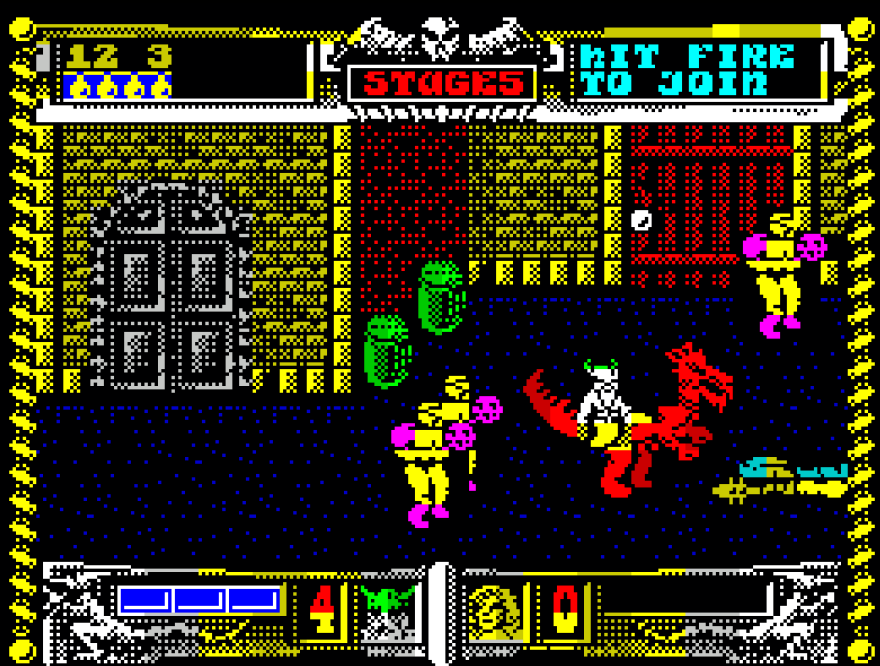




Golden Axe is a multi-load game with each level loading in and changing the background graphics that are quite detailed and look really good.

The graphics are excellent and really show off the Spectrum. The characters have large masks behind them that is quite obvious when they move in front of the coloured background, but it doesn't detract and you are usually too busy trying to stay alive.

Sound is OK, with a swoosh for your attack, a pinging sound when you collect things, and more white noise for fighting. Not the best use of the sound chip, but not too bad.



Overall, this is a great game, easy to play and difficult to beat, you'll have great fun trying.



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SOUNDING GOOD

IMPROVING YOUR SPECTRUM'S SOUND WITH THE STONECHIP ECHO AMPLIFIER

One of the criticisms aimed at the Spectrum was the sound output. Not only did it have a 1 bit beeper, monophonic sound, one channel and no white noise or volume, but also a tiny speaker that made the output weak.

Other micros were much better equipped and used the television for sound output, so to get good quality from the Sinclair machines (16k, 48k and 48k+) you had a few options.

Many companies offered internal or external kits that required some soldering or use of small clips. You could also get an external amplifier in various shapes and sizes.

I covered one such amplifier, the ZX box, in episode 67 that improved the sound via a large speaker. The Stonechip Amplifier though, was much more well known and had a unique styling.

It first appeared in magazines a few months after the Spectrum was released, around September 1982. Initially called the Stonechip Echo it was selling for £23.50. That was a considerable price at the time, however, it did offer other things such as a LOAD/SAVE switch. This was needed because the amplifier itself used the same leads the cassette did, so you had to switch the sound off if you wanted to LOAD or SAVE

data. A few months later and the price dropped to £19.95. Still expensive, but at least more affordable running in at about the price of three games.

There were two versions of this amplifier, the early one with rotary controls that was on sale from 1982 to 1984 and then the newer model. I can't track down when this arrived, but it has switches instead of dials.

The styling fits in really well with the 48k Spectrum and the unit looks great. Some pictures I have seen place the unit to the right of the Spec, but the leads it is supplied with do not allow for this, being only long enough for the device to sit on the left.

The Amplifier allows you to pass through the cassette leads as well as the power, but seeing as though I'm not using a cassette these days, we'll leave those out.

The switches allow switching from LOAD/SAVE to BEEP as well as having a volume selection of low and high. Presumably the original model with rotary dials allowed much finer control.

The last switch just turns on the Spectrum which is a nice touch.

The difference is amazing really when playing games, and the low volume setting is adequate for most rooms. Swapping between the Spectrum's speaker and the Stonechip Amplifier just shows how weak the internal device was. The sound is also quiet clear, which is good considering the age of the speaker and electronics inside it.

Switching to high volume really does get louder, as you would expect, maybe a little too loud if you are in a quiet room with no other sounds. Maybe this is useful for playing games with some music in the background.

This is a nice little amplifier. It looks great and certainly helps with sound. Some game music sounded a bit odd, sort of distorted, and I have no idea why, but it wasn't every game. Overall though, a great addition back in the day.





SWEET TALKING SPECTRUM

GIVING YOUR MICRO A VOICE

Way back in the mists of time, I reviewed the Currah Microspeech Unit, a hardware interface that allowed your Spectrum to talk in a cool robotic voice. Cheetah also released a speech unit, the Sweet Talker. With the film Wargames out, talking computers were magical, and this little unit promised to deliver this to your micro.

The Cheetah unit was larger and much heavier than the Currah one and this was due to the large speaker the interface had. Where as the Currah put the sound through your television, this one used it's own internal speaker.

Once connected it's time to chat with your computer, but unlike the Currah, it didn't automatically work. The Currah interpreted words in a defined string (e.g. HELLo), with extra emphasis added for double letters and capital letters. The Cheetah device was totally different.

The software uses sounds to produce words, and to get this you have to enter data statements into your programs. This takes much longer but is supposed to be more flexible. The below says 'cheetah'.

```
10 DATA 50, 19, 13, 15, 15, 0
20 FOR I = 1 TO 6
30 READ A
40 OUT 7, A
50 NEXT I
```

The first data item, 50, produces the CH sound as in church and the 19 produces the EE sound as in sweet.

The manual is very comprehensive, listing all possible sounds, example words for reference and the equivalent data number to be used.

One thing is for sure, when you play back the speech, that speaker is loud. Sadly the speaker is not used to output game sounds, which is a bit of a missed opportunity really.

If you get the data statements wrong, or try to mix up multiple data statements, things can go a bit weird with words and sounds not ending and producing a continuous loud drone.

The interface comes with a tape on which is a program called Chat Box.

This is just a demo that talks through various screens of text and shows examples of code. It then tries to sell you some more Cheetah products. You can't blame them for trying I suppose.

```
HOW ABOUT MY BROTHER THE 32K RAM
PACK FOR 16K UPGRADES AND MY
COUSIN THE LIGHTPEN.

ENJOY YOURSELF....
```

The speech, in my opinion, is better than the Currah unit, with more options to get words just right and the added speaker makes it a better, if less known option.

The device does have a passthrough port, which is a good feature, and overall, this is a nice unit if you want to produce speech. It didn't sell in large numbers though, and game support was very limited. In fact I can't find anything that actually used it.

Overall then, a nice device that produces acceptable results, but something to mess about with only, but still good fun.



WARNING: MAY CONTAIN SPOILERS

GRUMPY OGRE'S

Adventure Page

Welcome back to strange places where your mind wanders freely and your brain shifts into a higher gear.

In this adventure you find yourself stranded on an alien planet.

Your aim is to escape from this planet by finding your now captured and disabled, Space Ship.

You will meet various hazards and dangers on your adventure, some natural, some not - all of which you must overcome to succeed.

That was the background story that started the Artic adventure Planet of Death, as taken from the inlay. There was nothing more to the game than that; very short, to the point and quick. Did it give the player enough information?

The game itself was a simple text only 16K adventure that many players started their adventuring on. It was released on the 16K ZX81 first, quickly followed by a Spectrum release. Although short, the inlay tells you what you need to know and a rough idea how to play the game and what commands to try.

As games grew in size, using the larger memory of the 48K machines, they grew more complex, and required more information to play them. The Hobbit, a true classic, came with a very small booklet explaining the concepts of communication, and the language structure the game could understand. It did, however, also come with a copy of the book. The book set the background, the landscape and the characters, and may have provided clues to some puzzles in the game. You didn't have to read it, but it certainly helped to better understand the game.

Adventure One from Abersoft, a clone of the classic Colossal Cave adventure, gave instructions

```
Somewhere nearby is a Colossal
Cave, where others have found
fortunes in treasure and Gold,
though it is rumored that some
who enter are never seen again.
Magic is said to work in the
cave. I will be your eyes and
hands. Direct me with commands
of 1 or 2 words. I should warn
you that I look only at the
first four letters of each word,
so you'll have to enter
'Northeast' as 'NE' so that I
can tell it from 'North'.
Other information can be had by
typing 'Help' and 'Info'
```

a very brief overview via a few screens of text at the start of the game. This was because the game originally came from old servers that people accessed on terminals, and there was no such thing as a physical version of it. Players had to be told what to do at the point they entered the game.

The masters of additional material for adventure games had to be Infocom. They packed their games with things that added extra value, and complete sets are now highly prized on eBay. To give you an example, The Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy came with the instruction booklet, a pair of cardboard Joo Janta 200 glasses, a microscopic space fleet, a Don't Panic badge, house demolition plans, Earth demolition plans and some fluff. Infocom though, were not putting out games for the Spectrum (although you can play them in various ways on the +3 or Spectrum Next).



Level 9 and Magnetic Scrolls were putting out Spectrum games though, and they had a similar approach to added value, but not to the extent of Infocom. Level 9 provided less, but did have well written booklets covering the background, characters and story of the game, along with envelopes to request hint sheets and advertising things.

Magnetic Scrolls provided detailed maps and novellas.

You could say that games as complex as the above two companies needed this extra material to give the player a better chance of understanding all of the things they would encounter in the game, and I suppose this is true. Playing a pirate copy, or a TAP file downloaded from a website, without the supporting material would provide less enjoyment. You would not know about the land you were in, the characters you could meet or the actual aim of the game.

Some other games came with large booklets or novellas that brought the game world to life, and some were complete novels on their own. Lords of Midnight provided a novella and Valhalla came with a large booklet.

I remember opening games that came with this extra stuff, and it was really exciting to find it inside the box. To examine it and to wonder how it fitted with the game. I recall opening Ultima Underworld on the PC for the very first time, and thinking how good it was to get maps, guides and instructions. All high quality and all adding something special to the game.

It almost felt like you were merging with the game, things that appears in the text were actually physical. You could hold them. There was a similar feeling when I also played one of the first CD games for the PC, Sherlock Holmes Consultant Detective. In that game you got a mini newspaper. This though, was not just a prop, it was much more.

The game referred to it many times as you questioned suspects. They would make claims such as "I arrived on the 3pm boat from Ireland", and you could look up the arrival times in the newspaper to verify this fact. Sometimes you were told by a game character that they had heard of something, but didn't know where it was. Scanning the newspaper would throw up the answer, and off you would go. A really great addition to the game.



Back to the Spectrum though, and there are very few physical additions to games, in fact I can't recall any. I may be wrong, and would be certainly interested in finding anything other than novellas, keyboard overlays or manuals.

Thinking about this, I found myself playing

The Pawn from Magnetic Scrolls. A rich text adventure with impressively masses of descriptive text. The sheer size and quality of the game is outstanding, but without knowing what to do, I just enjoyed wandering around, examining things and interacting with characters. The whole thing was so easy and it made me want to dive in further.

You begin by being knocked unconscious and waking up with a strange band on your wrist. Examining it produces no clues and depending on your direction of travel you will either encounter a small hut inside which is a Guru who likes to laugh at you, or Kronos the magician who offers you a task. A simple task of delivering a note, but be warned, don't be nose!

You may also encounter a travelling salesman, but I chose to ignore him, for

You are now inside a dingy old mud hut. A shaven-headed guru wearing an orange robe sits cross-legged in the centre of the floor with a cupboard behind him. Also, a small bowl, full of rice, is on the floor in front of the guru. As you enter, he stands, bows to you and sits again. The guru notices your wristband and breaks out into uncontrollable laughter.

better or worse, I am sure to find out later.

The first puzzle in the game, apart from the laughing Guru, is a large boulder blocking your way. This requires two objects to solve, one of which is used for other things including stopping the Guru laughing.

The Guru himself, wonderfully illustrated in the 16bit versions, can be persuaded to move the game on by a simple ploy to hide the wristband, because it is that causing his hilarity. Now, what do you have in your inventory that can be used?

Completing this simple puzzle will initiate yet another task, to fill a bowl with something that nourishes all mortals. Now what could that be? Taking a walk outside you will soon realise that there are snow capped mountains nearby. Snow, now what happens if you melt snow.. and so the task to complete this task begins.

This sort of evolving puzzle is well created in this game, and all games by Magnetic Scrolls. Their reputation is well deserved.

The guru stifles a giggle then empties his bowl and gives it to you saying, "Fetch me the essential nourishment of all mortals and I will answer your questions, my child."

kronos the magician zooms past on a circular stone platform that hovers above the ground, executes a steep, banked turn and glides to a halt in front of you.

"Greetings, stranger", kronos says in a deep, rich voice.

>say hello

The magician says, Hello.

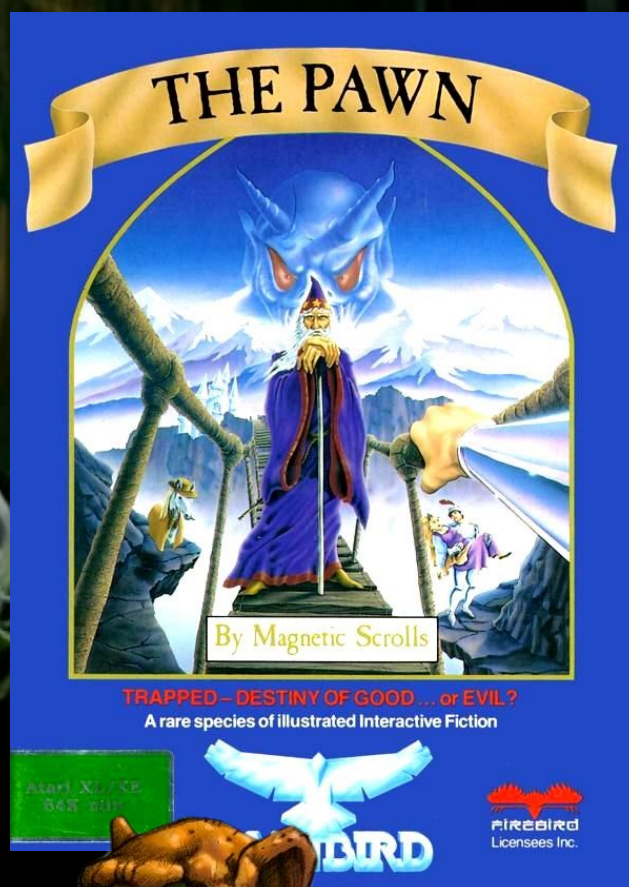
"I am having great trouble in finding someone to perform an extremely simple task and I wonder if you would help me out. If you deliver this sealed letter to king Erik of kerovnia, you will be well rewarded when I next meet you on your travels and I would be forever indebted to you."

The magician then offers you a sealed note.

The sheer amount of text in this game is amazing, and the phrase 'interactive fiction' is justly awarded. This is the type of game I would really like to spend time on, to get to know and to work my way through at my own pace. The last time I did that however, was with Adventure One and that took me over 20 years to complete!

Sadly, time was against me, and for now, I was

happy to walk around and explore, with or without knowing what I was supposed to do. With the Spectrum Next version of The Pawn coming soon, it may be just the thing to get me deeper into this world.



PALACE GARDENS



> east
 Palace Gardens
 You are in the palace gardens where rose bushes and herbaceous borders are neatly arranged.
 fountain. Surrounding the gardens is a high wall through which there are two exits: east to the
 to the stone bridge. Standing in the southwest corner of the gardens is a small toolshed.
 There is a mat here.
 > look in fountain_



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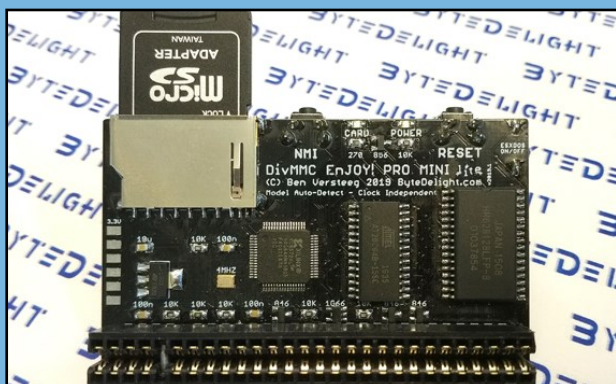
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