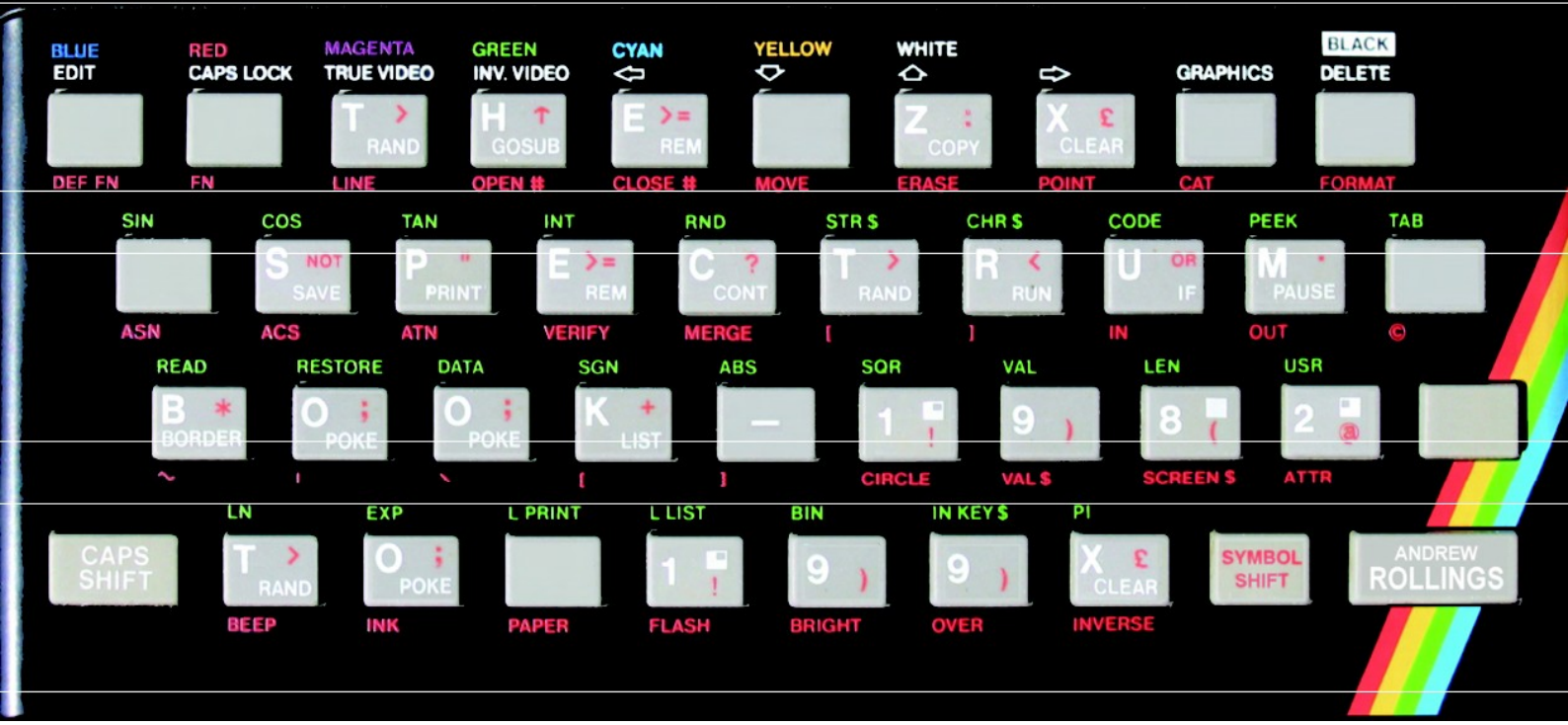
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ZX Spectrum


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ANDREW ROLLINGS


hiive
The ZX Spectrum Book - 1982 to 199X
ANDREW
ROLLINGS

Recollections of the ZX Spectrum

• For many, the **Sinclair ZX Spectrum** was the first glimpse of the exciting world of possibilities opened up by affordable home computing.

• Kick-starting the computer boom in the **UK**, Sir Clive Sinclair's electronic marvel, the **Spectrum** was almost single-handedly responsible for the modern games industry. Many of today's top industry figures got their start on **Sir Clive's** rubber-keyed wonder.

• Without the benefit of sophisticated graphics, sound, and with only extremely limited processing power and memory available, the early computer games had to rely on playability alone...and this is why many games from that time remain so compelling even today.

• This book chronicles 230+ of the most interesting games from the **Spectrum** era. From **Arcadia** to **Zombie Zombie**, this book covers an eclectic collection of games released in the **ZX Spectrum golden years** - 1982 to 1992.

"...for former 'Spec-Chums', this unique tribute to the colour clash of yore will prove hard to resist."
EDGE Magazine

"...We're looking forward to the excellent looking *The ZX Spectrum Book* by Andrew Rollings..."
GAMES™ Magazine



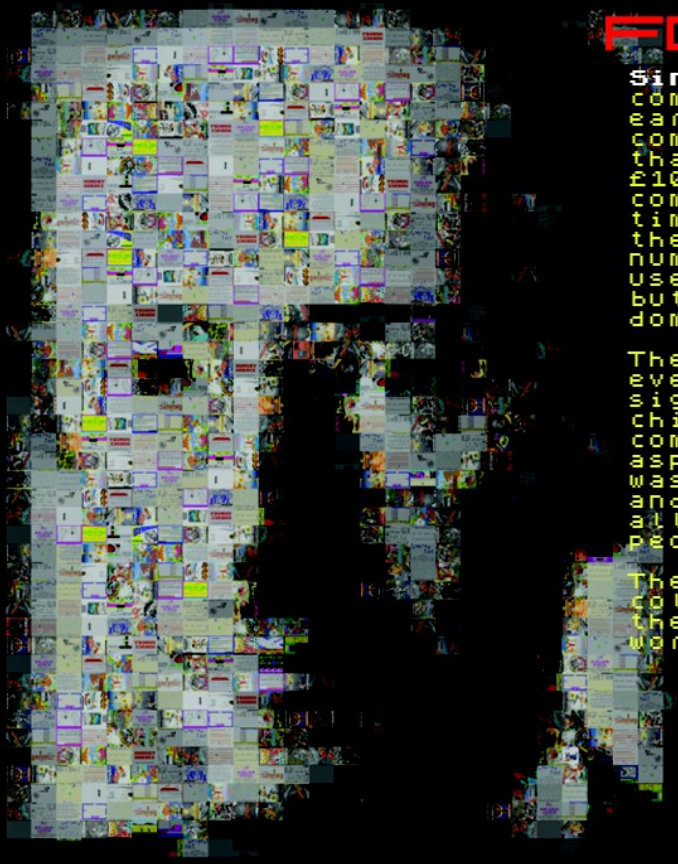


Crash t-shirt, YS Badge, signed Jet Set Willy, Trashman, hiive cup @ 48k Spectrum & Multiface 128 belonging to the author.

hiive books

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Foreword

Sinclair Research launched its first computer, the **ZX80**, late in 1979 (the earlier **MK14** was a kit and not a complete computer). My thought was that if we could achieve a price of £100 instead of £500 for the nearest competition we could, for the first time, sell computers to "the man in the street". And so we did in stunning numbers. The first buyers tended to use the machine to learn programming, but soon the games market became dominant.

The **ZX80** was swiftly followed by the even cheaper **ZX81** at £79. It is significant that the **ZX81** had only 4 chips compared with 44 in the cheapest competitor. We had innovated in every aspect of the design. The architecture was novel, the operating system new and the "Basic" wonderfully compact, all thanks to a handful of brilliant people around Cambridge.

The **Spectrum** took the next step of a colour image and soon became easily the best selling computer in the world.

Sir Clive Sinclair
November 2005

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Program: 1982

After the **ZX80** and **ZX81**, **Sinclair** decided to concentrate on the abilities that any computer worthy of the name should have, namely colour high definition graphics together with sound. The **ZX80** could only display text, the **ZX81** could handle the graphics, so it was only natural that the originally-named **ZX82** should handle the sound and colour. The machine was renamed to the **ZX Spectrum** to reflect the upgrade and **Sinclair** never looked back.

Naturally things started in a different direction compared to how they turned out. The **Spectrum** was intended for business use as well as for the hobbyists. Sure, there would be games written for it, and **Sinclair** even teamed up with **Psion Software** to promote them, but with applications such as **VU-3D** and **VU-CALC** being released and promoted, **Sinclair** thought that games would just be a sideline to the applications.

They were wrong.

They didn't stand a chance, really. **ZX BASIC** on the **Spectrum** was quite powerful, if a little slow. All of the machine's abilities were available to the programmer from the moment the machine was switched on: graphics, sound, the interfaces - everything.

And so it came to pass that a lot of people wrote a lot of games in **BASIC** and released them. The most notorious of these was a collection of fifty frankly dreadful games sold as a compilation called **Cassette 50**. During later years it would be sold with a "free" calculator watch as few people were tempted to buy it without one.

Not all **BASIC** games were poor, though. One which firmly lodged itself into the memories of most **Spectrum** users was **Football Manager**, one of the few games that took advantage of the slowness of **BASIC**. Watching the "match highlights" followed by waiting for the league table to regenerate was quite exciting!

But **BASIC** was just a means to an end: learning to program. Once the skills were learnt, it was onto the much whizzier world of **Z80** machine code. **Psion**/ **Sinclair** and other fledgling software labels would provide an outlet for the new wave of bedroom coders, and the ball had started rolling.

The initial games line-up gave everyone a taste of things to come. The **Horace** games took their influences from the arcades, **The Hobbit** introduced the idea of interactive fiction to the world, and if all you wanted to do was zap aliens then **Space Raiders** and **Planetoids** were for you.

Not bad for a machine which was on sale for "only" **£125**. Two models of the **Spectrum** were sold. Both were otherwise identical, but the **48k** version was sold for a little more money than the **16k** version. It's difficult to imagine these days that it was once thought that **16k** would be enough for most people...

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

3D Tanx

DK'Tronics Ltd.
Don Priestley
Ready... Fire... Aim!



"The 3D effect is best seen when you move the turret up and down."

- Sinclair User, May 1983

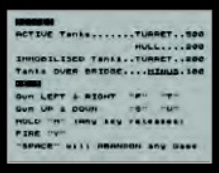
3D Tanx was one of *Don Priestley*'s first forays into commercial games programming and his second game published through *DK'Tronics*. Rather unusually for the tumultuous industry *Don Priestley* (after a few false starts in 1982) stayed with publisher *DK'Tronics* for most of his career. He only switched to an alternate publisher (*Piranha*) in 1986, after *DK'Tronics* had lost interest in software and instead focused on hardware peripherals. This proved to be a bad move, as by 1987 they had gone bust leaving their name and assets to be snapped up by *Ram Electronics*.

Surprisingly and despite the superiority of his later titles, *3D Tanx* was the best-selling *Don Priestley* game, surpassing even *Maziacs* and *Popeye*.
Of course, the scarcity of software in the early days may have had more to do with this than any technical superiority — or lack thereof.

The player's task in **3D Tanx** was to defend a bridge from the oncoming tanks attempting to cross it, presumably into the player's sovereign territory.
To defend themselves from the artillery barrage, tanks on the bridge would fire shells back at the player's gun emplacement. These shells needed to be avoided by moving the anti-tank emplacement left or right. In this respect, **3D Tanx** played somewhat like a pseudo-perspective version of **Space Invaders** combined with **Scorched Earth**.
In spite of the simplistic nature of the game, **3D Tanx** was a strangely compelling experience, something that would become a common feature of later *Don Priestley* games. Although the anti-tank emplacement could only be moved left and right, the gun barrel itself could adjust its elevation up or down. This altered the trajectory of the shell to strike one of four lanes of the bridge highway, enabling the player to destroy tanks in any lane.
When a tank was destroyed, the debris remained in the roadway blocking the way through. If the player blocked up one or more lanes with tank debris, any tanks travelling along the same lane were blocked. This gave the player a larger window of opportunity to destroy them — at least until the tank had brought its guns to bear on the debris, blasting it into oblivion.
3D Tanx was a fun and engaging title that held a promise of the quality of games to come on the *ZX Spectrum*.



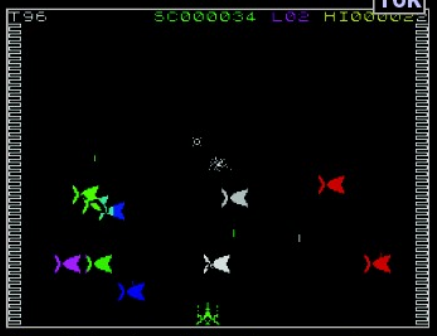




Arcadia

Imagine Software Ltd.
David H. Lawson
We... Come... In... Peace...

16k



"Despite the glossy [adverts] ... games from Imagine Software seem ... only average."
- Sinclair User, July 1983

Arcadia, the first game out of the *Imagine* stables, announced in typical bold, brash *Imagine* style that they were here to stay. Of course, we all know now how that turned out; *Imagine*'s subsequent flame-out was caught blow-by-blow on film by a documentary team as it happened. Ironically, the documentary was originally to be about *Ocean* and *Imagine*'s meteoric rise and instead ended up filming the demise of one of the most hyped publishers in the scene, killed by bad management and financial shenanigans, leaving scores of unpaid bills. Tellingly, the street price of the *Imagine* 'megagames', **Psyclapse** and **Bandersnatch**, was stated to be at least £40 — an unheard of amount which, at a quarter of the price of the machines they were intended to run on, made distributors' eyes widen with shock and disbelief.

***Imagine*'s first game sold many thousands of copies in the Christmas of 1982 and made an instant name for the now infamous software house. Although they were to produce several good games during the course of their existence, *Arcadia* is notable for being the first (and best) of their early releases.**







Arcadia was a simplistic shooter much in the same vein as **Galaxians** or **Galaga**. Like other games of that ilk, waves of aliens attacked in formation from the top of the screen, zooming lower and lower as they rained down fire on the hapless player's ship.
Again in common with its arcade cousins, the player's ship had a restricted area of movement, limited to the lower third of the screen. The aliens had no such restriction and were able to fly all over the screen.
Although **Arcadia** is remembered fondly by some, it is a perfect example of just how starved the software market was for good games back in the early days of the industry — the graph--ics flickered badly and the playability left a lot to be desired. In spite of this the game still managed to be somewhat addictive.
Arcadia played extremely difficultly at first, and quick reactions were required in order to make any headway against the relentless alien waves. This was not helped by the constant flickering of the graphics, which effectively rendered the aliens semi-invisible for short periods of time. Understandably, this had a hugely negative effect on gameplay.

Cyber Rats

Silversoft Ltd.
Iain Christopher Hayward

Revenge Of The Stainless Steel Rats...

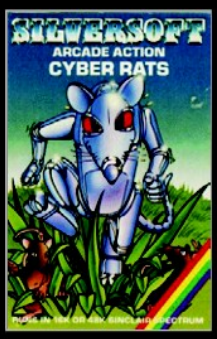
Cyber Rats was heavily influenced by the arcade game **Centipede**. However instead of presenting one large centipede, the game threw hordes of small metal rats at the player. Unfortunately the variety of the original arcade game was not present here. There were only two rat types — the standard blues, and the manic purples.

Whether the author took the *'multitudes of single enemy'* approach instead of the more standard *'one long insect splitting up'* approach for technical reasons or playability reasons is an open question. However, the end result is a very playable *Centipede* clone.
In fact, one of the main advantages *Cyber Rats* had over its contemporaries in spite of the limited nature of the enemies was that the graphics were fast and smooth, utilizing single pixel movement techniques.
Most of the competition around at the time moved in character blocks (eight pixel increments). This made a huge difference to the perceived playability of the game.

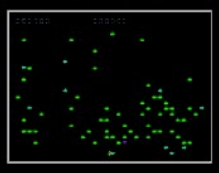
In **Cyber Rats**, much like in the original **Centipede**, the player controlled a small ship that was restricted to the bottom portion of the screen. Unlike **Centipede**, instead of a single segmented insect, hordes of metallic cyan rats made their way down between the tufts of grass from the top of the screen. The player's task was to destroy all of the rats before they could reach his ship. If he failed to destroy them before that happened the rats would attempt a suicide collision with his ship, destroying it in the process. Destroying all of the rats moved the player to the next wave with harder, faster rats.
To make matters worse, and add variety to the game-play, a manic purple cyber rat would occasionally appear. These were much less predictable and more dangerous than the standard rats, and had to be destroyed swiftly to end their threat.
Although **Cyber Rats** had none of the variety nor the delicate balance of the original **Centipede**, it was still a sterling effort that was worth recognition on its own merits. It remains one of the best versions of **Centipede** ever released on the *ZX Spectrum*.



*"...A little like **Centipede** but instead of one long worm there are dozens of metal rats..."*
- Sinclair User, June 1983







Escape

New Generation Software Ltd.
Malcolm E. Evans

Anybody Hear That? It's An... It's An Impact Tremor, That's What It Is...

Escape was the first 3D *ZX Spectrum* game written by the same author as the famous *ZX81* game **3D Monster Maze**. However unlike the famous *ZX81* game, **Escape** wasn't really in 3D. Instead it was a top-down maze game with partial occlusion to simulate a 3D effect.

After the superb and nail-biting *3D Monster Maze*, (shown in the bottom screenshot), the first *ZX Spectrum* outing for *New Generation Software* (recently split off from *J. K. Greye Software*) was a real disappointment for many purchasers, who were expecting a multi-dinosaur version of the *ZX81* classic. In fact *Malcom Evans* originally intended it to be just that, but the technical demands proved too much to do a *ZX Spectrum* version justice so a top-down 3D approach was taken instead.

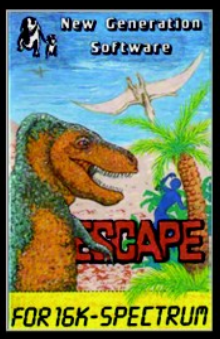
Escape was a simple maze game in which the aim was to escape a dinosaur-populated labyrinth of hedges by finding an axe with which to chop out an escape route.
Although it was only superficial, the 3D effect of the maze was an integral part of the game. The axe was hidden by the 3D effect of the hedges — a contrived challenge at best — which meant that the player did not know the location of the axe until he was right on top of it.
Despite the obvious disappointment, **Escape** was actually quite good fun and a very tactical game. When not carrying the axe, the player's avatar ran faster than the chasing dinosaurs. However, picking up the heavy axe caused the player to run at half-speed - much slower than the chasing dinosaurs. This meant that the game often involved picking up the axe, moving it a little way, and then abandoning it as the dinosaurs closed in. Once the player had led the dinosaurs away he could return to where the axe had been dropped and repeat the process.

Once the player had retrieved the axe and chopped through the exit door there would be another randomly generated maze waiting with more voracious dinosaurs, including a pteranodon that flew over the maze, swooping down on the player.
Despite not being the expected **3D Monster Maze** update, **Escape** still stood up as a reasonable **Pac-Man** inspired title only let down by the promise of what could — or what should — have been.

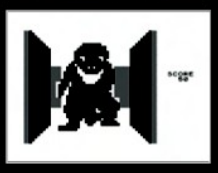
16k



"...One of the best and most original games we have seen for the ZX Spectrum so far."
- Sinclair User, November 1982







5 ¼

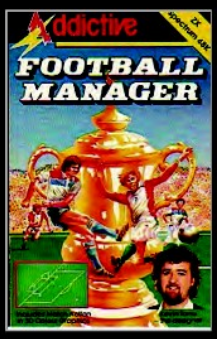
Football Manager

Addictive Games Ltd.
Kevin Toms

He Shoots... He Scores! GOOOAAAL!



"...Keegan is given a very low skill rating ... Apart from that, the game is a winner."
- Sinclair User, February 1983





Football Manager was the first *ZX Spectrum* game that featured the author's photograph on the front cover, making *Kevin Toms* a household name overnight. Interestingly, it was only after *Kevin's* picture was put on the cover that this game started selling. This theory was subsequently applied to other *Addictive* games with predictably limited results.

This is the game that started the football management genre. Later cassette inlays would proudly boast that this game had combined sales of over 300,000 copies, a fantastically high number when you consider that roughly four million *ZX Spectrum*s were sold.
Of course, fame had its price... There was an ugly, unsubstantiated and most likely untrue rumour going around the games industry in the late 80s and early 90s that author *Kevin Toms*' highly familiar face (and thankfully less familiar nether regions) had appeared in the *'One For The Ladies'* section of a certain adult magazine.
As of the time of writing *Kevin Toms* is now living in New Zealand and his latest game — an online version of *Football Manager* based around the New Zealand Championship — is available at `www.kevintoms.com`.

Despite being written in BASIC, **Football Manager** did astonishingly well given the stigma generally attached to BASIC (rather than machine code) authored games.
The game itself was text-based, and was played by picking teams and fixtures, and waiting while the computer calculated the results. Team choices were made using a numbered menu, and the only graphics were the match highlights. For these, a few tiny stick figures hung around a goal. After a couple of seconds of semi-random motion, a full stop would be launched towards the goal.
Compared to the photo-realistic sports games of today it is fairly laughable but back then it was a tense and nail-biting time. Despite the simplicity of the game it spawned a generation of armchair managers and founded a legacy of management titles, the mantle of which has been inherited by *Eidos*' **Championship Manager** series.
Things have moved on since the days of **Football Manager**, but for many gamers, it still holds a special place as the game that created and defined the genre of sports management games.

The Hobbit

Melbourne House
Philip Mitchell, Veronika Megler

Thorin Sits Down And Starts Singing About Gold...

Probably the most famous adventure game ever published on the platform, **The Hobbit** was released to critical acclaim in 1982 and went on to sell over 500,000 copies.
The original release of **The Hobbit** came with a free copy of the Tolkien book that the game was based on.

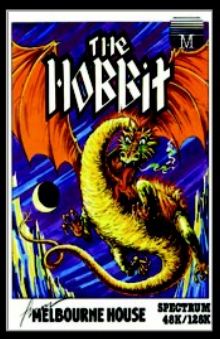
This game was single-handedly responsible for making the British Public (well, a certain segment of them, anyway) familiar with *Thorin*'s annoying habit of singing about gold. And once he started, the little bugger wouldn't stop...

The Hobbit put the player in the shoes (or actually, the bare feet) of Hobbit *Bilbo Baggins* and sent him off on an adventure to relieve a vicious dragon, *Smaug*, of its gold. Interaction with the game was via simple type-in commands, such as `GO EAST`, or `TAKE RING`. The parser system, named *Inglish* by the developers, was slightly more advanced than the standard verb-noun parsers of other games and allowed for a vocabulary of a few hundred words, including some fairly complex grammatical constructs such as `KILL THE WARG CAREFULLY WITH THE DAGGER`.
The location graphics were excellent for the time and were stored internally as vector-based instructions to draw lines and fill areas. This made for an efficient use of space, allowing many more pictures than would otherwise be possible, but the slow drawing made for an agonizing wait upon entering a new location.
However, once the typing began, what followed was an absorbing and beguiling adventure game that broke new ground in interactivity. The game followed the book quite closely, and the atmosphere was such that players really felt that they were part of the story. It is arguable whether any subsequent adventure game achieved this level of success and interactivity but if so then it certainly did not reach as wide an audience as **The Hobbit**.
No doubt fuelled by the huge sales of **The Hobbit**, *Melbourne House* later released adventures based on **The Lord of the Rings** trilogy.
Unfortunately they did not live up to their expectations. Compared to **The Hobbit** they were slow, tedious and fairly buggy. Ultimately, only two were released in the series: **The Lord Of The Rings** covered the first book, and **The Shadows Of Mordor** covered the last two.

48k



"Also, Thorin seems to ... start singing about gold, apparently at random."
- ZX Computing, April 1983







Hungry Horace

Sinclair Research Ltd.
William Tang

Faceless Blue Monstrosity Terrorises Local Park...



*"[**Hungry Horace**] uses the **Pacman** mould but is a great improvement..."*
- Sinclair User, December 1982







One of the most recognizable heroes of the Spectrum, *Horace* could hold his head high amongst the best of them. Well, he could if he had a head...
Hungry Horace was the first of three *ZX Spectrum* outings for *Horace*, the first and the last of which were also available on the ill-fated *Interface 2*.

According to the July 1985 edition of *Sinclair Programs* magazine a fourth game in the series, *Horace to the Rescue* was planned but never released - apparently due to the programmer suffering a collapsed lung. However a few years later a game featuring the same character, *Horace in the Mystic Woods* did come out on the *Psion Series 3* handheld computer. *Horace* did have one other *ZX Spectrum* appearance in the 1987 game *Inspector Gadget and the Circus of Fear*; one of the scrolling levels featured *Horace* as an enemy character, that the hapless inspector could trip over.

Taking its inspiration from **Pacman**, **Hungry Horace** had the blue blob running round city parks of increasing complexity, chased by strange bodyless park keepers. To escape each park, *Horace* had to eat green clumps of rather nondescript flowers before heading onto the next park/maze.
Strategically placed bells would, if rung, distract the park keepers for a few crucial seconds, allowing time for *Horace* to make his escape. Once a bell had been rung, it would continue ringing for a few seconds and then disappear. Apparently there was a bug that could be exploited that prevented the bells disappearing; if the player just brushed against the bell, it would ring but not disappear meaning that it could be used indefinitely.
Although the *Horace* series of games were to become enduringly popular, it is interesting to note that each game was strongly influenced by other popular games. The rather successful *Horace methodology* seems to have been to pick a popular arcade game, add a couple of basic sub-games to flesh it out and foist it onto the unsuspecting punters. **Hungry Horace** was, for many *ZX Spectrum* owners, their first encounter with a fully fleshed-out game hero — one that featured in a series of games rather than a one-off. As such *Horace* is the spiritual forefather of later heroes such as *Dizzy* and *Seymour*.

Horace Goes Skiing

16k

Sinclair Research Ltd.
William Tang

Faceless Blue Monstrosity Terrorises Ski Slopes...



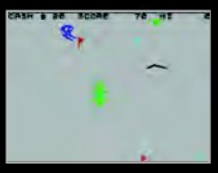
"...Definitely helps set the new higher standard for Sinclair distributed software..."
- ZX Computing, June 1983

Horace's second outing saw the scary blue blob taking a ski trip after his strenuous park adventures. However in this game there were no enemies specifically out to get *Horace*, unlike the persistent park keepers of the first game. Instead *Horace*'s main dangers were the risk of being flattened as he crossed the road to the ski-shop and, of course, mishaps on the ski-slope itself.

***Horace Goes Skiing* was heavily influenced by two games. The first of these was obviously *Frogger*. The second of these was any number of those 'slalom skiing' arcade games that appeared in the early days of the arcades. Oddly this game was the only one of the three *Horace* series games that was not released in cartridge form for the ill-fated *Interface 2* hardware.**







Horace Goes Skiing started with *Horace* on one side of a busy road trying to reach the ski-rental shop on the other side.
A ski-shop in such a dangerous location should have probably gone out of business but they did at least have one customer prepared to brave the treacherous route — namely *Horace*. Each time that *Horace* was hit by a car while crossing the road he had to pay the ambulance a $10 fee to ferry him off to hospital (with insult added to injury if it happened to be an ambulance that had struck *Horace* in the first place). The player only started with $40 and ski rental cost $10, so *Horace* only had a few attempts to get across the road before running out of money and ending the game.
Once across, *Horace* then had to get back with his rented skis. After this *Horace* could finally get on the piste. This part of the game was a fun slalom where the aim was to steer *Horace* between the flags and reach the finish line without hitting too many of the trees. Each time *Horace* crashed into a tree he risked damaging his skis. If they got broken he had to return to the ski-shop and, risking life and limb more so than on the slopes, pick up another set.
For a game called **Horace Goes Skiing**, there was a surprisingly lack of focus on the skiing part. In fact the road crossing was so disproportionately difficult that many players spent more time trying to cross the road than actually doing any skiing.
Despite that, **Horace Goes Skiing** was a stronger title than the first game in the series and a worthy amalgamation of two diverse game styles.

Pimania

Automata UK Ltd.
Mel Croucher, Christian Penfold, Chris Edwards
You Stole My Deaf-Aid And I Want It Back...

Pimania was a strange text adventure that would probably have faded into obscurity if it weren't for the small matter of a £6000 golden sundial prize. All the prospective prize winner had to do to claim the prize was solve the clues present in the game to find the right place and time to meet the *Piman* and collect the sundial.

The prize proved elusive and despite many efforts, (including a trip to Bethlehem on Christmas Day that was aborted at the last moment), it was not won until 1985. The length of time the prize remained unclaimed led many to speculate that it was a non-existent gimmick to increase sales. The magazine *Computer & Video Games* insinuated as much in print, ironically just days before the prize was won.

Pimania was a challenge from the outset, requiring at least a partial knowledge of Spectrum programming before the game could even be started. More than one potential Sundial-Hunter was stymied by the first screen of the game, which consisted of the simple text prompt: `A key turns the lock.`
The solution: The programming keyword `PI` could be entered by first switching the input to 'Extended Mode' (**CAPS SHIFT** and **SYMBOL SHIFT** simultaneously). Then, pressing the **M** key would produce the correct keyword. Surprisingly this simple but effective lateral thinking puzzle stumped a good many purchasers for hours after first loading the game.
The game itself didn't seem to make much sense but the surreal clues provided enough information to at least two people who were able to figure out the solution.
At noon on July 22nd 1985, *Sue Cooper* and *Lizi Newman*, from Ilkley in Yorkshire, waited in the pouring rain at the mouth of a chalk horse on Hindover Hill overlooking Beachy Head in the Sussex Downs, England. *Christian Penfold*, of *Automata*, dressed in a Piman costume presented the two winning sleuths with the Golden Sundial.
So how did they do it? The clues they solved included the view of the river winding through the valley below the hill could be seen by looking through the *Piman*'s telescope. The date, July 22nd can also be written as **22/7** which, when expressed as a fraction is an accepted approximation of PI. In addition, the musical clue **CAGG** featured in the game led to the exact spot. **CA** is the symbol for Calcium, commonly associated with chalk.**GG** can be pronounced Gee-Gee, slang for a horse.



"...The answers are so easy... it takes a child's mind to determine some of the clues."
- Sinclair User, January 1983



Planetoids

Sinclair Research Ltd.
Psion Software Ltd.

No Prizes For Guessing The Inspiration For This Game...

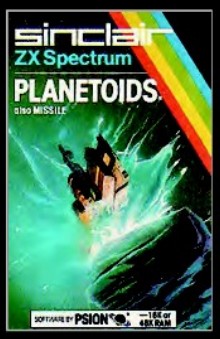


"The asteroids are displayed in 3D..."
- Sinclair User, December 1982

Planetoids was the closest to an 'official' *ZX Spectrum* version of the hit arcade game **Asteroids** as could be imagined given the fundamental difference in display technologies. **Planetoids** was also one of the few games released on *ZX Interface 2* ROM cartridge.

In the early "Wild West" days of the industry, unimportant concepts like *copyright* and *licensing* fell by the wayside in the rush to bring games to market. It was not uncommon for a successful arcade game to have myriad unofficial copies (of varying quality) released across a series of home computing platforms. In most (but not all) cases, the publisher was sensible enough to at least *rename* the blatantly plagiaristic copy in question.

Much like its inspiration, **Asteroids**, **Planetoids** put the player in control of a ship that could rotate left and right, thrust, and fire missiles which was rather inconveniently stuck in the mid--dle of a dense asteroid field. In addition to the missiles, a hyperspace feature that randomly displaced the player's ship to another area of the screen was provided for when the action became too much to handle. In order to progress through the game, the player had to destroy all of the asteroids in each wave by shooting them into smaller and smaller fragments, all while controlling the rotation, thrust and inertia of the ship.
Because the *ZX Spectrum* display system was not capable of pure vector graphics, there were certain adaptations that needed to be made in the conversion. Whereas the arcade game had a dedicated vector-based display requiring a custom X-Y monitor, the *ZX Spectrum* had a raster (pixel-based) display, giving the graphics a much chunkier look.
Apart from the graphics, this game included all of the features of **Asteroids**, including the varying size rocks that broke up into smaller fragments, the bonus *UFO*s that took potshots at the player and of course, the frantic inertial gameplay.
Overall, this was a good conversion of the arcade game that, although legally questionable, was a fun and playable game.







1 1

Slippery Sid

Silversoft Ltd.
Steven Goodwin

Do The Hippy Hippy Snake...

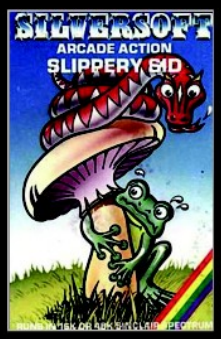


"...He can't eat [a poisonous toad] until having consumed a magic mushroom..."
- Crash Magazine, February 1984

Slippery Sid was another one of the early *ZX Spectrum* games released onto the market when demand was ramping up and software availability was low. Because of this it sold much better than expected given the game's level of polish.
Much of this success was probably due to the nature of the cover artwork which — while not entirely misleading — certainly overstated the quality of the game contained within.

***Slippery Sid* was strongly based on the well-known *Snake* genre of game. This type of game has appeared on virtually every computer-like device with a screen including an appearance as the default game on many mobile phones. It is believed to have originated on the *PDP-11* mini-computer but even this isn't known for sure. Due to its ubiquitous nature, it is also claimed that the original *Snake* is the most played computer game in the world, although it's likely that the creators of *Tetris* would want to dispute that.**

Slippery Sid played very similarly to the original game concept defined by **Snake**, with the player taking on the role of the aforementioned reptile.
A number of enhancements were made to the base game such as variable mazes and the concept of poisonous toads that could not be eaten until one of the randomly appearing mushrooms was eaten first.
The basic aim of the game was to guide *Sid* to eat all of the green frogs that were dotted around the level. Every time *Sid* ate a frog a poisonous toad would appear elsewhere on screen to take its place.
To complicate matters, when *Sid* ate he grew longer, making him more difficult to manoeuvre around the level. If *Sid* collided with himself, a wall, or a poisonous toad (without having first eaten a mushroom) then a life was lost and the level started over. Once all the frogs on a level were eaten, *Sid* went on to a new faster level with a more complex maze layout.
Although this is not the best implementation of the **Snake**-genre game, it's hard to not have fun as a snake chasing frogs, mushrooms and toads.







Program: 1983

With a few months passing after the launch of the **Spectrum**, the third-party market kicked into action. This was an exciting year with several new ideas being tried out for the first time. Some people kept things simple by offering keyboard overlays made of card to help people play games that required many keys. Cheap computer workstations also proved to be a popular idea with some being just a cardboard box to put a **Spectrum** and tape player in, whereas others were proper foam-filled suitcases that tried to promote the idea of portable computing.

One peripheral which found a niche market was a modem that allowed people to connect to **Micronet**, a bulletin board system which offered similar services to the current Internet. It was a lot simpler, of course, with everything being text-based and as for download speeds... well, how does the idea of downloading a **48k** game in twenty minutes sound to you?

But the Gold Rush was on and home computing was considered to be the current fad. Pop stars such as **The Thompson Twins** and **Shakin' Stevens** leapt onto the bandwagon by including mediocre games on their vinyl records.

Although some mainstream commentators were wondering when this bubble would burst, **Sinclair** himself was doing very well out of it all and decided to reinvest some of the profits into other areas, the first of which being a flat-screen pocket television, the **TV80**. Whist it proved very popular, **Sinclair** couldn't satisfy demand fast enough and the ensuing poor publicity because of the delays killed off the **TV80** and severely dented **Sinclair's** reputation.

Bubble or not, other computer manufacturers wanted a piece of the action. All sorts of machines were appearing in the high street stores with the enticing (and not so enticing) names of the **Oric**, the **Dragon**, the **Texas TI99/4A**, the **Super Colour Genie**, plus several others. Even **Atari**, famous for their arcade games and video game systems, tried to sell a couple of computers but they fell into the same trap as all the others: they failed to match the **Spectrum's** power-to-price ratio.

The exception was the **Commodore 64** which was launched this year as a business and home office machine, selling for **£345**. Although a powerful machine, it wouldn't become a serious competitor to the **Spectrum** for at least another year and only after a hefty price cut, but once that had happened the competition between the two machines was fierce.

It was inevitable that the Gold Rush would produce a lot of hype. Whilst **Matthew Smith's** stardom as a result of **Manic Miner** was well-deserved, **Imagine Software** tried to buy that level of admiration using a lot of self-promotion together with seeding tales of young programmers working for them earning a fortune and driving flash sports cars. It was a courageous move sparked off by the critical acclaim of their first few games, but little did they realise that even the smallest bubbles have to burst sometime...

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

Ah Diddums

Imagine Software Ltd.
David H. Lawson

Teddy Bear Gets Stuffing Knocked Out...

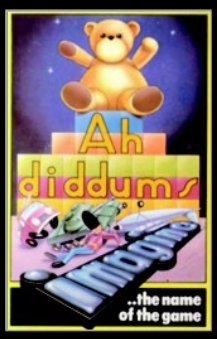
Ah Diddums should have been an interesting and original title from the newly established *Imagine* software house. Unfortunately, much like the majority of other titles from *Imagine*, it was an interesting idea let down by shoddy execution.

Amongst its other problems, *Ah Diddums* suffered from being drastically over-hyped. While the advertising and press releases trumpeted it as a slick arcade challenge it was in reality a badly programmed, difficult nightmare of a game where the only real challenge lay in figuring out exactly on which pixel to stand in in order to deposit a brick.
Apart from the excellent cover artwork and the original concept, it is very difficult to figure out why this game was ever popular.

In **Ah Diddums** the player took on the role of a devoted teddy bear trying to reach the baby that was crying in the nursery. However the bear was stuck in a toy box and need to stack up bricks in order to escape outside. The other toys in the toy box did not want this to happen as if *Teddy* managed to reach the baby and stop him crying, the lights would be turned out, ending their games. Obviously they did not want this to happen and so they aimed to prevent *Teddy* escaping.
In order to escape, *Teddy* had to build a stairway by placing the correctly coloured blocks in a stack to form steps. Meanwhile, the other toys tried to murder *Teddy* by literally knocking the stuffing out of him. The only defences that *Teddy* had were the *Jack-in-the-Box*, which could momentarily distract the toys, or the pea-shooter which would destroy them permanently.
Destroying all of the toys in the box was unwise because if there were no toys left then the evil indestructible homing plasticine (that looked nothing like plasticine) came out to destroy *Teddy*, making the game much more difficult.
The biggest tragedy about this game is that the idea is sound but the execution is appalling, and the concept alone is not enough to rescue the game from mediocrity. If ever a game cried out for a decent remake, then this would be a top contender. Fortunately, there are several such specimens to be found on the internet.



*"**Ah Diddums** uses amazing high resolution graphics and sound. It even uses colour..."*
- ZX Computing, August 1983







Alchemist

Imagine Software Ltd.
Ian Weatherburn

Lead Into Gold? That's SO 1480's...

Alchemist was *Imagine*'s contribution to the arcade-adventure genre that was pioneered by *Ultimate* with their seminal **Atic Atac**. Although impressive in its own right it was still not up to the andard of the *Ultimate* games.

When *Imagine* published this game they were the first publisher to have a cassette and case produced using gold plastic. Aside from being a publicity stunt (not out of character for *Imagine*) it also tied nicely into the fact that the aim of the original alchemists was to transmute base metals, that is to turn lead into gold.

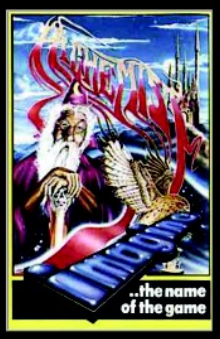
In **Alchemist** the object of the game was to reunite the four quarters of the scroll containing the *Spell of Destruction* scattered around the evil *Warlock*'s castle. Once the *Alchemist* had combined all four quarters of the spell, it was time to confront the evil *Warlock* in his lair and use his own spell against him.
Seeing as the *Alchemist* was definitely old enough to have qualified for his pension the slightest incline was impassable to him as he doddered around the rooms. Fortunately he had mastered the art of transmogrification and was able to transform into an eagle and back again, making journeying around the game's screens much less frustrating.
In his quest for the spell pieces, the *Alchemist* had to defeat or evade the many enemies around the castle. The only safe place in the castle was *The Sanctuary*, a place where the *Alchemist* could rest and recuperate in peace.
The game played like a small self-contained arcade adventure, with most of the puzzles revolving around simple 'move object from A to B' or 'use object C with object D' type solutions. It was very small and limited for this type of game, but it could be forgiven for that seeing as it was also one of the first of its type to appear on the *ZX Spectrum*.
However, although it was a great game on its first play through, **Alchemist** was really not a rewarding game on second and subsequent plays.



48k



"...its use of colour must have stretched the Spectrum to its limits (if not beyond)..."
- Your Spectrum, May 1984







1 ! 5 %

Android Two

Vortex Ltd.
Costa Panayi
Militoids, Robots And Mines, Oh My...

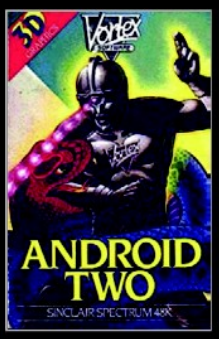


Android 2 was a fun game that managed to be a little on the frustrating side. This was partly due to the huge array of robots, mines and other nasties out to get the player but also because the forced 3D perspective would often hide the land-mines behind walls. The player had to make doubly sure that he kept a good eye on the proximity scanner in order to avoid arbitrary destruction.
For *Vortex*, **Android 2** was the game that really put them on the game publisher map, and flagged them as one to watch for future quality games. And for the most part they did not disappoint. **Android 2** was one of the first games to really show off what the *ZX Spectrum* (and author *Costa Panayi*) was really capable of.

***Android 2*, the sequel to *Costa Panayi*'s *Android*, was a quantum leap forward in gameplay and technology from the earlier title. Colour was cleverly used to give a very convincing sense of 3D — a technique that would be used by author *Costa Panayi* in two subsequent games: *TLL* and *Cyclone*.**

The aim of **Android 2** was to defeat the five *Militoids*, centipede-like creatures that patrolled three huge zones: The Maze of Death, The Paradox Zone, and the Flatlands. To achieve this monumental task, the eponymous *android* had to defeat or avoid the killer robots, dodge mines, and track down and destroy all of the *Militoids* (with three shots to the head) in each zone. After the *Militoids* in each zone were destroyed, the player had to fight his way back to the safety of the transporter capsule — all within a tight time limit.
The game was made extremely challenging by the marauding robots which came in two varieties: normal robots (smart, one shot to kill), and the bouncers (dumb but indestructible). Aside from those inconveniences there was also the small matter of the game being set in what appeared to be a huge minefield.
Playing through the three vast zones and killing the five *Militoids* proved to be a daunting but highly addictive task. **Android 2** was a real jaw-dropper of a game when it first appeared and still looks good and plays well even today.

"Excellent on almost all counts, highly addictive and first rate value for money..."
- Crash Magazine, March 1984







CRASH 90%

Ant Attack

Quicksilva Ltd.
Sandy White, Angela Sutherland

Giant Ants Ravage City. Dumb Teenagers Split Up To Investigate...

Ant Attack was the first of two games to be released using *Sandy White*'s SoftSolid 3D technique. At the time of release the 3D effect was so impressive that *Quicksilva* apparently tried to file a patent on it - the cassette cover proudly declared "Patent Pending" just below the title. Such was the impact of this game that issue 2 of *Your Spectrum* magazine devoted a cover to it and also featured a giant poster sized map of the city of Antescher, along with extremely popular competition with £7000 worth of prizes to be won.

The competition was in two parts: the first was to beat the game several times to find out the four final locations that the player's missing partner could be rescued from. The second part (only revealed on the day of the contest in a national newspaper classified advert) was to locate the mystery object in the desert. It turned out to be an unused AMMO box graphic — a side effect of the programming that doubled as a hidden sprite for use when a grenade was thrown.

In **Ant Attack** the player's role was to search through the street and buildings of the deserted city looking for his (or her) lost partner and then lead her (or him) to safety before the time ran out. However the city was not entirely deserted: giant ants roamed the empty streets hunting for fresh meat and had to be avoided or defeated to escape their bites.
If the player did encounter one or more ants, he (or she) had a small supply of grenades that could be used to stun or destroy them. In addition jumping onto the back of a moving ant would paralyze it — a feature that could be used to exploit a flaw in the game's programming. A useful — but probably unintended — side-effect of paralyzing ants was that due to the fact that there were only five active ants at any one time, paralyzing all five would leave the player unmolested for the rest of the level.
The most memorable part of this game was the fantastic atmosphere evoked by the stark buildings. The player really did get a true feeling of wandering a long-dead desert city populated by flesh-eating giant ants. This atmosphere was challenged slightly by the awkward control method — **Ant Attack** required a monstrous thirteen keys to play.

CRASH 85%

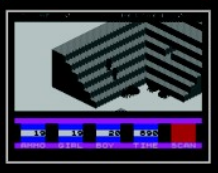
48k



"The most breathtaking 3D graphics yet seen on the ZX Spectrum..."
- Crash, February 1984







1 ! 7 '

Atic Atac

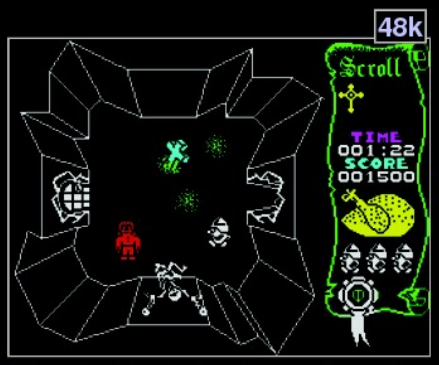
Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

With A Little Imagination, It Could Be...

Atic Atac was a mind-blowing game when it was released in 1983. It far outclassed its competition at the time and almost defied belief with its smooth graphics and arcade-like gameplay. For many, **Atic Atac** marked the true beginning of the *Ultimate* legacy.

***Atic Atac* was the second 48k title to be published by *Ultimate*, and the first of their software releases to be labeled as a G.A.S — which was an acronym for the rather grandiose "Graphical Adventure Software".**

In **Atic Atac** the player had a choice of roles with which to start the game — a wizard, a serf or a knight. The serf could access the barrel secret passages, the knight used the grandfather clock passages, and the wizard used the bookcases.
The game started with the player trapped in a haunted castle, the imposing main doors locked shut. In order to unlock the doors and escape, the castle had to be searched to find the three segments of the key of A.C.G.
The player was under constant attack from minor nasties at all times although these could be dispatched with a quick shot from the player's weapon. Further into the castle, deadlier monsters such as Dracula and Frankenstein's Monster lurked, and could only be defeated using special weapons that exploited their weaknesses.
The player also had to maintain his health by eating food, find coloured keys to unlock the colour coded doors, and fight off the nasties as he explored the castle and caverns underneath in his quest to escape. The player had limited inventory space that had to be used to hold other objects as well as key segments and there wasn't enough space to hold everything needed at once. Hence it was necessary to return each A.C.G key part to the starting room whenever one was found. Once all three pieces were assembled the player could escape.
Atic Atac was the first of a long line of G.A.S's published by *Ultimate*. Although they would subsequently release a straight arcade game or two, the majority of their output from this point were also graphical adventures.



"The entire thing is a learning experience, like life!"

- Crash, March 1984







CRASH 92%

Bear Bovver

Artic Computing Ltd.
Jon Ritman

The Answer To The Age Old Question?

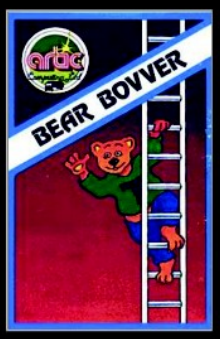
Bear Bovver came about after *Jon Ritman* saw the success of 'cute' games such as **Pssst** and decided that his next game would be more cute-themed. His previous games had been pure arcade conversions whereas **Bear Bovver**, although influenced by **Burger Time**, was not a direct copy and combined a cute teddy bear theme with contemporary *Sinclair Research* products — in the comical form of a *Sinclair C5*.

If the bear graphics in *Bear Bovver* seemed eerily reminiscent of the footballers in *Match Day*, no one would be surprised that it's not a coincidence. Author *Jon Ritman* reworked the *Bear Bovver* graphics for use with the seminal *Match Day*. *Bear Bovver* was also the last *Jon Ritman* game to be released by *Artic*.

In **Bear Bovver**, *Ted* had to climb the scaffolding and push the batteries down level by level to his waiting car. They needed to be pushed down several levels to reach the car. Not only that but care needed to be taken to ensure that the player did not push down the wrong battery at the wrong time. If a battery fell to the ground, and the car was not underneath to catch it, then the car would crash into the fallen battery when it did finally get moving. *Ted* was unfortunately not alone on the scaffolding. A group of yobbish bears known as the 'Bovver Bears' out to get him — as well as a strange green creature that looked a little like a dinosaur. On the plus side there were also various snacks and goodies that appeared which could be collected for bonus points. Also, by judicious battery dropping, the bad guys could be handily crushed for extra points. Once *Ted* had retrieved all the batteries on the screen and deposited them into his power-hungry electric car he scooted off screen only to break down *again* in front of another battery-laden scaffolding — a remarkable and somewhat fortunate (or unfortunate, depending on your point of view) coincidence.
Bear Bovver was a fun **Burger Time**-inspired arcade game that exuded quality, from the continuous music through to the smooth and colourful graphics. It was a fun but frustrating title that fast became frantic — to the point of being unplayable. Luckily, the author had the foresight to include a training mode, the 'baby bear' mode, that allowed the player to play without any of the nasties trying to get him. The only real fly in the ointment was the difficulty level: too easy on the training mode, and far too difficult on the normal mode.



"Artic say the graphics are of 'cartoon quality' ... which turns out to be fairly true!"
- Crash, April 1984







CRASH 90% YOUR SPECTRUM 80% SINCLAIR 80%

The Birds And The Bees

48k



Bug-Byte Ltd.

Adrian Sherwin, Matthew Smith

It's Not What You Thought...

Published (rather appropriately) by *Bug-Byte*, **The Birds And The Bees** was a **Defender** inspired game which cast the player in the role of *Boris The Bee*. *Boris* had to defend his hive from marauding critters, whilst collecting enough nectar to fill his honey stocks. **The Birds And The Bees** was a uniquely original, non-violent, and incredibly frustrating arcade game.

Apparently when this game was originally submitted to *Bug-Byte* by the 16-year old *Adrian Sherwin* for publishing, the author-provided graphics were little more than shapeless blobs. *Matthew Smith* of *Manic Miner* fame was drafted in to redraw the graphics.
The sequel, *Antics*, was written after *Matthew* had left for *Software Projects* and so did not have *Matthew's* assistance with the graphics. Unfortunately, it showed.
Notably, *The Birds And The Bees* was one of the first published games to support the *Currah Microspeech* device.

The Birds And The Bees set the player, as *Boris*, the task of filling his hive with honey against waves of ever more persistent predators. The game itself consisted of a scrolling play field, with *Boris*'s hive at one end of the field and several nectar-bearing flowers at the other. In between the hive and the flowers were various dangers, the severity of which depended on the current level.
Boris could choose to make one round-trip per flower or risk collecting several flowers-worth of nectar before returning to the hive. The more nectar *Boris* collected, the more unwieldy his flight and consequently the more difficult it was to avoid the nasties. Each level introduced a new class of nasty to the playing area, ranging from the initial bee-eating birds and progressing to venus flytrap plants, wasps, centipedes, and even a honey-eating bear. As the number of nasties increased, the difficulty of the game rose from mildly taxing to indescribably insane — especially by the time the wasps appeared.
As an environmentally sound **Defender**-derived collect-em-up, this game was hard to beat.

"... An ingenious reproduction of real-life conditions in the fields..."
- Sinclair User, February 1984







CRASH 83%

Bugaboo (The Flea)

Quicksilva Ltd.
Investronica (Paco Suarez, Paco Portalo)

This Game Made Me Itch!



"It is ... easy to forget that you are ... watching a picture generated by your ZX Spectrum."
- Crash, February 1984

With the rapid ascent of the *ZX Spectrum* as a serious games platform, publishers were clamouring for new titles. Certain enterprising publishers such as *Quicksilva* and *Mikro-Gen* started to look futher afield for good titles. **Bugaboo The Flea** was one such title.

***Bugaboo The Flea* was originally released in Spain by *Indescomp* under the name *La Pulga* - which translates as *The Flea*. Obviously, this was deemed as not quite enticing enough for the Great British Public, and it was duly renamed *Bugaboo The Flea*. A Spanish sequel, *Poogaboo*, was released in 1991 by *Opera Soft*, but this was never released in the UK. The sequel added extra levels and more detailed graphics. Oddly enough, when *Bugaboo* was converted to the *Amstrad*, it was renamed *Roland In The Caves* to tie in with a series of games already popular on that platform.**

The appealing loading process and introductory movie for **Bugaboo The Flea** told the story of a mission to a strange blue planet in the **Almat-1** sector of space. *Bugaboo* was sent to investigate the hitherto unknown planet, and see if he could determine the cause of the strange life-sign readings detected.
Upon landing on the planet, *Bugaboo* explored the surface for a while before accidentally falling down a hole leading into a large cave inhabited by a yellow flea-eating pterodactyl that had a strong desire to eat *Bugaboo*. Naturally, if *Bugaboo* did not want to end up as dinosaur food, he had to escape from the cave before the pterodactyl found him.

Controlling *Bugaboo* was very simple. One key jumped the flea to the left, and another jumped him to the right. The length of time that the key was held down dictated the power of the jump. There were also 'scroll keys' that allowed *Bugaboo* to look around a little to see the lay of the land ahead. The cave in which *Bugaboo* was trapped was fairly small but escaping proved to be a demanding, frustrating and highly addictive process.
Bugaboo The Flea was an exciting and original game, only let down by the fact that it was a little short. Once the player had escaped from the cave, there was little replayability.







CRASH 92%

2 @ 1 !

Chequered Flag

Sinclair Research Ltd.
Steve Kelly

The Chequered Flag... The Bull's Red Rag.

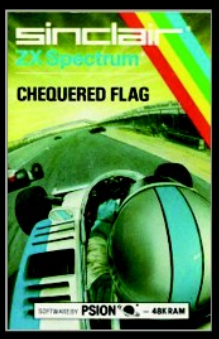
Chequered Flag was one of the first serious sport simulations for the *ZX Spectrum*. It provided a range of tracks to race on and although there were no other cars on the track it was smooth, responsive, and realistic.

Despite its limitations *Chequered Flag* still managed to feel more like a 'serious' simulation than later more arcade-style efforts such as *Pole Position*. Most of the tracks were based on real tracks (such as *Silverstone* and *Monza*), but a few were obviously nods to the *ZX Spectrum* mythos (such as *Micro Drive* or *Psion Park*).

Chequered Flag allowed the player to simulate racing a high powered F1 racing car. The player was provided with three cars and ten tracks to play on. The first car was fully automatic, and the second and third cars had a manual gearbox, with the first car being the easiest to drive and the other two being more difficult to drive effectively.
The nature of the races varied as well; several different race types were provided. The player could take a couple of quick laps to try and get a new record, or could instead plump for a longer race, where pitstops became an important part of the strategy. When the second and third (non-automatic) cars were used the game began to take on the feel of a professional simulation.
One of the nicer touches in this game was the on-screen steering wheel, which allowed the player to visually gauge how far he had turned the wheel. Other less helpful features included oil and water on the track (which both caused loss of traction — the former worse than the latter) and glass, which would puncture the tyres. Rocks in the track would damage the car also, causing a fuel leak that could only be repaired by stopping at the pits — assuming the car could make it that far.
If the car sustained too much damage from debris on the track, or driving too far off track, then it would crash and burn. Another effective method of destroying the car was to cause overheating (by constantly over-revving the engine or dropping down gears incorrectly).
Chequered Flag set the benchmark for racing simulation for years to come.



"...For those who feel ... uneasy about gear changing, an automatic has been included..."
- Your Spectrum, January 1984







CRASH 71%

2 @ 2 @

The ZX Spectrum Book 1983

Chuckie Egg

A'n'F Software Ltd.
Nigel Alderton
Who Gives A Flying Duck?

Chuckie Egg is probably one of the most famous *ZX Spectrum* platform games, up to (and possibly including) **Manic Miner**, and was released on at least six platforms. The original versions of **Chuckie Egg** appeared nearly simultaneously on the *BBC Model B*, and *ZX Spectrum* but it was quickly converted to other 8-bit platforms, including the *Dragon*, *Commodore 64* and *Acorn Electron*.

***Chuckie Egg* was developed under the working title of *Eggy Kong*, betraying one of its major influences. The success of *Chuckie Egg* made publisher *A'n'F* (originally *A&F*) financially secure for years to come. Fittingly, the *Nulli Secundus* byline of the publisher's logo is latin for *second to none*.**

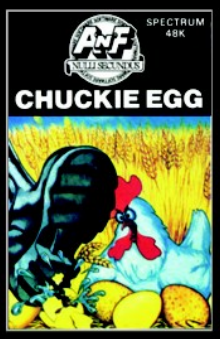
Chuckie Egg was the quintessential platform game, inspiring hordes of copies and imitations — none reaching the perfection of the original. The player, as *Hen House Harry* had to avoid the angry hens by navigating the ladders and jumping from platform to platform to collect all of the eggs. Also scattered around each level were several piles of bird seed. If *Harry* could get to the seed before the hens did, he scored extra bonus points. However, the seed was also useful if left alone — the birds would pause for a second to eat it, giving *Harry* a much needed chance to escape from a tight situation.
Just when the player had taken *Harry* through all of the levels and it didn't seem possible for the game to get any harder, the hitherto caged duck in the top left of the screen was freed and would fly around the screen homing in on *Harry*. Only the best players could continue much further past this point.
There aren't many people who got that far in the game, and for several months after the release of the game, letters to magazines declaring that the duck escaped the cage were sometimes treated with a pinch of salt, much like the fabled trailer in **Lunar Jetman**. One of the nicer features of **Chuckie Egg** — and one that is present in too few games these days — was the ability to play the game with style, as opposed to just mechanically completing the level. It was possible to take advantage of all types of neat moves within the mechanics of the game that made it more fun to play and watch.

CRASH 80%

48k



"Whether intentionally or not, the game makes it difficult to get on or off the ladders..."
- Sinclair User, January 1984







2 @ 3 #

Cookie

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

Don't Eat The Cake... No, Really...

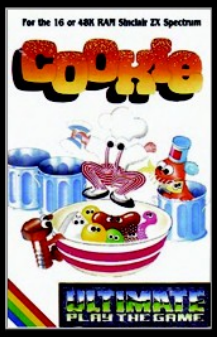


"The game concept is novel but it is easy to lose interest after ... a few levels..."
- Sinclair User, October 1983

Cookie, another 16k marvel from *Ultimate*, appeared to have been at least partially influenced by *Jim Henson*'s **Muppets** characters. At the very least, the *Charlie The Chef* character is strongly reminiscent of the *Swedish Chef* from **The Muppet Show**, and the *Bin Monster* is almost a direct copy of *Oscar The Grouch* from **Sesame Street**.

1983 was a good year for *Ultimate*, and a good year for the 16k *ZX Spectrum*. *Cookie* was only one of several titles that came out from the reclusive *Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.* that year. In common with their other games, *Cookie* was original, fun and very difficult.

Cookie was a fantastic arcade game consisting of five levels that required the player, as *Charlie The Chef*, to bake a cake. Each level of the game focussed on one ingredient, which had to be coerced into contributing to the cake by stunning them as they escaped the pantry, ideally knocking them into the bowl. The five ingredients were *Colonel Custard*, *Sneaky Sugar*, *Chunky Chocolate*, *Crafty Cheese* and *Mixed Peel*.
The aim of each of the five levels was to knock ten of a particular type of ingredient into the mixing bowl. This was a difficult enough task without the complicating factor of the nasties: *Terry Tack*, *Wally Washer*, *Bernie Bolt*, *Mike the Pike* and *Tin Tin Can*. The first three of these emerged from the forgotten depths of the pantry, but the last two were launched at *Charlie* by the *Bin Monster*.
Not only would the ingredients and the nasties kill *Charlie* on contact, but if *Charlie* accidentally knocked any of the nasties into the bowl, he would then have to knock five extra ingredients in to hide the taste.
If the player managed to guide *Charlie* successfully through the five levels, the reward was a short animation of a rising cake (complete with little eyes peering out from the used ingredients). There appears to have been more than one version of the game released, as some versions of the game played a tune at this point, while others remained silent.
Although **Cookie** was a superb little arcade game, the subject matter remains a little disturbing. Perhaps *Charlie* was actually a serial killer who baked cakes using the remains of his victims. Was his surname Manson? Enquiring minds want to know...







Corridors Of Genon

48k

New Generation Software Ltd
Malcolm Evans

Snot In 3D?



Corridors Of Genon was released by *New Generation Software* in 1983, and many people believed that it would be the spiritual sequel to **3D Monster Maze** — particularly after the disappointment of **Escape**. Unfortunately, it wasn't able to compete, primarily because the main monster, the dreaded *Bogul,* was more laughable than frightening.

***Corridors Of Genon* was the second of *New Generation Software*'s 3D *ZX Spectrum* games (after *Knot In 3D*) to use more than just attribute colours for the 3D effect (as compared to *3D Tunnel*), and the only one to use curved surfaces.**

Corridors Of Genon cast the player as a psychic warrior attempting to infiltrate a circular maze of corridors protecting an evil computer. Separating each of the thirty concentric corridors were a number of doors, each of which required a three figure code to open. Fortunately, due to the fact that the hero was psychic, his ESP enabled him to figure out the entry codes for the doors.

Of course, there was always a catch, and in this case the catch was the *Bogul*. The *Bogul* was a small roundish creature with a big nose that stomped around the maze searching for the player. It could be detected by the sound of its footsteps, and if it caught the player, it blasted a large ball of what appeared to be snot at the screen destroying some of the player's psychic ability. As the player's psychic abilities were depleted, it became harder to figure out the door codes leaving the player no choice but to attempt to crack them manually, which was possible but time consuming. When the player ran out of psychic powers the game was over.

Once the player reached the centre of the maze, he had to decipher the self-destruct sequence for the evil computer. This was performed using a system of clues that was similar to the old **Mastermind** board game. While the player was attempting to crack the self-destruct code, the *Bogul* was making a last ditch effort to thwart the player's escape by cloning itself into multiple *Bogul*s. The longer the player took to crack the code, the more clones there were to apprehend the player. To beat the game, the player needed to escape back out through the maze which was now potentially full of cloned *Bogul*s.

Corridors of Genon was an interesting title that just fell slightly short of the mark. As an updated version of **3D Monster Maze**, it did not live up to its venerable ancestor.

*"...[**Corridors Of Genon** is] more exciting than I thought it was going to be..."*

- Crash, February 1984







CRASH 72%

2 @ 5 %

3D Deathchase

Micromega Ltd
Mervyn J. Estcourt

At Least There's No $#!%*** Ewoks...

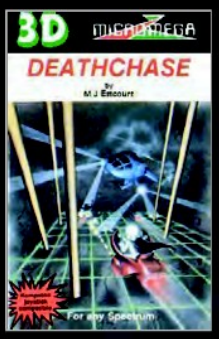


*"**Return of the Jedi** has nothing on this...."*
- Crash Magazine, February 1984

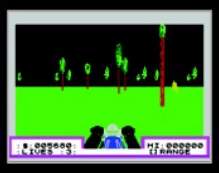
Deathchase was the second title from *Mervyn J. Estcourt*, and is greatly superior to his first effort, **Luna Crabs**. This game achieved a fair degree of fame for being an impressive demonstration of what could be achieved in 16k.

The magazine *Your Spectrum*, (that later became *Your Sinclair*), had a history of giving *3D Deathchase* poor review scores, not only on its first release, but also on its first and second re-releases! They redeemed themselves by voting the game as number one in their Top 100 all-time games list that appeared in the Big Final Issue.

In **3D Deathchase** the player rode through forests of ever-increasing density pursuing two riders on yellow and blue bikes. Both bikes had to be destroyed in order to progress to the next level by shooting them as they weaved between the trees. Taking inspiration from games such as **Space Invaders**, the occasional tank or helicopter would appear on the horizon and, apart from serving as bonus points opportunities, they did not interact with the player in any way.
In fact, the only objects in the game that threatened the player directly were the trees; the only way the player could die was to collide with one of them. Successfully avoiding them was made much harder every other level by the introduction of a night mode (which was the same as the standard level, except with a black background). It shouldn't have been any harder but psychologically it really seemed a lot more oppressive and claustrophobic to play.
Static screenshots really did not do this game any justice — it had to be played to be appreciated. Despite the simplistic graphics and repetitive gameplay, **3D Deathchase** is still remembered fondly by players today. Its inspired combination of racing and shooting offered an adrenalin rush on a par with the most sophisticated of today's 3D shooters.
Of the three games that *Mervyn J. Estcourt* produced during his career (the others being **Luna Crabs** and the popular motorcycle racing simulation **Full Throttle**), this is the one that is considered one of the true classics of *ZX Spectrum* gaming.







CRASH 92% SINCLAIR 60%

The Pyramid

Fantasy Software Ltd.
Bob Hamilton, Darren Hamilton, Ian Hamilton
Life, The Universe, And Everything.

The Pyramid was the first title from fledgling publisher *Fantasy Software*, having changed their name from *Quest Micro Software* on the 19th September 1983.

According to a feature in the April 1985 issue of *Sinclair Programs*, an enhanced version called *Super Pyramid* was due to be released. However due to an unfortunate encounter with bankruptcy by *Fantasy Software*, it never reached the market.
***The Pyramid* did, however, spawn two direct sequels: *Doomsday Castle* and *The Backpacker's Guide To The Galaxy, Part 1* — the first (and unfortunately, only) part of a trilogy. The universe of *Ziggy* was also the setting for all of the subsequent games from *Fantasy Software*.**

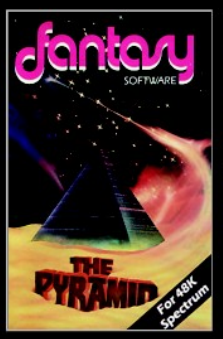
The aim of the game in **Pyramid** was to help *Ziggy* navigate through the 120 chambers of the eponymous pyramid. The pyramid contained fifteen levels, and *Ziggy* entered through the top chamber. To travel to the next chamber *Ziggy* had to shoot the indigenous aliens, the *Urks*, until an on-screen counter decreased to zero. When this happened, an energy crystal would fall from the top of the room. When it initially fell it was white but it soon decayed through yellow and then cyan. When it was white, it was indestructible, but when it was yellow or cyan, collision with an alien or some stray fire from *Ziggy*'s gun would destroy it. *Ziggy* could only collect the crystal when it was cyan, and when it was collected he had to drop it over one of the force fields preventing his exit to the next chamber. The force fields were colour-coded with the number of crystals needed to open them; magenta required one, green required two and cyan required three crystals.
The aim of the game was to solve the riddle of the ultimate answer. Each pyramid room that *Ziggy* completed revealed a code number. The intention was that these numbers would be used to enter a *Fantasy Software* competition by solving the associated puzzle.
Given the time of its release it's not hard to see why **The Pyramid** would be considered an impressive piece of software; it employed smooth graphics, had a wide variety of aliens, and boasted 120 (virtually identical) rooms. However it has not aged well and the gameplay tended more towards frustrating than fun.

CRASH 83%

48k



"The scope of the game will ensure that you will be playing it for months, if not years..."
- Sinclair User, December 1983







2 @ 7 '

Doomsday Castle

Fantasy Software Ltd.
Bob Hamilton

Life, The Universe, And Everything, Part Deux.



As a sequel to **The Pyramid** this game expanded on the basic room-based exploratory gameplay. **Doomsday Castle** cemented *Fantasy Software*'s reputation as a publisher of quality goods.

Like the *Pyramid*, the back-story for *Doomsday Castle* was heavily influenced by *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy*. This similarity would become so apparent by the time the third game, *The Backpackers Guide To The Universe*, was released, that *Fantasy Software* ran into legal difficulties with *Douglas Adams*

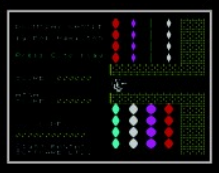
Doomsday Castle was a fun, but convoluted, game in which the player's task was to help *Ziggy* reunite the six stones of the Elves that had been stolen by the infinitely evil *Scarthax*, and use their power to defeat him. *Scarthax* had built the **Doomsday Castle** as a way to harness the power of the stones and populated it with several species of weird and wonderful creature to defend against intruders such as *Ziggy*. The castle consisted of 25 halls with 48 interconnecting passageways. Each hall was populated by *Urks* (the cannon fodder), the *Googly Bird* (the evil purple bird in the middle of the screen) and *Garthrogs* (the indestructible creatures in the lifts). In the centre of each hall was an antechamber that contained either a stone or an energy crystal.
To get into the chamber *Ziggy* had to destroy *Urks* in order to charge his laser to blast away the red doors protecting both the antechamber and the exit to the next hall. While doing this he also had to make sure that no *Urks* landed on the *Googly Bird*'s head and woke it. If the bird was awoken then all hell would break loose.
Once *Ziggy* escaped the hall, he then had to survive the onslaught of aliens in the interconnecting corridors until the entrance to the next hall opened. These passageways were populated by *Nucleoids* (small, but fun to shoot), *Orphacs* (simple robotic guardians), and more of the ubiquitous *Urks*.
The game itself was fairly complex but the prospect of seeing the next bizarre species of *Urk* was a compelling reason to keep playing.

"...another challenge to Ultimate's great game name..."

- Crash Magazine, March 1984









Groucho

Automata Ltd.
Mel Croucher, Christian Penfold
My Name Is Uncle Groucho... You Win A Fat Cigar...

Groucho or, to give it its full title, **My Name Is Uncle Groucho... You Win A Fat Cigar** was the spiritual follow-up to **Pimania** and also featured a competition to guess the identity of a Hollywood star as a sales gimmick. Remarkably at the time that **Groucho** was released **Pimania** still hadn't been solved.

The competition was set to run until June of 1984, and would be decided on a tie-breaker... to find a dafter slogan than *Automata*'s "We put the 'ting' in computing." The prize was won by a *Phil Daley* of Stoke-On-Trent, who correctly identified the mystery star as *Mickey Mouse*, and came up with the slogan "There's no blood in our games, it's all tomata sauce".
Given the value of the prize, (a Concorde flight to New York, a trip to Hollywood, a stay at the *Waldorf Astoria*, £500 spending money and a QE2 cruise home), it is difficult to imagine that enough copies of the game were sold to cover costs.

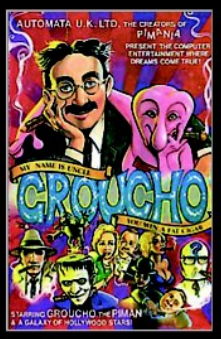
The game itself was a simple text adventure. The object was to solve the clues within the game to find the name of the mystery Hollywood 'star'. Although it was not officially a sequel to **Pimania**, the atmosphere and feel of the game was remarkably similar. Set in a bizarre version of America where the currency was "fat cigars" rather than dollars, this game started with the same A Key Turns The Lock puzzle as **Pimania** itself, clearly revealing its heritage. Starting with only 200 cigars, the player had to work, gamble and bribe his way around the States in order to find the identity of the mystery star.
A keen sense of humour, guest appearances by the *Piman* and other stars, as well as a generally chaotic experience helped to make this otherwise technically inferior game fun — at least until the novelty had worn off.
Although this game was not a technical stand-out, *Automata* had to be applauded for constantly releasing fresh and original content and refusing to give in to the tide of licensed conversions that plagued the later years of the *ZX Spectrum*. Unfortunately it was this originality and unwillingness to change with the times that was to be their downfall. *Automata* split in 1985 after the poor reception to the excellent but experimental **Deus Ex Machina**.

48k



"...My dad enjoyed the cigar that was stuck to the review cassette..."

- Crash, February 1984







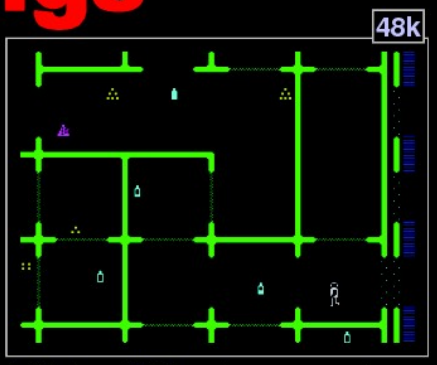
CRASH 67%

2 @ 9

Halls Of The Things

Crystal Computing Ltd.
Neil Mottershead, Simon Brattel, Martin S. Horsley

Idiot Adventurer Fights Against Overwhelming Odds... Loses, Of Course...

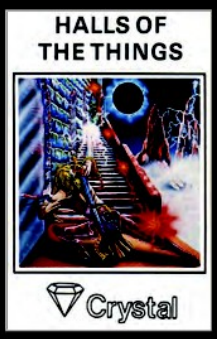


Crystal Computing became renowned for fast but sparse games. Playability rather than graphics were the focus of their games, which were often poor sellers because of the subsequent lack of eye candy. However they usually received excellent reviews and for those players brave enough to look beyond the initial appearance their games proved to be very playable. This one apparently did well enough for a sequel, **Return of the Things**, to be released carrying on the story from the moment the first game ended.

***Halls Of The Things* was one of those strange games that invoked strong reactions. People either loved it or hated it. It was extremely difficult, and played very much like a thinking man's *Gauntlet*. Specifically, it had to be played slowly and carefully. Rushing into battle was a surefire way to get the hero killed very quickly.**

Halls Of The Things was set in a tower of eight levels (seven floors and one dungeon) with the player starting in the lowest level. The player's quest was to seek out seven magical rings in the upper levels. Once all seven rings were collected, the dungeon had to be searched for the key to exit the tower. Meanwhile, hordes of fireball and lightning throwing nasties — the eponymous *Things* — tried to reduce the hero to a steaming pile of meat. Each of the levels of the tower were filled with these evil *Things* whose sole aim in life was to destroy the intruder - by bombarding him with lightning and fireballs.
Luckily, the player was also armed with fireball, arrows and lightning, and even had a uniquely powerful weapon, the **Vorpal Sword**, to defend against the *Things*.
Halls Of The Things was a phenomenally difficult, fast paced arcade adventure. A good play strategy was to creep slowly from room to room clearing them out methodically then retreating to the safety of the tower stairwell if the situation got heated. For those players that could get over the sparse graphics, this game presented a lasting challenge that kept them engrossed in the quest for the magic rings for a long time.

"...It looks as if [it's] running on ... computers more expensive than the Spectrum..."
- Sinclair User, August 1983







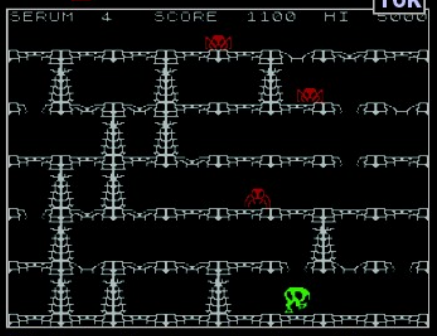
SINCLAIR 90%

Horace And The Spiders

16k

Sinclair Research Ltd
William Tang

Faceless Blue Monstrosity Confronts Multiple Eight-Legged Monstrosities...



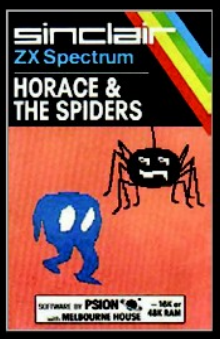
In *Horace*'s third and final *ZX Spectrum* outing, *Horace* was tasked with clearing out a nest of giant spiders. Armed with only a limited supply of anti-spider bite serum, *Horace* had to first venture into the cave entrance, then navigate a large spider-guarded chasm, and finally to the lair of the spiders, where he had to stamp out (literally) the nest of spiders.

Continuing the pattern made evident in its prequels *Hungry Horace* and *Horace Goes Skiing*, *Horace And The Spiders* was strongly influenced by a game called *Space Panic*. However much like *Horace Goes Skiing* before it, the early levels appeared tacked on as an afterthought.

Horace And The Spiders was split into three levels. In the first of these levels, *Horace* approached the entrance to the spiders' lair along an auto-scrolling path. *Horace* had to jump up on ledges and over spiders as they barrelled towards him. Once *Horace* had jumped over several of these obstacles, he reached the second level: a chasm with spiders lurking overhead. The spiders dangled web threads down over the chasm that *Horace* was able to use to swing across.
In this level, *Horace* had to leap from thread to thread in order to make his way across the chasm. When one of the spiders realized that *Horace* was hanging on its thread it swiftly reeled it in, trying to deliver a fatal bite to *Horace*. *Horace* had to swiftly leap to the next thread before the spider pulled up the thread he was on. Once he reached the other side of the chasm he was safe and the next level would begin.
The third level placed *Horace* in the spiders' lair, a platform and ladders affair, where he had first had to stamp up and down on the web platforms in order to make a hole. When a spider came to repair a hole, *Horace* had a few seconds to jump up and down on the working spider to send it plummeting to a squishy death below. Killing all of the spiders sent the player back to the starting level with a set of harder and faster spiders to defeat.
In spite of its derivative nature, **Horace And The Spiders** was probably the most popular **Panic**-style game on the *ZX Spectrum*

"The Horace idea is novel and fun, which sums up this game..."

- ZX Computing, October 1983







3 # 1 !

Jetpac

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

Interstellar Rocket Ship Salesman Runs Into Spot Of Bother...



"...The scenario is not the most original around..."

- ZX Computing, August 1983

The hero of **Jetpac**, *Jetman* had a job working for the *Acme Interstellar Transport Company* as a rocket ship assembler. Various rocket ship kits were left on planets for assembly, refuelling and finally, delivery. It was *Jetman*'s job to build the rockets, collect the bonus objects and refuel his way out of there.

***Jetpac* was the first *Ultimate Play The Game* title unleashed onto the *ZX Spectrum* owning public, and immediately established *Ultimate Play The Game* as a software house to watch. *Jetpac* boasted arcade quality smooth graphics, and to an extent it was true; they certainly were the smoothest graphics seen so far on the *ZX Spectrum*. According to sales figures at the time over 300,000 copies were sold to a market of one million machines; that's over 30% market penetration, an astonishing achievement for a non-bundled game.**

Jetpac was a single-screen based arcade game that set the player as the **Jetman**, a space-suited character with a rocket pack strapped to his back. On each level, there were three rocket parts distributed around a small number of platforms. First, these rocket parts had to be collected in order, and then dropped onto the assembly site. Once the rocket was assembled the player had to collect six fuel cells that were sporadically dropped in from above. Meanwhile various types of alien nasty were trying to knock *Jetman* out of the sky presumably to stop him stealing their bonus-point scoring treasure, which also fell from the top of the screen.

Once the rocket was built and fuelled, *Jetman* boarded the rocket and flew off to the next planet. After four of the refuelling stages, each with a new type of alien, the player got the chance to assemble another more advanced ship — culminating with an opportunity to build the fabled space shuttle.

Jetpac was a legendary title in its day that opened eyes to both the potential of the *ZX Spectrum* as a serious games machine and the fledgling publisher *Ultimate* as an extremely promising newcomer.







Jumping Jack

Imagine Software Ltd
Albert Ball, Stuart C Ball

Allegedly Not Related To The Marquis Of Waterford...



"Jumping Jack is quick and bold - with skill his story will unfold..."

- In-game rhyme

Jumping Jack was an early *Imagine* title released for the 16k *ZX Spectrum*. Despite having simplistic (almost minimalist) graphics, the game was a surprisingly original take on the platform game genre. Not only that, it was also an extremely frustrating game - often to the point of near insanity.

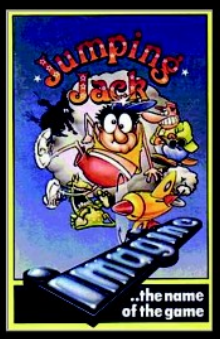
***Jumping Jack* has led to the confirmed destruction of at least one *ZX Spectrum*. Back when this game first came out, it was duly purchased by the parent creatures of yours truly, who then proceeded to get so frustrated with falling repeatedly (and unfairly!) to the bottom of the screen, that the computer found itself with a well-placed knee embedded in it. After that, it stopped working.**

The aim of the game in **Jumping Jack** was to get *Jack* from the bottom of the screen to the top, without running into any of the enemies or falling foul of the moving holes in the floor on the way up. In between *Jack* and his goal were eight horizontal platforms. At the start of the level, a hole moved along the platform skipping to the next platform when it reached the end of the current one. They did this in both directions, causing the situation to become very frantic when there were a lot of holes. Fortunately holes only moved in two basic modes: top-left to bottom-right, and bottom-right to top-left. This is just as well, because if the holes had moved in any other combination of direction as well, the game would have gone from merely incredible difficult to virtually impossible.

In order to ascend, *Jack* had to wait until a hole was directly above him before jumping up to the next platform. If he missed, he fell flat on his back for a few seconds, stunned and seeing stars — which meant that if another hole came sliding along the platform before he could move, he would fall down that hole too without any way to avoid it.

When *Jack* reached a platform that he hadn't previously reached in that level, a new hole would appear in a random location.

Although this game fun and addictive the biggest source of frustration occurred when a whole series of falls occurred without any way to prevent it, causing the player to lose a lot of ground — and quite possibly a life. This game was so frustrating to play that it is very likely that many *ZX Spectrums* ended their life by being bounced off walls by exasperated players after one too many arbitrary life-losing plummets to the bottom of the screen!







Jungle Trouble

Durell Software Ltd
Mike A. Richardson

It 'Aint 'Alf 'Ot, Mum...



"A busy game with plenty of opportunities for failure and so pretty addictive..."
- Crash, March 1984

Jungle Trouble pitched the player as a jungle explorer with a three-level host of dangers between him and safety. The basic idea of this single screen game was to get the explorer through each level of the obstacles to the safe zone and home.

In the release publicity for *Jungle Trouble* the animation of the main character was singled out as being particularly special. Apparently the author had employed a primitive form of rotoscoping to craft the animation. To do this, he watched his wife run, jump and fall and then used the results to animate the main character.

In **Jungle Trouble** the game began with the player stuck on the lowest level at the bottom of the screen. From there he had to collect an axe and navigate a set of stepping stones over a crocodile-infested river. If he fell in while crossing the river (and avoided getting eaten by the hungry crocodile) the axe would be lost and the player had to go back to the start to retrieve another one.

Once the player had managed to cross the river and still be in possession of the axe he was able to progress to the second level. The main obstacle on this level was a small copse of trees blocking the way that needed to be chopped down to get past them. To complicate matters a monkey would occasionally appear, attack the player and/or steal his axe. If the axe was stolen, the player had to run back and fetch a new one. Not only that, but the axe blunted fairly quickly — also requiring the fetching of a new axe. Once a tree was finally chopped down, the player only had a fraction of a second to get out of the way before the tree fell on him.

Getting past the trees was the most time consuming part of the game, but once past, the player was able to progress to the next — and most frustrating — part. The third level consisted of the double hazards of a fire pit and the gaping chasm. To traverse the pit, the player had to leap across it via a fast-swinging rope. The problem was that the rope moved so fast that it was very hard to time correctly resulting in many frustrating deaths for the player. Once across the pit, a widening chasm had to be jumped across (with pixel-perfect accuracy) for the player to make it to safety.

For what appeared on the surface to be a simple and easy game, this had to be one of the most frustrating yet addictive games for the 16k *ZX Spectrum*.



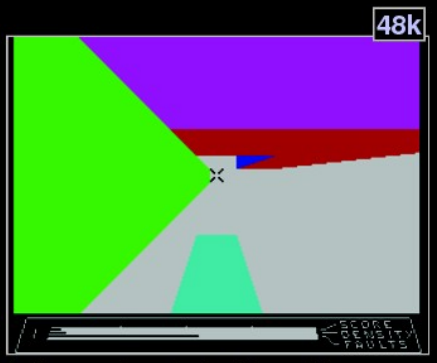




Knot In 3D

New Generation Software Ltd..
Malcom E. Evans

See If You Can Get Your Head Around This...



"...the game has a basic plot ... not deep enough when you strip away the 3D effects..."
- Sinclair User, September 1983

Knot In 3D was considered by many to be the best of the true 3D games produced by *New Generation Software* for the *ZX Spectrum*. It was also to be the last true 3D game that they released before the technically inferior (but more substantive) **Corridors of Genon**. Subsequently the **Trashman** series would catapult *New Generation Software* to a new level of fame, becoming their popular *ZX Spectrum* creation.

***Knot In 3D* was an impressive game that took the common-or-garden *Light Cycles* game concept — made famous by the *Tron* movie and subsequent arcade games and extended it into 3D. The author used simple blocks of colour and fixed angle perspective changes to minimize the amount of computing power required to draw the 3D viewpoint — an effective optimization that worked extremely well despite the limitations.**

Knot In 3D was one of those games where the ambition of the game design seemed to be slightly more than the *ZX Spectrum* could handle. However considering the author attempted to create a fully 3D **Tron** game with up to four autonomous chasers he deserved credit for the attempt. What was even more surprising is that he apparently succeeded in his task.

Much like the familar **Tron** game, the player's avatar had to manoeuvre through space avoiding the trails of both his own and other vehicles. The difference between this and standard 2D **Tron**-type games is the extension into 3D. This game was set in a wraparound 3D arena with the players leaving a solid trail in space as they travelled. At any point in his journey, the player could change direction through right angles (meaning that he could effectively go in five directions: continue forward, rotate left, rotate right, rotate up and rotate down).

Up to four other computer controlled entities were also moving in the same space, leaving similar trails. The longer the game went on, the more densely packed the space became until it was nearly impossible for the player to find enough space to move around in.

As a technical achievement it is astounding and it is certainly a fascinating and challenging game but unfortunately the 3D trails in the game were apparently not completely accurately tracked. This was probably purely due to technical issues with managing attribute clashes and tracking the trails in the computer memory rather than any game design oversight.



3 # 5 %

Luna Crabs

Micromega Ltd
Mervyn J. Estcourt

In Space, No-One Can See You Scratch...



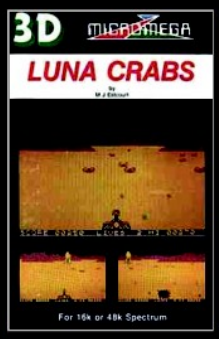
"...If you keep swinging about, sea sickness soon sets in..."

- Crash, February 1984

Luna Crabs, published by *Micromega*, received only lukewarm reviews in the winter of 1983. The game was essentially a 3D adaptation of arcade titles such as **Galaga** or **Galaxian** — a fact that escaped the notice of the reviewers and may well have caused them to look upon the game a bit more favourably.

As far as *ZX Spectrum* game authors go, *Mervyn J. Estcourt* was not the most prolific, but he the games he did create were certainly among the most well-remembered. *Full Throttle* — published in 1984 — was the third. *Luna Crabs* was written by the same author as the venerable *3D Deathchase* and was also released in the same year.

In **Luna Crabs** the player touched down on one of the moons of Saturn to take some mineral samples when suddenly the player was hit by the double whammy of (a) breaking his cannon platform, so that it could only spin on the spot, and (b) being attacked by hordes of indigenous acid-spitting space crabs.
To survive the onslaught the player had to fight off wave after wave of attacking crabs, constantly spinning on the spot and destroying them as they dodged and weaved in and out of the foreground and background. Even though it was technically 3D this game owed more to **Space Invaders** and **Galaxians** than it did to any other game. Much in the same mode as these games there was no real variation in the game play. The player's only role was to shoot the bad guys as they endlessly attacked.
Of course there are a couple of really obvious 'flaws' with the logic of this game setting (assuming that the concept of acid-spitting space crabs is accepted without question).
The first flaw was the question as to why the player would remain with a broken cannon platform when the lander (and escape) is apparently only a few yards away? The second flaw was the question as to why the crabs only attacked from the front. As the player swung around the crabs that were off-screen stopped shooting. That is, the platform was never shot at from behind. Ultimately it was a fun game but only for short periods of time. Of the published *Mervyn J. Estcourt* games, **Luna Crabs** was by far the weakest of the three.







CRASH 62%

Lunar Jetman

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

Yet Another Plot To Destroy Earth...



Lunar Jetman was the first 48k game from *Ultimate* and was received with great fanfare by the game playing public, as it ably demonstrated what the great and powerful *Ultimate* were able to do in 48k. This wasn't just idle rhetoric. The 16k games released by *Ultimate* were of a higher standard than many of the 48k games published around the same time. This game was also notable in that the aliens spoke if a *Currah Microspeech* device was present.

***Lunar Jetman* gave rise to one enduring myth about the game. On the cassette inlay, a trailer for the moon rover was shown. Several letters to magazines were written about this, asking whether it existed, or even claiming that it did. One such letter, published in issue 25 of *Crash Magazine*, contained a photograph of the trailer. The photo was a fake, but the graphics were of a sufficiently high enough quality to be convincing. Although the letter was signed *Peter Featherstone* (and others), the *Stampers* dropped a hint in a (much) later interview that they may have generated the image as a publicity stunt.**

After crashing a shoddily-built rocket, *Jetman* found himself stranded on an unknown planet finding not only the ubiquitous unfriendly aliens, but also a large silo with a rack of missiles aimed at Earth. The aim of the game was for *Jetman* to destroy the missile silo before time ran out by dropping one of the handy bombs directly onto it. There was only a limited amount of time before the missiles launched, with one heading towards Earth, and another heading for *Jetman*'s lunar rover. Destroying an airborne missile took multiple laser hits — a difficult task — so the best approach was to destroy the base before launch.
The rover was useful for protection and to transport equipment, such as bombs, teleport pods or a rover-mounted modular cannon. The rover itself could not cross craters, although an infinite supply of crater bridges was stored in the rover. This was fortunate because the surface of the moon was constantly bombarded with crater causing meteors that made transit with the rover a fairly tedious process.
Lunar Jetman was an exceedingly difficult game that, although technically excellent, did not live up to the addictive simplicity of its prequel.

"...practice makes imperfect but it's the only way..."

- Crash Magazine, February 1984



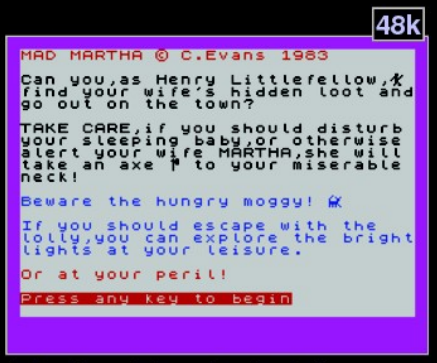




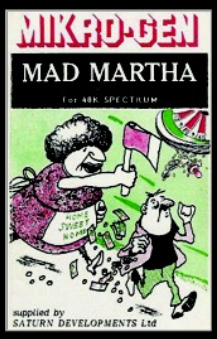
CRASH 95%

Mad Martha

Mikro-Gen Ltd.
Chris (Christmas) Evans
'Er Indoors...



"...Good vocabulary and an invariable program that resembles a word maze..."
- Crash Magazine, May 1984







The off-the-wall adventure game **Mad Martha** should be considered a game of classic British politically incorrect humour, much in the same vein as the **Carry On** movies, albeit with a slightly darker edge. To contrast, if a game involving the topic of 'humourous' domestic violence were released today, it would probably cause a minor scandal.

***Mad Martha* was one of the earlier text adventure games, and also one of the first that included some arcade aspects in the gameplay. Purist adventure freaks thought that this distracted from the essential nature of the game, but casual players preferred the splash of variety that it provided. Consequently, *Mad Martha* could be thought of as one of the first true arcade-adventures.**
An equally, if not more, politically incorrect sequel set in Spain and titled *Mad Martha II, Henry Sails The Spanish Main*, was released at the end of 1983. Unfortunately it was virtually the same game as the prequel, and it did not age well.

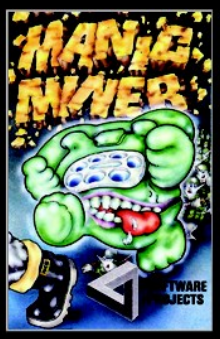
The game of **Mad Martha** started out with the hero *Henry*, the hen-pecked husband, finally deciding that he had had enough of his humdrum life and oppressive home situation, and wanting to go out for an exciting night on the town. Unfortunately, *Martha*, the domineering wife (whose favourite fashion accessory was a sharp axe) had other ideas about the night-life of her husband. Namely he was not to have one. So, in order to escape from his home-based hell, *Henry* had to sneak out in the middle of the night — without waking the baby, disturbing the cat, or otherwise giving his wife cause to dismember him with her axe.
The first part of the adventure (in a scenario familiar to hen-pecked husbands everywhere) involved stealing his hard-earned wages from the wife's purse and subsquently getting out of the house in one piece. Once he had managed that *Henry* had to make his way to the casino for a night of gambling goodness. Meanwhile the murderous *Martha* had discovered the absence of her husband and was hot on his trail. *Henry* had to avoid her for the rest of the night. If she caught him, the game (and his life) would be over.
Mad Martha was a very simple adventure game, with a very limited vocabulary and poor graphics. Additionally the arcade elements of the game were very rudimentary. However what saved this game from mediocrity was the wicked sense of humour and funny situations. Overall it was a solid, fun adventure — tense in some parts and amusing in others.

Manic Miner

Software Projects Ltd.
Matthew Smith
Miner Has Acid Trip, Makes Good...



"...One of the few games on the market which deserves to succeed automatically..."
- Sinclair User, December 1983







Manic Miner was for the time a stunning **Miner 2049'er**-inspired game written by a young *Matthew Smith*. It was originally published in 1983 by *Bug-Byte* software but this relationship came to an acrimonious end when *Matthew Smith* took **Manic Miner** over to start-up *Software Projects*, allegedly over a matter of unpaid royalties. In 1984, *Software Projects* published the highly anticipated sequel, **Jet Set Willy** — a situation that also resulted in accusations of stolen royalties. However, apart from all the legal issues, **Manic Miner** was one of the first games that showed the potential of what would become possible on the *ZX Spectrum* over the next few years and its success made *Matthew Smith* a poster child for the general media's "Whiz-Kid Programmer" image.

The cheat code for the *Bug-Byte* release, `6031769` was apparently a corruption of *Matthew Smith*'s driver's license number (rather than his phone number as was commonly believed). In the *Software Projects* version, this code had been changed to `typewriter`, mirroring *Jet Set Willy's* code of `write typer`.
***Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* were converted to a number of modern platforms (both officially and unofficially). The most successful of these were *Andrew Noble*'s *PC* versions, pixel perfect apart from an enhanced colour scheme. Most other conversions failed on various levels, though it was usually because they messed with the graphics and game play — as demonstrated by the awful *Commodore Amiga* version.**

In **Manic Miner** the player's character was a miner named *Willy* who for some strange reason found himself alone in a mine filled with incredible riches and bizarre monsters. Killer toilets, evil penguins and, of course, the famous mutant telephones threatened *Willy* as he attempted to escape the mine with his ill-gotten gains.
The game itself consisted of twenty single-screen levels of increasing difficulty in which *Miner Willy* had to run and jump through the level, retrieving all the keys/treasure so that the exit to the next level could be opened before the air supply ran out. Monsters would be on guard, following fixed linear patrol routes. Touching any of the monsters or poisonous plants that grew in the mine meant instant death for *Willy*. Likewise, falling too far lost *Willy* one of his three lives.
Manic Miner was the definitive *ZX Spectrum* platform game — not equalled for many years.

Maziacs

DK'Tronics Ltd.
Don Priestley

Three Words: Mazogs Was Better...

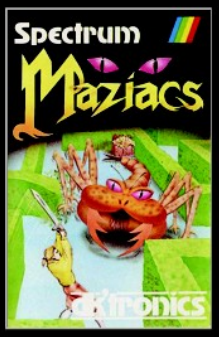


*"DK'Tronics ... have done ... one large step forward from '**Pacman**'..."*
- ZX Computing, December 1983

Maziacs was an updated *ZX Spectrum* version of an earlier *ZX81* classic, **Mazogs**, also by the same author. Among the many enhancements over the *ZX81* version was the implementation of *Currah Microspeech* support.

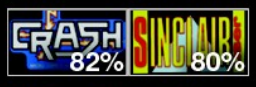
Like *Jungle Trouble*, *Maziacs* apparently benefited from the use of a sword wielding model in the creation of the 'life-like' fight graphics. In practice though, it was difficult to tell that when the hero was fighting a *Maziac* — the fight ended up looking like a semi-random blur of pixels.

Maziacs was a more or less straight conversion of **Mazogs** (shown in the bottom screenshot) updated to take advantage of the *ZX Spectrum*'s improved screen resolution and new sound capabilities. The task of the hero was to find the treasure hidden in a large maze and then retrace his steps back through the maze to his starting position.
Complicating matters were the guardians of the maze's treasure, the eponymous *Maziac*s, which were large spider/frog/scorpion things that randomly patrolled the passageways of the maze. Usually, due to the tightness of the corridors, there was no way past these other than to fight them. If the player character was unarmed then the battle would be a 50/50 shot. If the player had a sword then the *Maziac* would be killed. If the player was dumb enough to be sitting down when the *Maziac* attacked then he would be killed every time, sword or no sword. Swords were good for one use only and could be found scattered throughout the maze. This limitation proved to be really annoying when there was more than one *Maziac* in a row. Often the second and subsequent *Maziac*s would attack the player before he had a chance to react, leading more often than not to unavoidable death.
Also placed throughout the maze were food bowls (to restore lost energy) and helpful prisoners (to show the way to the current destination). The prisoner's routes were highlighted in yellow — but only for a short time. After that the player had to find the route for himself, or ask another prisoner. The player could only hold one item at a time, and could not carry sword and treasure simultaneously, which made the journey back even more perilous.









Mined Out

48k



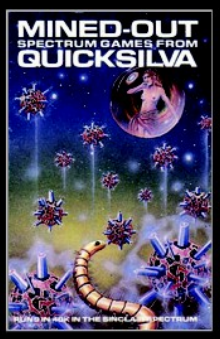
Quicksilva Ltd.
Ian Andrew
Why Are There Boobies In A Bubble On The Inlay Card?

Mined Out was the first published game by *Ian Andrew*. It was written entirely in BASIC and, as such, was one of those very rare examples of a good commercial game that was not written using assembly language. According to an early interview, when deciding what kind of game to write, author *Ian Andrew* had set out with the admirable but vague ideal of writing a "game that was different to existing games". *Quicksilva* obviously liked the results of his experiments, and published the game in 1983.

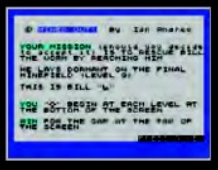
Despite being written in BASIC, *Mined Out* supported the *Currah Microspeech*. The game itself was developed level by level by the author in a piecemeal fashion. Each level was independently added, with his mother as an impromptu play-tester. Each time she had mastered a level, he would create another. Using this method, the game ended up with eight additional levels before his mother was finally stumped.

The aim of the game in **Mined Out** was to rescue *Bill the Worm*, who lay comatose on the ninth level. Each level introduced new dangers, such as mobile mines and a steadily increasing mine density. To get through a level, the player had to steer through the mine field, getting his character from the gap in the fence at the bottom of the screen up to the gap at the top.
As the player crossed the minefield there was a visual and audible warning giving the total count of any mines that were adjacent to the player in the four non-diagonal directions. The player had to use this incomplete information to plot a safe course through the mine field as quickly as possible. On the way the player had the option of trying to get bonus points by rescuing the trapped damsels in distress. In the early stages this was a fairly easy source of points, but when the mobile mines were deployed the pressure really kicked in.
Mined Out was the kind of game that made players break out in a cold sweat: it was a tense and thrilling experience — with the constant risk of being blown sky high adding to the thrill level considerably. If the player could look beyond the rudimentary presentation, **Mined Out** was an excellent and addictive little game.

"Forget the inlay ... probably written... by a stoned ... copy writer ... play the game!..."
- Crash Magazine, February 1983







4 $ 1 !

Molar Maul

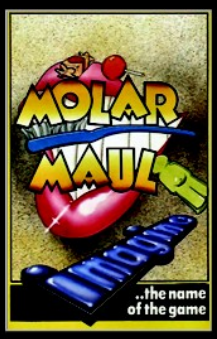
Imagine Software Ltd
John Gibson, Steve Blower

Look Ma, No Cavities...



"An excellent game with wonderful graphics, but so depressing to watch!"

- Crash, April 1984







Imagine Software Ltd
John Gibson, Steve Blower

As yet another odd game from the *Imagine* stable, **Molar Maul** cast the player as a tooth-brush guarding a mouth against invading bacteria. It was such a strange concept that it was almost guaranteed to polarize opinion one way or the other — **Molar Maul** was either a 'love it' or 'hate it' game.

***Molar Maul* was written in response to a job interview question. Prospective employee, *John Gibson*, was asked if he could write a game in a single month. The choice of theme for *Molar Maul* was allegedly inspired by dental treatment that *Imagine*'s founders were receiving at the time**

Molar Maul was a game of slightly distasteful prospects in which the job of the player was to keep a mouthful of teeth clean and safe from the marauding bacteria that were hell-bent on reducing it to a graveyard of rotten teeth.

Each level required the player to brush teeth clean using an ever diminishing supply of *Imagico* toothpaste. Meanwhile, bacteria would attack healthy teeth causing them to decay further. There were five levels of health per tooth, with *white*, being completely healthy, through *yellow*, *cyan*, *blue* and finally *black* — dead. Once a tooth was dead it could not be restored to health. Four dead teeth meant that the player would lose a toothbrush, and the player only had three brushes to start with.

Occasionally a sweet such as a *Jelly Baby*, *Liquorice* or *Lollipop* would appear on the tongue. When this happened the bacteria would rush towards it, devour it, and for a short time become more frantic than usual. Thankfully the level ended when the available supply of toothpaste was used up, so a good tactic for play (especially on the later levels when the bacteria became truly insane) was to repeatedly brush the nearest tooth as quickly as possible depleting the toothpaste supply and ending the level.

The speed of the bacteria increased linearly with the level, so a skilled player could reach a point where no further progress was possible (as the bacteria moved so fast they would rot out all of the teeth before the player could even brush a single one of them).

Penetrator

Melbourne House
Philip Mitchell

Surprisingly, Not Out Of A Naughty Catalogue...

48k



"Even during loading, the graphics are stunning..."

- ZX Computing, October 1983

Penetrator was one of the earliest **Scramble** clones on the *ZX Spectrum*. Rather than a straight clone, **Penetrator** was instead an enhanced version of the arcade game with increased variety and improved graphics.

***Penetrator* was unique for the time in that it had a fully integrated level designer built into the game. Although this feature was emulated in later games, this was one of the (if not *the*) first example on the market.**
Unfortunately the early releases of this game apparently contained a bug that corrupted the last level, rendering it impossible to complete. Of course, as the error was in the last level, not many people ever encountered it (including the programmer).

Penetrator put the player in a spacecraft with the mission to invade five levels of an alien tunnel complex. Much like the original arcade game **Scramble** it was based on, the ship was armed with lasers and air-to-ground missiles. In the tunnels themselves, the aliens had installed batteries of ground-to-air missiles, radar dishes and space ships hell-bent on defending the complex.
The player had to fly, shoot and bomb his way through the auto-scrolling tunnels — being sure not to collide with any of the walls, bullets or enemy ships — until he had reached the end of the level. As some of the tunnels were pretty tight, and the alien onslaught became quite intense, this was no easy feat even for the most skilled players.
One odd thing about **Penetrator** is that the opening screen of the game treated the player to a fireworks display. This was rather bizarre, as one would expect that kind of thing to be a reward for completing the game. Apparently the author was extremely proud of his special effects and chose to display it when the game finished loading instead.
Aside from this, the inclusion of a training mode that allowed the player to practice any and all of the five available levels was another smart feature that gave this game the edge as one of the earliest and best **Scramble** derivatives.
Overall **Penetrator** was a fun and competent **Scramble** clone that was not really significantly bettered on the *ZX Spectrum* until the advent of some of the arcade licensed shoot'em-ups.





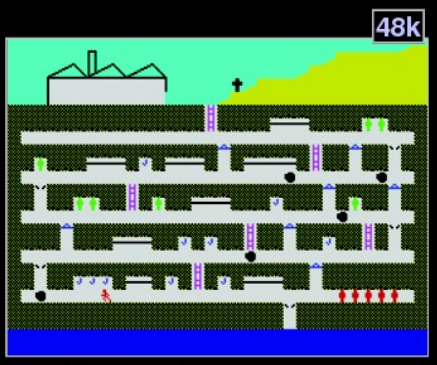


4 $ 3 #

Pitman Seven

Visions Software Factory
Simon Oliver

Well, It's Not Quite Manic Miner, But It's Not Bad...

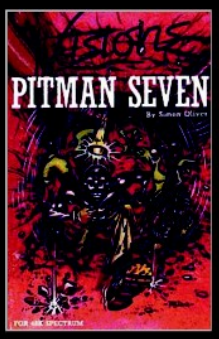


"A South African mine ... can scarcely count as a major selling point."
- Sinclair User, January 1984

Pitman Seven was set in a South African mine in which there had been some kind of disaster, trapping seven of the miners below ground. As the safety coordinator for the mine it was the player's job to guide these miners to the surface, avoiding falling rocks, poisonous gas, and other dangers on the way.

***Pitman Seven* could have been a successful game except for the fact that it was released around the same time as *Manic Miner*. With two mine games out at once, and particularly with one of them being *Manic Miner*, poor old *Pitman Seven* didn't really stand a chance.**

Aside from being overshadowed by its cousin, **Pitman Seven** was not actually a bad little game, in which the player had to rescue two teams each of seven miners trapped at various locations in the mine. For the first level, the player had to get the first team of seven miners back to the surface one by one. Judicious use of ladders, crawlspaces and overhead beams provided a method for the player's miner to avoid rocks as they hurtled by (in a fashion reminiscent of the barrels in **Donkey Kong**).
The second level involved the other team of miners. The hazards that they had to face included poisonous gas clouds that needed to be either avoided or passed through using the strategically placed gas suits. Interestingly, the miners in the first level could reposition the gas suits to aid the miners in the following level — a nice touch that opened up some deeper than expected tactical possibilites. For every miner that the player lost a tombstone would appear on the hill — a poignant feature used in the much later 16-bit **Cannon Fodder** series.
Despite the poor presentation, **Pitman 7** was a fun game to play, and was worth spending some time with. The strongest detectable influence in the design of this game would be the early levels of the arcade game **Donkey Kong**, specifically the levels with the barrels rolling down the scaffolding. The game design of **Pitman Seven** appears to have taken this basic concept and fleshed it out in a more complex, and arguably more satisfying game.







Pogo

Ocean Software Ltd.
Ronald Rhodes

PSA: Unrestrained Balls Can Cause Serious Injury Or Even Death!

48k



"The inlay states that ... [there are] ... 27 steps, ... there are actually 28."

- Crash, May 1984

In **Pogo**, a game heavily influenced (i.e. copied from) by the arcade smash **Q-Bert**, the eponymous hero had to bounce his way around a pyramid composed of hexagonal steps whilst avoiding the nasties that were out to get him. As *Pogo* jumped onto each step it would change colour. The aim of each level was to change the colour of all the steps to progress to the next level.

***Pogo* was probably the best version of *Q-Bert* to grace the *ZX Spectrum*. Other contenders, including *Automata*'s quirky and fun *Pi-Balled* and *Sinclair Research*'s rather off-the-wall *Disco Dan*, were not as technically accomplished or true to the original as *Pogo*. *Pogo* also supported the *Currah Microspeech*, making it resemble the arcade version of *Q-Bert* (which also supported speech) even more.**

Pogo proved to be a very addictive and fun game based on **Q-Bert**. Remarkably the computer games industry at this point in time was still pretty much under the radar as far as the big arcade companies were concerned. That's probably the only reason why *Ocean* (and others) got away with publishing almost identical copies of popular arcade games for so long.

The aim of the game in **Pogo** was to hop around the pyramid and change all of the step colours by visiting each one. On the earlier levels, each step only needed one colour change although on later levels each step required two colour changes, meaning that *Pogo* had to visit each step more than once.

To complicate matters, *Pogo* was not alone on the pyramid. As in the original various nasties including *Hiss*, *The Wily Snake*, glass balls and jumping scorpions accompanied *Pogo* on the pyramid. Luckily, *Pogo* wasn't limited to just jumping around on the steps; arrayed around the edges of the pyramid were several transporter disks that allowed *Pogo* to escape from tight situations. Bonus points could be earned by luring *Hiss* to attempt to follow you onto a transporter disk thus causing the bouncy pest to plummet to his death.

Pogo was by far the best version of **Q-Bert** on the *ZX Spectrum*. It's unfortunate that it and the less accomplished **Gilligan's Gold** appear to be the author's only games.







CRASH 87%

4 $ 5 %

Psst

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

A.K.A The Game That Sounds Much Ruder Than It Really Is...



"It sounds a bit rude but it's a wonderful game..."

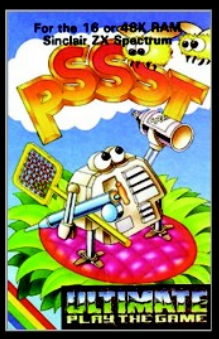
- Crash, February 1984

Pssst starred *Robbie The Robot* as a robotic gardener tasked with growing *Thyrgodian Megga Chrisanthodils* while protecting them from the marauding bugs that want to eat the growing buds. There were three types of bug and three types of bug spray. Match the right bug to the right bug spray and they would die.

Quickly juggling spray cans was an extremely important skill in this game.

***Pssst* came out at roughly the same time as *Cookie*, and quite frankly bore a lot of similarities to that game. Still, this was *Ultimate*, and a game from *Ultimate* typically had more originality packed into it than other companies entire range of games. *Pssst* was no exception, appearing in stores with little or no fanfare, to quickly come a best-seller.**

In **Pssst** the player, as *Robbie The Robot*, had the unenviable task of fighting off the three types of insect pest that were attacking the giant flower he was attempting to grow. There were three cans of insect spray available --- one for each of the three kinds of bugs, and the challenge lay in the fact that *Robbie* could only hold one spray-can at a time. Each spray had different effects on each type of bug. One spray would have no effect on a particular type of bug, one would momentarily stun a bug, and the remaining one would kill it. Consequently gameplay was a frantic matter of picking the best bug spray for the job --- often involving a lot of frantic spray juggling, particularly in later levels. Generally, the best approach was to choose the can that would kill one of the on-screen bug types and stun the other before rapidly switching to the spray that would kill the second type.
To add variety to the game, collectable bonus items would appear at regular intervals to boost the player's score; Picking them up was risky, as it gave the bugs a chance to reach the flower and start feeding. As the bugs fed on the flower the growth would reverse causing it to shrink. If the player managed to get the flower to grow, he would be rewarded with an animation showing the flower blooming. Approximately one out of every five times this happened, a female robot would be sitting on the top of the flower as an additional 'reward' for *Robbie*.







Push Off

Software Projects Ltd.
Andrew Giles
They Should Have Called It "Bugger Off"...



Software Projects was founded on the strength of **Manic Miner** and the potential of **Jet Set Willy**. However, they did release several other titles not related to *Matthew Smith*'s projects; none of these other games were quite as good as their flagship titles.

***Push Off* was one of the first releases from *Software Projects*, and certainly made a good early release for the nascent software company. Originally *Push Off* was advertised as a 16k game, but due to a small programming error turned out to only work on 48k machines.**

Push Off from *Software Projects* was one of the better **Pengo** clones to be released on the *ZX Spectrum*. The game itself played very similarly to its progenitor, **Pengo**, albeit with a few key differences — the main one being that the player controlled a ladybird rather than a penguin.

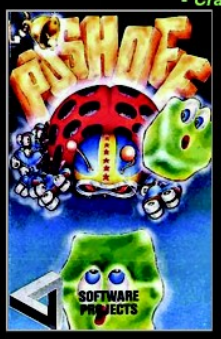
In **Push Off**, *Bertha* the ladybird had to destroy the other killer insects in the garden by pushing garden blocks into them. When a garden block was pushed it would either slide along until it hit something if there was room for it to move, or crumble to dust if there was not. Insects that collided with moving blocks were instantly destroyed, but *Bertha* had to be careful that an insect didn't destroy the same block that she was trying to push. If that happened, *Bertha* would often find herself unprotected right next to an angry insect, most often losing a life in the process.

Apart from being able to use blocks to her advantage, another helping hand to *Bertha* was provided by the bells that were spread around the level. In earlier levels, there were four bells that turned the insects to jelly when thay were rung, but later levels had fewer bells. When the insects were in jelly form, *Bertha* had a short time to eat them (gaining a cumulative score bonus similar to eating the ghosts in **Pacman**) before they reverted back to their killer insect form.

For a simple arcade game, **Push Off** provided a surprising depth of play, and was one of those rare games that took the best ideas of the game it was based on (in this case, **Pengo**) and improved upon them.

*"...due to an error, Software Projects [advertised as 16k] **Push Off** is not 16K but 48K..."*

- Crash Magazine, May 1984





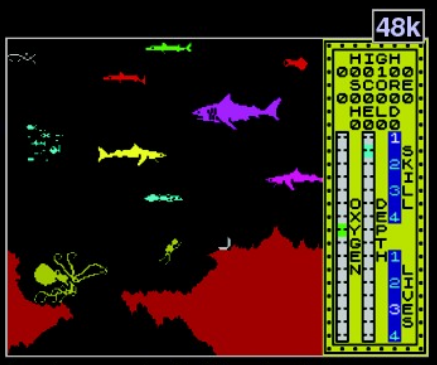




Scuba Dive

Durell Software Ltd.
Mike A. Richardson

Now That's A Mighty Big Clam...



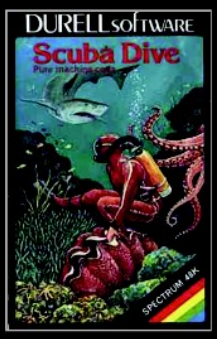
"...sets a new standard for animated graphics ..."

- Crash Magazine, March 1984

Scuba Dive's main claim to fame was the superbly animated marine animals; specifically, they were especially well animated when turning. Instead of the usual 'mirror flip' common with most 8-bit games, these graphics actually showed the body curving around to face the other direction.

***Scuba Dive* was, fairly unusually for the time, a non-violent game. There was no way for the diver to attack any of the marine animals as he was not provided with any kind of weapon. Apparently this decision was not lightly made, but the author, *Mike A. Richardson*, (who incidentally only wrote the game to earn enough money to buy a house for him and his expectant wife), felt that it made the game more tense without weapons.**

In **Scuba Dive**, the player was a scuba diver hunting for pearls in a large underwater sea-scape. Although the playing area was one large flip-screen maze, it was divided into three 'levels', or subdivisions of difficulty, based on how deep the diver chose to search.
At the top level where the water was fairly shallow, the marine life was fairly small and sparse. Here small oysters could be found which were harvested for a few points. If the player was willing to venture into the deeper caves, with entrances blocked by giant octopi, there were giant clams which meant bigger rewards and bigger risks; there was a chance that a clam would slam shut on a diver as he went for the pearl. Not only that, but the sea life at these depths was larger and more numerous. And as if that was not enough, the player had a limited supply of oxygen to use so deeper trips had to take into account the need to return to the boat for more air.
The third area had more caves, again guarded by octopi. These caves were so deep that the only way to survive was to make use of the oxygen tanks scattered around the caves, presumably from previously eaten divers. At these depths the rewards (and the risks) were greatest, with more giant clams and even treasure chests to be found.
Scuba Dive was a superbly tense, exciting, and yet non-violent game.







CRASH 92% SINCLAIR 90%

Splat!

Incentive Software Ltd.
Ian Morgan, Ian Andrew
Yippee!

Splat from *Incentive Software* was one of the rarest of creations - an original maze game. The sole aim of the game in **Splat** was to help *Zippy* survive while eating as much of the edible grass and plums as possible while avoiding the deadly spikes and water hazards. *Incentive Software* was formed by the two *Ians*, *Ian Morgan* and *Ian Andrew*, after the success of the **Mined Out** game for *Quicksilva*. *Incentive* would become well-known for releasing good, but slightly quirky, games, and subsequently become famous for pioneering huge 3D arcade adventures on the *ZX Spectrum* using their **Freescape** 3D engine.

To spur the game's sales, *Incentive Software* offered a £500 prize for the highest score greater than 500 points. High scores were verified by the inclusion of an auto-generated secret code that had to be submitted along with the score reached. The contest was won by 17-year-old *James Tant*, who scored over 112,930 points, by practising for up to seven hours every day over a period of several months.

Splat! was a maze game with a unique twist whereby the maze autoscrolled in semi-random directions and was only viewable through a small on-screen window. This made playing the game an adrenalin-pumping challenge — because if *Zippy* was scrolled off screen then he would be splatted against the edge of the view, (hence the name **Splat!**).
Apart from the scrolling maze, **Splat!**'s other innovation was that it was one of the first mainstream *ZX Spectrum* games (*Quicksilva*'s **Meteor Storm** and **The Chess Player** were the first, in 1982) to feature sampled speech, crying 'Yippee!' at the end of each level, (which caused a fair few first-timers to fall off their seats in shock).
The hero of the game, *Zippy* was a small frog-like character who, as his name suggested, zipped around the deadly maze looking for grass and plums to eat while avoiding the deadly colour-coded hazards; red and cyan objects were always deadly, green and magenta objects were always edible, and black objects were always barriers. Any other colours had no effect on *Zippy*. **Splat!** was also one of the pioneers of the 'secret bonus' concept - with the mysterious *invisible grass* and the double score to be earned by making sure that *Zippy* finished a level in the correct starting point for the next level. Also, depending on the version of the game entering a high-score using IAN as the name would either display a secret message (in the initial release) or activate a cheat mode (in the **Soft-Aid** version).



*"A liking for grass is Zippy's main problem in **Splat!**"*

- Crash Magazine, February 1984











Stonkers

Imagine Software Ltd.
John Gibson, Paul Lindale

It's Definitely Not This One...

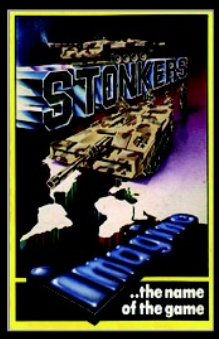
Stonkers, for all its faults, was a surprisingly good and accessible war game. Unlike most of the other war games on the market from companies such as *Lothlorien*, *Imagine* had expended a lot of effort on the presentation and graphics, making it one of the most attractive games of its type on the market.

The first batch of tapes out of the distributors contained a programming error causing it to crash after a few minutes of play. In the press, *Imagine* attempted to claim that it was only a problem with the first batch of tapes, but later batches still contained the glitch. Given the way the game was written it is not surprising that there were errors; apparently this game was written entirely on paper and then typed in with a HEX editor — not the most advanced method available at the time.

Stonkers set the player in the role of a general in an army defending his HQ and supply port from attack by enemy troops whilst simultaneously attempting to overrun the opposition HQ and/or port. The overall objective of the game was to destroy every enemy unit and take over their HQ. Likewise, the enemy is trying to do the same to the player's units and bases. The game was played at two scales, with the main view being a world map that could be zoomed in on to get a close up view of the war and manipulate individual units, consisting of heavy artillery units, infantry units, and supply units. The play was roughly real-time, with the player using a cursor to select and control the troop units. The action was paused whilst issuing orders so that the player could coordinate an attack without requiring frantic button mashing.
Although **Stonkers** was a fairly light war game, it implemented some advanced concepts, including the need to maintain supply lines and deal with unit attrition. The units were also affected by the type of terrain they were crossing, including swamp, open ground, deciduous and coniferous forest and plain ground.
For a war game, typically considered to be a stodgy and hard-core pastime, **Stonkers** was a surprisingly fun and accessible game.



"If only Imagine can get rid of the programming bug that causes it to crash..."
- Crash Magazine, March 1984





CRASH 78% SINCLAIR 90%

5 % 0 _

Stop The Express

Sinclair Research Ltd.
Hudson Soft

Defeat The Red Menace...

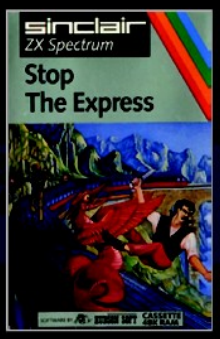


Stop The Express, or to give it its full title, **Stop the ITA Express**, was arguably one of the best games to come out of *Sinclair Research*'s software arm. The game was developed by Japanese company *Hudson Soft*, and was originally released in Japan under the more obscure name of Bousou Tokkyuu SOS.
The game was in two parts; in the first part, the green-clad secret agent had to fight his way past red agents on the outside of the train until he could gain entrance to the train. Once in the train, more red agents (and bizarre red jelly monsters) tried to block the hero's progress through the carriages until he got to the engine carriage and managed to shut down the engine.

***Stop The Express* suffered a little in translation, leading to the amusing Engrish phrase 'Congraturation! You Sucsess!' entering the lexicon of *ZX Spectrum* freaks.**

The player took on the role of a secret agent attempting to stop the runaway ITA Express, which had been sabotaged by evil knife-wielding red agents. The player started the game on the roof of the last carriage, and had to make his way along the top of the train, jumping from carriage to carriage and ducking under the low bridges, all the while avoiding the the enemy agents and their expertly thrown knives. As an aid to the player, occasionally a red snake-bird would fly overhead. The player could grab one of these birds, clip the wings, and release it along the top of the train. Once released, it would attack any of the red agents in its path. Once the player was approximately half-way along the train, he was able to climb in through a carriage door.
Inside the train, the player had to use the passenger straps to jump up and avoid the attacking red agents, while making his way to the driver's compartment at the front of the train. This was complicated by the red jelly monsters that appeared to have taken up residence in the straps, meaning that some careful manoeuvring was needed to avoid death.
Stop The Express was an amazingly compelling game that, despite technical shortcomings when compared to its contemporary brethren, managed to pack more game play into 48k than probably 90% of other games. It was a great game, and one that could be played again and again, if only for the amusement value of that intriguing Engrish victory message.

"A very original idea nearly always sells cassettes ... original and great fun to play..."
- Crash Magazine, July 1984







CRASH 80% SINCLAIR 80%

5 % 1 !

Terror-Daktil 4D

Melbourne House
Alan Blake

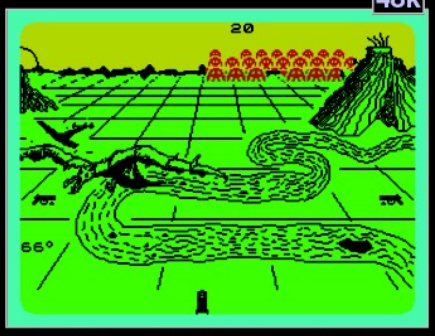
No, Seriously, This Is Space Invaders, Right?

Terror-Daktil 4D was published by *Melbourne House* after their seminal adventure title, **The Hobbit**. As such, it had a lot to live up to; unfortunately, it did not meet up to many peoples' expectations.

The expectations that *Melbourne House* had created after the release of *The Hobbit* placed them in an almost impossible position to produce a worthy follow-on release. *Terror-Daktil 4D* disappointed not only because it wasn't as good as *The Hobbit*, but also simply because it was essentially a rip-off of *Galaxians* with a limited 3D perspective. The *4D* part of the title, the dimension of *time*, came from the fact that each level of the game lasted one day of game-time with a simulated sun tracing through the sky to indicate the passage of time.

In **Terror-Daktil 4D** the player was cast as the sole survivor of a plane crash over a remote, desolate island. This was rather onerously explained by a one minute long pilot's eye view sequence of the period before the crash, the most notable feature of which were the bizarre noises forced out of the *ZX Spectrum* speaker as the plane crashed.
The game opened with the player controlling a cannon that could move left and right over a forced 3D perspective grid-line landscape. As the level started, the sun rose in the sky, and a squadron of *Daktils* appeared on the horizon in a **Space Invaders**-like formation. The player had to shoot the flying lizards out of the sky before they could swoop in on his position and destroy the cannon.
The level ended when either all the creatures were destroyed, or the player had been killed. When all of the creatures were destroyed, the day ended and night fell signalling the end of the level. The task of the player was to survive for six days and nights until the rescue plane could arrive.
Despite being a fairly poor effort, the main reason for the sales success of this game was purely due to a good marketing campaign; the game itself was a poor pseudo-3D **Galaxians** clone, of which there were plenty of better examples available. As such it is probably one of the earliest high profile *ZX Spectrum* games that clearly exhibited style over content. I.e. The game was bad, but at least it looked nice. Unfortunately this malaise would only afflict the industry more as increased commercialisation took hold.

48k



"...The birds are difficult to hit ... as they look like over-sized space invaders."
- Sinclair User, October 1983







5 % 2 @

Tranz Am

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

It's 106 Miles To Chicago, We Got A Full Tank Of Gas, Half A Pack Of Cigarettes, It's Dark And We're Wearing Sunglasses... Hit It!

Tranz Am was one of the four 16k titles that came from the legendary software house, *Ultimate*, in 1983. Set in a post-apocalyptic America, the race for gas and the eight Cups of Ultimate was apparently the only thing going on in the barren waste that remained.
Of all the *Ultimate* games released for the 16k *ZX Spectrum*, this is the least satisfying. Compared to **Cookie**, **Pssst** and **Jetpac**, this game really doesn't have the depth or replay value of the others.

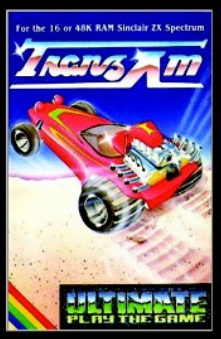
In spite of being the least impressive of the 16k titles, *Tranz Am* is still a game sought after by collectors. In fact, if a copy of the very rare (if it exists at all) silver-box *Sinclair Research* edition of this game were to show up for sale on eBay, it would certainly sell for a three figure — if not a four figure — sum.

In **Tranz Am**, the player had to race his supercharged car across the desert-like United States, avoiding evil black cars, collecting the cups and refuelling the car when it ran low on gas.
Instead of having offensive weapons, the only way to defeat the enemy drivers was to drive defensively. To dispose of a pursuing vehicle, the player had to steer the vehicle in tight turns around obstacles in an attempt to get the pursuer to crash into the obstacle.
As well as the threat of the ever-present and annoying black cars, the player also had to manage his vehicle fuel levels and engine temperature. If the vehicle overheated during some particularly frenetic driving then the performance would decrease. Worse still, if the car ran out of petrol then it would grind to a halt, stranded, until one of the enemy cars arrived on the scene and rammed it.
One of the oddest things about this future dystopia was that it only took about 30 to 40 seconds to drive from 'sea to shining sea' in the good old futuristic USA — a distance of 3300 miles in the real world.
Despite the impressive level of polish and the impeccable pedigree behind this title, it was probably the least memorable of *Ultimate*'s early output.

16k



"...very 'Ultimate' in that no new boundaries have been crossed, or new ideas used..."
- ZX Computing, December 1983





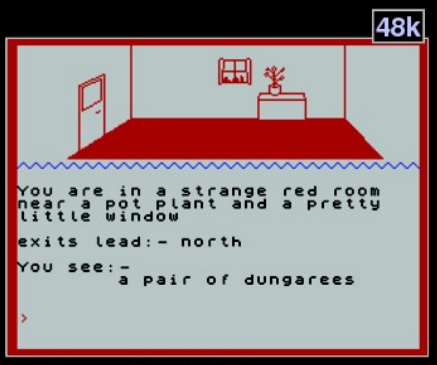


5 % 3 #

Urban Upstart

Richard Shepherd Software Ltd.
Pete Cooke

Scarthorpe Is The Sort Of Town Where Even The Dogs Carry Flick Knives!



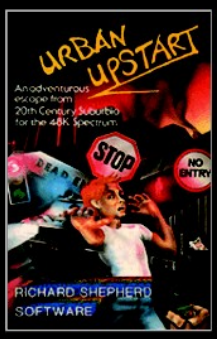
"...when you start out, don't assume you are clothed..."

- Crash Magazine, April 1984

Urban Upstart was written by *Pete Cooke* who subsequently became famous as one of the top authors of *ZX Spectrum* software, producing stand-out games such as **Tau Ceti**, **Academy** and **Micronaut One**.

Unfortunately, although *Urban Upstart* sold pretty well on the *ZX Spectrum* for an adventure game, *Pete Cooke*'s 'sequel', *Upper Gumtree*, apparently only appeared on the *Commodore 64*. *Upper Gumtree* was not a direct sequel and although it sold fairly well, it was to be *Pete Cooke*'s last text adventure game.

This game was set in the fictional town of Scarthorpe — an amalgam of several of the worst urban hells that passed for towns dotted around England. **Urban Upstart** was an unusual adventure for the time, because it did not deal with the then-standard fare of dragons and gold. Instead, it tapped into youth/yob culture, particularly the general cultural and social malaise of the late 70's and early 80's. It did this very effectively and, although taken to the extremes, reminded many players living in the suburban "New Towns" situated around the home counties outside London exactly what kind of a miserable hell-hole they lived in.
As may be expected, the objective for the player was to escape his useless dead-end life in Scarthorpe, by fleeing from the town without getting burnt, stabbed, killed, arrested or worse. Every location in the game had a picture to aid the description and, while the complexity of the game did not match **The Hobbit** it was still a very compelling and atmospheric adventure game. In order to finally get out of Scarthorpe, the player had to find his way to the airport, learn to fly and then steal a plane to escape.
Unfortunately (or fortunately, considering that adventure games are supposed to be challenging), this was a lot harder to do than it sounds...







CRASH 64% SINCLAIR 80%

5 % 4 $

The ZX Spectrum Book 1983

Wheelie

Microsphere Computer Services Ltd.
David Reidy, Helen Reidy

Grease 2: The Game (Sans Michelle Pfeiffer)...

Wheelie was an out of the blue hit from publisher *Microsphere*, who had previously released a train-based puzzle game called **The Train Game**. Even today, **Wheelie** is remembered as one of the greatest *ZX Spectrum* games, an amazing accomplishment in itself considering that it was released in the earlier period of *ZX Spectrum* history. In fact, *Microsphere* had an astonishing level of success with their releases, given the fact that the company was, for the most part, a husband and wife team.

In the early days of *ZX Spectrum* game development, the development tools were rudimentary to say the least. More often than not, games were written on paper and manually typed in to the computer, an extremely tedious and error-prone process. *Wheelie* was developed in this fashion.

In **Wheelie**, the player was a motorcyclist that had taken his new *Zedexaki 500* bike for a spin. While out riding he had strangely and unexpectedly come across a private road — posted with a sign declaring "no speed limit". This proved to be too much of a temptation for the player, and so he entered the private property with the hope of burning some serious rubber.
However, once the player had gone through the gateway, the gate closed behind him and he found himself trapped in the ominously named "Nightmare Park".
Unfortunately for the player, the only way to escape from the *Hotel California*-esque park was to find the mysterious *Ghost Rider* at the end of the maze and challenge him to a race back to the start. The race took place on a four level road connected by various slopes and ramps to form a maze. The maze was filled with hazards and obstacles including buses and cars that the player had to jump over, as well as many specimens of wildlife, such as hedgehogs, killer bees, kangaroos and others, each of which would instantly kill the player on contact.
Once the player had reached the *Ghost Rider* at the right hand edge of the maze, he had to frantically race back to the start, because the *Ghost Rider*, being a ghost, did not have to follow the ramps and paths of the maze and rode slowly in a direct line towards the finish.
Wheelie was a fantastic and playable game, most memorable for the controversial fun that could be had by crashing the bike and watching the player's character hurtle over the handlebars to collapse in a broken heap.



"...crash sequences are very graphic and tend towards the tasteless..."
- Sinclair Programs, March 1983







CRASH 93%

SINCLAIR 70%

5 % 5 %

Zip Zap

Imagine Software Ltd.
Ian Weatherburn

Famous Last Words: Let's Use The Broken Robot For This Important Mission...



"The idea is to buzz chaotically around in confusing circles..."
- Crash Magazine, February 1984

It would be a while before *Imagine* crashed and burned into receivership, but one of the many reasons that this occurred (apart from a failed contract with *Marshall Cavendish*) was an idiotic attempt to monopolize the Christmas software market by booking the entire capacity of the UK's leading tape duplicator. This strategy backfired badly as sales slumped after Christmas, leaving hordes of unsold tapes on the market. To attempt to recoup some costs, *Imagine* cut prices to below wholesale — a move that did not please the stores selling the games.

***Zip Zap* was one of the first decent 48k releases from *Imagine*, although it suffered from being overly difficult to control. However by the time of its release, *Imagine*'s image had already begun to tarnish, and subsequent releases such as *Pedro* would do nothing to improve this. *Zip Zap* was reviewed in the same October 1983 issue of *Sinclair User* as *Ultimate*'s *Cookie*; bizarrely, they found *Zip Zap* to be superior.**







Zip Zap set the player as the controller of the last functioning robot in a group stationed on a distant planet. The planet Hallucinor had recently been discovered as potentially life-supporting and suitable for terraforming. To facilitate this, a team of scouting robots were sent to establish a preliminary base. After a shaky start with some sporadic alien incursions, a sudden massive alien attack destroyed all except the one robot which, at the start of the game, was running low of power and could not slow down effectively. The robot had to destroy all the aliens, collect the power cells and escape through the teleporter before being destroyed by the attacking aliens.
Each level featured a different kind of alien although the differences between the various alien species were mainly cosmetic. **Zip Zap** proved to be a very difficult game to play mainly due to the small playing area and large character graphics. Controlling the robot was tricky as he was only able to rotate left and right as he zipped around at high speed.
This game should have been fun and interesting, but in practice it tended to be more frustrating than anything else. It was an entertaining game for the most part, but the level of frustration cannot be overcome even by the challenge of seeing all the different alien types.

5 % 6 &

The ZX Spectrum Book 1983

Zzoom

Imagine Software Ltd.
John Gibson, Mark Butler, Steve Blower
Nomen Ludi...

Zzoom, another of *Imagine*'s over-hyped releases, was also one of their first 48k games. Although this game is often remembered fondly, (and got pretty good reviews at the time), it was actually a fairly basic game. The game was a simplistic mix of **Defender**, **Galaxians** and **Operation Wolf**. It is arguable that the only real reason that it stood out at the time is due to publisher hype, a skill which *Imagine* apparently excelled at.

***Zzoom* played very much like a primitive precursor to *Operation Wolf*, with the basic 3D into-the-screen view of *Zzoom* being remarkably similar to that of *Operation Wolf*. In fact, even though the player was supposed to be flying a plane, there was very little to indicate this during the game, apart from the reversal of up and down on the joystick (a gaming convention which was intended to represent the reversed characteristics of flight; push forward to go down, pull back to go up).**

In **Zzoom** the player took on the role of a pilot of a futuristic aircraft on a mission to defend the ground-based refugees, fleeing from left-to-right across the screen, from incoming bombers. While the bombers were attempting to wipe out the refugees, the player also had to defend against other more direct threats.
There were three locations to fight through: an initial grassy area with planes and kamikazes as the main enemy, a desert location where tanks were added to the enemy roster, and finally a sea mission where enemy submarines entered the fray. In order to combat the tanks and submarines, the player had a stock of air-to-ground missiles that could bomb them into oblivion more effectively than the default machine gun.
Playing the game involved shooting the incoming bombers before they could bomb the refugees crossing the screen. The player's job was to defend these refugees until they made it out of the playing area. The bombers were not the only threat that the player faced. Incoming missiles and kamikaze pilots had to be shot down before they collided with the player and drained his shields. Not only that, but dipping the plane below the horizon would cause a crash, filling the screen with cracks and losing a life in the process.
Zzoom, despite its polished packaging and publisher hype, was only an average game. However, *Imagine*'s successful efforts to hype the title turned it into a chart-topping hit.

48k



"...probably the most famous ... non-available game ... a clever ploy..."
- Crash Magazine, February 1984



5 ½ | 7 ¼

Program: 1984

Now that the **Spectrum** games market was well established, **Sinclair** decided to focus on computers again. The **ZX Spectrum** was given a new keyboard - gone were the rubber keys and in came a cross between a typewriter keyboard and a bar of Dairy Milk. Sinclair also had another stab at producing a business machine with the **QL**, which sported the same style of keyboard, **128k** RAM and built in twin **Microdrives**.

Well, it was one way of pushing **Microdrives** onto wary consumers. They had been used with the **Spectrum** for some time but were proven to be unreliable, although some people swore blind that they worked fine if the drives were turned upside-down.

Microdrives had more success than the ill-fated **Interface II**. As well as being a joystick interface it featured a ROM cartridge port which offered instant game loading times. The problem was that the cartridges cost almost twice as much as the equivalent tapes and could only store **16k**, making it almost instantly obsolete with the majority of people deciding to buy **48k Spectrums**. It soon faded into obscurity.

Amstrad responded to the launch of the **QL** with their **CPC** range, which also attempted to compete with the **Spectrum** games market. It didn't quite pull it off, but it came a respectable third to the **Spectrum** and **Commodore** in the home computer market.

This year saw a thinning of the market with many computer manufacturers and software houses disappearing. The industry was learning that it wasn't enough to have a single hit; they had to follow it up with more quality products.

Ultimate (Play The Game) showed how it best should be done: build up a reputation for writing good games and then bump up the prices when the top-notch titles eventually arrived. By this time **Ultimate** had mastered the two-dimensional game with titles such as **Jet-Pac**, **Cookie**, **Lunar Jetman** and finally **Sabre Wulf**. In 1984 out came **KnightLore** and introduced the isometric 3D game to the world. The critics were staggered by this concept and ensured **Ultimate's** future.

At the other end of the scale was **Imagine Software**. The management were too busy living like playboys and pumping out hype that they didn't notice that their games were becoming poor and buggy. They were so deluded that they told anyone who would listen that the design of computer games had reached their limit, but **Imagine** had the solution: their "**Megagames**". For "only" **£40** the consumer would get a chunk of hardware to connect to their computer to increase the graphics and sound capabilities to play these next-generation games.

Trouble was that these "**Megagames**" were little more than vapourware. The **Imagine** directors were infamously reported as holding urgent meetings about the size of the box these games would be sold in whilst the company creditors were taking action to close it down. **Imagine** went under slowly, messily and in full view of the press who reported every little detail.

He who lives by the sword...

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

3D Lunattack

48k



Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Graftgold Ltd (Steve Turner)

Why Would An Alien Race Call Themselves The Seiddab? Why Not The Sdratsab?

Hewson Consultants produced a lot of excellent games during their tenure as software publishers, and the *Seiddab* quadrilogy was probably one of the most enduring of their products.

***3D Lunattack* was the third of four games, with the others being *3D Space Wars*, *3D Seiddab Attack* and *Astroclone* respectively. The first three games in the series were fundamentally similar in concept, being 3D flight combat games, but the fourth game was patterned after the author's *Dragontorc* series, with a smattering of *Defender* thrown in for good measure. This game also supported the *Currah Microspeech*.**

Similarly to the previous two games, **3D Lunattack** set the player as the commander of a lunar attack craft with the mission of finding and destroying the *Seiddab* base. The action was spread over three defensive zones, through which the player had to fight in order to get to the base.

The first of these zones threw hordes of robotic missile-firing tanks at the player, the second zone pit the player against an aerial minefield, containing robotic mines that would explode in proximity to the player. The third zone was the last line of defence before reaching the base, and was defended by banks of missile silos.

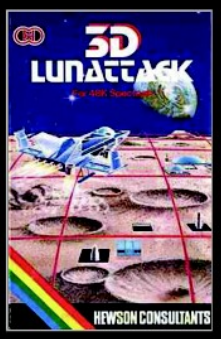
These were not the only defences: the player was also under attack from *Seiddab* fighters, and was armed only with lasers and long range air-to-air missiles to fend them off. Once all of these defences had been breached, the finale was a series of strafing runs on the alien base itself.

3D Lunattack was a very difficult game that rewarded intensive play, although it's unclear whether the game had enough initial appeal to make it worth persevering. At the time it was extremely impressive but it just did not age well compared to later competition.

CRASH 90% SINCLAIR 60%

"Your hover craft handles just like a real fighter would - I think."

- Crash Magazine, May 1984







5 % 9

Airwolf

Elite Systems Ltd.
Richard Wilcox

This Briefing Is From File A56-7W. Classified Top Secret. Subject Is, Airwolf...



"Definitely one for the masochists..."
- Your Spectrum, April 1985

Airwolf was the second officially licensed game from *Elite*, the first being the poorly received **Fall Guy**. Because this was one of the first licensed games to appear on the *ZX Spectrum*, it added a new air of legitimacy to the platform. It also heralded the beginning of the transition of the games industry from a back-bedroom hobbyist industry to the sleek corporate machine we know (and love?) today. **Blue Thunder**, another helicopter game based around a TV show, was released earlier in the same year by *Elite* (back when it was still *Richard Wilcox Software*) but it was clearly inferior to this title.

***Ocean* and *Elite* both competed in the rapidly accelerating TV license tie-in market. *Elite* won this round, but *Ocean* also made a name for themselves as licensed game producers. At the time *Elite* won the license, the show had not even been aired on British television. Luckily for *Elite*, by the time the game was released, the TV show had become a huge hit. An inferior sequel to *Airwolf*, catchily titled *Airwolf 2*, was released in 1986 by budget publisher, *Encore*.**

In **Airwolf** the player took on the role of pilot *Stringfellow Hawk*, controlling the highly advanced helicopter *Airwolf*. The mission was to infiltrate an underground complex and rescue five captured scientists.
Aside from the fact that the player piloted a helicopter, there was no other link between this game and the television series. The underground caves consisted of twelve screens protected by auto-regenerating walls and laser-wave projecting satellite dishes.
This was a remarkably difficult game that most players either loved or hated. Ironically, one of the most difficult parts of the game was reached almost immediately when the player was faced with the first of the regenerating walls. These had to be blasted block-by-block until a wide enough gap had been created to get *Airwolf* through — and then there was barely enough time to get through before the wall regenerated, destroying anything still in its path.





Antics

Bug-Byte Ltd.
Adrian Sherwin

Ants Capture Bee. Rest Of Alphabet Waits For Ransom Demand...

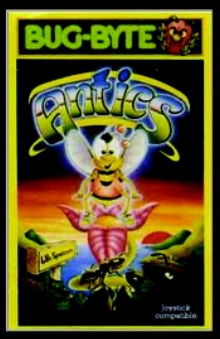


"The idea's quite good, but it's not clear why a bee should be found in an ants nest..."
- Your Spectrum, September 1984

Antics, also known as **The Birds And The Bees II**, was the sequel to the successful **The Birds And The Bees**. Unfortunately, by the time this was released, *Matthew Smith* had gone onto *Software Projects* and wasn't around to help with the graphics — and unfortunately it showed. However, the bad graphics may have been somewhat forgivable as the author, *Adrian Sherwin*, had taught himself to program in machine code and only started writing games at thirteen. At no point did he make any claims of graphical prowess!

By sixteen *Adrian Sherwin* had four games published. The ideas for *The Birds And The Bees* series of games came from the imagination of his younger sister, *Kay*. Apparently he had asked her for an idea for a game and, of the several she had come up with, this was his favourite.

In **Antics** the player, as *Barnabee*, had to rescue his cousin *Boris* (the main character in the prequel) from the depths of the ants' nest in which he had managed to get himself imprisoned. In order to rescue him *Barnabee* had to explore the underground maze-like tunnels of the nest, find out where *Boris* was imprisoned, then lead the injured bee slowly back to the safety of the hive.
Of course there were all manner of beasties underground that tried to prevent the player from doing this, including the ubiquitous ants, ladybirds, *ZX Spectrums*(?) and even inanimate thorns that always seemed to be positioned in the most inconvenient places. Fortunately for *Barnabee*, the ants seemed to be adept at cultivating underground flowers that he could use to restore his flagging stamina and nectar supply.
Controlling *Barnabee* was a major component of the challenge in this game. Only three directional controls were provided: left, right and flap. *Barnabee* was pulled down by gravity when not flapping his wings, meaning that the flap button had to be repeatedly tapped to keep him at a (roughly) constant height.
Overall, this was a fun maze game (though not up to the standard of the prequel) and although finding *Boris* was not too hard, the true challenge was in leading him back to the surface without dying.







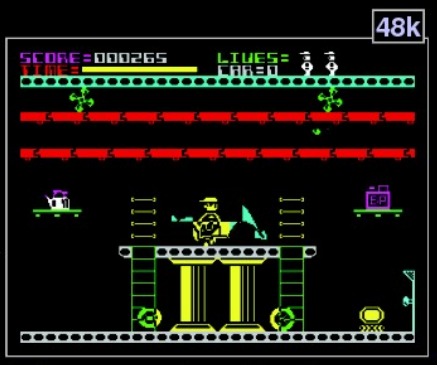
CRASH 90% SINCLAIR 80%

6 & 1 !

Automania

Mikro-Gen Ltd.
Chris Hinsley

Wally At Work...



Up until the release of **Automania**, *Mikro-Gen* was really a minor player in the games industry, releasing shoddy unofficial arcade conversions, and limited adventures such as the **Mad Martha** series. That all changed with the release of this, *Wally Week*'s first adventure in a series of four. (Five, if **Herbert's Dummy Run** is included, although *Wally* only has a bit part in that one — appearing at the end of the game with his wife, *Wilma*, when *Herbert* finally made it to the exit of the department store he was lost in.) Only the **Dizzy** series rivalled *Wally Week* in his capacity to get into adventurous scrapes.

The subtitle of this game, *Manic Mechanic* obviously intended it to be compared to *Manic Miner*. Although it *was* good, it did not quite have the finesse of the *Matthew Smith* game.

Automania was a fairly simple platform game, superficially similar to *Bug-Byte*'s **Turmoil** which was released a couple of months later in the year.
The game was split into ten distinct two-screen levels, each of which required the player, as *Wally Week*, to build a set of ten cars. One of these screens was the car bay where the car is constructed, and the other screen was the store room where all the car parts were kept. Unfortunately *Wally* was not the tidiest and most organised of mechanics and he had left his tires and equipment out and laying all around the workshop. Consequently, the equipment played the role of the game's enemies, rolling around the store room and mechanic's bay getting in the way and causing *Wally* no end of trouble.
The further the player progressed through the game, the better the cars *Wally* got to build, and the more hazardous the environment became.
Although **Automania** was a fun game, it still lacked that certain polish that would have propelled it to the level of greatness. However, as a debut for one of the *ZX Spectrum*'s best-loved heroes, it certainly made the grade.

*"...This program ... does not have the range of ... [**Manic Miner**] ... and loses out..."*
- Sinclair User, October 1984







CRASH 88% YOUR SPECTRUM 87% SINCLAIR 60%

Pyjamarama

Mikro-Gen Ltd.
Chris Hinsley

Wally Asleep...

48k

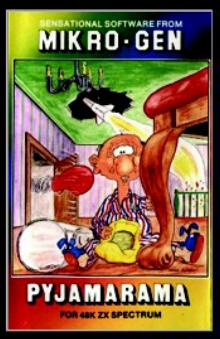


The second game in the **Wally Week** series, **Pyjamarama**, was more of an arcade-adventure than the pure arcade game that was its prequel, **Automania**.
Pyjamarama was a phenomenally successful game, catapulting *Wally Week* into the spotlight and turning *Mikro-Gen* from a minor publisher to a tier-one hot property.

The first production run of this game included an accurate rendition of the tune *Popcorn*. Unfortunately *Mikro-Gen* had not secured the rights to use the tune, and it was hastily replaced with another (inferior) tune when the copyright holders stepped in to enforce their copyright. *Mikro-Gen* also took the opportunity to tweak a couple of parts of the game, changing the layout and graphics in a couple of rooms and fixing some of the bugs in the first version.

Pyjamara put the player in the role of a miniature dream version of the hero, *Wally Week*, who had to fight his way through his own nightmare world with the eventual aim of finding the key needed to wind an alarm clock. The player's quest was to use this key to wake the real-world *Wally* up in time for work in the morning so that he would not get fired from his job as a car mechanic.
The format of the game was that of an arcade adventure. *Wally* had pockets in his nightgown that allowed him to carry up to two objects at a time. Picking up a new object (by running over it) would swap one of the objects *Wally* had already picked up and leave it in the same location as the object he had just collected. *Wally* had to use these objects in various combinations to solve the simple graphical puzzles spread around the room-based environments. Puzzles would usually grant *Wally* access to a previously locked area, or a hitherto unreachable object that could be used to solve another puzzle.
The game had a number of nice touches such as an arcade room containing a version of space invaders and an intricate scoring system based on a combination of the number of rooms visited by *Wally* and the number of steps he had taken.
Pyjamarama was an excellent arcade adventure that really showed off what *Mikro-Gen* could do given a decent programmer with a good idea. The sequel, **Everyone's A Wally**, improved on the basic design of **Pyjamarama** even further and represented a true milestone in *ZX Spectrum* game development.

"There seems to be a move afoot ... to repeat use of successful heroes..."
- Crash Magazine, November 1984







CRASH 92% YOUR SPECTRUM 90% SINCLAIR 80%

6 & 3 #

Beach Head

U.S. Gold Ltd.

David J. Anderson, Ian Morrison

We Shall Fight On Beaches, Landing Grounds, In Fields, In Streets And On The Hills...



"...coming from the States, [it's] perhaps a bit over-priced..."

- Crash Magazine, November 1984

Beach Head was a successful *Commodore 64* game that was converted to the *ZX Spectrum* by publisher *U.S. Gold*. *U.S. Gold* went on to convert a lot of *Commodore 64* (and Arcade) games to the *ZX Spectrum*. Eventually they purchased the rights to the *Ultimate* label from the *Stamper* brothers when they exited the home computer market for consoles.

Although *Beach Head* was published by *U.S. Gold*, the coding for the *ZX Spectrum* version was credited to *Ocean*. In America, the *Commodore 64* was significantly more popular than the *ZX Spectrum* (or it's enhanced ---- and incompatible without the use of a special *ZX Spectrum ROM dongle* ---- equivalent, the *Timex Sinclair 2068*). Consequently, although *Beach Head* for the *Commodore 64* was literally a straight import, the *ZX Spectrum* version had to be written from scratch.

Beach Head was a game played over a set of six levels as the player manoeuvred a small fleet of ships through open sea with the aim of attacking an enemy fortress to destroy the 'big gun' that was stationed there, preventing an all-out assault.
On starting, the game initially showed an overview map of the play area where the player had to sail his fleet of ships towards the enemy shoreline to make a landing. When the player approached an area of interest, such as the narrow channel into the bay or an enemy fleet, the game switched to the corresponding sub-game. These included piloting the player's ships single file through a narrow mine and submarine filled channel, and a first-person perspective defence of the fleet from incoming enemy planes, respectively.
The advantage of going through the narrow channel was that the enemy fleet did not detect the player's approach, and had less time to scramble defences. Even though the way through was harder than the alternative direct beach approach, it made the later portions of the game easier.
Beach Head was an average title that played upon it's 'imported' status in magazine adverts to generate interest. It's an approach that seemed to have worked.





Beaky And The Egg Snatchers



Fantasy Software Ltd.
Bob Hamilton

Captain Beaky? Where's Your Band?

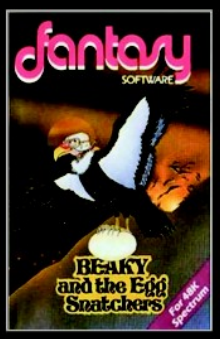


"Definitely one of the best games of 1984..."
- Sinclair Programs, August 1984

Fantasy's **Beaky And The Egg Snatchers**, a **Joust** and **Defender**-inspired game was their first that did not feature *Ziggy* as the hero.

The main selling point for *Beaky And The Egg Snatchers*, featured in all news snippets and reviews, was the fact that the hero of the game, *Beaky*, used 120 frames of animation. For a 2D sprite-based game this would be quite a lot even by today's standards. Back then it was even more impressive.

Beaky, a rare Andromedan Armed Condor, was in trouble. His species was on the verge of extinction - mainly due to their dumb choice of breeding location — the planet of Crackit — home of several species of bizarre creatures collectively known as the *Egg Snatchers*.
The game was split into four increasingly difficult groups of three repeating levels. On the first level *Beaky* had to collect the eggs and place them into the nest. The eggs were too heavy for him to pick up and so he had to rely on the stronger *Egg Snatchers* to pick an egg up, shoot them out of the sky by spitting magic seed (ooer!), and then catch the egg before it hit the ground. *Beaky* could only carry one egg at a time so he had to return to the nest in between retrieving each egg. Once the player felt that he had enough eggs he could choose when to exit the phase. Too soon — he wouldn't have enough eggs. Too late — he wouldn't have enough magic to survive the next two phases.
In the second phase *Beaky* had to incubate the eggs, a process that took roughly two minutes. The eggs' temperature had to be maintained despite the falling snowflakes which had to be shot down before they hit the nest. Additionally, the evil *Froogle* would inch towards the nest and then kick a snowball in when it got close enough, Dropping a spinning nucleus on its head (by shooting it at the right time) would prevent this.
For the third phase, the eggs hatched into voracious chicks and *Beaky* had to catch and feed them enough *Flying Worms* to keep them alive. Meanwhile, the ubiquitous *Egg Snatchers* would attempt to steal the chicks' food. Once *Beaky* had reared the chicks, the game would repeat for three more increasingly difficult breeding cycles.
Beaky And The Egg Snatchers was probably one of the best and most original of *Fantasy*'s games, although it unfortunately did not get the recognition that it deserved.







CRASH 75%

6 & 5 %

Booty

Firebird Software Ltd.
John F. Cain

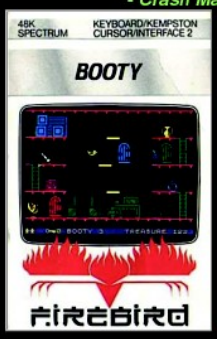
Yaaarrr!!! It Be Prettier Than A New Cabin Boy Swabbin' The Deck In A Full Moon...

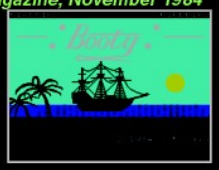


Firebird's **Booty** took the *ZX Spectrum* world by storm back in 1984 by being the first £2.50 budget game that was actually as good as — if not better than — many full price games. Up until the release of this game, budget games from companies such as *Mastertronic* tended to be extremely poor amateurish efforts, mostly written in BASIC. **Booty** set the bar for budget software, and consequently heralded the era of quality sub-£3 software.

Not only was *Booty* a surprisingly good game, it was also an example of probably the first major easter egg: If the program was loaded while a *Currah Microspeech* unit was plugged into the *ZX Spectrum*, an entirely different game (shown in the lower-right screen shot) would play upon loading. This was a simple affair where the player controlled a diver collecting small fish, avoiding big fish (that stole the small fish), and popping up for air in between sailing ships. Ironically this sub-game was still of better quality than many other budget games.

"The first budget game to get an unreserved appreciation from Crash reviewers, playable, addictive and excellent value for money."
- Crash Magazine, November 1984







Booty was a simple and addictive platform/puzzle game in which the player, as *Jim The Cabin Boy*, had to steal the treasure from a pirate ship. In order to collect all of the treasure various doors on each level had to be unlocked with the correct key. This was complicated by several factors such as the fact that the player could hold only one key at once, with any attempt to pick up a new key resulting in the currently carried one being spirited back to its original location.
The puzzle element of the game came in figuring out the optimal route to collect all the keys, get to the treasure, and avoid being skewered on the patrolling *pirates*' swords (or pecked to death by the *ship's parrot*).
Once all the booty on a screen was collected, (assuming that the player survived the occasional piece of booby-trapped treasure, as well as the *pirates* and the *parrot*), the player would then go on to clear another screen full of the *pirates*' ill-gotten wealth.



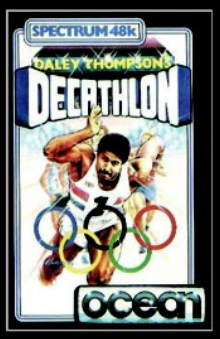
Daley Thompson's Decathlon

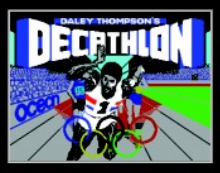
48k



"[In real life] ... Daley Thompson has a sun-tan..."

- Crash Magazine, November 1984







Ocean Software Ltd.
Paul Owens, Christian F. Urquhart

Daley? Are You Alright? You're Looking A Little... Pale...

After the success of **Track and Field** in the arcades, companies such as *Ocean* and *Imagine* rushed to make conversions for the *ZX Spectrum*. **Daley Thompson's Decathlon** (to give it its full title) was one such conversion and, along with *Imagine's* (post bankruptcy purchase) **Hypersports**, was one of the best. This type game was famous for breaking joysticks and wrecking keyboard membranes (not to mention inducing wrist-ache).

***Ocean* got some criticism for the fact that *Daley* was portrayed as a white graphic in this game, whereas *Daley* in real life was — to put it delicately — not white. Some of the more extreme views saw this as a deliberate affront to *Daley Thompson*, but it's far more likely to do with the technical limitations of the *ZX Spectrum*. A sequel, *Daley Thompson's Supertest* was released in 1985 and a special 128k version also included in a bundle pack with the new *ZX Spectrum 128k*. Proving to be an enduring franchise, a third game — *Daley Thompson's Olympic Challenge* — was also released to tie in with the 1988 Seoul Olympics (even though Daley only came in fourth due to injuries).**

Daley Thompson's Decathlon consisted of two days (one on each side of the cassette) of button-mashing events divided as follows:

Day 1: 100 metres, Long jump, shot-put, high jump, 400 metres.
Day 2: 110 metre hurdles, Discus, Pole-vault, Javelin, 1500 metres.

Each event involved a lot of button-bashing followed by an accurately timed press of another button in order to build up speed/strength and then perform the action.
This game was one of the best remembered of the **Track and Field** type-games, and still plays remarkably well today. Interestingly, a bug in the long jump section of the game allowed the player to get insanely long jumps by landing just a few pixels past the foul line.

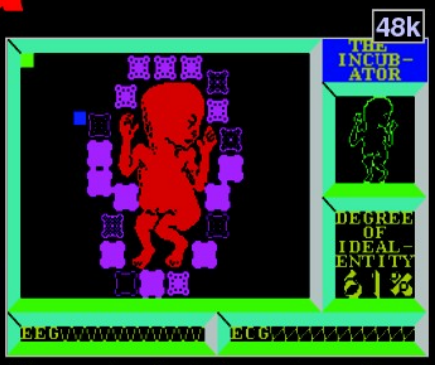
CRASH 82% | YOUR SPECTRUM 70% | SINCLAIR 80%

Deus Ex Machina

Automata UK Ltd.

Mel Croucher, Andrew Stagg

At First The Infant Mewling In Test Tube's Neck...



"The game is not fun in the usual sense, it's more of an experience!"
- Crash Magazine, November 1984

Deus Ex Machina was one of the boldest experiments in media fusion of the 1980's, and has been described as a concept album with a game attached. The quality of the accompanying soundtrack was astounding, and involved such showbusiness luminaries as *Frankie Howerd*, *Ian Dury*, *Jon Pertwee*, *Donna Bailey* and *Edward Thompson.*

Despite receiving excellent reviews *Deus Ex Machina* sold very few copies, mainly due to the fact that distributors refused to pay for their stock in advance, preferring instead to receive credit from the publisher. *Automata* could not afford to extend credit, and demanded payment up front, the end result being that the distributors refused to take it on.

Following the subsequent dissolution of *Automata*, *Electric Dreams* announced in the January 1986 issue of *Sinclair User* that they would re-release the game. However, no new release of the game was ever to be forthcoming.

Deus Ex Machina was a strange game that used a synchronized soundtrack on cassette that needed to be stopped and started by the player when instructed to do so. The game itself was a series of about fifteen sub-games that describe the birth, life and death of a genetically 'imperfect' defect in a harsh Orwellian world of perfection.

The bulk of the early part of the game involved keeping the defect sheltered from the searching probes of the *Defect Police*. The middle section of the game portrayed steering the character through life and making good choices. The final third of the game involved the fight against the ailing systems of the character's own body, prolonging his life as long as possible before his inevitable death.

Deus Ex Machina was a stunningly original product that transcended the label of game. It was an original piece of art that did not achieve the widespread recognition it deserved.









Factory Breakout

Poppy Soft
Stephen Crow

Robot Breaks Out Of Factory, Hunts For Sarah Connor...



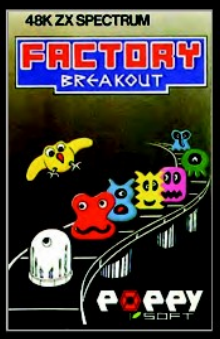
"...It begins to look like a normal day at any British factory..."

- Crash Magazine, July 1984

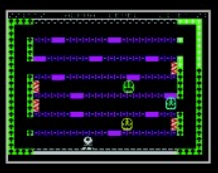
Factory Breakout is one of four known games published by **Poppy Soft** and is easily the best of the four. It was written by *Stephen Crow* of subsequent **Wizard's Lair** and **Starquake** fame.

An advance copy of *Factory Breakout* and £100 was the prize for a competition from *Stephen Crow*'s previous release with *Poppy Soft*, *Laser Snaker*. According to the July 1984 issue of *Crash Magazine* it was won by a *James Garrett* from Surrey.

In **Factory Breakout** an inconvenient alien invasion had activated the self-destruct mechanism of an advanced factory, and the player was left in sole charge of the last remaining robot, *Zirky*. The task of the player was to help *Zirky* escape by steering him through three diverse and difficult arcade stages.
In the first stage of the game, *Zirky* (rather bizarrely portrayed as an unhatched robot egg) had to destroy the incoming laser beams by rotating his single eye and shooting laser-cancelling beams at them. While he was busy with the incoming lasers, a 'hatching beam' was slowly growing towards *Zirky*'s egg. Once this hatching beam reached *Zirky*, he would be hatched from the egg and proceed to the next phase of the game.
In this phase the laser beams fired from overhead onto a conveyor belt from which *Zirky* had to dodge his way across the screen to the exit. If he took too long, an *alien canary* would begin to chase him in an attempt to foul up his nice chrome finish.
In the third level there were six platforms, populated with aliens, that *Zirky* had to navigate up. Spread around the levels were doorways that *Zirky* had to pass through in order to change their colours — a mechanism possibly inspired by **Q-Bert**. There were also force fields spread around the level that would charge *Zirky* up, giving him the ability to eat the attacking monsters and providing a few moments respite before they returned.
Factory Breakout was a fun and addictive arcade game that foreshadowed what author **Steve Crow** would become capable of as his programming skills matured.







CRASH 90%

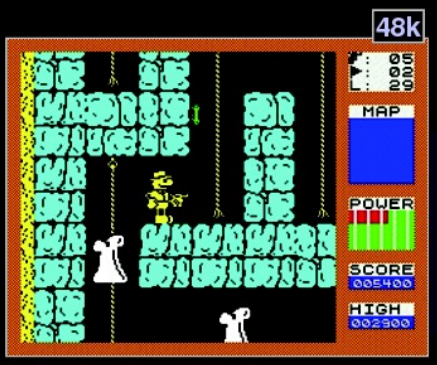
6 & 9

Fred

Quicksilva Ltd.

Carlos Granados, Paco Menendez, Fernando Rada

That Will Make You Go Blind, Fred...

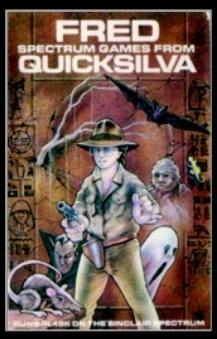


Fred was a game that conformed to the newly developing 'Spanish style' software from *Indescomp*. Like **Bugaboo The Flea**, **Sir Fred** and others, this game had a specific 'feel' associated with it that defined the atmosphere of the game.

***Fred* was the first game in a loosely linked series by the authors. The main linkage appears to have been the name of the hero, because apart from that there were very few similarities between *Fred* and the later *Sir Fred*. Incidentally one of the authors of this game, *Paco Menendez* went on to help write what is considered by many to be the finest of the Spanish games, *La Abadia Del Crimen*. Unfortunately, this game was never officially translated and released in England although an unofficial translation, *The Abbey Of Crime*, does exist on the web and is well worth checking out.**

The player took on the role of the eponymous hero *Fred* — an *Indiana Jones*-like archaeologist — who got lost while exploring the tomb-maze of the great pharaoh *Tootiecarmoon*. The aim of the game is to get out of the maze alive with the treasure of *Tootiecarmoon* avoiding the dangers and traps contained within the depths of the tomb.
The game consisted of six levels, each of which was populated with an increasingly meaner set of nasties. The first level contained ghosts that could walk through walls, scurrying rats and acid drops. Later levels introduced mummies, skeletons, vampires and poisonous chameleons. Some of these could be repelled and/or destroyed using *Fred*'s pistol, but unfortunately there was only a limited amount of ammunition available and few opportunities for replenishment.
To make matters worse, *Fred* also had a limited amount of energy to get through the maze and collision with the nasties would take away one unit. This energy could be replenished by finding the potions of *Nefertiti* that were scattered throughout the maze.
Overall **Fred** was an excellent and atmospheric game that gave many players hours of grave-robbing fun — even though the rope-climbing animation looked a little too much like masturbation for comfort.

*"...There's a danger that with a name like **Fred** ... people won't think it worth buying..."*
- Crash Magazine, April 1984







CRASH 83% YOUR SPECTRUM 83% SINCLAIR 60%

7 0

Hampstead

Melbourne House
Trevor Lever, Peter Jones
The Yuppies Networking, The Panic, The Vomit...

Publisher *Melbourne House* released this game of social climbing in the period during the long wait for **The Hobbit**'s spiritual 'sequel', **Sherlock**. This was the first game in a loosely linked series of three popular games with similar off-the-wall themes. The other two games were **Terrormolinos** and **Dodgy Geezers**. All three of these titles are well worth checking out.

***Hampstead* was first developed and prototyped using *Gilsoft*'s excellent adventure writing software, *The Quill*. Maybe to offset the apparent 'stigma' of using an adventure game creation tool rather than coding from scratch, *Melbourne House* claimed in the games press that the final published version of *Hampstead* was first translated completely into machine code for release. However, in reality two versions of this program were released, with the second being a bug-fix version. Whether the 'machine code' claim was intended to apply to one or both of these releases is not clear.**

The adventure game **Hampstead**, a quintessential game of social climbing, set the player as a low-class Londoner living on the dole and sitting in a dingy flat, watching the old quiz show 3-2-1 on the television. However, for the player, this was not intended to be a permanent situation — and the plan to escape the squalid surroundings involved a hearty dose of social climbing.

Ultimately the aim of the game was to 'attain Hampstead'. That is, not only was the player to move into the posh London neighbourhood of Hampstead, but he also had to make sure that his character fit in socially with the already snooty neighbours.

As part of this process, this moderately funny and cynically satirical text adventure required the player to climb the social ladder in the most extreme way possible, culminating in the acquisition of a wife (suitably named *Pippa*), a knighthood, and finally — a house in the promised land of Hampstead.

Despite some average reviews, **Hampstead** was a rewarding and fun game that challenged the conventional view of what an adventure game should be.

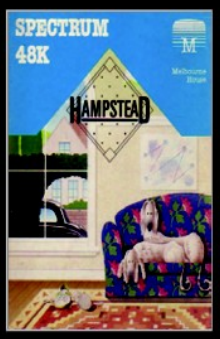
CRASH 70% SINCLAIR 80%

48k

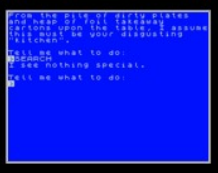


"...most of the jokes in this are pretty unfunny..."

- Crash Magazine, November 1984







7 1

Hyperaction

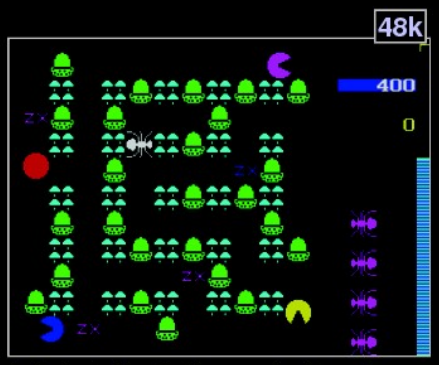
Silversoft Ltd.
Iain Christopher Hayward

One Of The Best Arcade Games You Probably Never Played...

Hyperaction was published by *Silversoft* — their third release by author, *Iain Hayward*, one of which, **Cyber Rats** was an excellent 16k **Centipede**-inspired title.
Hyperaction was not a direct copy of any particular title, but instead was a fusion of several popular arcade titles, including **Pengo**, **Pacman** and **Painter**.

Despite excellent reviews *Hyperaction* did not seem to have the mass-market appeal required to make it a big success. According to the *World of Spectrum* and other sources, it was also the last game that *Iain Christopher Hayward* was to write, with his last release being *3D Game Maker*, a 3D isometric game designer utility published by *CRL* in 1987, after a development period of almost two years.

The aim of the game in **Hyperaction** was for the player to manoeuvre an *ant* around a maze to perform a task that varied dependent on the level. For example, on some of the levels the player had to collect all of the flashing objects, while on other levels the maze would be filled with a colour that had to be eradicated by running over it thus restoring the entirety of the maze background to its normal colour. This was made slightly easier because the nasties running around the maze also erased the colour, leaving the player with less work to do. Similar in concept to the arcade game, **Pengo**, each level also contained some maze blocks that could be pushed to block off routes and trap the nasties. However, unlike **Pengo** the player would lose a life if he accidentally crushed, rather than merely trapped one of the nasties. As a reward for trapping the nasty so that it could not move, the time limit for completing the level would be reset to full. This got trickier as the nasties got more frantic in later levels. Of course, this in turn made the level harder and hence the necessity of replenishing the time limit was even more pressing.
Hyperaction was an arcade game that almost defied description. It was a perfect example of one of those rare games where gameplay trumped presentation.



"...A simple idea that is very playable and maddeningly addictive. Great!..."
- Crash Magazine, October 1984







CRASH 84% YOUR SPECTRUM 67%

Jack And The Beanstalk



Thor Computer Software Ltd.
Chris Kerry, Steve Kerry

The Gaming Equivalent Of Magic Beans... Except Without The Magic.



Glossy adverts for **Jack And The Beanstalk** started appearing in monthly magazines long before the game came out. The hype began, and the bubble only burst when players discovered that what looked like an excellent arcade adventure turned out to be nothing more than a pretty *invisible-maze-with-deadly-walls* game.

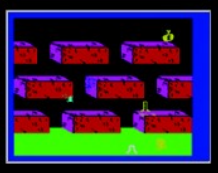
In spite of this, *Jack And The Beanstalk* was successful enough to spawn two sequels: The virtually identical (but graphically superior) *Giant's Revenge* and the uninspired (but much more free-flowing) *The House That Jack Built*, all of which made use of the *Currah Microspeech*.

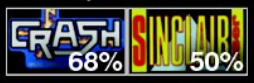
In **Jack And The Beanstalk**, the player took on the role of *Jack* from the famous fairy tale. Each screen of the game almost exactly mimics elements from the key scenes from that story, with each being a stunning (for the time) graphical depiction of one of the story scenes.
Each screen was presented to the player as a single level that had to be completed before the next screen could be reached. The object of each screen was to find the way through the invisible maze (by trial and error), collect the object, and then make it to the (invisible) exit whilst avoiding the nasties that patrolled the screen.
Although **Jack And The Beanstalk** looked pretty, the biggest flaw in this game was that the invisible (and deadly) maze boundaries just didn't make sense. For example, on the first screen, if the player took *Jack* up to the horizon, or down to the front of the screen (both places that seem that they should have been perfectly safe) then he would fall off the screen and die. It was almost as if the screen represented a 2D painting of a 3D scene that *Jack* was running around on. These non-sequiturs, frustrations, and inexplicable deaths made what could have been an average-to-good eye candy game nothing more than mediocre.
Despite these flaws, **Jack And The Beanstalk** went on to some success, spawning two sequels. Ironically, although the third game in the series went some way to addressing the flaws of the first two, by this time the shine had worn off and it received only a lukewarm reception.

"...just because a game [is pretty] doesn't mean it's worth ... a bag of old beans."
- Sinclair User, October 1984









7 3

Jet Set Willy

Software Projects Ltd.
Matthew Smith

Another Excuse To Play With Your Willy...

The long awaited **Jet Set Willy** was preceded with months of hype from publisher *Software Projects* that turned author *Matthew Smith* into a minor celebrity.
Further fuelling the hype, the reward for being the first to complete the game was to be a case of champagne, and a helicopter flight.
However, **Jet Set Willy** was also notorious for its use of a colour-coded card to prevent piracy — the first example of this kind of copy protection that went on to be emulated by other titles such as *Thor*'s **Giant's Revenge**. It worked — at least until the hackers circumvented it and released POKES to skip the protection stage.

Upon release, *Jet Set Willy* had a crippling bug that made the game almost impossible to complete. The infamous *Attic Bug* corrupted the majority of routes back to the *Master Bedroom*, causing instant death on entering any of the affected rooms. In a valiant attempt at spin, *Software Projects* published numerous adverts in magazines claiming that it was a planned feature. However, the flaw did not stop two Londoners, *Ross Holman* and *Cameron Else*, collecting all 83 objects to appease the angry housekeeper, *Maria*, and complete the game.
Another bizarre rumour, according to the December 1984 edition of *Sinclair User*, the legendary sequel to this game (tentatively titled *Willy Meets The Taxman*) was to be delayed until Spring 1985 because *Matthew Smith* wanted to include a hardware add-on that could also be used when not playing the game.

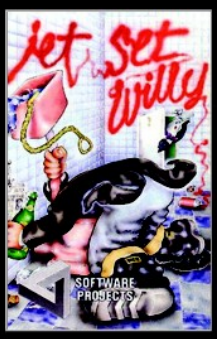
Jet Set Willy, the sequel to **Manic Miner**, consisted of sixty linked (and fairly obviously drug/alcohol inspired) rooms. The player had to guide *Willy* the ex-miner (now an obscenely rich member of the Jet Set after his success in the mines) around his brand new mansion to clean up after a party he had thrown to celebrate his new found wealth. Nearly every one of the rooms contained at least one object (such as dirty glasses/empty bottles etc.) that *Willy* had to collect before his psychotic housekeeper, *Maria*, would let him go to bed.

CRASH 95% SINCLAIR 90%

48k



*"...**Jet Set Willy** is a high point in the development of the Spectrum game..."*
- Crash Magazine, May 1984







7 4 $

Sabre Wulf

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

Thy Path Is Long So Tread With Care, Beware The Wulf And Pass His Lair...

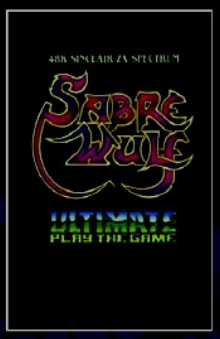
Sabre Wulf was hyped for months before release with teaser adverts showing nothing but the (admittedly cool) logo. The industry press worked themselves up into a frenzy trying to get any exclusive details on the game but *Ultimate*'s 'no-press' policy held fast. After the game's release *Crash Magazine* ran a mapping competition where the prize was a beautiful trophy in the shape of the game's Amulet.

***Sabre Wulf* sent ripples throughout the industry for being the first title to retail at the unheard of price of £9.95 instead of the more usual £5 - £7. This was done, said *Ultimate*, to discourage piracy, because those who bought the game would feel that they had invested more in it. True, the fancy box and inlay card were very stylish, but the new price-point brought mixed reactions from both the industry and the public.**

At it's heart, **Sabre Wulf** was just a simple maze game — simpler even that its predecessor, **Atic Atac**. What set **Sabre Wulf** apart was the beautiful presentation, both on screen and in the packaging. The idea of the game was to find and reunite the four segments of the lost amulet. The hero, known as *Sabreman*, travelled the maze-like jungle all the while fighting off the wild-life with his sword, killing the smaller ones and deflecting the larger ones such as rhinos, hippos, and native tribesmen. Despite being a mere annoyance the natives had one useful feature: When they were in line with a piece of the amulet they would flash yellow and make a noise, giving the player a clue as to the Amulet fragment's location.
Wild orchids that gave *Sabreman* special (positive or negative) abilities were dotted around the maze — such as the cyan orchid that made him fast and indestructible and the purple orchid that reversed the directional controls.
At the bottom of the jungle maze lived the eponymous *Wulf*, an indestructible beast that would stalk and pounce on *Sabreman* on sight and killing him immediately. Even the sword would not deflect this beast. Once *Sabreman* had found all the pieces of the Amulet, he had to travel to the central cave where the all-powerful gate-keeper would let him go down into the **Underwurlde**...



*"Let's just say [**Sabre Wulf** is] 'unrateable!' and leave it to you to decide."*
- Crash Magazine, July 1984







SINCLAIR 80%

7 5 %

Underwurlde

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

And The Public Gets What The Public Wants...



"...At a first glance, Sabreman resembles Bugaboo The Flea..."
- Crash Christmas Special, 1984/85

After the huge success of **Sabre Wulf**, and the mysterious ending message about *Sabreman*'s adventures continuing in the **Underwurlde**, *Ultimate* launched this game, and its sequel, **Knight Lore** virtually simultaneously for the Christmas of 1984. Both games had the same months of hype before release as had been done with **Sabre Wulf**.

***Underwurlde* was the only one of the published *Sabreman* series of games to provide more than one exit. One led to *Knight Lore*, another led to 1986's *Pentagram*, and the other led to *Mire Mare*, an unreleased but allegedly almost completed game.**

The first thing the player would notice when starting **Underwurlde** for the first time was that graphics were not as crisp and well defined as those in **Sabre Wulf**. The second thing he would have noticed is that *Sabreman* had somehow lost his namesake weapon between leaving the jungle of **Sabre Wulf** and entering the **Underwurlde**.
Instead there were four collectible weapons that **Sabreman** had to find. The first one was a catapult which was found in the same starting room as *Sabreman*. The other three were a dagger, a firebrand and a bow. At least one of these weapons had to be found in order to dispatch one of the three guardians guarding the three exits to the game. Of course, it was also possible to cheat and be bounced *through* the guardian by one of the wandering nasties. These wandering nasties impeded the progress of *Sabreman* who had to jump and climb his way through the castle and caverns of the **Underwurlde**, first by descending into the caverns below the castle and then using ropes and volcanic bubbles (whilst avoiding eagles, falling stalactites, poisonous plants and other nasties) to climb up into another region of the castle that contained the exits.
Unlike in **Sabre Wulf**, the nasties in this game did not kill on contact. Instead they deflected *Sabreman*'s path which could be very problematic if he happened to be jumping at the time. Long falls killed *Sabreman* although the magic gems dotted around the caverns extended the distance he could fall without dying for a short period of time.







CRASH 92% SINCLAIR 80%

7 6

The ZX Spectrum Book 1984

Knight Lore

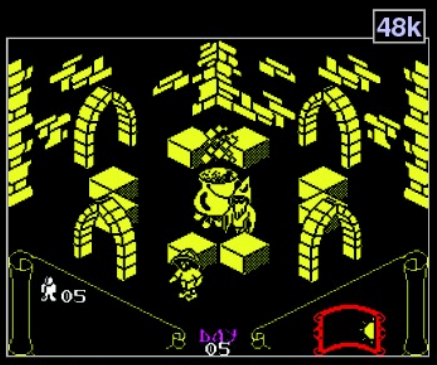
Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

The Wizard's Older Now Than All, His Help You Seek Within This Wall...

Knight Lore was released simultaneously with **Underwurlde**, but the hitherto unseen 3D effects (dubbed **Filmation**) in this game simply blew away its stable-mate. **Knight Lore** was the first of many, many isometric 3D room-based games of this type.

Alledgedly *Knight Lore* was complete and *Alien 8* was half complete before *Sabre Wulf* was even released. *Ultimate* chose to hold this game back because they decided the market was not yet ready for it, and that it would negatively impact sales of *Sabre Wulf*. They must have had cojones the size of grapefruit to make a decision like that, resulting in their delaying the release of *Knight Lore* for almost a full year.

In **Knight Lore**, *Sabreman* arrived at Knight Lore Castle to try and find the wizard *Melkhior* and get his help to cure the nasty case of lycanthropy caused by his brush with the jungle wulf in **Sabre Wulf**.
Sabreman had to cure his illness with forty days or he would become a werewulf forever. To effect a cure *Sabreman* needed to find the cauldron and then return with the object that it needed for the potion. The castle was full of tricks and traps as well as guards and other monsters that occupied the rooms of the castle. *Sabreman* had to run and jump his way around and through the traps in order to retrieve the often awkward to reach objects that were needed to make the potion. *Sabreman* could not even safely enter the wizard's room in wulf form, as the *Wizard* would unleash a spell that would track and kill him.
The game was played on a day/night cycle, and every night, when the moon rose (and set) *Sabreman* would freeze in place for a few seconds and then transform into (or from) the wulf. Depending on where he was at the time, this could be at best inconvenient and at worst fatal. Once *Sabreman* had found fourteen objects for the potion he would be cured and could go on to the next adventure, **Pentagram**.
ZX Spectrum purists tend to only consider the first three *Sabreman* games to be groundbreaking. By the time **Pentagram** was eventually released in 1986, the novelty of the 3D isometric view had worn off, and *Sabreman*'s last published *ZX Spectrum* adventure soon slipped off the radar screen.



*"...It's nice to see Ultimate depart from the Sabreman theme in **Knight Lore**..."*
- Crash Christmas Special, 1984/85







CRASH 94% YOUR SPECTRUM 93% SINCLAIR USER 90%

7 7

Kokotoni Wilf

Elite Systems Ltd.
Andy Williams, Neil Bate, Stephen Lockley, Rory Green

Jet Set Willy Beater? Move Along. Nothing To See Here...



"The graphics are as primitive as the dinosaurs which inhabit the upper levels..."
- Sinclair User, December 1984

The strangely titled **Kokotoni Wilf** was the first game marketed by *Elite* (a 'new' software house formerly known as *Richard Wilcox Software*). The game was hyped as being a **Jet Set Willy** beater for several months before release and although it was nowhere near the quality of **Jet Set Willy**, the hype still had an outstanding positive effect on sales.

***Elite* offered a prize of a free game based around the *Lee Majors* TV series *Fall Guy* to the first one hundred players who completed the game. More controversially, an additional prize was an offer of a chance to meet the star of the series, *Lee Majors*, for the first five people to get a letter published in a magazine praising *Kokotoni Wilf* — a disingenuous move that was eventually outed in the gaming press.**

Despite all the hype, **Kokotoni Wilf** was a simple *collect-the-flashing-objects* game of several distinct levels set across six time periods. Each level was themed to one particular period: one million BC (dinosaurs), 1066 AD (The Battle of Hastings), 1467 AD (Alchemy and Druids), 1784 AD (The Spanish Main), 1984 AD (The Modern Age) and 2001 AD (The Future).
In each time zone *Wilf* had to retrieve twelve pieces of a mysterious Dragon amulet for the *Great Wizard*, who had discovered its existence and desired to find out more about it. Because the wizard was too old to retrieve the amulet himself, he had sent his apprentice, *Wilf* to do the job for him. To help him in his task, the wizard gave him a set of wings and as a consequence *Wilf* could walk and/or fly around the levels to collect the amulet pieces. Once all twelve pieces in a level were collected, the wizard would then create a flashing warp-gate to the next time period somewhere in the level for *Wilf* to subsequently find.
The gameplay of **Kokotoni Wilf** was fairly tricky to master, due to the difficulty in keeping *Wilf* level whilst flying. However, instead of adding an interesting challenge to the game it just seemed to make it a more frustrating experience to play.









Kosmic Kanga

Micromania Ltd.
Dominic Wood, Julian Wood

Australians Wouldn't Give A XXXX About Any Other Game...

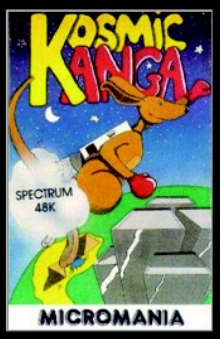
Kosmic Kanga was probably one of the most popular games from *Micromania*, who seemed to publish games almost exclusively by *Dominic Wood* - not that surprising really seeing as he was one of the company owners. Other well received games from *Micromania* included **Tutankhamun** and **Pengy**.

***Micromania* went down in the same industry slump that took out *Fantasy* and *Bug-Byte* (among others) round about mid-1985. Of these three publishers, *Micromania* and *Bug-Byte* got kudos from industry observers for doing things correctly by informing the creditors of the bankruptcy in advance, whereas *Fantasy*, on the other hand, just vanished leaving large amounts of money owed, lots of angry creditors and several snide news articles in the games magazines.**

Kosmic Kanga was reminiscent in style of many pre-existing games, but rather than being a direct copy of any particular example, it was more of a fusion of other game styles.
The aim of the game was for the player to guide *Kanga* the space kangaroo through the eleven diverse levels back to his home on the moon. The player controlled *Kanga*, who had to jump and bounce his way through a side-scrolling landscape, leaping on top of buildings and other structures all the while firing his endless supply of boxing gloves at the onslaught of planes, trains and other vehicles that were trying to bring *Kanga* down — probably for no other reason than the fact that a giant space kangaroo is probably a very scary sight for the average non-Australian. Part of the game's challenge was the control method. The player only had control over *Kanga*'s direction of facing and the height of bounce when he was in contact with the ground.
The zones that the player had to travel through to get *Kanga* back home were all variations on the same theme but were different in setting, including locations such as an airport, the beach, the desert, the countryside, a city setting, the Moon and even Atlantis.
Overall, **Kosmic Kanga** was a fairly light arcade game that provided a limited amount of fun. It was great for its time but was soon eclipsed by other superior and more memorable games.



"...Kanga can do what Kangaroos have always done, hurl boxing gloves..."
- Crash Magazine, August 1984







CRASH 88% SINCLAIR 50%

7 9

Lords Of Midnight

Beyond Software Ltd.
Mike Singleton

Lord Of The Rings? What? Never Heard Of It...



"...transcends the simple word-matching of the mainstream adventure..."
- Crash Magazine, August 1984







Lords of Midnight was the first entirely graphical large scale war/strategy/adventure game for the *ZX Spectrum*. The player started the game in control of four characters, *Luxor the Moonprince*, his son *Morkin*, *Rorthron the Wise* and *Corleth the Fey*.
The task was to use these characters, and others enlisted on the way, to overthrow *Doomdark*, the evil ice-lord to the north whose influence could be felt across the land as the nebulous ice-fear which drew colder as the player got closer. The central characters were not badly affected by the ice-fear, but any recruits that were gathered along the way were. In a game so heavily influenced by *Tolkien*, it was no surprise that *Doomdark* could be defeated either by taking his home citadel of Ushgarak by force or by destroying the source of his power, the Ice Crown, which was kept in a tower to the north-west of the citadel. Only *Morkin* could get to the crown as he was immune to the ice-fear. If *Luxor* was killed, then *Morkin* would lose all of his allies until he could find his father's body and take the Moon Ring. Unfortunately this then made the task of stealing the Ice Crown next to impossible, as *Doomdark* could sense the whereabouts of the Moon Ring and therefore *Morkin*.

Beyond Software Ltd. Mike Singleton Lord Of The Rings? What? Never Heard Of It... As one of *Beyond*'s earliest releases, Lords of Midnight, (originally to be called Lords of Atlantis), stunned the public when it was first released in 1984. The author, *Mike Singleton*, had managed to pull off a technological miracle in the design and development of this game. Even more incredibly the sequel, Doomdark's Revenge, that was released at the end of the same year, pushed the barriers even further with many more distinct locations and the ability to travel through underground tunnels. Despite much publicity the third game in the trilogy, Eye of the Moon, was never released although a poorly received *PC* 'sequel', The Citadel, was released ten years later in 1995.

***Mike Singleton* started out as an English teacher until he decided to quit his job to start a computerized gambling venture using the *Commodore Pet*. That venture ran into difficulty, culminating in *Mike Singleton* leaving with the computer. Deciding not to return to teaching, he tried his hand at writing games — with great results.**

Lords of Midnight was the first entirely graphical large scale war/strategy/adventure game for the *ZX Spectrum*. The player started the game in control of four characters, *Luxor the Moonprince*, his son *Morkin*, *Rorthron the Wise* and *Corleth the Fey*.
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CRASH 100% SINCLAIR 90%

Match Point

Sinclair Research Ltd.
Steve Kelly

Anyone For Tennis? Wouldn't That Be Nice...

With the popularity of the annual *Wimbledon* tennis tournament in England it was not surprising that it did not take long for a decent tennis simulation to show up on home computers. As previous efforts had more resembled **Pong** than any serious attempt at simulating tennis, **Match Point** came as a refreshing shock upon release as it had well-defined and, above all, realistic graphics. **Match Point** was the best tennis game to come out on the *ZX Spectrum*, and certainly showed the potential for sports simulations on the system. Arguably, **Match Point** was not even equalled as a racquet-sports based game until *New Generation Software* released the superlative **Jonah Barrington's Squash** in 1985.

The author of this game, *Steve Kelly*, was also responsible for the excellent *Chequered Flag*. He only started programming games after an accident lifting heavy boxes ended his career as a warehouse worker. After the accident he took a government-sponsored computer course, purchased a *ZX81* and joined *Psion* just as they were putting the finishing touches to *Flight Simulation*, where he contributed the code that displayed the explosions when the plane crashed.

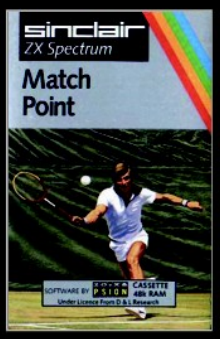
Match Point is a fairly simple game to describe as it was a very close simulation of an actual tennis game. The game adhered fairly accurately to the official rules of tennis, although obviously, given the crudity of both the control system and the display resolution it did not allow the subtlety and variety of shots that can be achieved in real life (or even in modern day tennis simulations).
The game allowed two humans to play against each other, a human to play against the computer, or two computer players to play against each other. While it was extremely fun and competitive to play against either the computer or friend, even setting up the computer to play an exhibition match and watching the ensuing games proved to be more riveting than it sounded. The only flaw, if one can be said to exist, in **Match Point** is that it did not allow doubles play. In any case, it still remains one of the best tennis simulations today, given the limitations of the hardware.
Match Point set the gold standard for *ZX Spectrum* sports simulations, and was a very tough act to follow for other sports games.

CRASH 89% SINCLAIR 90%

48k



*"...**Match Point** would have been almost inconceivable this time last year"*
- Crash Magazine, September 1984







8 (1 !

Mugsy

Melbourne House

Philip Mitchell, Clive Barrett, Russell Comte, Greg Cull

I'm Gonna Make You An Offer You Cannot Refuse...



*"Thus far the game is a moderately simple version of **King[dom]**, the land management game."*

- Sinclair User, August 1984



Mugsy, from publisher *Melbourne House*, was an old game style brought bang up to date with decent graphics and slick presentation. Strategy/business management games were not a new concept but usually they were merely functional and boring, being mainly screens of text and menu selections. **Mugsy** broke this mould by adding attractive graphics on top of the detailed strategy game based around 1920's Chicago gangsters. It played more like an interactive comic book than a **Kingdom**-style strategy game even though in places the veneer seemed quite thin.
Two years later, in 1986, a sequel called **Mugsy's Revenge** was released but it wasn't really that different from the original — a fact that did not escape notice in the magazine reviews. However, as an added bonus **Mugsy** was re-released on side B of the **Mugsy's Revenge** cassette for those who had missed the original.

By the time of *Mugsy*'s release, publishers were already having to go to extremes to get publicity for their games. For *Mugsy*, this took the form of two 'gangsters' who visited the offices of London's computer magazines espousing the virtues of the game.

The gameplay of **Mugsy**, despite all the graphical wizardry, was actually a fairly simple affair. Each year the player had to make the decision of how much money to spend on weapons to defend the player's turf and bribes to keep the police happy. Not only that, but the master crime syndicate controlled who got to squeeze 'customers' in a protection racket, and so they had to be paid off to get squeezing rights. To add variety the game was interspersed with brief arcade sequences in the case of a shoot-out, but these did not really interfere greatly with the strategy aspects.
Mugsy was a fairly simple **Kingdom**-type game dressed up with a gangster theme. In spite of this, it was still a very playable and atmospheric game.

CRASH 50% SINCLAIR 80%

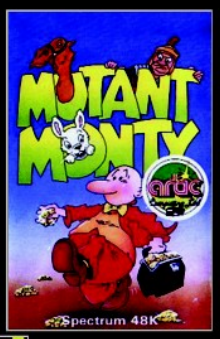
Mutant Monty

Artic Computing Ltd.
Karl Jeffery

It's Gonna Be Like Manic Miner Crossed With Pacman... I'm Gonna Make You A Star, Kiddo...



" Forty-seven cans of Special Brew and a blindfold might prepare you..."
- Your Spectrum, March 1985







Mutant Monty did not achieve the success it probably deserved — in part because the published magazine reviews were very hit and miss affairs with reviewers expressing mixed opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the game. All of them, however, drew attention to the very obvious plagiarism from other products. This was a shame, because **Mutant Monty** had the makings of a good game — and the plagiarism was obviously intended to be a tribute rather than a deliberate exploitation.

***Mutant Monty* played very much like a potted history of *ZX Spectrum* games and personalities. Many of the game's levels had titles such as *The Hoppit — Thorin's Lair*, *The Mazog's Retreat* and *'Minor' Smith's Cavern*. *Karl Jeffery* went on to write other games using the same game engine and most of the graphics, including 1985's *Rocket Man Mike* and *Mad Caverns*, published as type-in listings in *Your Computer* magazine. All three games were virtually identical bar the appearance and movement style of the main character.**

Mutant Monty set the player as *Monty*, a very (almost suspiciously) *Willy*-like character with a big nose and a thirst for the finer things in life — namely, gold and women. In order to achieve these aims, *Monty* had to traverse forty caverns, collecting all the gold in each cavern before he could exit. The obligatory cave-dwelling nasties were out in force to prevent him from doing so.
In **Mutant Monty**, the character of *Monty* moved in a very strange fashion, accelerating left and right at high speed but able to move up and down very slowly. This made for an interesting play dynamic, as it was often the case that the player would accidentally zoom *Monty* into one of the nasties by going too fast horizontally and yet in other instances not be able to move out of the way fast enough vertically. This dynamic tension had the effect of causing *Monty* to indulge in a kind of parabolic dance, frantically trying to get a little more legroom to escape.
In spite of this fairly obvious (and arguably plagiaristic) derivation, **Mutant Monty** actually managed to be a fun and frustrating title in its own right.



8 (3 #

Out Of The Shadows



Mizar Computing Ltd.
R.W. Walker, R.M.R. Woodward

Tragically, Not Many People Played This...

Mizar's **Out Of The Shadows** was an excellent graphical dungeon crawl reminiscent of an old (and much simpler) *ZX81* game called **Catacombs** — possibly combined with a touch of **Sorcerer's Island** (also a *ZX81* game). **Out Of The Shadows** was probably the best example of a **Rogue**-like game for the *ZX Spectrum*.

Despite receiving excellent reviews, distributors showed little interest in *Out Of The Shadows* resulting in a bitter *Mizar* announcing to the press that, in spite of the universal critical acclaim, they had only managed to sell four hundred copies. An editorial in *Crash Magazine* lamented this fact and, resulting from that, *Mizar* got a fresh distribution offer from *Gem Distribution*. Sadly, this was not in time to prevent *Mizar* fromgoing under shortly thereafter

In **Out Of The Shadows** the player could take on the role of a human (good all round), an elf (good with magic, more dextrous, less strong) or a dwarf (strong, less dextrous, less magical) in a quest to liberate vast quantities of treasure from a dungeon. What made this game special, despite the slightly crude appearance, was the attention to detail paid to effects such as the true line-of-sight calculations and real-time lighting which both had a very real impact on gameplay.

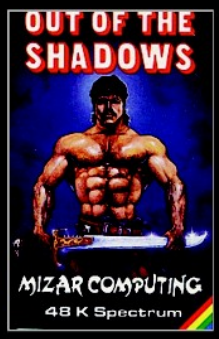
The game was played by entering simple text commands for actions such as moving, attacking, buying, selling and then watching the results play out on screen in real-time. One of the first required actions was to go to the merchant and purchase either a torch or a lantern, as the player was not able to get far without either of those.

This game was an incredibly compelling and apparently deep adventure, with extra touches like the modelling of morale for the monsters and the preference for certain monsters to only attack from the shadows elevating this game beyond the mere ordinary.

Out Of The Shadows was a game that would not have looked out of place (assuming it had better graphics) on considerably more sophisticated hardware.

CRASH 90%

"...distributors ... 'assessed' [it] and found it 'not suitable for the Christmas period'"
- Crash Magazine, May 1985







Rapscallion

Bug-Byte Ltd.
Albert Ball

Do The Rapscallion Rap! Yeah! Uh! Or Something...

Rapscallion was marketed by *Bug-Byte* as a potential **Manic Miner** beater. However, although it was good, it was certainly no match for **Manic Miner**.

***Rapscallion* was the second of two games written by *Jumping Jack* author *Albert Ball*, and featured the same distinctive graphical style albeit slightly modified to display double-sized sprites.**

Rapscallion was an arcade adventure in which the hero had lost his castle to the rogue *Rapscallion*, who upon taking the castle proceeded to have the player thrown into his own dungeon. Luckily for the player's character, he had friends in magical places and so the game started with a fairy granting him the ability to switch between bird and flying insect. However, each time he did so he would lose one of his six lives. Unfortunately, sometimes it was necessary to do so in order to solve some of the game's puzzles. Of course, it was not all bad; when the player died by colliding with one of the nasties, he would become a ghost that could then explore without risk to himself. He would only be restored back to life when he returned to his body.

The game was split into three main sections each with its own quest. In the first quest, the player had to escape from the Wilderness. To do this, the player needed to find the key to escape and a magical shield to hide him from the guard. Once the player got through the Wilderness, the next section of the game was the Magic Labyrinth.

In the Labyrinth, the player had to gain the power of the Magic Eye. The Magic Eye would allow the player to see the three hidden *Wizards* who needed to be approached for help — but only when they were resting. Any other time and the player would find himself on the receiving end of a painful magical bolt.

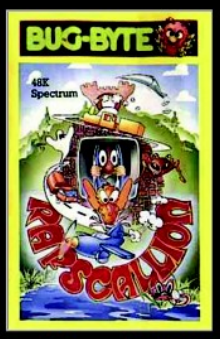
Obtaining all three *wizards* allowed the player to enter the third and final section: The Castle. In the Castle, the player had to find two *Genies* who would provide the player with a Magic Wand, which could then be used to destroy the rogue *Rapscallion*.

At game end, the player was given the deeds to his castle; *Freehold* if the game was played through in one go, or *Leasehold* if the player had restored from a saved game.

48k



"...worth more than a passing glance..."
- Your Spectrum, September 1984







CRASH 85% SINCLAIR 60%

8 (5 %

Sherlock

Melbourne House
Philip Mitchell

It's Elementary My Dear Watson. Now Get The XXXX Out Of My Lap!

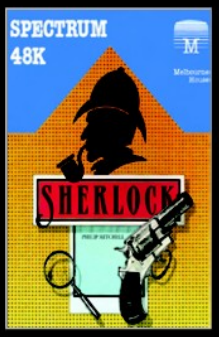


"... I counted my money. I had five dollars and 7/6...Holmes...[is an]... American tourist"
- Crash Magazine, October 1984

Sherlock was viewed by many as the spiritual sequel to **The Hobbit**, as it used an enhanced version of the parser from **The Hobbit**, with *Inglish* as the interface language. At the time, **Sherlock** was billed as an extremely advanced adventure game with unparalleled artificial intelligence.

Amongst its many bugs, three specific oddities in this game caused a fair amount of notoriety. The first of these was the *Gay Watson* problem... Under some circumstances *Watson* would sit in the same chair as *Holmes*, typically while he was still in it. The second, and more obvious problem (although understandable considering the game was written by an Australian in Australia) was that in the game *Holmes* could take a train from *King's Cross* to *Leatherhead*. In reality, this is not possible — *Victoria* or *Charing Cross* were the correct source stations. The third obvious oddity was the currency used in the game; the authors were apparently unaware that the currency of the UK was the pound rather than the dollar.

In **Sherlock** the player took on the role of the greatest of fictional detectives, *Sherlock Holmes*, with the task of solving a mysterious double murder that had taken place in Leatherhead. Input was via text instruction, some of which could be quite advanced, such as SAY TO WATSON "TELL ME ABOUT THE PISTOL". However, due to its complexity there were also many bugs, but if the player was willing to persevere, then **Sherlock** was a deep and interesting adventure. Sadly, for many players the difficulty in even doing simple things such as navigate around London in the cab was very discouraging.
Sherlock was a very difficult game that, all bugs aside, represented *Arthur Conan Doyle*'s legacy well by providing a game that was would have truly challenged the great detective himself, (although not necessarily for the right reasons).







CRASH 80% SINCLAIR 90%

Skool Daze

Microsphere Computer Services Ltd.
David S. Reidy

We Don't Need No Education.... We Don't Need No Thought Control...

Microsphere stunned the games industry with the release of this game which represented typical school life with undreamt of clarity. Among the many outstanding features of **Skool Daze**, one of the best was the ability to customize the names of characters. Many youngsters increased their enjoyment of this game by playing using the characters named after their schoolfriends (and enemies).

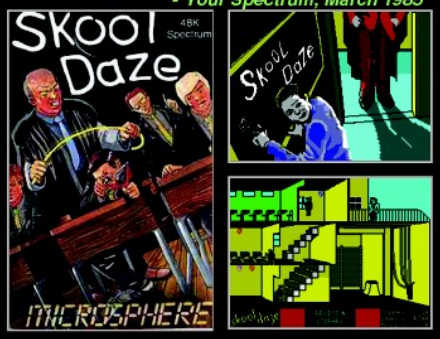
According to various magazine sources, *Skool Daze* was originally meant to be the first game in a trilogy. Unfortunately, only the first two games were ever made — this one and its sequel, *Back to Skool*. This fact was revealed in an interview with the husband and wife team who made up *Microsphere* published in the February 1986 issue of *Crash Magazine*.

In **Skool Daze**, *Eric* had to retrieve his report from the headmaster's safe before it could be sent home to his parents. To make this even more difficult, all of this extra-curricular activity had to be performed while adhering as best as possible to the school rules and schedule. Failure to do so would cause *Eric* to be given lines. If he exceeded 10,000 lines, he would be summarily expelled, and the game would be over.
In order to get the combination for the safe, *Eric* needed the four code letters from each of the teachers. The first step in the process was to touch and/or fire his catapult at all of the school shields (some of which required creative bouncing of stones via teachers' heads) to make them flash. Once all of the shields were flashing, the four teachers entrusted with the combination could be hypnotised and interrogated.
For three of the teachers this simply required knocking them over with a shot from the catapult. For the fourth, history teacher *Mr. Creak*, *Eric* had to deduce the year of his birth and write it on the blackboard where he could see it. The resulting shock caused him to reveal his secret code letter. Once *Eric* had discovered the correct combination he could steal his report from the safe in the headmasters office and rest easy for another year, but only after he had de-flashed all the incriminating shields.
Skool Daze was a stunning game that is still just as playable today as it was back in 1984.



"Buy now - before Sir Keith Joseph has it banned! This is as near to the real thing as I'm prepared to get."

- Your Spectrum, March 1985



CRASH 93% YOUR SPECTRUM 67% SINCLAIR 80% 8 7

3D Starstrike

Realtime Games Software Ltd.
Ian Oliver, Andrew Onions, Graeme Baird

Star Wars? We Don' Need No Steenkin' Star Wars...



"It's the best 'Star Wars' type game to date..."
- Crash Magazine, December 1984

Starstrike was the second release from newcomers *Realtime* and blew people away with their incredibly (almost litigiously) accurate rendition of the popular **Star Wars** arcade game.

The father of *Andrew Onions*, one of the authors of *Starstrike*, owned a house that was rented by the nascent *Crash Magazine* as a makeshift office. Originally, *Starstrike* was going to be called *Starburst* — a name suggested by *Crash Magazine* editor, *Roger Kean*. This close relationship with *Crash Magazine* caused a few rival magazines to question the impartiality of their game reviews, but these grumblings were soon silenced when the quality of the finished product shone through.

Starstrike followed the format of its inspirational game very closely. In the first part of the game the player had to fight off hordes of incoming *Outsider* ships in a pitched space battle. Once the player had fought his way through the waves of enemy ships, he got a chance to land on the enemy *Battle Planet* (i.e. Death Star in all but name), which had gun emplacements that needed to be shot out in order to prevent them destroying the player's ship. If the player had flown his way this far without being destroyed, he then had to fly through the trench avoiding colliding with the cross-beams and covering fire from the laser emplacements.
At the end of the trench was a force-field protecting the Battle Planet's weak point. The two generators at either side of the force-field needed to be neutralised before the weakness could be exploited. Failure to do so meant the player had to do the trench run again, while success meant flying into space and seeing the Battle Planet explode and then doing the whole thing again.
Despite being a violation of copyright, **Starstrike** was the best of breed, arguably surpassing even the official *Domark* conversion of the arcade game **Star Wars** that was released in 1987.









Technician Ted



48k



Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Steve Marsden, David Cooke

Subtitled: "The Chip Factory, Featuring Technician Ted"

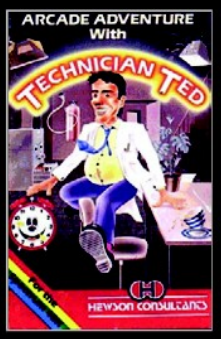
Technician Ted was arguably the first game that seriously challenged the crown of **Jet Set Willy** as the king of 'collect-the-object-and-explore' games. It was a hellishly difficult, smooth as silk, platform exploration game. The official sequel **Costa Capers**, released in 1985, tried to push these boundaries even further, but was not as playable — or as well received. When the 128k *ZX Spectrum* was released in 1986, an updated version of this game, called **Technician Ted — The Megamix**, with smoother graphics, more rooms, better music and a slightly easier set of tasks was released to an enthusiastic reception.

***Technician Ted* was the first game to feature real animation during loading. As the game loaded, a counter decreased to zero and row upon row of *Ted*s walked back and forth across the screen. The 128k version replaced this with an equally impressive set of screens that told a story as it loaded.**

Much like **Jet Set Willy** this game required the player to guide the hero, *Ted*, around the silicon chip factory to perform a set number of tasks within a time limit. Unlike **Jet Set Willy**, *Ted* did not have to collect glasses. Instead, he had to perform a set number of work-related tasks in the correct order. Each task was performed by touching two flashing boxes in a room. The boxes had to be touched in the correct order for the task to be considered complete. Not only that, but an additional level of frustration was added by the fact that the player had to discover for himself the correct order of the tasks. Peforming a task in the wrong order did not knock it off of the day's task list. Once the task was correctly finished, the player had to search the factory to find the next task to perform.
Technician Ted was a difficult and exacting game at the best of times but this additional level of complication made it all but impossible unless the player looked up the correct task order in advance. The 128k release of this game, **Technician Ted: The Megamix** corrected this flaw by displaying the task number in one of the flashing boxes.



*"...Yet another platform game bearing startling similarities to **Jet Set Willy**."*
- Sinclair User, January 1985







Tir Na Nog

Gargoyle Games Ltd.
Greg Follis, Roy Carter

When Not Drinking And Wenching, Cuchulainn Gets Some Adventuring In...

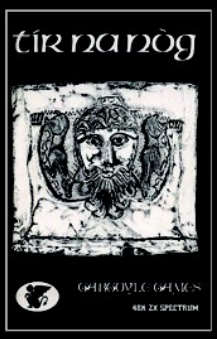
Tir Na Nog was the Celtic afterlife, which in English is known as the *Land of the Young*. *Gargoyle Games* plundered Celtic mythology for the story of this game, taking the ancient hero, *Cuchulainn* and setting him shortly after death and his entry into the *Land Of The Young*. This was *Gargoyle Games* second release. Their first, the space shooter **Ad Astra**, although good was not up to the standard of this game.

The game was advertised as a *Computer Movie* with the main character, *Cuchulainn* standing a then unheard of fifty-six pixels high. *Gargoyle Games* produced three games in this style. The second of these was *Dun Darach*, a prequel of sorts to this game. The third game, *Marsport*, was intended to be the first in a new space-based trilogy called *The Siege Of Earth*. Despite advertising, the sequels, *Fornax* and *Gath*, were never released.

The *Sidhe* (pronounced *shee* as in *banshee*) were once a mighty otherworldly race who fashioned the Great Seal to keep the *Great Enemy* bound in captivity. However, a thief managed to steal the seal and the *Sidhe* struck him down. In doing so they inadvertently broke the seal into four pieces. This broke the power of the *Sidhe* causing them to degenerate into shrunken monkey-like primates. It was the job of *Cuchulainn* to restore the great seal. Unfortunately for *Cuchulainn*, the diminished *Sidhe*, as amnesiac shadows of their former selves, did not appreciate this and attempted to kill him on sight.
The game itself took the form of an arcade-adventure in which *Cuchulainn* had to collect objects and solve puzzles in order to reunite the pieces of the Seal. One of the first objects that the player would want to collect was the sword which allowed *Cuchulainn* to defend himself against the *Sidhe*. Of course, one of the advantages of already being dead is that dying again was no more than an inconvenience. When *Cuchulainn* was killed he would reappear at the starting point with the game world exactly as he left it.



"...[The animation of Cuchulainn is]... as good as a Walt Disney cartoon character..."
- Crash Magazine, September 1984







CRASH 92% SINCLAIR 90%

TLL

Vortex Ltd.
Costa Panayi
Tornado Low Level

Tornado Low Level took the 3D engine that *Costa Panayi* had developed for **Android 2** to stunning new levels with the release of **TLL — Tornado Low Level**, a fast action flying game based around the hot new military jet of the day.

The advertising for *TLL* was pretty obscure for the time, showing just the letters *TLL*, a shadow of a fighter plane, and a stylised horizon which was virtually identical to the cassette inlay, in fact. According to the publisher this was not done out of any desire to be specifically obscure — it was simply done that way because at the time the advert needed to be submitted for printing, the game design hadn't been finalized. The inspiration for *TLL* was the success of the *Psion* game *Flight Simulator*. As could be seen from the finished product, flying a plane was the only thing the two games had in common.

In **TLL** the aim of the game was to take out several military targets, marked by a small target symbol, by flying over them at an extremely low level (hence the title).
The fighter plane could be flown in two flight configurations — with wings swept back, or with a more standard wing position. When the plane's wings were swept back it flew significantly faster, whereas when the wings were in the standard position the plane was easier to control. The lower the player got to the ground, the higher the score that was earned when bombing a target. The player also had to manage the refuelling of the plane, a process which required a difficult landing on a short runway. Once refuelled, the player could then get back in the air and continue attacking the military targets. The player could gauge his height by observing the technically impressive shadow that skittered along the ground directly underneath the plane. By today's standards, this kind of 'infinite-distance, sun-directly-overhead' shadow wasn't too exciting, but when this game was released it was one of the features that stood out the most.
One of the most fun features of this game was not the *official* mission that the player was set... Instead, it was far more fun to simply take the plane on a joyride, flying under power-lines and bridges and playing chicken with trees, houses and cliff-faces.
Note: trees, houses and cliff-faces *always* won when playing chicken.



*"I was never really keen on **TLL** because I always thought there wasn't much to it."*
- Crash Magazine, June 1985



CRASH 81% SINCLAIR 80%

9) 1 !

Trashman

New Generation Software Ltd
Malcolm Evans

Just Give Me A ZX81 And I'll Control The World...



"This game can't be praised highly enough. It's totally original and the idea is brilliant..."
- Your Spectrum, August 1984

New Generation's first game in the planned **Trashman** trilogy took a mundane subject and turned it into a world class game. Indeed, it would have been difficult to get more mundane than collecting rubbish. Despite the topic, **Trashman** turned out to be an extremely addictive and very original new game from *New Generation*.

The name *Trashman* was chosen over a more conventionally British sounding one in order to maximize the global recognition and potential sales. This game did well enough to warrant a sequel, *Travel With Trashman*, and a planned third game which never actually appeared, expected to be called *Trashman In Time*. Evidence for this third game is revealed at the end of *Travel With Trashman* where a time machine is discovered in the final location. One of the more interesting facts about *Trashman* that only came to light fairly recently was the fact that all of the names of the streets in the game were in fact named after roads near the house that the author *Malcom Evans* lived in at the time.

Trashman was a game in which the eponymous hero, *Trashman*, had to collect dustbins full of rubbish, empty the contents into the dustcart and then return the bin to its original location. If *Trashman* managed to do this without treading on the grass or flowerbeds, then the house-holder would invite him in for a tip in the form of bonus time, usually accompanied by a bad pun.
Other hazards included cyclists, cars, dogs and even the temptation of a quick tipple when emptying the bins at the local pub. Each level was played to a strict time limit and the number of houses to take care of increased in each level, starting with five bins in Montague Road and increasing by one for each of the seven levels. At the end of the last level, *Trashman* received his diploma of Trashman-ship, and was sent out to rid the world of trash, which led to the interesting (though arguably inferior) sequel, **Travel With Trashman**.







Tribble Trubble

Software Projects Ltd.
Jim Scarlett

The... Trouble... With... Tribbles... Is...

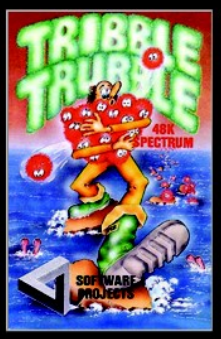
Software Projects, which often seemed little more that a vehicle for **Manic Miner** and **Jet Set Willy**, occasionally released other games and some of them were even good. **Tribble Trubble** was one of the good ones. The author of **Tribble Trubble** also released an equally original prior game called **Doombugs**. This game did not receive a wide release and was very hard to find, in spite of being an original and interesting game. Similarly, the only other previous game by this author, **Flip Flap** was a fun take on pinball that did not receive the recognition it deserved at the time.

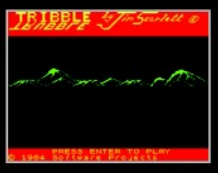
***Tribbles* were small furry creatures first seen in the original Star Trek series episode "The Trouble With Tribbles" and then again in the Deep Space 9 cross-over episode "Trials and Tribble-ations". In fact, intellectual property concerns seemed to have been a very fluid concept back in 1984, considering that the game hero's name is *Brian Skywalker*, (obviously no relation to the more famous owner of that name).**

Tribble Trubble is a difficult game to describe, consisting as it did of five very different (and very addictive) levels of play. In the first of these levels, the hero *Brian Skywalker* had to build a stepping-stone bridge across a river using rocks that were dug up after being located by their characteristic twinkle. While this was going on, *Tribbles* would escape from his spacecraft and had to be led back to safety before they drowned or were eaten by the *Firebugs*. When *Brian* had built the bridge, he then had to escort a *Tribble* with him and blow up the home of the *Firebugs* using a conveniently placed TNT detonator.
The second level required *Brian* to guide the **Tribbles** between giant cacti to eat small creatures called *Goofers*. Collision with the cacti merely inconvenienced *Brian*, but would kill *Tribbles*. The third level required *Brian* to use a tin-tack to puncture three *Tribble*-eating *Spheroids* across three levels of platform. The fourth level required him to steer the *Tribbles* around a level populated by *Tribble*-eating *Snappers* to collect all of the spinning mushrooms. And the fifth level simply required *Brian* to shepherd a herd of *Tribbles* into a waiting pen. After completing all that, the process began again.
Tribble Trubble was a fun and original arcade game that rewarded perseverance, with a refreshing addictive twist that compelled repeated playings.



"...demands a great deal from the player...and is a refreshing change from zapping aliens."
- Sinclair User, June 1984







CRASH 91% SINCLAIR 80%

9) 3 #

Ugh!

Softek Software International Ltd.
Tony Samuels, Stevie Beverly

One Million Years B.C., And No Raquel Welch In Sight... What's The Point?

Ugh! was one of the last games that *Softek* published before spinning off and transforming into *The Edge Software*, publisher of gems such as **Fairlight** and **That's The Spirit**.

The author of this game, *Tony Samuels*, was also a regular contributor to *Your Spectrum*/*Your Sinclair* magazine(s). One of the other programs he had written was an editor for *Ant Attack*, which he had even tried to sell to *Quicksilva* (who declined his offer). However, they subsequently found themselves on the wrong end of *Tony Samuels* ire, and a threatened lawsuit, when they were discovered to have gone ahead and used it without his permission anyway.

Ugh! was a game that had a concept that sounded as if it should have been fun to play, but unfortunately sufferered from the fact that it seemed like someone had worked really hard to make it *not* fun to play — which was a shame as it was a very promising title.
In this game, the player was cast in the role of a caveman, (for whom the game was named). *Ugh*'s task was to make his way from his cave at the bottom of the screen, up the network of paths to reach the *Pterodactyl*'s nest to steal an egg, while avoiding the *Tyrannosaurus Rex* wandering the paths. When *Ugh* left the cave he was armed with one spear which would be lost if he threw it at the wandering *Tyrannosaurus Rex* (causing it to retreat to the edge of the screen to lick its wounds). In order to get another spear *Ugh* had to return to his cave. To make matters worse, he was not able to carry the spear and an egg from the nest at the same time so he would be defenceless on the way back to his cave. Meanwhile, the *Pterodactyl* was extremely unhappy with the egg-snatching caveman, and attempted to drop rocks on him from above to impede his getaway.
Ugh! would probably have been a fantastic game if it were not for one major flaw... The difficulty in navigating the corners in the paths meant a lot of unfair and frustrating deaths. Other than that, this game stood a good chance of being a big hit.



*"**Ugh!** is quite fun and I feel it could be a hit with a few adjustments..."*
- Crash Magazine, August 1984







CRASH 61%

Wanted: Monty Mole

48k



Gremlin Graphics Software Ltd.
Peter M. Harrap
Scab! Scab! Scab! Scab!

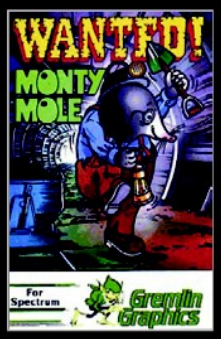
Wanted: Monty Mole was the first in a series of three excellent games (the other two being **Monty On The Run** and **Auf Wiedersehen Monty**). The trilogy should have been left as it was but unfortunately greed got in the way of the legacy and a fourth game, the execrable **Impossamole**, was also released (but most people try and forget that one ever existed). *Gremlin Graphics* got a lot of mileage out of this character, releasing ancillary games such as **Monty is Innocent** (not featuring *Monty* except in a cameo role at the end) and **Sam Stoat, Safebreaker**.

This game got a lot of publicity, including much television news coverage (and the accompanying boost in sales), by claiming that it was 'inspired' by the miners' strikes led by *Arthur Scargill*, that were ongoing at the time of release in 1984. Aside from the fact it was set in a coal mine it seemed to be little to do with the strikes themselves. To be fair, there was an angry miner at the beginning of the game and the end-of-game guardian did look a little bit like the head of *Arthur Scargill*.

At the start of the game, *Monty* first needed to steal a bucket in order to be able to collect the coal within the mine (otherwise the coal would be invisible and no progress could be made). As he attempted to steal the bucket, an angry miner would run out of his house and chase *Monty* into the mine. Once inside, the entrance was blocked by the miner, and *so Monty* had no choice but to descend into the mine, avoiding the mine's denizens, sporadically firing crushers, and other dangers. And while he was there, he thought, he may as well go ahead and pick up enough coal to last the winter. *Monty* consequently had to run, jump and climb through twenty or so screens of dangers, until he could escape from the mine at the pit head. Once out of the mine, the game was over with the little mole declaring a (short-lived) victory. Unfortunately his troubles did not end there. Having stolen coal from the mine, gone to prison and then escaped, the sequel, **Monty On The Run**, detailed his attempted journey to France as he fled from British Law Enforcement. Following that, the second sequel, **Auf Wiedersehen Monty**, detailed his flight across Europe to a safe haven from the long arm of the European Police. Of the three games, **Monty On The Run** was the hardest, whereas **Auf Wiedersehen Monty** was the most polished and playable, particularly in its *128k ZX Spectrum* incarnation.

CRASH 92%

*"...[A] most blatant clone of Matthew [Smith]'s **Manic Miner**..."*
- Your Spectrum, November 1984







9) 5 %

Zombie Zombie

Quicksilva Ltd.

Sandy White, Angela Sutherland

When There's No More Room In Hell, The Dead Will Walk The Earth...

Zombie Zombie was **Sandy White**'s follow-on for the seminal **Ant Attack**. This game expanded on the original by incorporating several new features into the design of the *SoftSolid 3D* engine, including colour, a helicopter and the ability to reposition elements of the landscape.

***Zombie Zombie* was unique for two reasons. The first was that it was the first *ZX Spectrum* game to feature two channel sound. The second was the fact that the inlay had a circuit diagram for a home-made MIDI interface on it allowing the game to drive a MIDI keyboard. Unfortunately, due to bugs in the code, it was virtually impossible to get this working on anything other than the same model of keyboard owned by the programmer, *Sandy White*.**

Zombie Zombie had the player piloting a helicopter around a (mildly) zombie infested city to kill the zombies within. In order to do so, the player needed to use the helicopter to position blocks in order to create a ramp suitable for leading a zombie along until it reached the end and plunged to its death. The score received was a function of the height of the ramp and its length, so obviously a longer higher ramp gave the highest score.
In order to entice a zombie to follow the player (without chowing down on his vittles) he had to approach the zombie directly from behind. Do this correctly and the zombie would turn magenta indicating that it was in docile follow-the-leader mode. Get it wrong, and the zombie turned red indicating that it was about to eat the player. The only defence against this was to use a hefty puff of compressed air to push the zombie away. Assuming that the player has approached the zombie correctly he then had to lead it up the ramp and jump off the end. When the zombie followed it would disintegrate into a red heap on the ground. Once all of the zombies were disposed of, another level began with more zombies than before. Despite not being as groundbreaking as **Ant Attack**, this was still a pretty good game.



"...More fun to potter around designing buildings...than get on with the game..."
- Sinclair User, December 1984







CRASH 80% YOUR SPECTRUM 43% SINCLAIR 70%

Program: 1985

These were dark times for **Sinclair**. Stung by reliability problems surrounding the **QL** and **Spectrum Plus**, and with their reputation also dented by the **Pocket TV** supply problems, **Sinclair** needed a success story - and fast. It had to be something new, something eye-catching, something that would capture the imagination of cynical onlookers.

The single-seater **Sinclair C5** electric car had all of those qualities, but in the worst possible way. It was a boffin's dream which didn't stand a chance. Whilst the vehicle could hit fifteen miles per hour and was road legal, doubts were raised about just how safe it was to use with the driver sitting down so low that lorry drivers right behind them would not be able to see them. The fact that they looked silly didn't help matters and the press had such a field day that the name **Sinclair** is now permanently associated with the failed **C5** rather than with his many successes.

Sinclair Research was now millions of pounds in debt, yet still had dreams of new portable computers, **Spectrum** upgrades and state of the art data storage methods. They needed money, and with **Sinclair Research** fighting bankruptcy new investors were being searched for. Flamboyant **Mirror Group** owner **Robert Maxwell** announced to the nation that he would save **Sinclair Research** and wallowed in the publicity that desire generated over a few months.

The potential deal fell through when **Maxwell** was refused access to the full accounts, leaving **Sinclair** in a very precarious position and surrounded by rumours about how bad things really were with them. In the end the **Dixons** retail group agreed to a ten million pound deal which took a lot of unsold stock off of **Sinclair's** hands and **Sinclair** lived to fight on for a little longer.

Meanwhile, a large empire was being formed in the software market. **David Ward**, managing director of **Ocean Software**, expanded his horizons by acquiring what was left of the now-defunct **Imagine Software** label, but also started up a new label called **US Gold**. Whilst the **Spectrum** hadn't made much of an impression on the **American market**, the **Commodore 64** had done so and **US Gold** was dedicated to releasing those games in Britain and porting them to the popular British computer formats, together with being a vehicle for releasing conversions of popular American arcade games.

"**Coin-op conversions**" were starting to catch on. The simple design, instant appeal and game recognition combined to form a lucrative business off the back of the popularity of amusement arcades. The idea of buying a home computer version of a favourite arcade game and not having to regularly feed ten pence coins into the genuine article anymore proved to be irresistible to many punters, and the good news for the software houses was that there would always be a constant supply of new arcade games.

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

Alien 8

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

Knight Lore In Space?



Alien 8 was lauded by some as the best of the isometric **Filmation** titles from *Ultimate*, but for others it was the very beginning of the decline of the once great software house. Visually it was virtually identical to their previous game, **Knight Lore**, although the graphics engine had been tightened up and a space-aged theme had been tacked on.

According to various interviews, *Alien 8* was half-completed at the time of *Sabre Wulf*'s release. Both it and *Knight Lore* were held back from the market for fear of damaging the sales of *Underwurlde* and *Sabre Wulf* respectively. If(!) this was actually the case, then it seems that the legend and reputation of *Ultimate* was well-deserved.

The story of **Alien 8** cast the player as a maintenance robot on board a colony ship tending to the needs of cryogenically frozen beings held in suspension until they reached their destination. Unfortunately, there was an alien attack en route and the resulting damage left the cryogenic devices inoperative. In order to fix all of the machines and save the cryonauts, the robot was required replace all of the valves that had been removed by the aliens. This had to be done within a strict time limit or some of the cryonauts would die and the mission would be a failure. Failure meant reprogramming — an amusing (although rushed looking) sequence in which the robot was beaten with a hammer, cane, and boxing glove (possibly inspired by the similar death animation in **Manic Miner**).

In terms of gameplay, **Alien 8** was only a little different from its predecessor, **Knight Lore**. In **Knight Lore**, the aim of the game was to collect the objects requested by the cauldron. Each time an object was deposited in the cauldron, it would request another, totalling fourteen in all. However, in **Alien 8** the mission was to collect different shaped plugs to repair the cryogenic devices. Fundamentally, it was the same concept, but instead of taking many objects to one central location in series, the player had to take many objects to many locations. Whilst being fairly similar to **Knight Lore**, the atmosphere and aim of the game were just sufficiently different to make it worth while. Unfortunately the same could not be said for later games from *Ultimate*.

*"It looks just like **Knight Lore** a lot of people exclaimed, feeling obscurely ripped off..."*
- Crash Magazine, April 1985



CRASH 95% SINCLAIR 90%

Back To Skool

Microsphere Computer Services Ltd.
David S. Reidy

No Dark Sarcasm In The Classroom... Hey! Teacher! Leave Those Kids Alone...

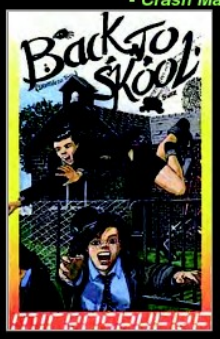


Back To Skool was the long awaited (and much delayed) sequel to the seminal **Skool Daze**, a game that resonated with schoolchildren across the UK upon its release.

***Skool Daze* and *Back to Skool* were originally intended to be part of a trilogy. An interview with the owners of *Microsphere* was published in the February 1986 issue of *Crash Magazine*. In that article *David Reidy* intimated that clues to the third game in the planned trilogy were hidden in *Back to Skool*. According to an interview in the October 1999 issue of *Arcade* magazine, the sequel was to be called *Eric and Hayley's Decathlon*. It was not finished because at the time (1987) the *ZX Spectrum* software market consisted of mainly budget releases. Whether this was to be the title, or whether as many suspected, the third game in the trilogy was to be called *Skool's Out* will remain a mystery.** Apparently the cover artwork for the third game had been created, although it has since been lost in one of several garage clearouts over the intervening years.

*"Though...a year overdue...**Back to Skool** certainly proves itself as a worthy successor to **Skool Daze**."*
- Crash Magazine, December 1985

In **Back To Skool**, *Eric* found himself at a newly remodelled school in a similar predicament to the last game. This time, instead of stealing his report from the headmaster's safe, he had to return his newly forged one to the safe before it was discovered to be missing.
As is standard for a sequel, the task to be performed in this game was significantly more complex than the prequel. Additional characters such as *Hayley*, *Eric*'s girlfriend would help out by offering to do some of his lines. Ask her too many times, and all *Eric* would get was a slap in the face. In order to get the report back into the safe, *Eric* had to get up to all kinds of mischief including stealing a bike, knocking out the caretaker, getting the masters drunk, releasing frogs and mice in the girls school and relieving the headmaster of *Eric*'s school and the headmistress of the girls school of their all-important keys.
Back To Skool was a great improvement over the already excellent original game, and it's a definite shame that the *official* sequel was never released. In lieu of this, the unofficial sequel, *Richard Jordan*'s **Klass of '99** is an excellent surrogate and can be found on the web with a simple search.









Cauldron

Palace Software Ltd.
Tony Barber, Steve Brown

Esmerelda Weatherwax In Her Younger Days?

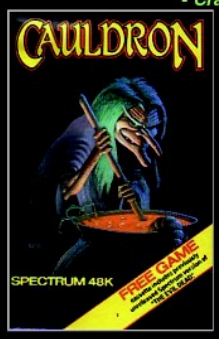
Cauldron was a conversion of a successful *Commodore 64* game. It blended aspects of **Scramble** and **Defender** with a medieval mythos and added an arcade-adventure component to the mix.

One of the key differences between this version and the *Commodore 64* version is the lack of a continually scrolling screen. In this version, the screen only scrolls when the witch reaches the edge of it. It's probable that this compromise contributed to the delayed release of this game compared to the *Commodore 64* original. This difference does affect the game play, and as with the sequel, the *Commodore 64* version is the superior game. However, as an added bonus, the original cassette edition of this game came with a free bonus game on the reverse side — a game inspired by the famous horror movie, *The Evil Dead*, that wasn't good enough for independent release.

In **Cauldron** the aim of the game was to help the witch find six magical ingredients for her spell to defeat the *Pumpkin King* and obtain the golden broomstick — an artefact of untold power.
The game started off at the witch's hovel and the player, as the witch, flew across the erratically scrolling landscape searching for several colour-coded keys that allow access to subterranean caverns. In each of these caverns, an ingredient for the spell could be found. The witch, proving to be extremely spry for her advancing years, had to jump from platform to platform to reach the spell ingredients. Once all six ingredients were found, the spell of opening could be cast and the seventh door breached, behind which was the *Pumpkin King* and the golden broomstick. In defeating the *Pumpkin King*, the witch claimed the broomstick and the unlimited power that it represented.
Cauldron was an excellent, atmospheric and playable game. The two biggest faults in the playability were the fact that the witch had no defence on the ground (meaning that she was guaranteed to lose magic power in collisions with the enemies) and that the collision detection in the underground platforms section was a little ropey.



"Here's another game...converted from the 64. They've had some trouble with the continually scrolling screen..."
- Crash Magazine, July 1985







CRASH 91% SINCLAIR 00%

Chaos

Games Workshop Ltd.
Julian Gollop

One Life, Furnished In Early Moorcock...

Games Workshop, publisher of many boardgames and 'as-addictive-as-crack' metal miniature collection wargames branched into computer game publishing with a number of fairly well received titles. **Chaos** is one of the more well-remembered of these.

***Chaos* was written by the same authors as the famous *UFO* series, known as the *XCOM* series on the other side of the pond.**

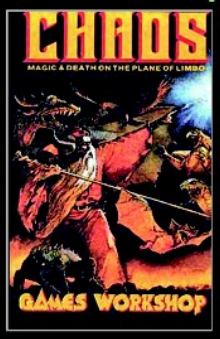
In **Chaos**, the player took on the role of one of eight wizards fighting for supremacy on the planes of Limbo. In order to battle against the other wizards (that could be controlled by the computer or by other players on a hot-seat, turn-by-turn basis) the player cast spells to summon magical creatures or entities such as giant rats, golden dragons and the fabled gooey blob. Each spell had a chance of succeeding which varied depending on the difficulty of the spell in question. For example, a giant rat was significantly easier to conjure than a golden dragon.
As well as casting spells, the player was able to move his wizard one space at a time unless mounted on a magical creature or using a spell (in which case he could move up to six squares although whether that was enough to escape the WMD that was the gooey blob was another matter entirely). To complicate matters, the player could also cast illusory spells. These were easier to cast but evaporated when an enemy wizard *disbelieved* them. There were many other types of creature in the game including the undead, immune to all except other undeads, and flying creatures that could escape obstacles. Spells were classed as lawful, neutral, or chaotic, and their relative strengths and effects were affected by the nature of the battlefield. The battlefield was changed by the type of spell cast, so chaotic spells made the environment more chaotic, while lawful spells made it more lawful. The more lawful the environment, the easier lawful spells were to cast and vice versa.
Chaos was an excellent game with many strategic possibilities. It was one of those games that appeared to engender love/hate reactions — most loved it, but a significant number of players (inexplicably) found it slightly on the dull side.





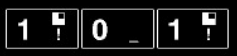
"The game is sufficiently complex to appeal to dungeons and dragons fans and to strategy game players."

- Sinclair User, May 1985









Chuckie Egg 2

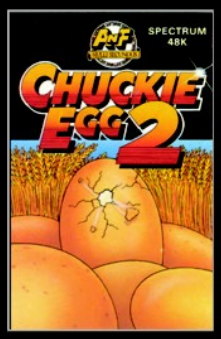


A'n'F Software Ltd.
Mike Webb, Sean Townsend (?)

Also Known As: Choccy Egg...



"As platform stuff goes, this is bad enough to make a chap chuckie up..."
- Your Spectrum, July 1985







After the success of **Chuckie Egg**, *A'n'F* wanted to capitalize on the success of the multi-platform release with a sequel. To this end, they released this multi-screen arcade-adventure game which transplanted the *Henhouse Harry* of the original into a Chocolate Egg factory.

The author of the original *Chuckie Egg* was not at all happy with *A'n'F*s plans for the sequel. In a March 2004 *World Of Spectrum* forum post, *Nigel Alderton* had this to say: "I didn't have anything to do with *Chuckie Egg 2*. I didn't like *A'n'F*s idea for the game. I felt they were just rushing the game out to cash in on the success of *Chuckie Egg 1* and they didn't care if it worked as a game or not. Also by that stage they'd only paid me about half of my royalties and it turned out they were well on their way to going bust." Oops!

In **Chuckie Egg 2** the aim was for *Hen House Harry* to make chocolate eggs for Easter. To do this he needed to collect all of the required ingredients from the separate areas of the factory. The ingredients required to make a complete egg were chocolate, sugar, milk and of course, toys for the inside of the egg.
The factory was split into a number of logical sections such as the chocolate making section and the sugar processing plant. There was also the dairy and the toy-making depot, as well as other linking areas that represented the bowels of the factory. Not only did *Harry* have to collect the ingredients to mix the eggs, but he also had to find and use other items to complete the task, such as ladders, bits of girders, keys and more. Of course, the first task that *Hen House Harry* faced was to get past the guard dog, rendered in an attractive cartoon fashion. However it looked as if the effort put into the presentation of this section (which made up the first three screens of the game) was not put equally into the rest of it.
Despite the short time in which this game was written it was not at all bad. The disdain with which the prequel author viewed the game was probably undeserved, as it was a reasonably fun arcade adventure.



Confuzion

Incentive Software Ltd.
Brendan Kelly

Everywhere The Sun Is Shining, All Around The World, It's Shining, But Cold Winds Blow Across Your Mind...



Confuzion was one of a rash of puzzle games of this type released for the *ZX Spectrum*, joining such titles as **Jumbly** and **Split Personalities**.

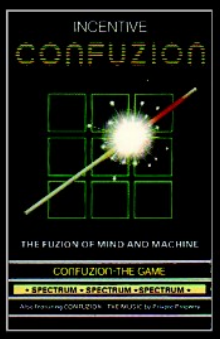
The author of this game was *Brendan Kelly* who (along with *Sean Ellis*) wrote the famed utility *Graphic Adventure Creator*, *Incentive*'s answer to *Gilsoft*'s *The Quill*. *Incentive* also publicized this game by holding a competition, the first prize of £100 going to the first walk-in in their Reading store who could play all the way through the game.

Confuzion was an action puzzle game that required the player to slide blocks around in order to form fuse paths between bombs and sparks. Each block contained one or two sections of path and could be slid into whatever configuration the player preferred using the handy gap. Blocks could be slid and/or rotated to form a path for the sparks.
If a spark struck the edge of the gap then a big chunk would be taken out of the fuse that smouldered quietly at the bottom of the screen. Failure to get the spark to one of the bombs that were spread around the edge of the playing area before the time limit ran out spelled disaster (and a large explosion).
On later levels the task became more difficult, not only because the size of the playing area increased, but also due to the introduction of mobile water droplets that doused the player's spark if they collided with it.
The main problem with **Confuzion** was that it moved too quickly to play strategically. Unless the player had the reflexes of a super-human there simply was not enough time to adequately plan a good approach, and consequently most play sessions devolved into a simple 'close-the-eyes-and-hope-for-the-best' jam. A shame for such a promising puzzle game.



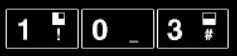
" Read the name and then agree that yes it is, isn't it!"

- Your Spectrum, July 1985









The Covenant

P.S.S. Ltd.
Paul Hutchinson

Take An Old Biblical Story, Mix In Some Sci-Fi Mumbo Jumbo, And This Is What You Get...

The Covenant is the little-known and underappreciated sequel to the little-known and underappreciated **Xavior** also from *P.S.S.*. *P.S.S.* was not one of the major *ZX Spectrum* publishers but a few of their games did make a splash in the industry. This game and its prequel also made use of the *Currah Microspeech*.

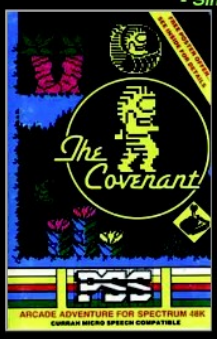
The author of this game, *Paul Hutchinson*, wrote into *Crash Magazine* shortly after starting full-time work with *P.S.S.*, having flunked out of his second year of university. His letter, detailing his work on the *Swords And Sorcery* game and this game (referred to as *Xavior II*), wouldn't be otherwise notable except for the fact that it appeared in the July 1985 issue of the magazine, alongside a photograph of the envelope that he had decorated with creatures from the forthcoming game. Although it clearly wasn't meant as such, this was an excellent advertising ploy for the upcoming game and probably one of the first examples of a modern game developer blog.

In **The Covenant**, the player took on the role of an adventurer, *Xavior*, collecting the fragments of a document — the **Covenant** of the title — the last record of a once proud civilization. Along with the covenant fragments, the player also had to collect samples of the wildlife in the caverns.
The caverns were split into groups of four linked screens containing a key, a piece of the covenant and some anaesthetic used to arm the capsule stun gun. The player travelled around the area in a small capsule that afforded some protection and was also armed with a stun gun that could be used to stun the creatures for collection.
The player could also leave the capsule — and in fact had to do so in order to collect objects. Of course, when he did he was also more susceptible to damage. In order to travel to the next region the player had to stun and collect all of the creatures within the area. Once all of the areas were complete and all creatures were collected then the quest was complete and the **Covenant** would be revealed.

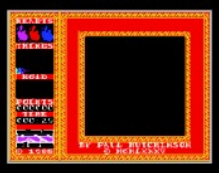


*"Any connection between **The Covenant**, biblical events and good games is totally coincidental."*

- Sinclair User, August 1985







CRASH 83% YOUR SPECTRUM 73% SINCLAIR 40%

Cyclone

Vortex Software Ltd.
Costa Panayi

Someone, Somewhere Has Been Eating Too Much Fibre...

Cyclone, a follow-up to **TLL**, used a much enhanced graphics engine and even had more of a game bolted onto it too. *Costa Panayi*'s games were going from strength to strength, and this game — although very good — was still not to be his best work.

***Cyclone* was the first game written after the author, *Costa Panayi* left full time employment to concentrate on writing games for *Vortex*. He would go on to write many more excellent games for the *ZX Spectrum*, often looking as though they were for more powerful machines. He finally left the games industry in 1989/1990 to move onto other things.**

In **Cyclone** the player took on the role of a helicopter pilot who had to retrieve five crates of medical supplies that had been dropped somewhere on the fifteen or so islands that made up the game area. Not only that, but there were also evacuees on the islands that needed rescuing and to be taken somewhere safe, away from the huge cyclone that battered the playing area.
One of the features that made this game unique was that there were no *enemies* per se, save for the relentless storm (and the occasional stray plane flying across the play area). The only real risks to the player were losing control of his helicopter if the windspeed got too high (in which case it was safer to set down as quickly as possible), crashing into surface features or running out of fuel. Fortunately most of the islands had landing pads that allowed the player to quickly refuel.
Cyclone was one of those games with simple and intuitive controls that would probably have been a great candidate for conversion to a handheld platform such as the *GameBoy Colour* (and an unofficial homebrew conversion has since been released for the *GameBoy Advance*). It was a fantastically compelling game despite the lack of violence and shooting. Players soon learnt to hate that malevolent little bugger of a cyclone as it always seemed to turn up just when it was most inconvenient, mercilessly sending the helicopter spiralling into the ground.





*"A far better game than **TLL** with much more content and playability..."*
- Crash Christmas Special, 1984/85







Dark Star

Design Design Software Ltd.
Simon Brattel

Don't Give Me Any Of That Intelligent Life Crap, Just Give Me Something I Can Blow Up...

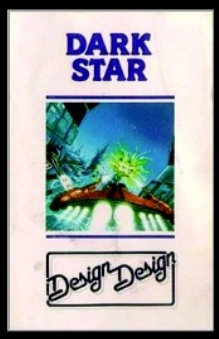


Dark Star was a blazingly fast 3D space combat game from *Crash Magazine* darlings, *Design Design*. The graphics in **Dark Star** and its sequel, **Forbidden Planet**, were fast because they were so sparse. The shape of ships, laser fire and enemy planets was more *suggested* than explicitly *displayed*.

***Dark Star* was released with a second program on the reverse side of the cassette — a password protected spoof of teletext called *Spectacle*, that (among other things) bemoaned the author's lack of romantic encounters (although a quick web search reveals that he's sorted it out since then, with a wife and kids in tow).**
The password was Everyone's a nervous wreck — a line from the Supertramp song, *Just Another Nervous Wreck*.

"Hopefully Design Design's next offering will be a game instead of a programming exercise."
- Your Spectrum, February 1985

In **Dark Star** the player was the pilot of an advanced space fighter, the *LIAR*, in a sixteen by sixteen array of galactic sectors. Each of these sectors needed to be purged of evil alien life by the player, a task which involved fighting off alien *Outsider* attacks in space, and then clearing each planet in a sector of any military outposts on the surface. Surface defences included alien ships and gun towers that had to be avoided or destroyed. Once all planets in a sector were cleared the player could then leave the sector via hyperspace — a process that involved navigating through a tight tunnel between zones, and then beginning the ethnic cleansing process all over again in the new sector.
Dark Star was a fun game but was definitely on the sparse side. A feature of note was that almost as much effort appeared to have gone into the front end menu system as had gone into the game itself. It was a veritable cornucopia of secrets, Easter eggs and surprises.







(Note: The Sinclair User score is taken from a 1987 review of the re-released game.)



Dragontorc Of Avalon

48k

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Steve Turner

Astral Projection In The Wispy Woods? Hmm... Stop Eating The Mushrooms, Methinks...



Back in 1984 *Steve Turner*, well known for his 3D games in the **Seiddab Trilogy**, felt the need to write a game along different lines so he came up with the first "adventure movie", **The Legend of Avalon**. As was often the case with him the next game started out as a rewrite of the last one. A year later, **Dragontorc of Avalon** was born, a game that essentially used a slightly improved version of the same engine but added more quantity and quality to the original thus making it a greatly enhanced experience.

***Steve Turner* was responsible for a great many of the games put out by *Hewson Consultants*, mostly authoring them under the name of his own company, *Graftgold*. He designed the *Avalon* series because he believed a major revolution was looming on the horizon that would involve interactive entertainment: instead of watching a film we would be able to participate in it. *Avalon* was meant to be a milestone on the timeline of that revolution. In fact, he once admitted that his favourite creation on the *ZX Spectrum* was *Dragontorc*.**

In **The Dragontorc Of Avalon** the player was the wizard *Maroc* who travelled around the lands of Avalon by astrally projecting his image as a floating apparition. The aim of the game was to defeat the evil witch-queen, *Morag The Shapeshifter*.
To do this, the player had to enlist the aid of *Maroc*'s old tutor, *Merlyn*, who had been imprisoned by *Morag*. The witch-queen sought the magic of the titular Torc, an artefact of great power, rendered harmless until five mystical crowns were reunited. *Maroc* had to travel the lands, finding new objects, spells and allies to help him on his quest and defend him from the forces of evil arrayed against him.
The Dragontorc Of Avalon was an exciting, challenging and highly addictive game that many would find perhaps a bit too hard for comfort.

CRASH 92% | YOUR SPECTRUM 60% | SINCLAIR 80%

"It's an improvement over the original but I still rate this as a triumph of programming over playability."

- Your Spectrum, June 1985







Guest Writer: Mike Lalaounis

Elite

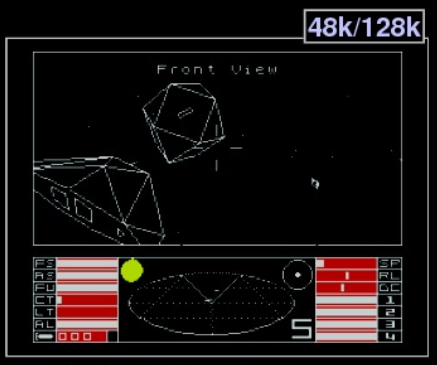
Firebird Software Ltd.
Ricardo Pinto, Dominic Prior, Philip Machan, Mark Whigton

Elite: Teaching A New Generation Of Narcotics Dealers The Tricks Of The Trade...

Elite was one of the publishing phenomena of the 80's, selling millions of copies across multiple platforms. The *ZX Spectrum* version of **Elite** came out in two versions: one for 48k, and a later version for 128k machines. The latter was mainly a bug-fix with very few extra features and — disappointingly — no 128k enhancements.

Despite its fame, *Elite* also went down in history as the game that foisted the frustrating (and thankfully short-lived) *LensLok* protection scheme onto an unsuspecting public. This was a small piece of plastic housing a refractive lens. When the program loaded some optically scrambled letters and numbers would be displayed on screen. Looking through the correctly-positioned *LensLok* device would allow them to be viewed normally. If they were then typed in correctly the game would load. Unfortunately, early copies of *Elite* shipped with the wrong *LensLok*, making it impossible to start the game. Notably, the 128k version of the program did not include the protection scheme.

Elite was the quintessential space trading game setting the player as the new owner of a *Cobra Mk. III* spacecraft and letting him loose in a huge eight galaxy universe full of planets, pirates, and opportunities for trade and battle. The aim of the game, in as much as there was one, was to reach the combat status of **Elite**, a task which required the destruction of an Herculean amount of enemy space craft. Trading required hyperspace jumps between systems, running the risk of an incorrect jump and the dangers of Witchspace and the *Thargons*.The galaxies and solar systems in the game were algorithmically generated, resulting in a huge playing (and somewhat homogenous) playing area, although the technology level and political stability of systems varied somewhat. To provide a bit of gameplay variety, there were several special mission events programmed into the game.



"My only gripe is that you have to use some stupid lenslock thing to play the game..."
- Crash Magazine, November 1985







CRASH 92% SINCLAIR 100%

Everyone's A Wally

Mikro-Gen Ltd.
Chris Hinsley

Wally, Wilma, Tom, Dick, Harry (And Herbert)... Oh, The Humanity!

The adventures of *Wally Week* went from strength to strength with the release of this groundbreaking arcade adventure from *Mikro-Gen*. Instead of merely one character to control, **Everyone's A Wally** introduced no less than five separate player characters, and one non-player character.

Originally, this game was going to be titled *The Life Of Wally*, but this was changed before release, possibly because it didn't make a very good song title. The reverse side of the *Everyone's A Wally* cassette contained a catchy (read: annoying) 'hit' tune that was also duplicated in-game as the title tune. Fortunately, *Mikro-Gen* chose not to pursue this particular promotional strategy with future games, although the song was picked up as a jingle by the *Steve Wright in the Afternoon* show on Radio 1. Interestingly, the town in which this game is set appears to be closely modelled on Bracknell, near Reading — the home town of *Mikro-Gen*. In particular, the Red Lion pub, shown in the screenshot looks very similar to the real thing as it looked back in 1985.

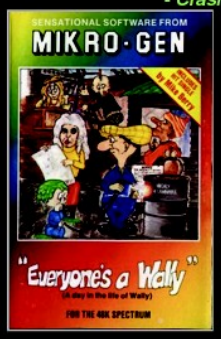
Everyone's A Wally was a game in which the overall task was to earn money by performing odd jobs and subsequently find the combination of the safe containing the money to pay the gang's wages. This game was notable for being one of the first to allow the player to control multiple characters. Each of the five playable characters had a different set of skills that enabled them to do certain jobs. For example, *Wally* was a builder, *Wilma* was a housewife (very P.C.), *Tom* was a mechanic, *Dick* was a plumber, and *Harry* was an electrician. When not being controlled by the player each character wandered around the game doing their own thing. Control could be switched between characters when they appeared on the same screen as the player.
For many people, **Everyone's a Wally** was considered the pinnacle of the series.

CRASH 93% SINCLAIR 80%

48k



"[this]...has to be a big hit, and I hope the pop single...does as well (although our preview copies did not have this on yet)."
- Crash Magazine, March 1985







1 ! 0 _ 9)

Fairlight: A Prelude

The Edge Software Ltd.
Bo Jangeborg, Niclas Osterlin

Neither Fair, Nor Light...

48k/128k



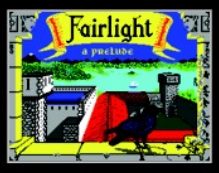
Fairlight was the first of the post-**Knight Lore** 3D isometric titles that made any real advance in the genre, blowing everyone away in the process. It was released with the alternative subtitle: **A Light Revealed**. A version was also released for the 128k *ZX Spectrum* — the main difference being the higher quality music and sound effects.

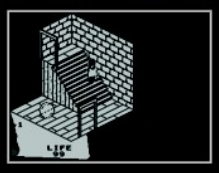
According to the November 1985 issue of *Crash Magazine*, the utility used to create the *Fairlight* world, known as *GRAX* was originally designed to create half-screen graphics for QUILLed adventures. The initial plan was to use *GRAX* internally in-house to produce a series of *Fairlight*-type adventures, and then to eventually release *GRAX* as a utility much like the text-adventure creation software, *The Quill*, to allow people to create their own isometric 3D adventures. *Fairlight* was originally intended to be a trilogy, but only the first two games were released. The second game, subtitled *A Trail Of Darkness*, was released incomplete and unwinnable due to time pressures and disagreements between *Bo Jangeborg* and the publishers.

"...A stunning game, achieved with a new programming technique..."
- Crash Magazine, November 1985

The game of **Fairlight** was set in a land that had been covered by a terrible darkness, linked to a mystery surrounding an impenetrable castle. The game opened with the hero, *Isvar*, rescued by a mysterious wizard from the larder of she-ogre, *Ogri*. The wizard led *Isvar* to the previously sealed castle, and asked *Isvar* to rescue him, claiming to be the imprisoned court sorcerer of the old *King Avars*. The wizard then vanished, leaving *Isvar* alone in the castle. The player then had to find the fabled *Book of Light* and take it to the imprisoned wizard so that he could restore light and hope to the land of **Fairlight**.
One of the interesting things about this game was the surprisingly sophisticated plot twist (for a game of this type), in which upon bringing the book to the wizard, *Isvar* finds that he has been deceived, and had released the imprisoned *Dark Lord* responsible for plunging **Fairlight** into darkness in the first place.







CRASH 95% SINCLAIR 100%

Fighting Warrior

Melbourne House
Stephen Cargill, Russell Comte

Fighting Warrior? Erm... How Many Other Kinds Are There?

Fighting Warrior was considered by many to be an 'unofficial' sequel to **The Way Of The Exploding Fist**. Certainly the similarities in presentation — both in the program *and* the packaging did not go unnoticed by the majority of players.

***Fighting Warrior* was not written by the *Melbourne House* in-house UK team, but instead was farmed out to an independent contractor known as *Studio B* even though they worked out of the same office space.**

In **Fighting Warrior** the player took on the role of an Egyptian fighter who, upon discovering that the pharaoh had slated the love of his life to be buried alive in the pharaoh's honour, decided to go on a quest to rescue her. Unfortunately, the pharaoh (and his court sorcerer) had other ideas — ideas involving the generation of lots of magical creatures to throw in the path of the player's character that he would have to fight through in order to get the girl.
The nasties arrayed against the player in this game included a dog-headed warrior, a lion-headed warrior and a large gargoyle-like creature. The animations of these characters were particularly well done and some of the poses were downright startling — especially when any of the creatures roared at the player.
Overall, **Fighting Warrior** was a pretty good scrolling beat'em-up game. It did suffer a bit from repetitive gameplay, as the only thing to do was move from left to right killing the anthropomorphic enemies to progress (and occasionally avoid a stray arrow that was fired on screen).
It was a fun game, but wasn't a patch on **The Way Of The Exploding Fist** despite the obvious (and superficial) similarities. The range of play options available to the player were simply too limited compared to its superior cousin.





"One of the best variations on the karate theme I've seen."
- Your Spectrum, December 1985







1 1 1

Frank Bruno's Boxing



Elite Systems Ltd.

Andy Williams, Trevor Perks, Paul Holmes, Gary Priest

Know What I Mean, Harry? Who The Hell Was Harry?

48k



Frank Bruno, the ever-popular British Boxer, provided the tie-in license required to propel this 'pretty-good-but-not-brilliant' unauthorized conversion of *Nintendo*'s **Punch-Out** to stellar sales. To be fair, it was actually an entertaining game, beating out the superior looking (but not as fun to play) **Rocco** from Spanish publisher *Dinamic* (originally titled **Rocky**, but rapidly changed for copyright reasons).

If the player fought his way through all of the multi-load boxers in *Frank Bruno's Boxing*, the victory screen advertised two things: an add-on tape containing further boxers, and the *Dragon's Lair*-inspired cartoon adventure *Scooby Doo And The Castle Mystery*. Neither of these products were ever released, although the *Scooby Doo* license wasn't wasted. *Elite* turned to *Gargoyle Games* to produce a game based around it, and they came up with a fun platform beat'em-up that was released in 1986.

"...If you are into vicarious violence - buy it."
- Sinclair User, September 1985

Frank Bruno's Boxing was probably the best of the arcade boxing games to appear on the *ZX Spectrum*, providing a wide range of well-animated opponents and a lot of flexibility for the player's controls.
The boxers that the player (as *Frank*) had to face were inspired by national stereotypes from around the World (Marketing Speak for "Hey! We included them all, so it's not racist!"), and included such gems as the Canadian lumberjack(!) *Crusher*, *Fling Long Chop* from Japan, Russian *Andra Puncheredov*, the nose-bone wearing *Tribal Trouble* from some far-flung ex-colonial conquest, *Frenchie* (no prizes for guessing his origin), the Italian *Ravioli Mafiosi*, Australian *Antipodean Andy*, and finally *Peter Perfect* from the USA.
Each boxer presented a progressively harder challenge and the game provided long hours of simulated arcade boxing fun. However, for a greater cerebral challenge many players turned to the more managerial simulation-based **Barry McGuigan World Championship Boxing** which although graphically inferior was probably the more well-rounded game.









Frankie

Ocean Software Ltd.
Denton Designs (John Gibson, Graham Everitt, Karen Davies)
Relax...

This game (also known by its full title of **Frankie Goes To Hollywood**) was an anomaly of the highest degree: A game based around a contemporary (and ever-so effeminate) pop band that was actually good. Not only that, it was fairly true to the concept behind the band without feeling particularly forced or contrived. Rather than release a tired platform game featuring the members of the band, *Ocean*'s *David Ward* gave *Denton Designs* the leeway to come up with something that truly reflected the high concept behind the band.

***Frankie* was announced as the first computer game to use a MacGuffin — a term popularised (and possibly invented) by the film director *Alfred Hitchcock*. For the uninitiated, a MacGuffin is an otherwise unimportant plot device used to launch a story in a certain direction. In this game, the MacGuffin is in the form of a murder.**

Frankie Goes To Hollywood was a strange and stylistic arcade adventure in which the player took on the role of the faceless non-person from the *Frankie* logo. The aim of the game was to transform from a non-person into a personage worthy of entry into *Frankie*'s fabled Pleasure Dome by maximising the score in each of four pleasure point categories: Lust, Fear, Love and Faith.
Along the way the player had to try and find clues to the identity of the murderer by playing a range of bizarre *Frankie*-inspired arcade games, based mainly around the end of the Cold War-era political climate dominant at the time. These games included *THE TERMINAL ROOM*, *SEA OF HOLES*, *CYBERNETIC BREAKOUT*, *RAID OVER MERSEYSIDE*, *THE ZTT ROOM*, *WAR ROOM* and the political spitting game, *TALKING HEADS*. Each of these games had to be won to increase the pleasure point score, and some of the games could only be reached by completing certain tasks (such as giving the cat some milk or solving the murder).
For a game that tied into a slightly dodgy eighties band, **Frankie Goes To Hollywood** was incredible. Even without the tie-in, it was still a superb and fascinating study of alternative game design.

CRASH 94% SINCLAIR 80%

48k



"(Lust + Fear + Love + Faith) x Frankie = a tough task..."

- Your Spectrum, October 1985







1 ! 1 ! 3 #

Go To Hell

Triple Six Software (Activision Inc.)
John George Jones

Stupid Is As Stupid Does...



This game caused a stir in the press when it was released, not just for the gruesome and somewhat amateurish Satanic imagery (that has been far outclassed by anything available today since **Doom**), but also due to the fact that the game came out from the apparently new software house *Triple Six Software*. Was this to be the first in a long line of Satanic *ZX Spectrum* games? The answer, as it turned out, was an emphatic no.

***Triple Six Software* was none other than a nom-de-plume for *Activision* who, for some reason or another — be it a lack of cohones, a desire for extra publicity for what was an average game, or a combination of both factors — chose not to release it under the parent label. In fact, this was the only game released on the *Triple Six Software* label. The thematic sequel, *Soft And Cuddly*, was released in 1987 by a more normal publisher, *The Power House*.**

In **Go To Hell**, the hero of the game had rather rashly told his friend to go to Hell. His friend, obviously not being blessed with the greatest intellect the World has ever seen, took him up on his request, and descended into the underworld. Consequently, it was the job of the player to guide the hero through the maze of Hell, armed only with a supply of throwing crucifixes for defence, in order to gain an audience with *Satan* (or at least, the big green head of *Satan*) and plead for the return of the soul of his friend.
The difficulty came in the fact that everything in the maze was deadly to the touch — and as the collision detection was character square-based rather than pixel-based, this led to some unfair energy loss. Still, for a basic maze romp, the game was surprisingly fun and succeeded in creating a suitably hellish atmosphere. It was filled with amusing graphics and other nice gameplay touches, including the spiders that raced around the screen leaving their deadly webs behind. It was certainly nothing stunning, but it *was* good, clean, Satanic fun.

"Buy it for the sicko humour rather than the game, and you'll not be disappointed."
- Sinclair User, August 1985









Yankee Rose.

1 ! 1 ! 4 $

Gunfright

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

Sabreman Heads Out West...

Shortly after the release of **Gunfright** and **Pentagram**, the *Stampers* sold the *Ultimate* name and back catalogue lock, stock and barrel to *U.S Gold*. Subsequently, most of the older games were re-released on the *Kixx* label. Following this, the *Stampers* concentrated solely on the *Nintendo* consoles (at least until the *Microsoft* buy-out) and left the *ZX Spectrum* market for good.

Similar to the *Knight Lore*/*Sabre Wulf* saga, it has been claimed that the missing *Sabreman* game, *Mire Mare*, was virtually complete before *Gunfright* and that this game was finished and released first for a specific reason. There are persistent rumours that *Mire Mare* may have been on the verge of completion before the *U.S. Gold* buy-out of the *Ultimate* back catalogue. Allegedly unable to stomach the idea of *Mire Mare* being shovelled out as a budget title, the *Stampers* quietly let it go missing. They had planned on it being their final swan-song in the *ZX Spectrum* market (hence releasing *Gunfright* first), but the buyout went faster than expected, and a generation of gamers missed out.

Taking the **Filmation 2** engine and actually attaching a game to it, **Gunfright** was a fun, playable and entertaining amalgam of two gaming genres. The game began with the player controlling a crosshair cursor, shooting at falling cash bags to determine the starting cash reserves. Then the game proper started, and *Sheriff Quickdraw* had to search the small town for the bandit, while being both helped and hindered by towns-people, who would kill him on contact.
A pantomime horse could be found that allowed the sheriff to move a lot faster and not suffer any ill effect from collision with the towns-folk (apart from having to pay a fine). Of course, collisions with cacti were still fatal. The use of the horse lasted for a short while and cost money. Likewise replenishing bullets also cost money.
When the sheriff found the outlaw, a shoot-out took place using a similar perspective as the original money shoot-out. *Sheriff Quickdraw* only had a fraction of a second to shoot the bandit before he himself would be shot although this time could be increased if the player approached the bandit from behind.



*"Well it seems that Ultimate have made up for the recent spate of not-so-good games with **Gunfright**"*

- Crash Magazine, February 1986







CRASH 92% | YOUR SINCLAIR 70% | SINCLAIR 80%

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Gyroscope

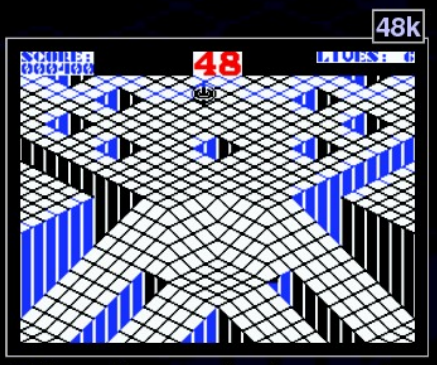
Melbourne House
Steve Lamb, Tony Mack, Dave Dew
Like Spinning Plates...

Gyroscope was the first of several adaptations of the classic arcade game **Marble Madness** to the *ZX Spectrum*. *Melbourne House*'s adaptation was much more of a literal translation than some of the others such as **Spindizzy** and **Bobby Bearing**, and did extremely well due mainly to the popularity of the arcade game in combination with the 'first to market' effect. It wasn't the best of the **Marble Madness**-influenced games, but it did have the advantage of being the first.

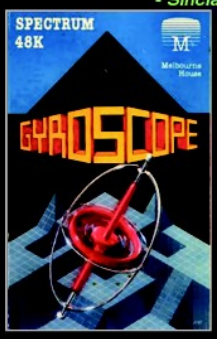
Numbering amongst probably the most blatant PR lies of all time, *Melbourne House* claimed that there was absolutely no link between *Gyroscope* and its obvious inspiration *Marble Madness*, and that the former was in no way based on, or influenced by the latter... In spite of this obviously tenuous grip on reality, *Melbourne House* also released the official conversion of *Marble Madness (Deluxe Edition)* and the *Marble Madness Construction Kit* in 1986.

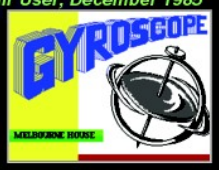
Gyroscope was, at its heart, an extremely competent adaptation of **Marble Madness** given the limitations of the *ZX Spectrum*. The aim of the game was to steer a gyroscope (controlled by the player) from the top to the bottom of a geometric slalom-like landscape, avoiding dangers such as ice, aliens, holes and other nasties. To complicate matters, the player only had a limited time to get his gyroscope from the start to the finish.
Gyroscope had a number of nice features including a catchy two channel tune, excellent use of colour, and frantically addictive gameplay.
It may not have had all the features of its ostracized parent but it certainly was a close second, and **Gyroscope** and its brethren did a lot to diminish the eventual impact of the true **Marble Madness** conversion when it finally appeared on the *ZX Spectrum*, even though it was *also* published by *Melbourne House*.





*"Melbourne House says there's no connection between ...[**Gyroscope** and **Marble Madness**]..., and [it] is not based on it."*
- Sinclair User, December 1985







Highway Encounter

48k



Vortex Software Ltd.
Costa Panayi

So These Five Daleks Go On A Road Trip...

After seeing the 3D isometric effects pioneered by *Ultimate*, *Costa Panayi* began work on what many consider to be his magnus opus of computer games, **Highway Encounter**.

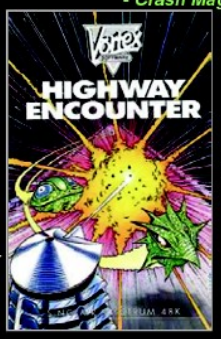
According to *Mark Haigh-Hutchinson*, *Highway Encounter* was the third isometric game released for the *ZX Spectrum* after *Ant Attack* and *Knight Lore*. Additionally, a much enhanced version of *Highway Encounter* was produced for the *Atari ST* over a three month time period — with the subsequent *Amiga* conversion taking three days, although unfortunately it appears that these conversions were never actually released. (Sadly, Hutchinson died on January 8th 2008 of pancreatic cancer.)

In this highly original game from *Vortex*, the player had to guide a convoy of five *Vortons* along a thirtytwo segment highway, pushing a weapon of mass destruction to its final destination — the enemy mothership that was parked at the end of the road.
The player controlled the lead *Vorton*, whose job it was to clear the way on the road ahead. There were many things that could block the road such as barrels, brick barricades and the enemy's defence troops (of which there were several types including eyes on stalks, mobile mines and large frog-clam things). The blockages in the road formed puzzles that needed to be solved by either destroying or moving/blocking aliens, barrels and brick barricades.
Once the blockage was cleared the column of remaining *Vortons* pushed the WMD further up the road. In fact, this could be a problem if they pushed it too far into an area that the player had not yet cleared. It was a sensible tactic to use a barrel to block the path of the *Vorton* column until the player was ready for them to move.
Another unique feature of this game which added an extra dimension of difficulty was that the column of pushing *Vortons* also doubled as the player's lives. If one of these was destroyed, then the player had one life less — making it imperative that the player did not allow any aliens past. If the lead *Vorton* was destroyed — the one that the player controlled — then control was passed along to the next *Vorton* in line.

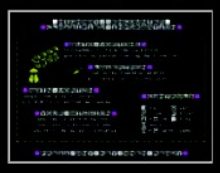
CRASH 95% SINCLAIR 100%

"...I think it will be easy to complete in a short amount of time and I will probably get bored with it then..."

- Crash Magazine, September 1985







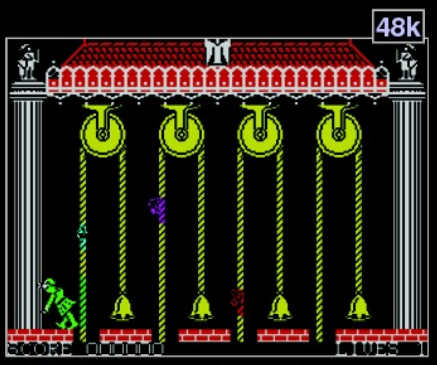
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Hunchback 2



Ocean Software Ltd.
Paul Owens, Mike Webb, F. D. Thorpe

The Danger Of Following A Pretty Woman In The Streets By Night...



The release of the original **Hunchback** arcade conversion by *Ocean* (who had secured the license) was a disappointment to many who had been fans of the original. However in an attempt to milk as much mileage out of the license as possible, two further *Hunchback*-themed games were released.

The first of these, *Hunchback 2*, was featured in the infamous episode of the television programme *Commercial Breaks* that featured the programming teams of *Ocean* and *Imagine* in the run-up to Christmas. Originally intended to show the process of creating games in two different companies in the pre-Christmas period, it ended up showing the self-destruction of *Imagine* from the inside-out. As most of the show covered *Imagine*, *Ocean* got a little lost in the rush, but *Hunchback 2* was prominently featured in the *Ocean* segments. Of course, the most bizarre thing to come out of the *Hunchback* license was the third game: *Hunchback: The Adventure*.

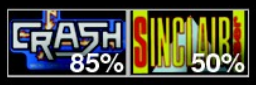
Hunchback 2 was a fairly straightforward platform game themed around the original arcade **Hunchback** game — that is, featuring bells, bats ropes and bell-towers. The game was split into several levels culminating in the rescue of *Esmerelda*, the object of *Quasimodo*'s desire. Each level of the game was different and gave the player a varying level of challenge through-out. In the first level *Quasimodo* had to get into the tower via the sewers beneath it.
Of course there were still bells in the sewer and with *Quasimodo* suffering from some sort of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, he had to ring each bell on his way through. Subsequent levels had *Quasimodo* climb up through the chambers of the bell-tower until he reached the battlements leading to the tower containing *Esmerelda*.
It wasn't a bad platform adventure game but, despite being fun, it somehow left the player with the feeling that it should have been better.

*"...falls down on its graphics ... when compared to ... **Knight Lore** which shows exactly what can be squeezed out of the ZX Spectrum."*
- Sinclair User, April 1985









I, Of The Mask

Electric Dreams Software Ltd.
Sandy White, Angela Sutherland, Paul Fik

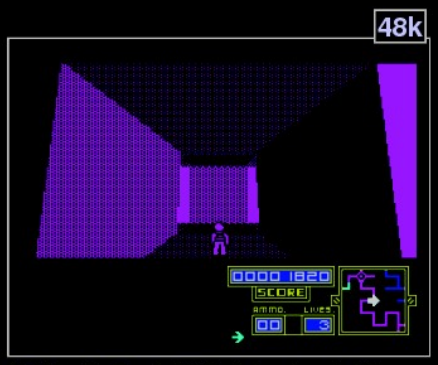
Nice Graphics... Shame About The Game...

Sandy White switched publishers with his third (and final) outing, **I, Of The Mask**. Unfortunately, apart from looking superb (and being the first solid third-person 3D game on the *ZX Spectrum*), the gameplay was sadly lacking. This was not helped by the obscure and information-free instructions. Apparently figuring out what to do in this game was also part of the challenge.

After the release of *I, Of The Mask*, *Sandy White* began work on another game, codenamed *Dick Special*, for the 16-bit platforms. This game was never completed, and at some time during this process, *Sandy White* moved to Spain and began working on human physics simulation software. *Sandy White* also maintains a website at `www.sandywhite.co.uk`.

The back-story of **I, Of The Mask** was that the player is trapped in a bizarre extra-dimensional maze that contained (among other things) all of the parts needed to construct a giant city-stomping robot.
To build the robot, the player had to run and explore the maze looking for *Entrances To Universes* that were guarded by three crystals at the entrance. Each crystal served a specific purpose. One crystal acted as a teleport to another region of the maze. The second crystal acted as a teleport to a different universe within the maze, and the third crystal allowed access to a robot body-part.
To retrieve a body-part, it had to be shot three times using the player's limited ammunition. To further complicate matters, the player needed to ensure that the robot-parts were collected in the correct order — starting with the feet and progressing upwards to the head. Once the player built the robot, the assumption was that he went on a genocidal rampage, reducing the cities of the world to rubble and laughing in the ruins. However this last part wasn't included in the game (unfortunately).





" Evidently, Sandy White is far ahead of his time..."

- Crash Magazine, December 1985







Jet Set Willy 2

Software Projects Ltd.
Derrick P. Rowson

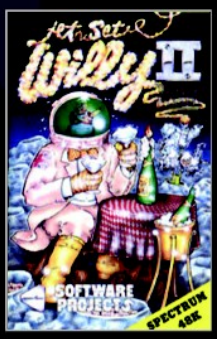
Oh $#!+, The Central Cavern!



In the absence of any real output from **Jet Set Willy** author *Matthew Smith*, *Software Projects* contracted out a back-port of the enhanced version that was released on the *Amstrad* machine.

***Matthew Smith* seemed to vanish from the scene after a few short-lived advertisements for a game called *Attack of the Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens from Mars*, leaving a mythical third *Willy* game unwritten. Recently however, disks containing an early working version of the third *Willy* game, tentatively titled *The Megatree* were unearthed and investigated by the *Retro Gamer* magazine. *Attack of the Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens from Mars* was never released, as written by *Matthew Smith* (although an empty cassette inlay would turn up at a second-hand shop in Merseyside round about 2002), but it was rewritten and released as *Star Paws* by *Software Projects* a couple of years later.**
After a long and mysterious exile *Matthew Smith* recently resurfaced and provided additional insight into what he's been up to since the early days of *Software Projects*.

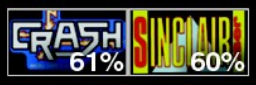
"It is eight months late, and Matthew Smith had very little to do with it..."
- Sinclair User, August 1985







Jet Set Willy 2 was at its heart an improved and updated version of the original with bugs fixed, extra rooms added and annoyances removed. For example, the old infinite deaths problem whereby the player would die repeatedly without chance of reprieve was removed, the infamous Attic bug was not present, and the mansion approximately doubled in size — including a set of rooms inspired by an infamous **Jet Set Willy** hoax involving sailing to a desert island on the yacht by waiting on the yacht until nearly midnight.
It may have been a hoax in the original version, but in this enhanced pseudo-sequel, flipping the trip-switch and going to the yacht would whisk the player off to the fabled desert island. Many of the new screens are in-jokes at popular culture in the 80's, making fun of other computer games and TV series of the time.
Technically this is the superior version of **Jet Set Willy** on the *ZX Spectrum* but many people still prefer the original, written by *Matthew Smith*.

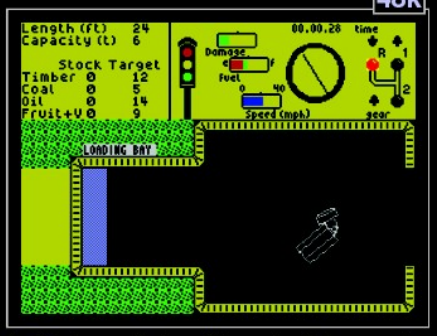


Juggernaut

CRL Group PLC.
Pete Cooke

Mercy Sakes Alive, Looks Like We Got Us A Convoy...

48k



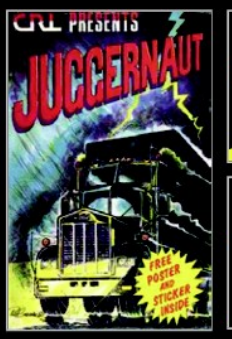
"...This is one that you'll have to sit down and play before you find out how absorbing it is..."
- Your Spectrum, October 1985

Juggernaut was never a record-breaker in sales, probably because the idea of a lorry-driving delivery game just didn't appeal to many *ZX Spectrum* owners. However, it did well enough to justify the release of a conversion for the *Amstrad* computers.
Juggernaut was also the first game that showed the beginnings of *Pete Cooke*'s signature polished style — which was developed further in his subsequent games, **Tau Ceti**, **Academy**, **Micronaut One** and **Earthlight**.

The idea for *Juggernaut*, originally titled *Jack-Knife*, came from a friend of author, *Pete Cooke*'s, who had failed a lorry driving course due to his inability to reverse. This prompted *Pete Cooke* to play around with some computer models of articulated lorries, where he found that reversing was as tricky and unpredictable as his friend had claimed. Eventually, this small technical experiment grew into a game that he sent to *CRL*, who subsequently published it.

Far from being a light arcade title, **Juggernaut** was actually a fairly involving driving/logistics simulation package with a wealth of options available to the player. Aside from the ability to choose the size of the lorry and practice several common manoeuvres, the game itself required the player to drive the lorry around the town to collect and deliver several tons of Timber, Coal, Oil and Fruit & Vegetables. The player was given a daily target of these goods that he had to deliver.
Other destinations that the player had available in the town included phone boxes so that he could call directory inquiries for the location of a goods dealer and garages for refuelling and repair. Once the player had finally got the goods, they needed to be returned to the depot loading bay. Fortunately, there was no other traffic on the road, but driving the lorry was difficult enough in itself without problems caused by other drivers.









1 ! 2 @ 1 !

Match Day

Ocean Software Ltd.
Jon Ritman, Bernie Drummond, Chris Clarke

Do You Remember What You Were Doing When Match Day Came Out?



*"...**Match Day** must be the definitive football game for the Spectrum..."*
- Crash Magazine, February 1985

Ocean's seminal **Match Day**, with its **Bear Bovver**-salvaged graphics, defined the pinnacle of computer football games for many years. It wasn't until **Kick Off** and **Sensible Soccer** on the *Atari ST* and *Amiga* were released that **Match Day** was ever surpassed.

***Jon Ritman*, among other things, was famous for the quality of his soccer games. Amazingly though, it was the strength of this game and its sequel that cemented this reputation. *Match Day II* was the sequel to this game, but it was not the last soccer game that he worked on. There was a *SNES* game, completed but not released because of an unfixed bug that caused it to go to a black screen once in a while, and a *PC* update using 3D sprite-based graphics called *Super Match Soccer* which was released but did not get widespread distribution, and consequently did not do well.**

Match Day was the first decent arcade game conversion of football for the *ZX Spectrum*. The player could either take on the computer, or a human opponent for a variable length match (from five minute halves to the full forty-five minutes), in a game where most of the rules of football were enforced — although the little-understood *Offside Rule* was not one of them.

The player controlled one footballer at a time (the one closest to the ball) and could either dribble, tackle, shoot, or pass the ball. The computer AI was fairly formidable too. According to *Jon Ritman*, the AI was one of the last things implemented, and the initial algorithm was simply to have the computer player to simply (a) run towards the ball, (b) pass the ball up-field and (c) shoot at goal if in range. This simple algorithm — although much enhanced before release — scored against him within thirty seconds when it was first implemented.









Nightshade

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

Not Up To The Usual Ultimate Standard...

Many people expected this game from *Ultimate* to be as revolutionary as **Knight Lore** had been on its release. Unfortunately these people were dismayed to discover that with the release of **Nightshade** (which came out before **Gunfright**) the previously immaculate name of *Ultimate* began to take on a little patina of tarnish.

***Nightshade* was mistakenly thought to be a continuation of the *Sabreman* saga by several magazines, including *Sinclair User* and *Your Spectrum*, causing confusion amongst game players. In fact, *Nightshade* was a standalone adventure and the first game to feature the scrolling iteration of Filmation. However, the *Commodore 64* conversion of *Underwurlde* did in fact mention *Nightshade* as a sequel. But then, it also mentioned *Sabre Wulf* and *Blackwyche* as sequels too (which made no sense).**

For many **Nightshade** was a step back for *Ultimate* as it was a much less sophisticated game than **Knight Lore** or even **Atic Atac**.
In **Nightshade** the player took on the role of an adventurer intrigued by tales of the disease-cursed village of Nightshade and determined to free the village of the curse.
The game was set in a large village full of mutated, diseased villagers and four Prime Evils, a *Ghost*, a *Mad Monk*, a *Skeleton* and the *Grim Reaper* himself. Fortunately, there were four special weapons secreted in the village that could take these foes out — a *Bible*, *Crucifix*, *Mallet* and *Hourglass* respectively.
The mutated villagers themselves presented a problem, as they would infect the player on contact. The player had to collect *antibodies* that spawned in the village rooms. It was important to use the correct *antibody* to kill a monster. Using the incorrect one caused it to mutate to a different type, or even to split into two monsters. Note that there was one room in the game that had no entrances, so if any of the required weapons were in that room, the game could not be completed.
Nightshade, for all its technology, was a simple collect and shoot game with pretty graphics.



"Here come Ultimate once more with the continuing saga of Sabreman..."
- Sinclair User, October 1985







CRASH 91% SINCLAIR 100%

1 ! 2 @ 3 #

Nodes Of Yesod



Odin Computer Graphics Ltd.
Steve Wetherill, Colin Grunes, Stuart Fotheringham
Looks Familar!



"After starting the game I had to look twice to make sure that it was not by Ultimate"
- Crash Magazine, August 1985

With no regard for mythological correctness *Odin* sprang out of the loins of *Thor*, and with their debut release, **Nodes Of Yesod**, they set themselves up as a competitor to *Ultimate*. Even their loading screens, logo and graphic style echoed the best of the *Ultimate* golden years and it's not hard to see how these games could have been from *Ultimate* if they hadn't been sidetracked into 3D after **Underwurlde**. An enhanced 128k version of this game was produced, although aside from the 3 channel music, there was little difference. More disturbingly, the sequel to this game, **Arc Of Yesod**, was — aside from the room graphics — virtually the same game.

According to *Stuart Fotheringham* the version of *Nodes Of Yesod* released was not the version that the authors intended. Unfortunately, the *Microdrive* containing the code crashed, corrupting the data, and causing them to have to hurriedly rewrite a large portion of the game — apparently not as good as it had been originally.

In the very *Ultimate*-esque **Nodes Of Yesod** the player took on the role of space adventurer *Charles Fotheringham-Grunes* who had been sent to the moon to investigate a series of strange transmissions from a large black monolith. In order to unlock the monolith *Charlie* had to collect eight **Alchiem**s — strange crystals in various shapes and sizes that were scattered around the caverns.
Charlie also had to get help from one of the moon's stranger life-forms, the lunar mole, which could burrow through some of the softer walls in the lunar caverns. Not all of the denizens of the moon were so friendly, however. Aliens attacked the player taking some of his life force and red astronauts attempted to steal any **Alchiem**s that *Charlie* had collected.
There were three ways of dealing with such annoyances, run away, jump on them or collect the *gravity stick* device that caused them to fall to the ground.
Nodes Of Yesod was an accomplished and entertaining arcade game, if a little *too* transparently close to the *Ultimate* style.









Panzadrome

48k



Ariolasoft Ltd.
Tony Barber, Simon Dunstan, Nick Cooke
Tanks For The Memories... (Almost).

Prior to release, **Panzadrome** was hyped rather a lot in the press, and consequently sold significantly better than one would expect for what is really a fairly dull maze game. *Ariolasoft* handled the PR for this game very well to get the sales that they did.

***Panzadrome* was the first game specifically designed for the *ZX Spectrum* by the authors (collectively known as the *Ramjam Corporation*) who had previously stuck to conversions from other platforms. Originally a sequel called *Aquadrome* was announced — supposedly to be released by *Electric Dreams*. However, this game was renamed before release, and finally saw the light of day as *Xarq* — which was pretty much the same game except with boats substituted for tanks.**

In **Panzadrome**, the player controlled a *Hell-Tek* tank attempting to infiltrate an island of robotic tanks to destroy the central computer controlling the robots.
To destroy the central computer, the player had to destroy plasma vents that formed part of the power grid supplying electricity to the computer. Of course, the computer was expecting the player to go for these weak spots, and consequently there were plenty of robot tanks guarding these areas.
Rather typically, the tank that the player was initially given to complete the mission was fairly weak and puny (due to budget restrictions, apparently) and was easy prey for the robot tanks. Fortunately, the player was able to make use of the factory depots scattered around the island to upgrade his tank.

One of the most important upgrades to get was a **Polycrete**™ module which allowed the player to fill in otherwise impassable craters caused by tank shots. In fact, if it wasn't for the impassable craters, **Panzadrome** would have been an exceptionally fun **Combat** update. As it was, every stray tank shot created a crater that blocked the narrow passages.
That got really annoying, really quickly greatly diminishing the playability of the game.

CRASH 77% YOUR SINCLAIR 70% SINCLAIR 80%

"The most aggravating aspect... was getting stuck... between two craters... [without Polycrete, forcing a]... restart."
- Crash Magazine, January 1986



1 ! 2 @ 5 %

Popeye

DK'Tronics Ltd.
Don Priestley

Popeye The Sailor Man Causing Eyes To Pop...

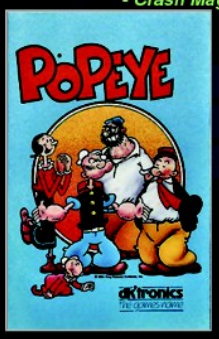


The first in *Don Priestley*'s celebrated series of huge colourful sprite-based games began with this *DK'Tronics* release, **Popeye**. Other games in this series were **Trapdoor**, **Flunky**, **Through The Trapdoor** and **Benny Hill's Madcap Chase**. However, for many, **Popeye** was still the best of this series.

The graphical style of *Popeye* was due to *King Feature Syndicate*'s insistence that the character of *Popeye* should look identical to his cartoon counterpart — complete with correctly coloured clothes. According to *Don Priestley*, the only way this could be successfully accomplished was by making the figures eleven character squares high. This requirement was apparently relaxed for the sequel, *Popeye 2*, written by *Richard Stevenson* and *Paul Bellamy*, and released by *Alternative Software* which featured a detailed, but monochrome *Popeye*, climbing up a building to rescue *Olive*. However the second sequel, *Popeye 3*, was a laughable intergalactic wrestling game featuring *Popeye* against a range of alien wrestlers.

The player took on the role of *Popeye* who was on a quest to collect twenty-five hearts for *Olive Oyl* without being accosted by *Bluto*, the *Sea Witch* or any of the other denizens of the world.
The game took the form of a small arcade adventure with hearts hidden behind a network of doors that required *Popeye* to find the correct key. Other objects available for *Popeye* to collect included spinach, which was used to help him recover after being knocked out by one of the baddies.
Each area of the game had three levels of depth, effectively making it a 3D game where *Popeye* could move in and out of the screen to navigate around objects or nasties as they approached. Of course, some of them, such as *Bluto* could also change layers, so the player had to be careful he didn't get clobbered when he least expected it.

"A very well finished game that proves that even the impossible can be done with a clever bit of programming."
- Crash Magazine, September 1985







CRASH 90% YOUR SPECTRUM 67% SINCLAIR 80%

Raid Over Moscow

48k



U.S. Gold Ltd.

David J. Anderson, Ian Morrison

It's Political Correctness Gone M.A.D...

Another one of *U.S. Gold*'s cross-platform American imports, **Raid Over Moscow** was a game conceptually in the same series as **Beach Head**. *U.S. Gold* built a reputation for importing American games, usually written for the *Commodore 64*, and producing fair-to-middling conversions of them for the *ZX Spectrum*.

***Raid Over Moscow* was released in the final years of the Cold War, and as such it was acceptable to make fun of the Russians. Even so, this game did take things a little too far for a lot of people, and got some negative press coverage for its title and subject matter. Of course, any publicity is good publicity, and consequently the press coverage just increased sales.**

Despite all of the publicity, the *ZX Spectrum* conversion of this game was not actually that good. It was fairly playable, but not that technically impressive. The game was split into several sub-games, starting with the overview screen showing a hemi-globe for pin-pointing soviet launches. Once a launch had been detected, the view was switched to the sub-orbital fighter hanger, containing the pilots whose mission it is to intercept the Soviet missiles. The player had to guide the fighter craft out of the hangar in the low gravity conditions. If circumstances warranted, the player could choose to bring out more than one craft at a time, preventing the need for a round trip to the hangar should one be destroyed.
Upon reaching the area of the launch silo, the player had to pilot the fighter plane in for a low level attack run, defeating ground defences and avoiding guided heat-seekers. When the player got through the ground defences, he entered the missile silo in an attempt to destroy the control centres within using rockets. This had to be done before the launched nuclear warhead hit America.
Assuming the player managed to destroy the three silos at Leningrad, Minsk, and Saratov, he then got a chance to attack the Soviet Defence Centre at Moscow, in which the player had to infiltrate the reactor room, defeat the maintenance robots and destroy the reactor, ending the threat of the red menace once and for all.

CRASH 92% YOUR SPECTRUM 93%

"Praise for its originality and cleverness has to be tempered with moral abuse but it is, nevertheless, a direct hit with no survivors... "
- Your Spectrum, May 1985







1 2 7

Riddler's Den

Electric Dreams Software Ltd.
David Harper

Riddler's Den? Sounds Like An East-End Pub...

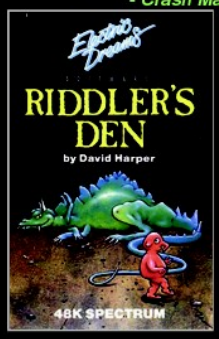


Riddler's Den was the (rather underwhelming) debut release from *Electric Dreams*, the company formed by *Rob Cousens*, formerly of *Quicksilva*. However, this *Quicksilva* connection proved valuable in securing *Electric Dreams* second release - *Sandy White*'s hotly anticipated **I, Of The Mask**.

The author of *Riddler's Den*, *David Harper*, wrote a number of other games, such as *Ariolasoft*'s *Toadrunner* (considered to be an unofficial *Riddler's Den 2* due to the obvious similarities between the two games) and *Fantasy*'s *The Drive In*, that were inexplicably popular given their general level of playability when compared to other contemporary releases. This game was originally intended to be the first in a series, but only this one was ever released (barring the 'cousin' game, *Toadrunner*)

Described as a cross between **Sabre Wulf** and **Pyjamarama**, **Riddler's Den** was originally intended to be the first in a series of games starring *Trunkie the Manelephant* in his quest to find the *Great Golden God Gregogo*.
In this, the first part of the quest, *Trunkie* was trying to find the *Golden Tusk* and the exit to the **Riddler's Den** in which he was trapped. While he was doing this he was also hunting for treasure to fund his future adventures. Such treasures could be deposited at the bank with its convenient **Riddler's Den** branch office.
To find the *Golden Tusk*, the player had to solve a series of puzzles based mainly on fairly awful puns. For example to cross the impassable river, *Trunkie* had to go there at 3:30pm (which is the time that *banks* closed — or at least they did in the 80s). Another example was the method of getting past a giant spider, which was to give it a *coat of arms*.
Overall, **Riddler's Den** relied too much on bad puns to disguise the fair-to-middling implementation and this game was not as good as magazine reviews at the time implied. For those players who like obscure non-logical puzzles and obscenely difficult gameplay then this game provided them in abundance.

"Some people dislike this apparent 'throwback' to the early days, but if they bother to ... play it ... they could ... [become] ... addicted."
- Crash Magazine, November 1985







CRASH 78% YOUR SPECTRUM 73% SINCLAIR USER 100%

Robin Of Sherlock

Silversoft Ltd.
Fergus McNeill, Judith Child (Delta 4)

What Kind Of Alcohol-Fuelled Haze Spawned This Unholy Combination?

48k

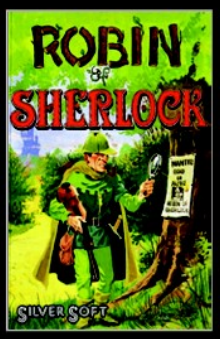


"When does a cult become a bandwagon?"
- Crash Magazine, February 1986

Delta 4 became famous for their detailed spoofs on popular themes, such as their breakthrough title, **Bored Of The Rings**. (inspired by the American National Lampoon book of the same name but much more obscene plot), and its sequel, **The Boggit**. **Robin of Sherlock** was one such title, lampooning both *Robin Hood* and *Sherlock Holmes*.

***Robin Of Sherlock* was the second and last *Delta 4* title to be published by *Silversoft*. Subsequent titles (of which there were many) were published by *CRL* and *Piranha*, among others. One particular innovation introduced by this adventure was the ability to travel back and forth between the three multi-load sections at will.**

Robin Of Sherlock was a funny and clever adventure spoof drawing from references such as *The Smurfs*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *The Wizard Of Oz* and other diverse sources.
In this game the hero took on the role of forest detective *Robin Of Sherlock* along with his band of merry men, tasked with solving (among other things) the kidnapping of *Dorothy*'s dog, *Toto*, finding out why the *Transvestite Nuns* were selling *Smurfs* as garden gnomes, who killed *Watson* and many other mysteries.
There were over two-hundred locations, many characters that could be separately interrogated and lots of funny events and puzzles to solve in this excellent **QUILL**ed adventure.
Playing this game immersed the player in the zeitgeist of 80's humour with lots of in-jokes based in and out of the software industry. The obvious examples of these would be the direct derivation of the game from *Melbourne House*'s **Sherlock** and *Adventure International*'s **Robin of Sherwood**.
Another less obvious example was the mysterious *NCP* car park that followed the player around — obviously influenced by those ubiquitous carbuncles of the 80's urban landscape in most towns.
Robin of Sherlock was a funny, irreverent and very difficult adventure that relied on a lot of brain-power (and a twisted sense of humour) to beat it.







CRASH 70% YOUR SINCLAIR 70% SINCLAIR 100%

1 ! 2 @ 9)

Robin Of The Wood

48k/128k



Odin Computer Graphics Ltd.
Steve Wetherill, Paul Salmon, Fred Gray
Sixteen Weeks Of Radio Hell...

Odin's second game after their debut **Nodes Of Yesod** took a noticeably different approach than its predecessor, although still followed the *Ultimate* mould. However, this time they took a chronological step back as **Robin of the Wood** is much more influenced by **Sabre Wulf**, whereas **Nodes Of Yesod** was inspired by **Underwurlde**.

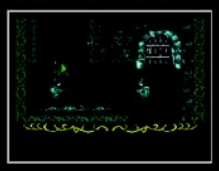
Shortly after the release of *Robin of the Wood*, *Odin* signed a contract with *British Telecom* to provide exclusive marketing rights to *Odin*'s games for a period of one year. Because of this contract, *Odin* had to decline a request by *Capcom* to create a *Robin of the Wood* arcade machine. The *BT* contract did not work out well due to issues with the payment schedule and *Odin* went out of business after a bout of legal tussling with *BT*.

Robin of the Wood (also known as **Robin O' The Woods**) put the player in the shoes of the legendary hero, *Robin Hood*. The plot of this game followed the story of *Robin Hood* somewhat but with several key differences.
In this game, *Robin* had to retrieve the legendary silver arrow, *The Shaft Of Power*, once held by his father *Aleric, Keeper Of The Arrow*. The *Sheriff of Nottingham* stole the arrow after having arranged for *Aleric*'s murder to crush the Saxon spirit.
The arrow was an important symbol to the Saxons and so the *Sheriff* knowing that *Robin* would go to any lengths to retrieve it, offered it as a prize in an archery contest hoping to flush *Robin* out into the open where he could be captured and killed.
Robin had to collect bags of gold to give to the *Forest Ent* in exchange for a bow, a sword and three magic arrows. Once these were collected *Robin* could enter the contest and win back the silver arrow. As long as *Robin* had the magic arrows he would not be recognised in the contest. As soon as all three arrows were used, *Robin*'s magical protection vanished, and he had to flee to escape the *Sheriff*'s men.
Despite the overwhelmingly positive magazine reviews **Robin of the Wood** seemed to be little more than a **Sabre Wulf** clone with slightly less cartoon-like graphics.

*"Some cynics may say that the game looks like a **Sabre Wulf** variant..."*
- Crash Christmas Special 1985/86







CRASH 94% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 80%

Shadowfire

Beyond Software Ltd.
Denton Designs (John Gibson, Graham Everitt, Simon Butler)

Admit It... Sevrina Caused A Funny Feeling In The Tummy... Right? Right?

48k



" Icon control may be new to computer games, but as a control method it must surely be here to stay..."

- Crash Magazine, June 1985

After the demise of *Imagine*, a group of displaced game developers banded together to form *Denton Designs*. *Beyond* snapped up *Denton Designs* to produce **Shadowfire** after a mere thirty minute phone call. *Beyond* hyped **Shadowfire** as the first fully icon driven graphical adventure and also published its sequel **Enigma Force** as well as a game modification application, the **Shadowfire Tuner**, allowing a player to tweak the internal game settings.

***Shadowfire* went through a series of name changes during development, being first announced with a working title of *Shadow Squad*, followed by various news items referring to the game as *Shadowstar*. At the time the idea for icon driven adventures was very novel and the inspiration for this came from *Ian Weatherburn* back at *Imagine*, nothing ever coming of it until after that company's demise. Due to internal disagreements, *Ian Weatherburn* left *Denton Designs* shortly after the signing of the *Shadowfire* contract. According to *Steve Cain*, *Ian Weatherburn* gave them an ultimatum: Do it his way or he would leave. Instead, he was sacked and went to work for *Ocean*.**

The player in **Shadowfire** controlled a team of six agents with unique skills in an attempt to get onboard *General Zoff*'s flagship, rescue *Ambassador Kryxix* and retrieve the plans for the top secret spacecraft, *Shadowfire*. Following that, the player had to capture *General Zoff*, destroy his flagship, the *Zoff V* and escape with *Zoff* in custody.
Shadowfire was a real-time game in which the player had exactly one hundred minutes to achieve the objectives using the six members of the team: *Zark Montor* (Human team leader), *Sevrina Maris* (Human locksmith and markswoman), *Manto* (teleport droid), *Syllk* (Insectoid fighter), *Torik* (Avian scout), and *Maul* (weapons droid). Of these, it was imperative to keep *Manto* alive as he was the only one who could beam everyone off the ship to complete the mission.
Shadowfire was an excellent graphical adventure game that was unsurpassed by any other game in its class — including the sequel, **Enigma Force**.







CRASH 96% SINCLAIR 100%

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Enigma Force

Beyond Software Ltd.
Denton Designs (J. Gibson, G. Everitt, S. Butler, Karen Davies)
MCMLXXXV (Albeit Five Years Too Early...)



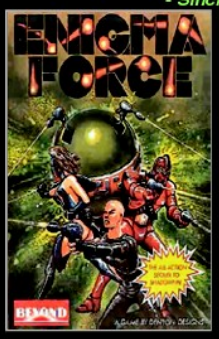
The sequel to **Shadowfire**, **Enigma Force**, was the fourth *Denton Designs*' game to be published by *Beyond*. It took the basic icon-driven concept of **Shadowfire** and extended it into a simpler, but more action-oriented adventure. *Beyond* went on to release one more *Denton Designs* game after **Enigma Force**. This game, **Bounces**, was an extremely poor effort compared to the first two and marked the beginning of a distinct decline in the quality of *Denton Designs* output. A fourth title, **Infodroid**, was never released on the *ZX Spectrum*.

The theme tune for *Enigma Force* was apparently written in the space of a few minutes while the musician, *Fred Gray*, was waiting for a program build. Apparently, he was messing around with a keyboard while he waited, and liked what he heard, adding a melody to it to form the final game music on the *Commodore 64*. An adaptation of this tune appears at the beginning of the *ZX Spectrum version*.

Enigma Force started off shortly after the end of the previous game. The team was transporting *General Zoff* back to face trial when a malfunction in the shuttle, triggered by *Zoff*'s psionic powers, forced a crash landing on Insectoid *Syllk*'s homeworld. During the crash two of the team members, *Torik* and *Manto*, were killed while *Zoff* escaped in a life-pod shortly before the impact. The surviving members of the **Enigma Force** team had to hunt *Zoff* down and recapture him so that he could finally face trial.
This was complicated by a civil war that was currently occurring between *Syllk*'s people and the *Reptiloids* Not only that, but until *Syllk* managed to contact his queen, the *Insectoids* treated the **Enigma Force** team as a threat.
In order to complete the mission the player needed to recapture *Zoff*, find the *Reptiloids* space craft, (the only functioning one on the planet), and capture it before *Zoff* reached it. Failure to do so within the time limit meant the team's demise when the *Emperor* called for the planet to be destroyed in an attempt to eradicate *Zoff* before he got off-world.



"I am quite enamoured with Maul, the manic droid, and love the way he spins on his axis during the game..."
- Sinclair User, February 1986







Spy Vs. Spy

Beyond Software Ltd.
Anthony Taglione & Malcolm Hellon
Bitchier Than A Catfight In A Whorehouse...

48k



"Let there be no doubt that bloke in the dark mac brings out the worst in me..."
- Crash Magazine, August 1985

Beyond Software secured the UK publication and conversion rights for this successful American game based on the long running *MAD Magazine* cartoon strip franchise. The *ZX Spectrum* conversion was performed by the mysterious *"Tag and The Kid"* whose identities have recently been confirmed by Richard Hewison. The two *ZX Spectrum* sequels, **Island Capers** and **Arctic Antics** were not written by the same authors, and unfortunately were appalling conversions that weren't worth playing.

***Spy vs. Spy* used an interesting graphical technique that betrayed its *Commodore 64* heritage. To compensate for the diminished colour capabilities of the *ZX Spectrum*, the conversion used double-width pixels in combination with stippled effects. Despite the odd look of the graphics, many reviewers felt that the stippled monochrome effect was more in keeping with the original cartoon strip the game was based on.**

In this game, featuring **Simulvision**™ and **Simulplay**™ (i.e. two players could play at once and see what they're doing simultaneously), one or two players could take on the role of *MAD Magazine*'s *Black Spy* and *White Spy* as they frantically raced each other to search an embassy for a map, passport, airport key and briefcase in an attempt to escape in the conveniently parked aeroplane.
The fun part of the game came in the wide variety of tricks and traps that the spies could set up in order to nobble their counterpart. Water buckets and live wires could be placed up above doors to cause anyone opening the door to be electrocuted, guns with strings attached to their triggers could be attached to door handles, bombs and powerful springs could be placed as booby-traps in searchable objects and timebombs could be dropped in rooms to catch the unwary.
This game was best played with two players, but the AI also offered a stiff challenge on the higher levels. It was a fun and original game that hasn't really been surpassed since.





CRASH 93% SINCLAIR 100%

1 ! 3 # 3 #

Starquake

Bubblebus Software Ltd.
Stephen Crow
It's An Ultimate Game In All But Name...



The second game released by *Steve Crow* that seemed to be directly influenced by *Ultimate*'s games, the first being **Wizard's Lair**. Although *Steve Crow* had already garnered attention with **Factory Breakout** and **Wizard's Lair**, it was this game, **Starquake**, that really made his name as an author of quality software.

***Steve Crow* was part of the team that published the 1996 claymation *PC* game, *The Neverhood*. More recently he was part of a new company called *Monkeytropolis* that were signed to produce extreme sports games for *Activision*. Unfortunately that venture appears to have folded sometime in 2002.**

In **Starquake** the player took on the role of *BLOB*, the BioLogically Operated Being. Starring in a typically implausible sci-fi plot, the player was responsible for rebuilding the core of an inherently unstable planet that had recently emerged from a black hole. If it was not rebuilt, then the planet core would explode causing a chain reaction that would take the rest of the universe with it.
Naturally, as is always the case in these situations, *BLOB* crash-landed on the planet, rendering his ship inoperative. To rebuild the core, *BLOB* had to search the 512 caverns surrounding it to find the nine objects that need to be replaced to effect the repairs.
BLOB could move around the cave system by a number of methods including hover-pads, teleports and temporary platforms. The hover-pads allowed *BLOB* to move around freely but he had to disembark to use any objects. Teleports allowed *BLOB* to move across large distances instantaneously — assuming that he had the correct destination code. Temporary platforms were useful for climbing to hard to reach areas but they decayed quickly. *BLOB* only had a limited supply of these although also had the ability to place them where he needed them.
As *BLOB* explored the caverns indigenous aliens would try to attack him. Fortunately, he had a laser to defend himself although like the temporary platforms, he only had a limited supply. Fortunately he could replenish his supplies by finding the many convenient supply dumps.

"We love it, and if Ultimate hadn't done most of it yonks ago we'd have given it a Classic. Buy and enjoy."

- Sinclair User, November 1985







CRASH 96% YOUR SPECTRUM 63% SINCLAIR 100%

Starion

Melbourne House
David M. Webb

Fixing Time By Solving Anagrams...



"The screen display shows instantly that this is a 3D space arcade game."
- Crash Magazine, May 1985

Melbourne House published this bizarre space-fighter/puzzle game written by a young *Oxford University* mathematics undergraduate. Of course comparisons to **Elite** were inevitable --- and while **Elite** was the better game, **Starion** had a much smoother 3D engine.

The released version of *Starion* contained bugs which prevented the game being completed, including failure to automatically refuel the craft when necessary, and a showstopper which crashed the game in the final stages. One of the last words in the game for the player to unscramble was OBERAMMERGAU, which was too large for the game's internal word length limit. *Melbourne House* released a patch, as a small BASIC program to be typed in before loading the game. This was probably the first ever release of a software patch for a published game.

In **Starion**, the player was responsible for unravelling the mess in history caused by evil aliens that had stolen historically significant artefacts from crucial junctures in time. The artefacts that had been stolen took the form of letters. The player had to shoot down all of the enemy ships in a zone so that each would release its cargo of one letter. After collecting all the letters, the player had to solve the anagram puzzle to work out what the historical artefact was.

With the anagram solved, the player then had to fly his ship into a time warp gate and decide which of the nine available time destinations the artefact belonged in. If the player was correct then the ship would be refuelled and reloaded. If not the player was returned to battle whereupon he had to destroy enough enemies to be able to re-enter the time gate.

The game was split into blocks, grids and zones of time. There were three time blocks. Each block contained nine time grids. Each individual grid contained nine time zones. Each zone contained one artefact --- and one anagram to solve.

Once the player had solved all of the *zones* in a *grid*, the first letters of each of the nine artefacts formed a new anagram that had to be solved to enter the next grid. When the player had completed all of the *grids* in a *block* then, once again an anagram of the initial letters had to be solved to access the next of three blocks.

In order to beat the game, reach **Event Zero** and attain the rank of *Creator*, the player then had to solve a final anagram of the first and last letters of each of the block words.



CRASH 94% SINCLAIR 100%

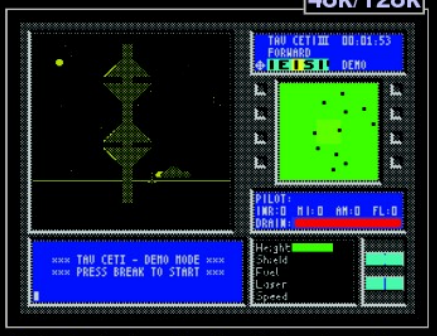
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Tau Ceti

CRL Group PLC.
Pete Cooke

The Stars, Our Destination...

48k/128k

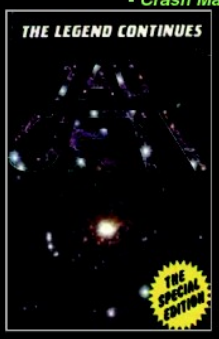


CRL put a lot of effort into publishing **Tau Ceti**, releasing it in an especially large odd-shaped box. The cassette inlay image below does not represent the initial release and instead comes from the expanded **Tau Ceti — Special Edition** release that came out in 1987.

***Pete Cooke* was inspired to write *Tau Ceti* after seeing *Firebird*'s *Gyron*. The large filled spheres of *Gyron* sparked the realization that the 3D look could be improved by the use of bi-level shading using a look up table to determine the proportion of the line that needed to be shaded given the angle between the object, the viewer and the light source.**

Tau Ceti told the story of humanity's attempt at colonizing the third planet of the **Tau Ceti** system. The first wave of settlers' attempt to colonize ended in failure due to a mysterious plague.
Once the dust had settled and a cure was found, a second wave of ships were sent out to recolonise the world. Unfortunately this second wave ended in disaster, destroyed by the automated defence systems (malfunctioning due to an asteroid strike) that were left running by the previous settlers.
This is where the player came in, piloting a single skimmer small enough to slip past the sensors. The task for the player was to shut down the main fusion reactor powering the robotic defences. Unfortunately for the player, the robots were not too keen on this idea and were attempting to destroy him. There were a variety of robots arrayed against the player including heavily armed *Fortresses* and three versions of automated *Hunter-Killers*.
The scope of the game was huge and the task of collecting the widely dispersed cooling rods required to shut down the central reactor was not easy. Nonetheless this was a complex and rewarding game only surpassed by the sequel, **Academy**.

"Pete Cooke should go far. He has brought us a game that will be remembered as an all time classic. There's not much more to say."
- Crash Magazine, December 1985







CRASH 94% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

That's The Spirit!

The Edge Software Ltd.
Steve Lipowicz, Andrew Blazdell
Who Ya Gonna Call? A Copyright Lawyer!

48k



*"**Hampstead** in piccies for the streetwise kids, and most of the jokes are stale..."*
- Your Spectrum, October 1985

As one of the weirder games published by *The Edge*, **That's The Spirit** was an intriguing yet odd, arcade adventure game with a fairly unique style of its own. If anything it could be said to play like a cross between **Tir Na Nog** and **Manic Miner**.

After a ten year stint in the games industry involved with titles such as *Guilty* and *Innocent Until Caught* from *Psygnosis*, *The Gene Machine* from *Vic Tokai* and *The Orion Conspiracy* from *Domark*, both *Steve Lipowicz* and *Andrew Blazdell* moved to 2D animation, and are currently (as of the time of writing) working at animation company 2DTV.

Sometime in the mysterious near-future the World Government in their wisdom, had renamed every city in the World 'New York'. Not only that, they also declared a moratorium on spirits and, being sticklers for detail, it was not just the alcoholic kind that they outlawed. The player took on the role of a ghost hunter in a city strongly reminiscent of the original New York. Thus began an extremely odd, but highly entertaining and quirky arcade adventure that provided single key actions that can be performed such as **swear** (which 'reset' the machine if performed in the wrong place), **join** which could be used to combine objects into other more useful creations — such as combining the nuclear reactor and gun into a **Ghostbusters**-esque **proton pack** which when used in conjunction with the **ashtray** allowed stray phantoms to be sucked up.
Not all of the ghosts could be disposed of so easily though — for example, the *ghost dog* had to be given a **bone** and the *ghostly granny* only departed if the player swore at her. Another one of the puzzles in **That's The Spirit** actually emulated the *Sinclair QL*, requiring the player to debug an incorrectly written **QL BASIC** program. The solution was to add an `End Proc` in the correct place.
That's The Spirit was a uniquely styled arcade adventure that, despite its poor presentation and implementation, provided a compelling experience with many in-jokes and puns that are often more groan-worthy than chuckle-worthy.







CRASH 82% YOUR SPECTRUM 67% SINCLAIR 80%

1 3 7

Way Of The Exploding Fist

Melbourne House

Gregg Barnett, Greg Holland, Steven Taylor, William Tang

"Woh! I Know Kung Fu!" ... "Show Me."



Melbourne House's **Way Of The Exploding Fist** was not the first two-player martial arts simulation for the *ZX Spectrum*. That honour went to *Bug-Byte*'s **Kung Fu**, released in 1984. Despite being released first (and being a fairly good game) it is **Way Of The Exploding Fist** that is remembered with the most fondness to this day — partly because of the wider variety of moves but also having a lot to do with the imaginative and atmospheric title.

***Way of the Exploding Fist* was first released on the *Commodore 64* and *Amstrad* before being converted across to the *ZX Spectrum* and was originally based on an arcade machine called *Karate Champ* that appeared in arcades in 1984.**

Way Of The Exploding Fist was played as a sudden-death karate tournament which continued until the player suffered a defeat. As soon as the player lost a bout, the game was over.

The game provided a small subset of the more popular (and impressive) moves from karate ranging from standard kicks, punches and blocks to flying kicks, somersaults and roundhouse kicks. This game represented the beginning of the "key combo" fighter genre, as each move was accessed by a combination of factors including the character's facing, joystick direction and whether the fire button is pressed. This system of controlling on-screen fighters is still used today although in a much expanded form.

For the player to win a bout, he had to score two points. Each point was represented by a **Yin-Yang** symbol displayed at the top of the screen. In order to score a full point the player had to execute a flawless attack — hitting the opponent hard and without error. If the hit was fuzzy, weak or partially blocked, then the player would only score a half-point. The more complex (and hence difficult to perform) moves scored the most points.

In the one-player game, the player levelled up for every two successive bouts that were won. If the time limit ran out during a tied fight, then it had to be re-fought. However, in the two-player game the winner was decided on points after four rounds.

"Though the weather hasn't been very sporty the recent releases of sports simulations have more than made up for it!"
- Crash Magazine, October 1985







CRASH 92% SINCLAIR USER 100%

Three Weeks In Paradise

48k/128k



Mikro-Gen Ltd.
David Perry, Nick Jones

Wally Week Goes On Holiday...

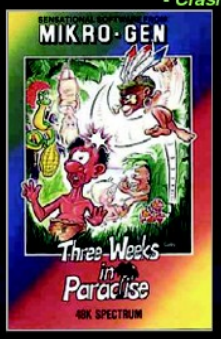
Mikro-Gen's final outing for the *Wally Week* family was arguably the best of the five published games in the series. Following this, they published a range of not so good games and never reclaimed their former glory, with lacklustre titles such as **Stainless Steel**, **Frost-Byte**, **Cop Out** and their own personal albatross, **Shadow Of The Unicorn** — the hardware enhanced megagame that required an expansion pack plugged into the back of the *ZX Spectrum*.

One of the authors of *Three Weeks In Paradise*, *Dave Perry* became better known a few years later as the head of *Shiny Entertainment*, famous for titles such as the *Earthworm Jim* series of games, *Messiah*, *MDK* and the fairly poor *Enter The Matrix*.

Three Weeks In Paradise came in two versions, one for the *48k Spectrum* and an enhanced version for the *128k Spectrum*. The latter version had smoother gameplay, better music and more screens. The extra screens took the form of a previously inaccessible missile base and a room with two gorillas and a giant beehive that could be found under the sea bed.
As with the previous *Wally Week* games, this game was an arcade adventure spread over a number of interconnected screens. In this episode in the life of *Wally*, he and his family, *Wilma* and *Herbert* went on holiday to a tropical island to soak up some sun — hence the not-so-subtle pun in the game title.
Seeing as this was a *Wally* game, the trip to paradise didn't quite go according to plan and the adventure started with *Wilma* strung up by her leg from a tree and guarded by an angry tribesman. Meanwhile *Herbert* was stuck in a cooking pot guarded by a pair of lions. *Wally* had to solve the various puzzles (usually based around bad puns) to rescue *Wilma* and *Herbert* and escape from the island.
Overall, this game vied with **Everyone's A Wally** for the crown of the best *Wally* game. However while this game clearly had the technical edge, the earlier game was more innovative and fun to play. By the time this game rolled around the *Wally* series was becoming a bit too familiar for many people.



"My overall impression was that this is a ... very professional game. Just don't ... dislike it because of the star."
- Crash Magazine, March 1986







Wriggler

Romantic Robot UK Ltd.
Devonshire House
Tickle It You Wrigglers!

48k

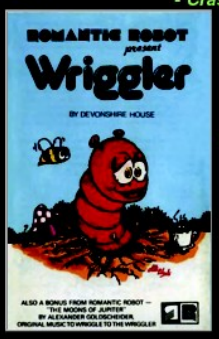


The oddest thing about **Wriggler**. apart from the game itself, is the company that published it. **Romantic Robot** were far more famous for their 'backup' devices, the *Multiface* range, that allowed a game to be paused at any point, saved off to tape, microdrive or disk or altered while running. The *Multiface* was the number one *must-have* peripheral for the *ZX Spectrum* after a *Kempston*-compatible joystick interface.

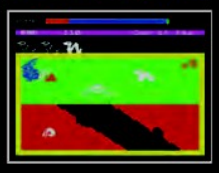
***Wriggler* used an extremely sensitive speed-loader routine (distinguishable by the fact that it drew the loading screen in reverse) that stubbornly refused to load on even the most sophisticated tape recorder. This was compounded by the fact that *Romantic Robot* apparently did their own tape duplication, with reports of people purchasing copies of the game recorded over the *Amstrad* version. There were even reports of new labels being stuck over old cassettes for *Romantic Robot*'s other titles such as *The Music Typewriter*, a musical notation utility.**

In this game the player took on the role of one of four maggots, each of which was taking part in a cross-country race through dangerous territory covering **The Garden**, **The Scrublands**, **The Underground**, **Hell**, **The Dungeons**, **The Basement**, **The Mansion** and finally, **The Planet's Surface** and escape.
Once the race started, the player's maggot, *Wriggler*, had to traverse the 256-screen maze, avoiding the black and blue ants (which moved on fixed paths) and running from the white ants that homed in on his position. Colliding with an ant caused a loss of energy as long as the player remained in contact with it. When all the player's energy was gone the maggot lost a life. Eating the various items of food, such as ice-cream and cornflakes that had been left spread around the maze helped to replenish this lost energy. Also, the infrequent cans of insect spray left lying around could be used to dispose of particularly troublesome pests.
Of particular note in this fun maze game was the *Death's Head Spider*. This monstrosity crept along the screen with an air of deliberate menace that sent shivers down the spine of any confirmed arachnophobe. One touch meant instant death to the *Wriggler*.

*"I must confess that my first impression of **Wriggler** was not a good one, I thought it was going to be rather dull. I was very wrong."*
- Crash Magazine, April 1985







CRASH 90% YOUR SPECTRUM 65% SINCLAIR 80%

1 ! 4 $ 0 _

Program: 1986

This year was the defining time in the history of the **Spectrum** as it was the year when **Sinclair's** luck ran out.

It started optimistically with the launch of the **Spectrum 128k**. Whereas the **48k Plus** was just a keyboard upgrade, the new **128k** model brought extra memory and also a new sound chip that allowed the creation of decent-sounding music. Although some commentators were disappointed there were no improvements in the graphics department and pretty much everyone was disappointed by the poor backwards compatibility, there were high hopes for the machine.

Then the bombshell dropped. **Sinclair Research** was spiralling into debt again and this time it called for drastic action. **Alan Sugar's Amstrad** company were sold the rights to **Sinclair's** range of computers in exchange for wiping out **Sinclair's** five million pound debt.

It was the end of an era. **Amstrad** soon sold off the **QL** assets to another company and set about targetting the **Spectrum** purely at the games market rather than at the hobbyist, the coder and the businessman.

First thing to change was the black Dairy Milk keyboard which was replaced by a grey typewriter keyboard with integrated tape recorder and two built-in joystick ports. With a focussed marketing campaign, **Amstrad** had guaranteed that the **Spectrum** would still be around for several years to come, and even the harshest **Sinclair** critic was thankful for that.

Just as **Amstrad** was concentrating in the games market, the three major **Spectrum** magazines were also leaning more towards the entertainment side of things. Whilst **CRASH** magazine was always biased towards games, **Your Spectrum** and **Sinclair User** had started out as publications for the coder and hobbyist. **Your Spectrum** had recently gone through a redesign turning it into a **Spectrum** version of **Smash Hits**, renaming itself to **Your Sinclair** in the process. The combination of games coverage, humour plus a thin slice of technical coverage proved to be a winner and that persuaded the staff at **Sinclair User** to spend 1986 going through their own changes.

In doing so, **Sinclair User** had lost direction. It used to be rich in technical detail and its news coverage of the industry was second to none. Now it was trying to imitate the other two magazines, combined with trying to capture the influx of younger gamers who were given a **Spectrum** for Christmas, resulting in a mediocre magazine that came a poor third to the more enjoyable **Your Sinclair** and **CRASH**.

However, **Sinclair User** and **Your Sinclair** had another trick up their sleeves. Game program listings were nothing new as publishing these was how **Sinclair User** originally started out in 1982. Those were short and simple **BASIC** games, whereas nowadays they were full-sized machine-code efforts which meant that the reader had to type in page upon page of hex dumps - lines of numbers printed in very small text crammed onto each magazine page.

They were nice free games, and sometimes they even worked first time.

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

Bobby Bearing

The Edge Software Ltd.
Robert Figgins, Trevor Figgins

What A Load Of Balls!



Bobby Bearing, published by *The Edge Software* was arguably the pinnacle of the isometric 3D form on the *ZX Spectrum*, introducing the never-bettered *Curvispace 3D*, an implementation of truly curved surfaces.

***Bobby Bearing*, much like *Jet Set Willy*, *Manic Miner*, *Chuckie Egg* and others, was a popular enough game to merit a modern day commercial remake. A fairly accurate conversion of the game can be purchased for play on *Nokia*-series mobile phones, although playing the game using a phone as a controller is likely to be more frustrating than it is enjoyable.**

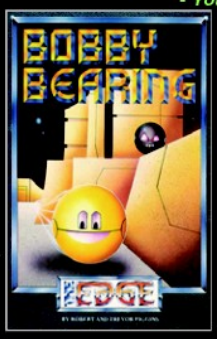
The stunningly nonsensical storyline for this game was that *Bobby Bearing* lived with his four brothers in the futuristic realm of **Technofear** surrounded by the dangerous **Metaplanes**. *Bobby* had often been warned by his parents not to venture into the **Metaplanes**, and up until the events in this game, this had never been an issue, until his mischievous cousin had come to stay. Predictably his cousin took *Bobby*'s four brothers out into the **Metaplanes** and got them all into trouble.

The player took on the role (no pun intended) of *Bobby Bearing* who had to venture into the **Metaplanes**, that were populated by evil *Black Bearings* who had captured and stunned his four brothers and cousin.

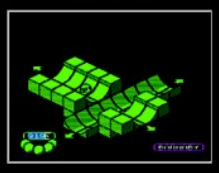
Bobby had a limited period of time to find each of his four siblings (and his cousin) and push their stunned forms carefully back home. The player rolled *Bobby* around the isometric landscape solving puzzles involving blocks, magnets, pneumatic blowers and switches (or some combination thereof) and trying to avoid falling too far, being squashed by moving platforms or stunned and pushed off an edge by one of the *Black Bearings.* Any of these unfortunate events caused an accelerated loss of time whilst *Bobby* was resurrected.

This was an extremely difficult game and was virtually impossible to complete without a map. The sheer scope and size of the playing area — not to mention the uniform nature of the rooms — made it very difficult for the player to find his way around.

"...It's so nice to look at that you spend most of the first hour just watching what the program can do - blow playing it!"
- Your Sinclair, August 1986







CRASH 94% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 00%

Bat Man

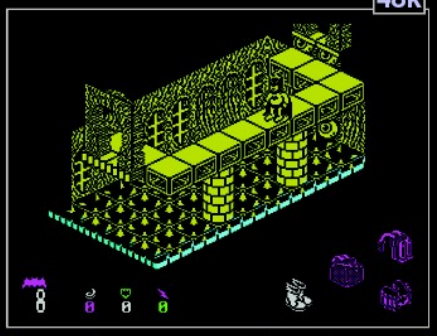
Ocean Software Ltd.
Jon Ritman, Bernie Drummond

Jingle Bells, Bat Man Smells, Robin Laid An Egg!

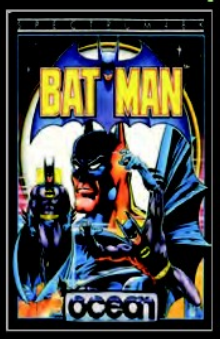
Bat Man was the first isometric 3D title written by *Jon Ritman*. After seeing **Knight Lore**, *Jon Ritman* decided that he could go one better (**Knight Lore** suffered from slow down in busy rooms) and this was the result of his efforts.

Originally *Jon Ritman* had *Bat Man* eating Bat-Pills to enhance his speed or give him invulnerability for a short time. However *D.C. Comics*, owners of the *Bat Man* IP, were adamant that "*Bat Man* did not take drugs". *Ritman*'s solution was simple but ingenious - he simply renamed them to *Bat-Powers*. The game also did not have the famous *Batmobile* as the rotating wheels took up too much memory, so the *Bat-Craft* was born.

The game **Bat Man** was really only tenuously linked to the campy series from the Sixties (which in turn were entirely different from the modern graphic novels and movies). The only real link was the main character himself and some elements of the plot. That's not to say it was a bad game at all. In fact it was an excellent game, partly because it wasn't required to follow the original plots of the series or the comic books.
In this game the player took on the role of a rather short, fat and bizarrely cute *Bruce Wayne*, aka *Bat Man*. His mission was to rescue *Robin*, who had been captured while he was in the process of servicing the *Bat-Craft*. Consequently, the *Bat-Craft* was still in pieces and had to be reassembled before *Bat Man* could make his rescue attempt. There were some other gadgets that *Bat Man* also required to complete his mission; The *Bat-Bag* that allowed him to carry his goodies, *Bat-Boots* that allowed him to jump higher, the *Bat-Thrusters* that allowed him to control his direction during a jump or fall, and a low-gravity *Bat-Belt* that halved his rate of descent. There were also several *Bat-Powers* that *Bat-Man* could collect and use, such as extra lives, speed boosts, jump boosts and neutralizers (that *removed* any existing powers). *Bat-Man* was also provided with the occasional *Bat-Signal* spread around the rooms of the *Bat-Cave* which acted as save points allowing play to continue from the last one touched when the player lost all of his lives.



*"**Batman** keeps up a constant speed ... none of those short, slow steps that held Sabreman back on full screens."*
- Your Sinclair, May 1986







CRASH 93% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100%

1 ! 4 $ 3 #

Cliff Hanger

New Generation Software Ltd
James Day

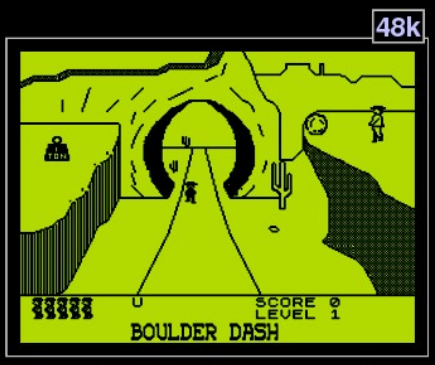
Guns.... We Don' Need No Steenkin' Guns!

New Generation Software, having released a few less-than-stellar titles since their seminal **Trashman**, almost reclaimed their legacy with this original and amusing game fashioned after the cartoon antics of *Road Runner* and *Wile. E. Coyote*. Tragically this game sold only in tiny quantities and pretty much signalled the end of *New Generation Software*'s interest in the games industry.

The *ZX Spectrum* version of this game suffered from some annoying bugs that prevented it being completed. The particular screen that caused the problem contains an *Apollo 13* rocket that the player must fly off the screen to complete that level. Unfortunately, the rocket does not ever fly off screen, instead wrapping around vertically and flying up again from the bottom until the level time limit ran out. However, some intrepid hackers have apparently fixed the problem and an updated snapshot is available on the internet.

In **Cliff Hanger**, the player took on the role of the eponymous hero, sworn to defend the town from the incoming bandits hell-bent on causing death, destruction and other types of general chaos. Of course, as this was a cartoon-based adventure *Cliff Hanger* couldn't just go and shoot the bandits. Instead the player had to set up and trigger a range of increasingly intricate traps — the likes of which would have made even *Rube Goldberg* green with envy.

The game was split up into several groups of levels, and each level in a group had to be completed before the player could progress to the next group. For each group the complexity of the levels increased and the number of sequential tasks, such as rolling a boulder, riding a mine-cart, throwing a boomerang, using a magnet and firing a cannon also increased — thus decreasing the time window for causing something bad to happen to the gun-toting bandit. This was a remarkably fun and original game that deserved a better reception than it ultimately received.



"...Seems to be the kind of game you only play once... but there is something about it that makes it very playable..."
- Crash Magazine, July 1986







CRASH 63%

Cauldron 2

Palace Software Ltd.
Steve Brown, Richard Leinfellner, Richard Joseph

A.K.A Cauldron 2: The Pumpkin Strikes Back... (I'll Get You My Pretties! You And Your Little Pumpkin Too!)

Palace Software's sequel to the successful **Cauldron** took the basic concept of the first game to a new level with this excellent sequel which — unlike many sequels — expanded upon and improved the concepts of the first game whilst still remaining true to the original theme.

Another game that has remained fond in the hearts and memories of early gamers, *Cauldron 2* has also found itself as a target for modern-day remakes. As of the time of writing, an excellent *Flash*-based remake of *Cauldron 2* that seems to be modelled on the *Commodore 64* version of the game is available at www.cauldron-2.com.

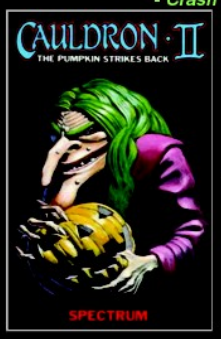
Cauldron 2 was set a short time after the end of the original game. The *witch*, having succeeded in her quest for the legendary *Golden Broom*, used her newfound power to build a huge castle on the edge of the forest. From here, she struck fear into the inhabitants of the surrounding lands — both natural and supernatural.
The player took on the role of one of the last surviving *pumpkins*, the previous guardians of the *Golden Broom*. Still stinging from his failure to defend the *Pump-King* and the broom from the witch, he vowed to invade the witch's new castle and end her evil reign. The cassette inlay for the game contained a rhyme which gave hints on the ingredients required to cast a reversal spell and the player's job was to guide the *pumpkin* around the castle to look for those ingredients, avoid the magical guardians and finally brew the spell to destroy the witch's powers.
This was a difficult enough task on its own, but it was made doubly difficult by the method of locomotion employed by the *pumpkin* — he bounced like a ball. Surprisingly, although this could sometimes be very frustrating, the novel control system elevated this game from a merely average arcade-adventure to a fun and addictive bounce-fest.

CRASH 91% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

48k



"Great! A brilliant arcade adventure which doesn't rely on the now rather worn and weary filmation style techniques."
- Crash Magazine, August 1986







1 ! 4 $ 5 %

Cyberun

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
U.S. Gold (?)

What... No Filmation? What's Going On?



For one of their last releases (and the first *U.S. Gold* game released under the label) *Ultimate* went back to their 2D roots — an interesting attempt to close the Pandora's Box of 3D isometric games that they had opened almost two years earlier.

Although this game is thought by some to be one of the last written by the original *Stamper* brothers, there is some question as to whether it was written by them, or by an in-house *U.S. Gold* programming team. Originally it was thought that only *Martianoids* and *Bubbler* were written by *U.S. Gold* teams and although this is still possibly the case there is still some question mainly due to the veil of secrecy surrounding the company and their acquisition by *U.S. Gold*.

The packaging for **Cyberun** informed the player that he would be taking part in a race of some sort. However the back story for the game talked of mysterious *Cybernite* crystals that existed on a planet with such a huge gravitational pull that conventional ships did not have the power to escape. Because of the unique nature of the system, *Cybernite* was the hardest mineral in existence — conferring near unlimited power on the authority that controlled the resource.
Consequently the powers that be had commissioned the construction of a multi-stage super-ship, the parts of which had been dropped at strategic locations on the planet's surface ready for retrieval.
The task of the player was to fly around the surface of the planet, searching the numerous caverns for the ship parts and the valuable *Cybernite* crystals. As the player collected ship parts, their capabilities added on to that of the ship — conferring increased fire-power and manoeuvrability. Once the player had collected all of the ship parts and a cargo-hold full of crystals he could escape the gravitational pull of the planet and return home as a hero.
Sadly, this game was definitely not one of their best efforts.

"After the last few Ultimate releases this is the last thing I expected. No Filmation I or II or anything like that..."
- Crash Magazine, May 1986









Cobra

Ocean Software Ltd.
Jonathan Smith, Martin Galway

Crappy Movie Tie-Ins Are The Disease... "Joffa Smifff" Is The Cure...



Ocean's movie tie-in **Cobra** was an excellent but strange game that was related to the movie (which was rather poor) only in the same way as an LSD trip is related to reality. The programmer, *Jonathan Smith*, was the one to thank for this, as he was responsible for taking a rather mediocre film and turning it into an excellent and humorous arcade game.

The movie that this was based on was panned by the critics for an unsophisticated story and cartoon-like violence. In a nutshell, the plot revolved around a mysterious faction of criminals who planned to kill all the outsiders and rule the world. A model *Ingrid*, played by *Brigitte Nielsen* (*Stallone*'s wife of one year at the time of the film's release), had witnessed some murders by the faction and therefore became a protected witness. Subsequently, she was assigned to *Cobra*, there was lots of shooting and an apocalyptic showdown where the leader faced off against *Cobra* and ended up being burnt in a furnace. And they all lived happily ever after.

The player took on *Sylvester Stallone*'s role, playing as *Marion Cobretti* — the eponymous *Cobra* of the title. *Jonathan Smith* was obviously allowed a fair amount of free reign with this title, as although the plot matched the film fairly well, the implementation was a little strange to say the least.

The three levels were set in the city, countryside and a disused factory respectively. Each level of the game had *Cobra* jumping and head-butting his way through the bad guys looking for the four hamburgers containing weapons. Each weapon's power was represented by a deteriorating rubber duck (the QUACKOMETER), and could only be used until the duck was gone. Weapons were used by hitting the 'murder' key on the keyboard and each use of a weapon removed some of the duck.

To get through a level, *Cobra* had to find *Ingrid*, each of the four hamburgers and also kill the majority of the bad guys. Once the last level — the factory — had been cleared of bad guys, the player then had to face the leader of the faction — the notorious *Night Slasher*.

CRASH 93% YOUR SINCLAIR 80% SINCLAIR 60%

*"In a market that has become constipated with tie-ins, **Cobra** is a dose of syrup of figs!"*
- Your Sinclair, February 1987







1 ! 4 $ 7 '

Dan Dare

Virgin Games Ltd.
Dave B. Chapman, Martin Wheeler

A.K.A Dan Dare: Pilot Of The Future...



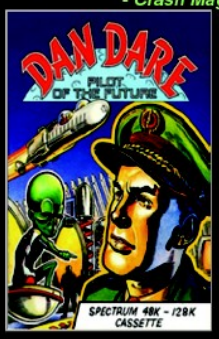
This was the game that made people look twice at the output of *Virgin Software*. **Dan Dare**, the first in a series of three games, was of surprisingly good quality — particularly relating to the use of colour.

***Dan Dare* was based on *Frank Hampson*'s character from the British comic, *The Eagle*. The first issue of *The Eagle* appeared in newsagents in April 1950 and featured *Dan Dare* as the lead character. *Dan* has had many faces over the years in many stories (not all of them worth reading) but it's the original *Frank Hampson* concept — a normal man bound by duty, honour and courage that shone more than any of the steroid-fuelled superhero reimaginings that followed. In the short-lived mature-reader comic, *Revolver*, *Grant Morrison* published an excellent 90's-angst dark future version of the original 50's *Dan Dare* which brought an unsettling air to the saga... although it's best viewed as a possible alternate universe version as it's certainly not what the original creator envisioned as an end to his story.**

In their latest evil plot, *The Mekon* and his *Treens* hollowed out a huge asteroid and sent it hurtling on a collision course towards Earth. The player, as *Dan Dare* had ninety minutes to land on the asteroid and find a way to disable, destroy or otherwise prevent it from hitting Earth. To do this, *Dan* had to search the asteroid for the five parts of the self-destruct system, assemble them in the control room, and escape the asteroid to reach *Digby* in the waiting ship. Meanwhile, *Dan* also had to avoid the *Treens* and *The Mekon.* If they caught him, he would be knocked unconscious and thrown in jail — losing precious time until he woke up. Luckily the automatic door mechanism on the asteroid had malfunctioned so escaping from jail was fairly easy.
Dan Dare was a fun and rewarding game that at the time redefined use of colour and set the benchmark for colourful action oriented games for the *ZX Spectrum.*



*"A very slick piece of programming, but I wonder if I'll still be playing **Dan Dare** in a couple of weeks' time..."*
- Crash Magazine, September 1986







Dynamite Dan 2

Mirrorsoft Ltd.
Rod Bowkett

Dynamite Dan? What Kind Of Dumb Codename Is Dynamite Dan?

The prequel to this game, **Dynamite Dan**, was a successful title published in early in 1985. Despite being fun to play it still seemed to lack a certain polish that made the sequel, **Dynamite Dan 2** such a stunning game.

One of the most notable features of *Dynamite Dan 2* (and its prequel) was the excellent musical accompaniment which was beyond that in most other games. Unsurprisingly, the day job of *Rod Bowkett* was as a professional musician.

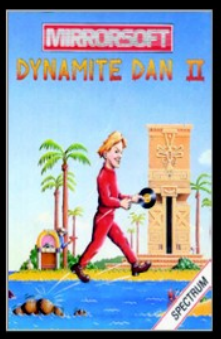
In this game the player reprised his role as secret agent *Dynamite Dan* in his never-ending mission to foil the evil schemes of *Dr. Blitzen*. This time his cunning plan was to embed mind-bending brain waves into the pop music of the day. In order to prevent this happening *Dan* had to infiltrate *Dr. Blitzen*'s network of islands, find the master copy of the vinyl record containing the signals and play them on the convenient island jukebox to destroy the record and reveal the unlock code for the next island. Then the player had to gather fuel for the airship and make his way to the next island. Apart from the fuel, other useful items to be found were bombs (to destroy doors), goggles (to protect against the doctor's mesmer-ray), food (to replenish energy) and of course, the record that needed to be played. However, it was not all straightforward — some of the enemies would steal items that the player had collected, leading to some awkward predicaments such as being behind a locked door without a bomb.

Once *Dan* had retrieved all eight records from the islands he had to plant a bomb in *Dr. Blitzen*'s secret laboratory. Then, he had to get back to the airship in three minutes or be destroyed along with the rest of the base.

Of all the platform games released on the *ZX Spectrum*, **Dynamite Dan 2** is probably the pinnacle of the form. It could have been even better — if the planned 128k version had ever been released.



*"...[**Dynamite Dan 2**]...is a Rolls Royce amongst...[platform games]..."*
- Sinclair User, August 1986







CRASH 93% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100%

Fat Worm Blows A Sparky

Durell Software Ltd.
Julian G. Todd

The Continuing Adventures Of A Tape-Worm Invading A Computer... And This Makes Sense How, Exactly?



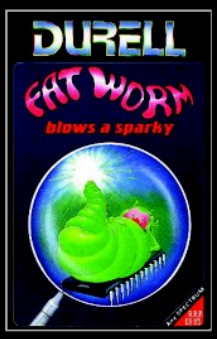
*"[this game]..., graphically, is as revolutionary as **3D Ant Attack** was in its day..."*
- Crash Magazine, November 1986

Fat Worm Blows A Sparky was a bizarre, somewhat playable and technically fascinating release from *Durell Software*. It was also the first game to use vector graphics to provide an overhead view of the game-world in this fashion. Another first was the 'shop-your-friends' anti-piracy message that greeted players when the game was loaded.

According to the author *Fat Worm Blows A Sparky* was originally going to be a car chase game inspired by the programmer's view of New York from the top of the World Trade Center during a visit there. Unfortunately a car proved too slow to render and so the hero became a four polygon tape-worm. According to *Durell Software* it was also modified further — changing from a serious game about software worms invading computer systems to the eventual whimsical romp that was released.

In **Fat Worm Blows A Sparky**, the player was a tape-worm trapped inside a *ZX Spectrum* computer, under constant assault from bugs whilst trying to reproduce. To do this, he had avoid the *Creepers* who flew overhead in *Sputniks* and the *Crawlers* who erupted directly from the PCB. For *Fat Worm* to reproduce he needed to collect fifty spindles (sparkling triangles of energy) and reach the disk drive in order to clone himself. When *Creepers* and *Crawlers* caught up with *Fat Worm* they would attach themselves to a body segment. To remove all of the attached bugs, he had to visit a debugger before the entirety of his body segments were covered, or he would die. For defence, *Fat Worm* could fire out two varieties of missile (Blasters and Burpers) to take out each type of bug.
Fat Worm Blows A Sparky was a reasonably fun game that soon became frustrating. Ultimately it was more a technology demonstration than it was a game.









Firelord

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Stephen Crow

The Most Original Storyline Ever... Really.

Moving from *Bubble Bus* to *Hewson* with his fourth popular hit game, *Steve Crow* — author of **Factory Breakout**, **Wizard's Lair** and **Starquake** — unleashed **Firelord** onto an unsuspecting public. Learning from previous criticism, **Firelord** had considerably more original touches than his previous works (with the possible exception of **Factory Breakout**).

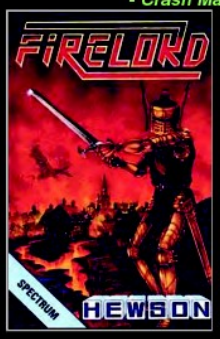
Sadly *Firelord* was the last solo project that *Steve Crow* wrote for the *ZX Spectrum*. Subsequent projects, *Zynaps* and *Eliminator*, were written as part of a team effort. Both of these were also published by *Hewson Consultants*. After that he migrated to 16-bit platforms, consoles and eventually the *PC*.

Rather than being a formulaic **Sabre Wulf** clone (as *Steve Crow* had been accused of plagiarism) **Firelord** had a depth of play that elevated it above the simple arcade-adventure "run around, collect the objects and find the exit" shenanigans of other titles.
The player, as *Sir Galaheart*, had to search through the 512 screens of the cursed land of *Torot* to find four charms of eternal youth with which to obtain the *Firestone*. This was the source of power of the *Evil Queen* who had the land in her thrall. Rather than just run round and collect the charms, the player had to trade for them. Entering a villagers house allowed the player to trade items with the villager. Stealing was also possible but if caught *Sir Galaheart* would be hauled up before the *Reeve*, where he had to stop the *Wheel of Justice* when the indicator pointed to "Innocent". Failure to do so would cause a loss of life.
There were two endings to this game... The first was achieved by trading up to obtain the four charms and then trading those with the *Evil Queen*. The second was to steal the *Firestone*. The honest option granted *Overlord* status (because the *Evil Queen* still got what she wanted), while the latter granted the title of *Firelord* (as the player had prevented her from obtaining eternal youth).
Firelord was a deep and interesting arcade adventure although it still felt a little derivative and unoriginal.





" I liked the way you can go into different doors and find different people in houses - all offering useful bits 'n' bobs."
- Crash Magazine, December 1986







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Glider Rider

Quicksilva Ltd.
Binary Design Ltd (John Pickford, Ste Pickford, Et Al.)
Above The Clouds...

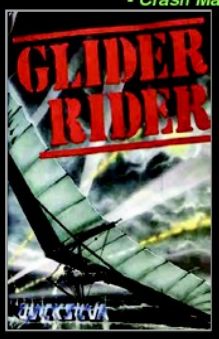
Quicksilva's **Glider Rider** restored some of their tarnished image after a series of lacklustre releases. It was one of only six *Binary Design* releases published through *Quicksilva* — the majority were published by *Mastertronic*.

The main distinguishing feature of *Glider Rider*, which was in most respects a fairly average title, was that it was most likely the first game with any sort of enhancement for the 128k version. In fact the difference was so pronounced that *Crash* gave it two scores: one for each version.

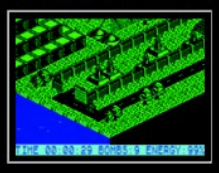
The aim of the game in **Glider Rider** was to destroy an island-based installation belonging to the illegal arms-dealing *Abraxas Corporation*.
The player, taking on the role of a special agent, had been dropped off on the island with a motorbike that could rather handily turn into a hang-glider if the player reversed direction whilst driving downhill.
The installation itself was heavily defended by sharp-shooting laser towers. However, they could be momentarily put out of action by colliding with them with the motorbike. Once this was done, the player had a few seconds to get airborne and bomb the various destructible features of the installation.
The 128k version of this game was greatly enhanced by an atmospheric *David Whittaker* tune that seamlessly changed depending on whether the player was using the motorbike or the hang-glider at that particular instant; heavy rock for the motorbike and a light airy tune for the hang-glider.
Unfortunately, the 48k version did not have the benefit of the music and, as such, the flaws in the gameplay showed through without any distractions. Despite being a beautiful game, **Glider Rider** was a little too hard and confusing to play for any length of time, and the lack of variety in mission goals robbed what could have been a ground-breaking title of the chance of rising above the merely average.



*"**Glider Rider** has nicely drawn graphics (and a great tune if you own a 128). After that, I'm afraid, it's a bit of a disappointment."*
- Crash Magazine, November 1986







CRASH 80/92% YOUR SINCLAIR 50% SINCLAIR 100%

The Great Escape

Ocean Software Ltd.
Denton Designs
Just Don't Mention The War!



Published by *Ocean* and written round about the time of the *Denton Designs* split, **The Great Escape**, based on the *Steve McQueen* movie of the same name, featured one of the most popular *Bob Wakelin* paintings as the cover art.

Despite the fact that many people thought this was cover artist *Bob Wakelin*'s finest hour, he apparently hated how it was presented on the cassette case. He felt that important features had been cut off by the stark white barbed-wire border. Aside from the pseudo-sequel, the 128k only *Where Time Stood Still*, this is probably one of the most detailed and involved isometric 3D arcade-adventures on the *ZX Spectrum*, with stunningly atmospheric graphics. The graphic artist, *Ally Noble*, prepared herself for the project by repeatedly watching prison-camp themed movies and television.

The Great Escape put the player in the shoes of a would-be escapee from a German prisoner-of-war camp. The player started the game in a dark cell shortly before the wake-up bell was rung. After that, the player had to get to the roll-call, and perform other myriad tasks to adhere to the camp's daily routine. To aid in the escape, Red Cross parcels containing useful items would be dropped over the camp at regular intervals.
The daily prison-camp routine did not leave much time for the player to get on with the difficult job of escaping. This was made even trickier by the fact that if the guards caught the player out of place, they would throw him into solitary (or worse) affecting the player's morale. Morale was represented by a flagpole on the left of the screen — the lower the flag the lower the morale. When morale was at its lowest point the game would be over.
There were many methods to beat this game, including sneaking out through secret tunnels and cutting through the wire fence, among others. In order to escape, however, the player had to plot and plan using the tools and objects both in the camp and dropped by the Red Cross.
The Great Escape was arguably the best of *Denton Design*'s 48k output — only surpassed by their 128k game, **Where Time Stood Still**.



*"**The Great Escape** is definitely one of the best games ever seen on the ZX Spectrum."*
- Crash Magazine, December 1986







Heavy On The Magick

48k



Gargoyle Games Ltd.
Roy Carter, Greg Follis

Coolest... Game... Title... Ever...

Heavy On The Magick marked somewhat of a departure from the norm for *Gargoyle Games*, given that their last three graphical adventure games were the very similar **Tir Na Nog**, **Dun Darach** and **Marsport**. This game was more overtly humorous than the prior three and seemed a lot more detailed and interactive — partly because the new graphical technique employed allowed them to get more graphics in less space, leaving more room for the gameplay.

Add-ons and sequels for *Heavy On The Magick* were mentioned in the instruction manual. The add-ons were planned to be loaded into the original program as an expansion and were to be available by mail order from the publisher. These add-ons, *Collodon's Pile*, (set in the castle above the dungeons of this game), *The Tombs Of Taro* (set in catacombs adjacent to the dungeon) and *Paradise Reglossed* ("in which things are not as heavenly as they seem"), were unfortunately never released. Likewise the sequel, called *The Trials Of Therion* detailed the story of what happened after the completion of *Heavy On The Magick*. A book on the land on Graumerphy, in which the game was set, was also planned — and never released.

The ironically named *Axel the Able*, a low-grade magician, had managed to find himself magically whisked away to a dangerous dungeon shortly after indulging in his favourite sport of wizard-baiting. Unfortunately for him the wizard in question, *Therion*, did not take kindly to the jokes and proceeded to cast the spell leading to *Axel*'s predicament.
In order to escape, *Axel* had to solve the puzzles within the four levels of the dungeon, conjure and tame the demons contained within and use their help to finally escape.
The game took the form of a graphical adventure that used a language called *Merphish* (basically a verb-noun syntax) to interact with the environment and provided many hours of demon-appeasing enjoyment.

"... The best blend of arcade skill and adventure logic that I've ever seen..."
- Your Sinclair, July 1986







CRASH 90% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100%

Hyperbowl

Mastertronic Ltd.
Binary Design Ltd (Steve Hughes, Ste Pickford)

In The Distant Future, All Sports Will Be Vector-Based...

As one of the earliest games to emerge from the legendary programming team *Binary Design*, and published on the budget *Mastertronic* label, **Hyperbowl** surprised reviewers and players alike as being one of the first of the new wave of quality budget games. Previously games that cost £1.99 looked as if that had been their entire production budget, but with the advent of authors like *Binary Design* and *David Jones* (of the *Magic Knight* series) this began to change.

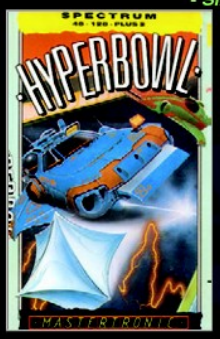
***Binary Design* wrote *Xeno* for *A'n'F Software* that also came out in the same year. Apart from differing graphics engines (top-down vector vs. stadium view sprite) the gameplay was virtually identical — an observation that raised eyebrows at the time.**

Hyperbowl was a simulation of a simplistic future sport in which the aim was to score more points than the opponent within a five minute time period (or be first to nine points). To score, the player had to use his ship to steer the puck to the opponent's goal-line. To move the puck, the player could shoot at or collide with it. Scoring was graded by the location where the puck hit. If the puck hit the back of the goal-line without hitting the centrally placed goal register then one point was scored. If the player did manage to hit the register then an extra point was awarded.
The player could also choose which ship to play, with each ship having differing characteristics such as top speed and turning rate. The choice of ship was more than just a cosmetic decision and the ship characteristics really affected the feel of the game.
The game provided one and two-player head-to-head play, and allowed for league and tournament play.
For a £1.99 budget game, **Hyperbowl** was an exciting, top-class playing experience that excelled even that of its full-price close cousin **Xeno**.

CRASH 76% SINCLAIR 80%



*"**Asteroids** meets **American Football**. Both win. Simple to learn difficult to master. Another Mastertronic winner."*
- Sinclair User, March 1987







1 ! 5 % 5 %

Jack The Nipper

Gremlin Graphics Software Ltd.
Greg Holmes, John Holmes, Peter M. Harrap
Gerronartofityoulittlebleeder!



Jack The Nipper really was a title that came like a bolt out of the blue. The first that many people even heard of it was the review in *Crash Magazine*. **Jack The Nipper** was essentially the best of the *Beano*, *Dandy* and *Whizzer and Chips* rolled into one.

***Jack The Nipper* was supported by a series of advertisements that took on the form of a very *Viz*-styled seven episode comic strip that appeared in *Your Sinclair* issues 16 to 22. It certainly went a couple of steps further than the game, being that in the first episode *Jack* polished off a bottle of whisky, and in the second episode he burned down the house with his discarded cigarette. It was toned down a little after that, and eventually resolved itself into an advert for the sequel *Jack The Nipper 2: In Coconut Capers*.**

In **Jack The Nipper** the player took on the role of the eponymous *Jack*, a young romper-suited toddler (reminiscent of *Attila the Hun* in nappies) whose sole aim in life was to cause as much chaos as possible without getting caught.
The game started with young *Jack* in his bedroom surrounded by ghosties and monsters, who could only be repelled by a well-placed shot from a pea shooter. And therein lay the first problem: the pea shooter in question had been placed precariously on a high shelf, presumably by *Jack*'s Father who was fed up with getting peas shot at the back of his head. Aside from fun with high velocity peas, *Jack* had many other opportunities for mischief, including blowing up the computer store's display models, killing all the flowers in the park, gluing all the false teeth in the false teeth factory, stopping sock production at the Hummo sock factory, stealing his parents' credit card, releasing all of the prisoners from jail, and many other dark deeds. Once these and other tasks were completed, *Jack* attained the score of 100% naughty and the game was over.
Jack The Nipper was a stunning game that redefined what could be done with the *ZX Spectrum*. Unfortunately the sequel, **Jack The Nipper 2: In Coconut Capers**, was little more than an average quality derivative of the *Wally Week* series of games.

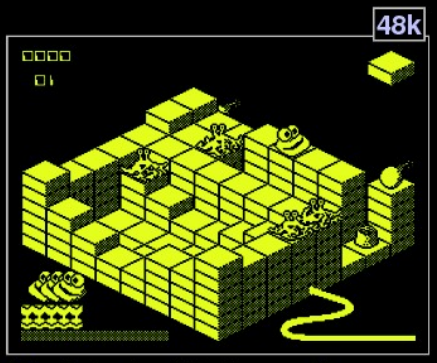
"'Come on, play the game! You're not a wimp are you?' asks the evil Sweeny Toddler character..."
- Crash Magazine, July 1986



CRASH 93% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

Kirel

Addictive Games Ltd.
Siegfried Kurtz
Kirel Collects Balls To Gain Time...



Kirel was a very strange little puzzle game released by *Addictive Games* — previously famous for the **Football Manager** series. Although **Kirel** was an excellently playable game, it received very little coverage and consequently very poor sales.... A shame, because **Kirel** was a game that deserved to succeed.

***Kirel* appears to have been the only game ever written by *Siegfried Kurtz*, and there is very little available information on him. It's certainly possible that the dismal sales for *Kirel* may have caused him to give up game writing... which, judging by the game design of *Kirel*, was a real loss.**
Notably, *Kirel* was also the first game released by *Addictive Games* that did not feature *Kevin Toms* on the cover.

Kirel was an odd puzzle game where the aim was to manoeuvre the small creature *Kirel* around each of seventy levels to defuse the bombs on each level before they detonated. In order to reach the bombs and defuse them, *Kirel* had to pick up and drop blocks to build staircases and bridges.
Being a blob with no legs was a disadvantage as *Kirel* could only jump up and down one level. This meant that the puzzle element of the game mainly came from figuring out where to put blocks without cutting off the route to additional blocks and becoming trapped.
Play was complicated by the abundance of monsters that populated each level. If a monster jumped on *Kirel* he lost stamina. Monsters could be disposed of by jumping on top of them when the player was in possession of a piece of cake. Each monster kill used up one piece of cake. Other collectable objects in the game included balls (that gave more time before the bombs exploded), arrows (that increased the number of bridges *Kirel* held — special floating blocks that helped in a tight situation), and sweets (that increased *Kirel*'s stamina.
Other annoyances that plagued *Kirel* were the immovable and impassable pyramid blocks and the invisible walls that appeared on later levels.
Kirel was an awesome and underrated puzzle game that deserved to be played a lot more widely than it was.

"Give it a try. It could just be one of the cleverest games of the year."
- Your Sinclair, July 1986



CRASH 85% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

1 ! 5 % 7 '

Knight Tyme

Mastertronic Ltd.
David Jones

Cue The Jokes About Klingons In 3... 2... 1...

The difficult part about choosing a game to represent the adventures of *Magic Knight* in a space-constrained book is in picking which of the four superlative adventures (**Finders Keepers**, **Spellbound**, **Knight Tyme** and **Stormbringer**) to write about. While all of the games were published through *Mastertronic* at budget prices, **Knight Tyme** was considered by many to be the best.

***Knight Tyme* was notable for being the first game to be released for the 128k *ZX Spectrum* before the 48k version was released.**

Following on directly from the prequel, **Spellbound**, **Knight Tyme** set the player as *Magic Knight* aboard a 25th century starship. At the end of **Spellbound** the player had succeeded in freeing the wizard *Gimbal* from imprisonment, but in casting the spell to return *himself* home **Magic Knight** inadvertently shot himself forward through time. Now, he had thirty days to return before the *Paradox Police* noticed his presence and threw him in jail.
Knight Tyme used the *Windimation* nested windowing technique pioneered by **Spellbound** to interact with objects and people with a nested set of increasingly specific text options — a precursor to point and click adventures on the 16-bit platforms.
In order to successfully return to his own time *Magic Knight* had to enlist the help of the crew of the *USS Pisces*. Unfortunately, they would ignore him until he had an official ID card and so the first task he needed to accomplish was to persuade some of the less rule-bound robots to help him create one.
Subsequent to this the mission was to travel the Universe until he could find the *Tyme Guardians* and obtain a time machine with which to travel back to the past.
A tricky and demanding arcade-adventure, **Knight Tyme** was to be recommended — as were any of the *Magic Knight* games.

CRASH 94% YOUR SINCLAIR 90%

48k/128k



*"**Knight Tyme** is the first 'proper' game on the 128 and I must say that I was very impressed..."*

- Crash Magazine, June 1986







Light Force

Faster Than Light Ltd.
Greg Follis, Roy Carter

May The Force Be With You...

48k



For their arcade arm, *Gargoyle Games* created the *Faster Than Light* label to distinguish the games from *Gargoyle*'s arcade-adventure range. For this, the first release on the new label, the authors were attempting to produce a fast shoot'em-up that eschewed the traditional attribute clash limitations. To a large extent they succeeded.

Given the fairly small size of the software industry back in the 80s, it is not surprising that their was a lot of friendly (and not so friendly) rivalry between companies. *FTL*'s *Light Force* had the dubious honour of being spoofed by *Binary Design* with *Lightfarce* allegedly written by "*Fast-As-You-Like*" as a hidden Easter-egg game within *Zub*.
***Zub* itself was a fairly forgettable game. But it was made worth owning by the existence of the Easter-egg which was later released in its own right as a game called *Zarjas* on issue 72 of *Sinclair User*'s cover-tape.**

As a fast action, vertically scrolling shoot'em-up, **Light Force** may not have had the edge over less colourful titles such as **Terra Cresta** and **Flying Shark** but it certainly held its own in grand style — particularly when it came to use of colour.
When a set of peaceful *Terran* colonies were attacked by savage and unknown aliens, the galactic council immediately ordered all peace-keeping forces into the area to mobilize and destroy the enemy. Unfortunately, there was only one *Lightforce*-class ship in the area — and, of course, it happened to be the one being piloted by the player.
The game was a fairly bog standard pattern-based shooter set over a range of different environments — the Ice Planet, the Jungle Planet, a number of Alien Factories and the impassable Asteroid Belt. The player had to clear the enemy from all of these areas in order to beat the game.
Light Force was one of the best shoot'em-ups for the *ZX Spectrum* and marked a welcome departure from ponderous arcade-adventures for the authors.



"My first sight of this game at the PCW show turned me into a gibbering wide-eyed heap on the floor."
- Crash Magazine, November 1986







1 ! 5 % 9)

M.O.V.I.E

Imagine Software Ltd.
Dusko Dimitrijevic

Stick With Me Kid, I'm Gonna Make You A Star...



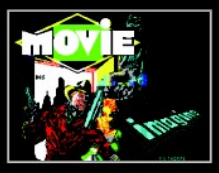
"A neat development on the 3D theme with a very different scenario..."
- Crash Magazine, March 1986

As one of the games published by *Ocean* after they purchased the *Imagine* label, **M.O.V.I.E** was a new twist on the rapidly aging isometric 3D market and was released to almost universal acclaim.

The author of this game, *Dusko Dimitrijevic* started on the way to getting *M.O.V.I.E* published by flying one-way to England in order to sell a couple of games he had written to *Bug-Byte* software. Unfortunately for him they had already gone bust, but he was pointed in the direction of *Ocean* who bought the games to use as promotional freebies. Before he went back to Yugoslavia, he spent some time with the *Ocean* programmers in order to get a feel for what kind of games *Ocean* would want. Six months later he returned with *M.O.V.I.E*.

In **M.O.V.I.E**, the player took on the role of a private detective who has been hired to retrieve an incriminating audio tape from the office of a Mafia boss.
In order to find the office in question, the hero needed the help of a girl who knew where the office was. Unfortunately the only reason that she knew the office location was that her twin sister was a member of the mob. So not only did the player have to find the girl, but he also had to be sure it was the right girl. In the game, the way to identify an enemy was by asking, `Friend or Foe`. If the response from the girl was `KILL KILL KILL` then the player had found the bad girl and should shoot her right away. Of course if the player didn't know this little piece of information then he could determine which girl was which by seeing which one kept leading him into trouble.
M.O.V.I.E was an excellent and atmospheric gumshoe game. After solving the other puzzles in the game, the player could be led to the office by the good twin — although he had to protect her from attack on the way, otherwise the player would never find the office and the audio tape.







CRASH 93% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

Nosferatu

Piranha Ltd.
Design Design (Graham Stafford)

Is This Your Wife? What A Lovely Throat...

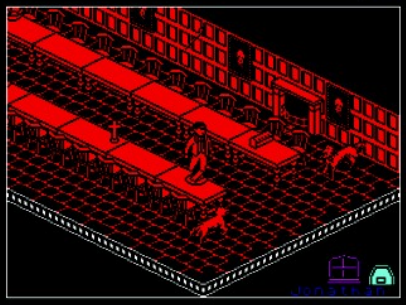
As one of *Piranha*'s first releases, **Nosferatu** was an ambitious attempt to meld isometric 3D games with multiple character control and multi-stage adventuring where the results of previous stages affected the difficulty of the next.

The game was inspired by the classic silent movie of the same name that was first released in 1922. The movie was originally based only loosely on the original *Bram Stoker* novel, *Dracula*, whereas the game incorporated far more of the original story — including changing the names of the lead characters back to the far more familiar originals.

In this game, the player took on the role of not one, but three characters; *Jonathan Harker*, *Lucy Harker* and *Van Helsing*. In a slight variation of the classic *Bram Stoker* story, the player had been sent to *Nosferatu*'s castle to deliver the deeds to a house in his home village of Wismar.
Once *Jonathan* reached the castle, he discovered the true identity of his host. Unfortunately, the deeds were no longer where he left them and he had to search the castle to find them again, avoiding the rats, spiders and ghostly hallucinations caused by the power of the vampire.
Once the castle section was completed, play continued at Wismar where *Lucy* and *Van Helsing* could be used to assist *Jonathan*. If the player managed to retrieve the deeds in the first part of the game then this second part would be easier, as *Nosferatu* did not have a home base to operate from. This forced the vampire to roam the streets and seek other shelter during the day. To kill the vampire, the player had to use *Lucy*. To ensure her survival, the two men needed to destroy the plague infected rats and root out any vampiric townsfolk that had fallen into *Nosferatu*'s thrall.
Part three of the game had the player controlling *Lucy*, who had to lure the vampire to her house. Unfortunately, the two men were unaware of her role in this and needed to be locked out of the way in case they tried to interfere. If *Lucy* could succeed in keeping *Nosferatu* with her until daybreak, he would die the traditional vampire death and the game would be over.

CRASH 91% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

48k



*"I'm gonna stick my neck out right at the start. **Nosferatu** is one of those meaty games that you'll be dying to sink your teeth into..."*
- Your Sinclair, January 1987







1 ! 6 & 1 !

Olli And Lissa

Firebird Software Ltd.
Ionis Software International (Roger Danison)

A.K.A Olli And Lissa: The Ghost Of Shilmoore Castle



Once again proving that budget software could be of good quality with excellent production values, **Olli and Lissa: The Ghost Of Shilmoore Castle** — the first in a series of three games — was released to a round of mildly surprised reviews from the games magazines. Along with titles such as **Thrust** and **Booty**, this game cemented the reputation of **Firebird** (actually the games arm of **British Telecom**) as a purveyor of fine budget software.

In January of 1987, and again in September of 1991, the following playing tip appeared in *Crash Magazine*: "Press PORTCUL after the menu choice and *Ollie (sic)* can zoom around the screen." In May of 1992, the following playing tip appeared in *Sinclair User*: "Press PORTCUL after the menu choice and *Olli* can zoom around the screen."... Well, at least they corrected the spelling the second time around.

"When you see a cheapie of this calibre you start to wonder if you should've been quite so critical of them in the past."
- Your Sinclair, November 1986







An obscenely rich American, *Eugene Portcullis III Jr.*, had purchased Shilmoore Castle and was preparing to move it — stone by stone — back to the States from its home in the Scottish Highlands. However, the castle ghost, *Sir Humphrey*, had decided that he wanted no part of this forced emigration.
Instead, he enlisted the help of castle lovebirds/small round monsters *Olli* and *Lissa* to gather the eight ingredients for an invisibility potion, because *Sir Humphrey*, in his ghostly wisdom, had come to the conclusion that humans were only frightened of invisible ghosts. The player, as *Olli*, had to search through the rooms and grounds of the castle gathering the ingredients that the ghost required for his potion. Finding an ingredient earned *Olli* a kiss from *Lissa* and the identity of the next item for the spell from *Sir Humphrey*. Once all the items were collected the spell would be cast, and *Sir Humphrey* could begin his haunt.
Olli And Lissa: The Ghost Of Shilmoore Castle was an excellent little game for the price, and provided some extremely tricky puzzling for the player. The sequels, **Ollie And Lissa: Halloween** and **Olli And Lissa: The Candlelight Adventure** were also worth checking out.



1 ! 6 & 2 @

Pentagram

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper

The Final(?) Adventure Of Sabreman...



Ultimate's final *ZX Spectrum* release in the *Sabreman* series, **Pentagram** was a synthesis of the best features of their previous games in the series. Of course, the enjoyment of the game was somewhat marred by the fact that the instructions were so vague that nobody could figure out how to play it.

***Pentagram* was possibly the last game written by the original *Ultimate* team. All subsequent titles were apparently written by *U.S. Gold*, who had just bought the rights to the *Ultimate* name and games. There was supposed to be another *Sabreman* game, *Mire Mare*, but it was never commercially released.**

Pentagram played very much like a cross between **Knight Lore**, **Sabre Wulf** and **Atic Atac**. In previous adventures, the hero *Sabreman* had braved tropical jungles in **Sabre Wulf** (where he contracted lycanthropy from the *Wulf*), underground caverns in **Underwurlde**, and finally crumbling castles in **Knight Lore** where he sought the wizard's assistance in curing his lycanthropy. Apparently, while he was with the wizard, he chose to learn a little magic too, because **Pentagram** started out with the player dressed in wizardly robes.
Pentagram was an extremely difficult game to play — not just because of the gameplay, but mainly due to the complete irrelevance of the instructions. However, the level of intricacy in the game's objective was probably one of the deepest in any *Ultimate* game. The object of the game was to repair five broken obelisks using magical well-water. To get the water, the player had to find the wells and shoot them seven or eight times until a bucket appeared. Next, the player had to take the bucket to one of the five broken obelisks spread around the map and drop it in the same room as an obelisk to repair the damage. Once all five obelisks were repaired, the outline of a **Pentagram** would appear in one of the central rooms. This outline had to be filled in by collecting the five pieces of the **Pentagram** (which looked like classic rune-stones) and dropping one on each point of the star. Once this was done, the game was over and *Sabreman* had succeeded in 'unleashing' the power of the **Pentagram**. Time to move on to **Mire Mare**...

"[It's] ... in the Ultimate style, but people shouldn't complain 'cos it's a good idea and why shouldn't they use it over and over again?"
- Crash Magazine, June 1986







CRASH 93% YOUR SINCLAIR 70% SINCLAIR 60%

1 ! 6 & 3 #

Phantomas

Codemasters Ltd.
Enrique Cervera

Phantomas Viene De Muy Lejos...

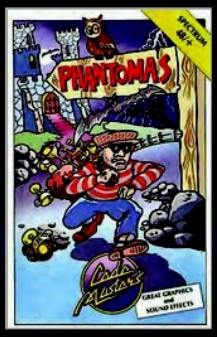


*"...I'll play **Phantomas** again. Phor the sheer phun of it!"*
- Your Sinclair, December 1986

Along with England, Spain was also a great producer of *ZX Spectrum* games. Savvy publishers such as *Codemasters* saw the benefit of localizing and re-publishing these games, many of which were odd and quirky titles such as this one. Other publishers had tried this same approach with some success, including *Mikro-Gen*, *Quicksilva* and *Ocean/Imagine*.

The *Your Sinclair* review pointed out that some of the graphics in *Phantomas* appear to have been *very* closely inspired by the nasties in *Jet Set Willy* — so close, in fact, as to invite suspicion as to their exact derivation. Interestingly, this game and its sequel were developed as part of an informal 'programming rivalry contest' between two friends — one writing a platform game centred around a thief, and the other writing a game centred around ghosts and vampires. The Spanish publishers, *Dinamic*, noticed the similarity between the two games and suggested that they were made to share the same lead character. Thus, *Phantomas* and *Phantomas 2* (known as *Vampire* outside of Spain) were born. Sadly, the programmer of the sequel, *Emilio Pablo Salgueiro Torrado*, was killed in 1999 by a car whilst he was out cycling.

In **Phantomas** the player took on the role of a thief — aptly named *Phantomas* — who intended to rob a millionaire's mansion on the planet of Earth-Gamma. The chosen millionaire was a stickler for security and consequently had guarded his wealth using an intricate security system. There were thirty-six switches spread around the planet (and beyond) that had to be tripped by the player in order to reveal the location of the vault. Not all of these switches were easy to reach, and this otherwise fairly standard (although great fun) platform game threw a number of surprises at the player — including a 'bash-the-buttons-to-run' **Indiana Jones**-style escape from a rolling rock triggered when a specific switch was hit. **Phantomas** was a fun and inventive game that is strangely captivating. Many, many hours were lost to this game without even realizing it.









Pyracurse

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Mark Goodall, Keith Prosser

Tomb Raider: Part Zero...

Hewson gave their in-house tools programmer the opportunity to produce a game, and **Pyracurse** was the result.

The original working title of *Pyracurse* was *Sphinx* and it was set in Ancient Egypt rather than Central America with an Egyptian rather than an Aztec theme. However, *Andrew Hewson* felt that the Egyptian theme had been done to death and chose to use Aztec mythology instead.
The game went through a number of graphical iterations, including a top down view (somewhat like *Renegade*) and a squashed isometric view (as in *Rasputin*) before finally settling on standard scrolling isometric 3D.
***Hewson* planned to use this game engine and toolset to produce several similar games but after this one there were no further releases in the series.**

The player controlled four characters in this game, each with their own unique skills and weaknesses. These were: *Daphne Pemberton-Smythe* (good at finding things), *Professor Roger Kite* (good at using things, but needed protection), *Patrick "Legless" O'Donnell* (strong, but clumsy) and *Frozbie the Dog* (good at digging).
These characters were on a mission to rescue *Daphne*'s father, who had gone missing while investigating the temple-tomb of *Xipe Totec*. The player had to infiltrate the tomb and use the abilities of the four characters to solve the puzzles and avoid the traps to find out what happened to *Daphne*'s father whilst avoiding *Headless Corpses*, *Flying Skulls*, *Giant Scorpions* and other supernatural beasties that inhabited the tomb.
Care had to be taken with the characters in this game, as supplies of *reanimation enzyme* were tricky to find. Not only that, but the game was so tightly crammed into memory that death of all characters required a reload — there simply wasn't enough memory left over to reset the game back to the beginning state.
Pyracurse was a game that rewarded persistent play but some may have found it hard to get into.

CRASH 90% | YOUR SINCLAIR 80% | SINCLAIR 100%

48k



"The graphics are certainly very good: there are well detailed backgrounds and 'moon walking' characters..."
- Crash Magazine, August 1986







1 ! 6 & 5 %

Quazatron

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Steve Turner

This Game Kicks The Butt Of Paradroid...

48k



Paradroid was such a success on the *Commodore 64*, that *Hewson* decided it should be converted for release on the *ZX Spectrum*. **Quazatron** was the result — a game that is arguably greatly superior to the original *Commodore 64* title and even can be considered superior to the 1990 *Commodore Amiga* remake, **Paradroid '90**.

According to *Steve Turner* on the (sadly now defunct) *Graftgold* website (www.graftgold.com), the design ethos of *Quazatron* was to create a game that "borrowed gameplay from Paradroid and married this with a graphic engine I had no game for."

Quazatron was a citadel of rogue droids that had thus far resisted all attempts at shutdown. In a last desperate ploy to regain control, the droid *KLP-2* (A.K.A *Klepto*) was created and fitted with an experimental droid grappling device that allowed direct circuit-to-circuit combat between droids. His mission was use this as well as more conventional weaponry to take out the droids in the citadel.
In fact, use of the grapple was a necessity because the droids on the deeper levels of the citadel had fearsome weaponry that could take out *Klepto* with a single shot. Consequently he needed to upgrade his parts to be able to withstand the abuse and the only way to do this was to win convincingly in a grappling contest. The more overwhelming the victory, the less chance of damage to the loser's parts so they could be used for upgrade.
The grappling sub-game split the screen into two halves with a central column. The aim was to fire pulses at the central column in order to change it to predominantly yellow. The complexity of the play area (i.e. the amount of pulse splitters, combiners and blockers) and the number of pulses available to use depended on the relative strength of the opposing droid.
The implementation of the upgrade system and the rapid-fire complexity of the grappling sub-game give **Quazatron** hidden depths that made it a standout game that is still very playable today.

"Quazatron is a true masterpiece. Nothing about it is of a bad standard - sound, graphics, playability and addictiveness, they're all there."
- Crash Magazine, June 1986







CRASH 94% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

1 ! 6 & 6 &

Rasputin

Firebird Software Ltd.
Paul Hibbard

From Russia With HOT Love...

48k/128k

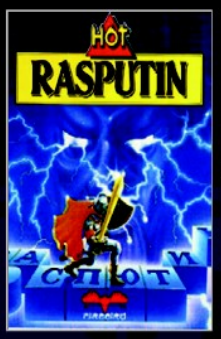


As one of *Firebird*'s new *HOT* range, along with **Costa Capers** and **Gerry the Germ**, **Rasputin** was supposed to be one of their new flagship games published at full price rather than their usual budget price. The attempt to break into the full price market wasn't as successful as *Firebird* would have liked, mainly because the initial run of games weren't of a sufficiently high quality to distinguish themselves from their budget counterparts.

***Rasputin* may well have been the first game ever to appear in a cut-down demo version on a cover tape. The inaugural issue of *Your Sinclair* (the revamped and reborn *Your Spectrum*) published in January of 1986 came with a cover-mounted cassette containing the first four screens (of forty) from the game.**
The game was released in two versions — 48k and 128k — with the latter having additional (and mostly superfluous) graphics and speech.

"...could be a bit late to make its mark in the monochromatic games market."
- Crash Magazine, April 1986

The player took on the role of the *Crusader*, a medieval time-lord sent to prevent the spirit of the evil mad monk, *Rasputin*, from escaping his other-worldly bonds. The source of *Rasputin*'s power was the mystical **Jewel of the Seven Planets** and in order to reach the jewel and neutralise it, the eight spells protecting them had to be dispelled. This is where the *Crusader* came in.
The realms of the Seven Planets were a series of platforms and ladders floating in space-time. In each realm, the player had to step on the stones with the mark of *Rasputin.* Once all the stones in a realm had been reached then *Rasputin*'s evil manifested in the form of a dark creature to be defeated. Once defeated it was transformed into a *spell stone* that would aid the player. Most of these spells were for health or power restoration, but some — the most important — afforded the *Crusader* protection against the *Evil Eyes* that contained the spells protecting the gems. Once all of the spells were neutralized, the player could collect the jewels and *Rasputin*'s power would be at an end.
Rasputin was a good looking game with an interesting spin on isometric 3D. Unfortunately, it was too fiddly and hard to play to be any fun.







CRASH 79% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 80%

1 6 7

Revolution

U.S. Gold Ltd.

Vortex Software (Costa Panayi, Mark Haigh-Hutchinson)

We Can Never Get Enough...



After the phenomenally successful **Highway Encounter** series, *Vortex* decided to try something a little different with **Revolution**. More of a series of interconnected puzzle games than an arcade game, **Revolution** was a bold move for *Vortex*. It was also their first game published through *U.S. Gold*.

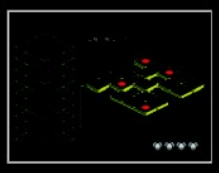
According to author, *Costa Panayi*, the idea for *Revolution* came from a simple observation that there were no bouncing ball games around. Unfortunately, shortly after development started, a rash of games involving balls were released. In an interview with *Crash Magazine* in October 1986, *Costa Panayi* noted also that the same thing had happened with *Cyclone*.

The player controlled a bouncing ball that had to make its way via elevator to the top of a ten floor tower. The aim of the game was to solve the four puzzles on each level and return to the central elevator within the time limit displayed. The player would then be transported to the next level and be given an extra life (up to a maximum of five).
Within each puzzle were two grey blocks of matter. If the player touched one it became unstable, turning white for a short period of time. The player had to then touch the second block before the first reverted to grey. If that was achieved within the time limit then both blocks would vaporise.
There were usually several ways to solve each puzzle. However, as the player progressed through the stack of levels the unstable period became shorter, making the game far more difficult.
Revolution was an intriguing game but came across as being a little too dry and sterile to be any fun. Some of the puzzles were pretty tricky to solve but the emptiness of the screens in between the puzzles and the general sparseness of the design dragged it down to the level of a merely average game.

"Many people should be quite addicted ...[to this]..., but I couldn't see enough in it to compare with [Costa Panayi]'s previous game."
- Crash Magazine, October 1986





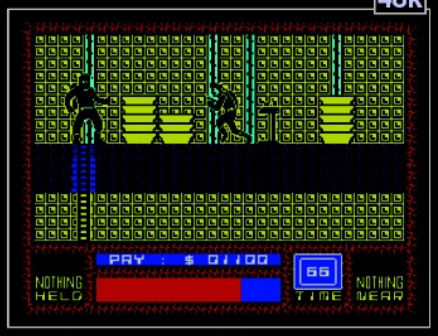




Saboteur

48k

Durell Software Ltd.
Clive Townsend
Real! Ultimate! Power!



Durell Software was not the most prolific of software houses, but when they did put out a product, it was sure to be of high quality. With **Saboteur**, *Durell* excelled themselves. Their first few releases were pretty good — but not outstanding. With each subsequent release the quality of the product slowly but surely improved with very few missteps along the way.

***Clive Townsend*, programmer of *Saboteur*, wrote the game due to his strong interest in martial arts, having taught Ninjitsu for five years. He has also worked as gymnastics teacher in two schools, with such notable students as the two children of *HRH Princess Anne*.**
Oddly enough, *Saboteur* was not the first game due to be published by *Durell* from *Clive Townsend*. However, his first game *Death Pit* — although heavily advertised by *Durell* — was never published due to quality issues. However, in 2007 ***Death Pit*** was recovered after yours truly contacted ***Clive Townsend*** and — with the help of the ***World of Spectrum Preservation Team*** member ***Andrew Barker*** — is now available online.

In this game, the player took on the role of a masked ninja — the eponymous *Saboteur* of the title. The mission for the player was to infiltrate an underground complex populated by martial arts-schooled guards, vicious dogs and various other defensive systems.
Initially, the player had a limited amount of time to search the complex for a computer disk that contained important data — a list of the names of rebel leaders that would be distributed to the authorities unless the player could steal it first.
Once the disk was retrieved, the timer stopped decreasing but the player still had to escape the security station by finding the conveniently located helicopter.
The player could even the odds a little when fighting the guards by making use of the convenient weapons lying around — such as bricks, pipes and shuriken.
As an added bonus, a time-bomb could be located which could be used to blow up the complex once the disk was safely retrieved, earning the player a large amount of bonus points.
Saboteur was a fun and rewarding game, and broke new ground on the *ZX Spectrum*, drawing much admiration when it was released.



"[They've] really pulled their act together this year. After a couple of years of mundane releases they're now producing classics..."
- Crash Christmas Special, 1985/86







Scooby Doo

Elite Systems Ltd.
Gargoyle Games (Greg Follis, Roy Carter)

Scooby Doo! Where Are You?

Scooby Doo was another one of *Elite*'s tie-in licenses — but unlike others (such as **The Fall Guy**, **Grand National**, and **911 TS**) — this one actually held some promise. As initially advertised, it was planned to be a cartoon adventure on a grand scale. However, the game that was eventually published, although excellent, did not match the original concept at all.

***Elite* had big plans for this *Hanna-Barbera* tie-in license, intending to produce a cartoon adventure similar in scope and style to *Don Bluth*'s *Dragon's Lair* — even going so far as to advertise it as "the first ever computer cartoon".**
Unfortunately, the demands of the program proved to be too great for the humble *ZX Spectrum*. Luckily, *Elite* had secured the license for a long enough period of time to allow them to sub-contract production of a game to *Gargoyle Games*. *Elite* considered releasing the original version as designed for the 128k *ZX Spectrum*, but nothing ever came of it.

In **Scooby Doo**, the player took on the role of the cowardly dog, shortly after the gang (*Scooby*, *Fred*, *Daphne*, *Shaggy* and *Velma*) had arrived at a mysterious creepy castle. Shortly after getting out of the *Mystery Machine*, mysterious hands grabbed the team and spirited them away into the depths of the castle.
Scooby — left all alone outside the castle — made an uncharacteristically brave decision to head into the castle and rescue each remaining member of the gang.
Each floor held a single member trapped in a glass jar, and *Scooby* had to punch his way through the ghosties and ghoulies on each level to find his way to the jar through the maze of stairs and corridors.
Despite not being written as originally planned, **Scooby Doo** turned out to be a superb, if difficult, platform game that somehow managed to succeed in evoking the feel of the original cartoon.



"This is obviously not the game promised by Elite some time last year, but it was definitely worth the wait as it is tremendously playable..."
- Crash Magazine, October 1986



CRASH 91% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 80%

Sir Fred

Mikro-Gen Ltd.

Carlos Granados, Paco Menendez, Fernando Rada, Camilo Cela

From Plundering Pyramids To Rescuing Fair Maidens...

Mikro-Gen launched **Sir Fred** in a flurry of publicity by throwing a launch party at London's Tudor Rooms — a Tudor-period themed restaurant. *Mikro-Gen*'s owner, *Mike Meek* (who unfortunately died of cancer on June 21, 2002), thought that this game might be as popular as his *Wally Week* series.

Another *Mikro-Gen* import from Spain, *Sir Fred* was thought to be the sequel to *Quicksilva*'s earlier import *Fred*. However, apart from being sharing three of the same authors and the game hero sharing the same name (albeit with the addition of a knighthood) the two titles are so dissimilar that it's unlikely it was originally intended to be a straight sequel.

In **Sir Fred**, the player took on the persona of the aged and fat *Sir Fred*, the only knight left in the kingdom to rescue the princess, who had been captured by the evil *Baron Hugh D'Unwyt*. As the other knights were all off on quests to one place or another, *Sir Fred* found himself at the castle of the evil Baron ready to begin his quest to rescue the princess.
Sir Fred had to collect objects to solve the puzzles that make up the defences of the Baron's stronghold. The defences in the castle took many forms, including traps, moats, and dangerous creatures such as piranhas, octopi and the castle guards. Luckily for *Sir Fred* the programmers saw fit to endow him with a good range of athletic ability using what was probably one of the first decent in-game physics systems. This meant that *Sir Fred* reacted realistically with true inertia, including jumping further with long run-ups and tumbling down stairs if he ran too fast.
Sir Fred was an intriguing and detailed arcade adventure that suffered for being extremely difficult and frustrating. This was mainly due to the realistic physics engine being a little too realistic for its own good, making the character of *Sir Fred* extremely difficult to control with any accuracy.

CRASH 91% YOUR SINCLAIR 70% SINCLAIR 100%

48k



"His inbuilt inertia means he gets puffed, falls over and drowns pretty realistically as well!"
- Your Sinclair, February 1986







1 7 1

Spindizzy

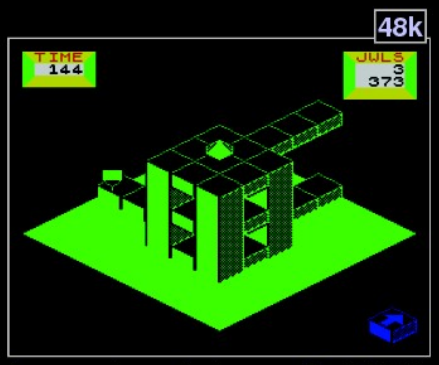
Electric Dreams Ltd.
Paul Shirley, Phil Churchyard

Marble Madness Adventures...

The latest in a string of programs influenced to varying degrees by the seminal arcade game **Marble Madness**, *Paul Shirley*'s **Spindizzy** was a fast, smooth and detailed romp through an isometric 3D world of ramps, lifts and traps. **Spindizzy** was the game regarded as the one that restored *Electric Dreams* to some of its former glory. It certainly ranked amongst the best of the titles they released.

The *ZX Spectrum* version of *Spindizzy* was written by *Paul Shirley* with additional assistance from *Phil Churchyard*, who had previously written the *Sweevo's World* screen editor for *Robin Candy*'s Playing Tips Supplement that appeared in issue 27 of *Crash Magazine* in April 1986.

Not content with meddling in this dimension alone, scientists working for The Company had discovered a strange dimension that they named Hangworld floating in extra-dimensional space.
The player had been chosen by the company to pilot *GERALD* — the Geographic Environmental Reconnaissance and Land-Mapping Device.
As a Trainee Assistant Cartographer for Unknown Worlds, it was the player's job to travel through the strange environments of Hangworld and map out as many of the areas as possible. In order to make the cartographer's job easier, the computer in the *GERALD* craft displayed an isometric 3D representation of the surrounding environment which just happened to exactly match the representation displayed by the *ZX Spectrum* screen.
The player's craft was affected by gravity and inertia and could change shape into three aesthetically pleasing forms. Falling off the edge of a level resulted in a loss of energy. Running out of energy resulted in game over.
The player had to explore each level, collecting energy jewels to keep the craft running and solve the puzzles to find the exit to the next zone. Most of the puzzles in the game were of the 'reach switch A to activate elevator B' type, but the game still hung together as an incredibly fun and accomplished take on the **Marble Madness** genre.



*"**Spindizzy** is a really nice game. Buy it: I think it represents State of the Art on the [ZX Spectrum] today."*

- Crash Magazine, June 1986









Starglider

Rainbird Software Ltd.
Ian Oliver, Graeme Baird, Dave Lowe

Missile Launched!

48k/128k



"Wizz nesaw zoom! ... Zap zap zap kapow! Budda budda budda..."
- Crash Christmas Special 1986/87

After many adventure releases, *Rainbird* changed direction completely by releasing **Starglider**, a 3D vector graphic shoot'em-up. A huge hit on the *Atari ST*, it was soon ported to just about any other popular computer around at the time. But with fast paced vector graphics and sampled speech usually only found on the 16 bit machines, this game was one of the first that critics said "couldn't be done!" when the thought of it appearing on the *ZX Spectrum* came up. But then, *Realtime Games* weren't an average programming team. Already the masters of the 3D genre on the *ZX Spectrum* with such efforts as **3D Tank Duel** and the **Starstrike** games, no one could deny that they were the best in the business when it came to the sheer number crunching required to make the *ZX Spectrum* show fast moving 3D objects. And in **Starglider** they didn't disappoint. Not only did they manage to create animated vectors (which had never been done before on the *ZX Spectrum*) but they also managed to cram in nearly every aspect of the *Atari ST* original into 48k of memory.

The speech and bonus missions were only in the 128k version (which influenced *Crash* into scoring each version separately). *Claire Edgeley*, formerly a *Sinclair User* reviewer, and then current employee of *Rainbird*, provided the voice of the onboard computer. It was nigh on an exact replica of the *Atari ST* version. If there was ever a reason to upgrade to a 128k machine, this was it.

Gameplay wise, **Starglider** was a run of the mill shoot-em up. The player simply had to blast as many ships, tanks and gun emplacements as possible and — for maximum points — destroy the mighty *Starglider One* with a couple of missiles. There were some twists though. Refuelling wasn't as straightforward as the player might think and later levels became a "hunt the silo for missiles" game unto itself, as each progressive level increased the armour strength of the enemy. On the 128k version later levels would require the player to complete extra missions, ranging from picking up a rear view scanner or super missile, to blowing up silo-destroying battle crawlers.
Complete with a sixty-four page Novella filling in the back story, manual, poster and keyboard layout guide, it was worth every penny of the hefty £14.95 it cost to own.







Guest Writer: The Starglider

CRASH	SINCLAIR
95/97%	100%

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Sweevo's World/Whirled

48k/128k

Gargoyle Games Ltd.
Greg Follis, Roy Carter

It Doesn't Get Much Sillier Than This...



Sweevo's World was a huge departure from the typical fare of *Gargoyle Games*, producers of Gaelic-themed arcade adventures **Tir Na Nog** and **Dun Darach**.
Two editions of this game were released: the 48k version of the game was titled **Sweevo's World**, whereas the expanded 128k *remix* with more rooms was called **Sweevo's Whirled**. The latter version typically received lower review scores as it did not use the extra hardware capabilities (and also contained a room layout bug that rendered it impossible to complete).

In the words of *Greg Follis* himself: "[*Sweevo's World*] is a *Gargoyle Games* Special Edition — Just for Fun. We're making it very clear that it's an arcade adventure. And if it doesn't have you rolling about on the floor, what more do you want?".
In a *Crash Magazine* interview, he also said: "Our next game, *Sweevo's World*, however, is aimed more at the arcade market — but it still fits into the *Marsport*/*Siege of Earth* trilogy scenario."

Sweevo (which stands for Self-Willed Extreme Environment Volitional Organism) had been sent to the artificial world of Knutz Folly to clear out the three types of undesirable life-forms infesting it: evil *Little Girls*, goose-stepping *Dictators* and the strangely harmless *Wijus* (Waste Ingestion Janitor Units).
There were also *Geese* which would lay a golden erg if *Sweevo* said "Boo!" to it.
On starting the game, the player could choose in which of the four zones to start *Sweevo*. The available starting locations were Really Free, Lonesome Pine, Fingers and Apple Pie; all were bad puns that are left as an exercise for the reader to work out.
To dispose of the enemies and clear out Knutz Folly, the player had to employ various means to destroy the nasties. The *Little Girls* needed a teddy bear dropped on them from a great height. Similarly, *Dictators* had to be crushed underneath one-ton weights, whereas the *Wijus* had to be lured into being poked by one of the underground fingers that popped up on a regular basis. Additional brownie points could be earned by collecting *Brownies* and further points could be earned for tidiness.

*"Get [**Sweevo's World**] - it proves that even a Gargoyle can smile!"*
- Your Sinclair, March 1986







CRASH 95% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100/80%

Thanatos

Durrell Ltd.
Mike A. Richardson, Jane Richardson, Julian Breeze

Here Be Dragons...

Durrell had made a name for themselves publishing technically excellent and playable games such as the **Saboteur** series, **Turbo Esprit**, and **Jungle Trouble** since the early days of the *ZX Spectrum*. **Thanatos** was no exception to that rule, featuring large smooth graphics, an intriguing use of 3D and a beautifully haunting 128k tune.

***Thanatos* — taken from the Greek word for death — featured a two-legged dragon. Unfortunately (as any fule kno) dragons traditionally have four legs, not two. In classical mythology, the dragon-like creature that only has two legs is known as a Wyvern.**

In **Thanatos**, the player took on the role of a huge dragon, *Thanatos the Destroyer*, that was on a mission to rescue the good sorceress *Eros*, who had been captured and imprisoned in a fortress by an evil lord of the Underworld.
In addition to being captured, her sources of power were taken from her and stored in two heavily guarded castles. *Thanatos* had to first rescue *Eros* from the fortress and then fly her to retrieve her other belongings — a spell book and a cauldron.
The dragon *Thanatos* could fly, breathe fire and pick up people and rocks in his claws as he flew over the landscape searching for the castles. Along the way, he was attacked by *knights*, *giant bees*, *rock-throwing peasants*, *giant spiders*, a *two-headed dragon* and *sea-serpents*, amongst other things.
Flying and breathing fire also diminished the dragon's energy which could be replenished by resting. The fire-breath itself was replenished by eating the virginal maidens that the townsfolk left tied between two stakes to "appease the dragon".
Once *Thanatos* reached the first castle he could burn the doors down and rescue *Eros*, who then climbed onto his back for the rest of the journey. Once the spell-book had been retrieved from the second castle the player had to continue on to the third castle containing the cauldron where *Eros* would cast the spell to rid the land of evil.



48k/128k



"If variety is the spice of life then buy this and become a chicken curry."
- Crash Magazine, December 1986







1 ! 7 ' 5 %

They Stole A Million

48k

Ariolasoft Ltd.
Tigress Marketing Ltd.

You Blew The Whistle On The Blag, You Slag!



Tigress Marketing, publishing through *Ariolasoft*, had already made somewhat of a name for themselves with the excellent 1985 puzzle game **Think!**. The game was designed by them, but was programmed by *The Ramjam Corporation*, a team responsible for a string of hits including **Panzadrome**, the **Cauldron** series, **Archon**, **Dandy** and others.

***Tigress Marketing* were *Beth Wooding*, *David Bishop* and *Chris Palmer*, and were known as one of the earliest pure game design houses. Instead of writing the games in-house, they would design a game, write the technical specifications and farm out the programming to third-party programmers.**

In **They Stole A Million**, the player was *The Boss*, a would-be criminal mastermind with a little start-up capital and a burning desire to work his way up the ranks of the criminal underworld. The player started with £55,000 and a selection of building plans to purchase. The plans ranged from the fairly cheap (an antique coin shop) to the expensive (a bank or a museum), though initially, the player could only afford the cheapest of these. The more expensive the floor plan, the greater the reward — and the risk.
After choosing which floor-plan to purchase, the player then had to choose his team. Each team member required an up-front fee as well as a cut of the job. To perform a job, it was a good idea to spread the available skills around — as each person could have up to two skills. Most jobs needed a driver, a safe-cracker and an alarm specialist. Other skills that were desirable but not always mandated were lookouts and thugs. The choice of team was important and could make the difference between getting a huge haul or being hauled off by the police. Once the team was chosen, the player selected a fence to sell the swag. After the team selection phase, the player planned out the robbery using the building blueprints, (and any other information that may have been purchased from informers in the previous phase). When the job was planned to perfection, the player sat back and watched the team carry out the plan — interacting and changing things on the fly if necessary.
TSAM was an excellent game that did not get anywhere near the exposure it deserved.

"...it's so educational I wouldn't be surprised if there was some sort of moral backlash against it."

- Your Sinclair, January 1987







CRASH 85% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 80%

Thrust

Firebird Software Ltd.
D. Lowe, Jeremy Smith

A Bit More... A Bit More... Oh Yeah. That's Right Baby... Right On The Pod...



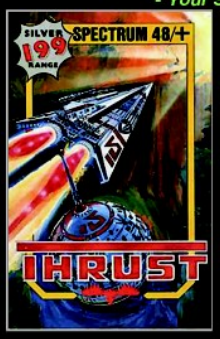
"...[The Resistance have] not got the all important Klystron Pods... which is why they walk that way!"

- Your Sinclair, December 1986

Yet another *Firebird* title that maintained their reputation for publishing high quality budget software, **Thrust** appeared with little fanfare as a deceptively tricky and addictive game. Despite its apparent originality, the game was, in fact, based on the arcade game **Gravitar**, which began appearing in arcades sometime in 1982.

Of the four main 8-bit computers in the UK market, the *ZX Spectrum* was the last to receive a conversion of *Thrust*, which had already been released for the *BBC Micro*, *Amstrad* and *Commodore 64* machines. Other versions of *Thrust* were released for the *Acorn Electron*, 8-bit *Atari* and the vector-based *Vectrex* console. Remarkably a conversion for the *Atari 2600* console — programmed by hobbyist developer *Thomas Jentzsch* in 2000 — is on sale as a cartridge from homebrew publisher *Xype* and also for free download as an emulator image.

In this game the player flew a small spacecraft that was manoeuvred using the standard **Asteroids** controls (rotate left, right, thrust, fire and shield/tractor). The mission was to steal *Klystron Pods*, the fuel cells for the recently 'liberated' *Battlegrade Star Ships* that the *Resistance* had captured from the *Empire* in preparation for a major offensive.
The *Pods* were stored in planetary storage depots guarded by *Limpet Guns* deep within a network of caverns. The player had to fight against the pull of gravity to find and tractor the *Pods* and escape into orbit.
The *Limpet Guns* could be destroyed by shooting them, but could also be disabled *en masse* by damaging the reactor supplying their power. Care had to be taken not to shoot it too many times or else it would detonate, taking the planet with it ten seconds later. This was only a problem if the player hadn't already retrieved the pod. If he had, then a quick escape was required to get away from the explosion and receive a hefty dose of bonus points.









1 7 7

Twister

System 3 Software Ltd.
Sensible Software (Jon Hare Et Al.)

Mother Of Harlots.. Er No, Wait... Charlotte... I Meant, Charlotte!...



"This is one for the Jung at heart who feel like shooting hell out of the cosmic mother..."
- Your Sinclair, April 1986

System 3's interesting though flawed shoot'em-up, **Twister**, was released to a blaze of fairly negative publicity and a swift name change.

Originally, this game was to be released with the title *Twister — Mother Of Harlots*. However *System 3* got into a spot of bother over its sexist content and title. Allegedly the original game title came about because none of the people at *System 3* actually knew the true definition of the word *Harlot*, believing it to be some sort of demon, rather than your common-or-garden 'lady of the night'.

The overall aim of **Twister** was to fight through hordes of demons to collect the required occult elements to be able to destroy the *Twister* — mother of all evil, who manifested as a giant snake wrapped around a spiky planet. In order to defeat her, the player had to collect symbols including card signs, the planets, the zodiac, the parts of *Twister*'s human body and her name. The symbols appeared for every third demon killed — and the player collected them by running over them. Not all of the symbols were good; for example, picking up a horse-shoe would destroy one of the items already collected and the rocket symbols would deplete the player's energy.
The game was split over six levels of first person 3D action — slightly reminiscent of the arcade game **Tempest**. The first level of the game had the player leaping over a set of stepping stones floating in space while shooting demons. The second level had two roads — one at the top and bottom of the screen and the player had to flip between them to avoid demon attacks. The third and fifth levels were similar to the second except that there was only one road at the bottom of the screen, and the fourth was a free-roaming blast through space with the aid of a jet-pack.
The intensity of the demonic attacks increased level by level, culminating with the final battle with the evil *Twister* after the fifth level was completed.









Universal Hero

Mastertronic Ltd.
Stuart Middleton, Ray Tredoux, Chris Harvey

He's A Hero, And He's In The Universe... Geddit?

48k



Bucking the trend for *Mastertronic* — who had developed somewhat of a reputation for releasing crappy games — **Universal Hero** was one of those rarities; a budget game that would have been worth buying even at full-price. *Crash Magazine* noted in the October 1986 issue that this and **Molecule Man** seemed to have marked the start of a turnaround for *Mastertronic*'s fortunes.

The BASIC loader for *Universal Hero* — originally to be called *Starman Jones* — contained a hidden message from programmer *Stuart Middleton* (and his sister *Dawn*), lamenting the fact that there was no sound due to bad design (solution: play *Prince* albums) and giving instructions to hackers about where it is safe to overwrite code in memory.

Universal Hero featured the player as *Captain Burt*, an unlucky dogsbody who found himself in the unfortunate position of being stuck on an asteroid while a space-faring freighter was hurtling towards destruction. To avoid being stranded on the asteroid forever, the freighter had to be repaired and, as it happened, *Captain Burt* was the only qualified person within range.

The first task for the player was to get off the asteroid. This was the first of three sections of the game where the player had to solve puzzles and collect items in order to repair a broken shuttle. Once the shuttle was repaired, the player could escape the asteroid and go on to the second part of the game — the runaway freighter.

Once on board the freighter, the player needed to solve another set of slightly more complex puzzles to repair the freighter and pull it out of its collision course. The end result of this was that the player ended up trapped on a planet where another set of puzzles had to be solved in order to complete the game.

Universal Hero was a highly derivative but very involving arcade adventure that presented a fun and fairly logical set of challenges to the player.

CRASH 83% YOUR SINCLAIR 50% SINCLAIR 100%

*"I wonder if Ultimate knew what it was starting when it released **Jetman** [sic]"*
- Your Sinclair, November 1986



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Uridium

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Dominic Robinson

They Said It Couldn't Be Done...



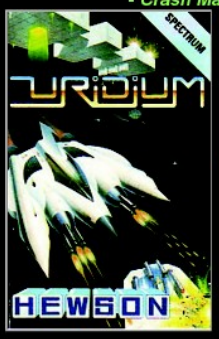
Hewson Consultant's **Uridium** was first released on the *Commodore 64*, originally written by *Andrew Braybrooke*. It took full advantage of the hardware to produce a fast scrolling sprite-based shoot'em-up that was so reliant on the features of the target machine that many pundits thought that a *ZX Spectrum* conversion was simply impossible. However, *Hewson*' s new hotshot programmer *Dominic Robinson* was only too happy to prove the pundits wrong - much to the delight of *ZX Spectrum* owners everywhere. **Uridium** is often cited as being one of the best available shoot'em-ups on the *ZX Spectrum* — and not without reason.

A semi-official sequel to *Uridium*, *Uridium Plus*, was released in 1987. It was basically the exact same game as the original, except for a few subtle enhancements and a set of new and harder levels.
Notably, *Uridium* is one of the few games to break the '2 colours per 8x8 pixel square' rule; the high-score table is a great example of interrupt-driven multi-colour animation.

Uridium placed the player in the role of a pilot of a *Manta* class single man star-fighter whose job it was to perform low-level strafing runs over a squadron of *Super Dreadnoughts*. These were huge city-sized ships that had stationed themselves in orbit around each of the planets in the solar system in order to drain core mineral resources from the planets' surfaces.
The player had to guide the fighter around the obstacles on the surface of the *Dreadnought* and destroy each of the attacking waves of defence drones and homing mines deployed by the *Dreadnought*'s defensive systems. Once the drones and the majority of the surface based defences were destroyed, the player could land on the *Dreadnought*'s main runway to initiate the destruct sequence.
The player was then transported to the next of the fifteen *Dreadnoughts*.
Uridium was a stunning game, both technically and artistically way ahead of its time, and remains very playable and addictive even today.



"The graphics are brilliant, with some excellent scrolling, which of course isn't up to the standard of the Commodore 64 version..."
- Crash Magazine, December 1986







The Way Of The Tiger

Gremlin Graphics Software Ltd.

Chris Kerry, Shaun Hollingworth, Peter M. Harrap, Marco Duroe

No, It's Not A "Rocky" Game...

Gremlin Graphics' licensing endeavours netted them this license based on the once popular 'Choose Your Own Adventure' books from the 80's.
These books, (published by *Knight Books*), detailed the adventures of a ninja warrior in a series of fantastical adventures.

One of the original authors of the book series, *Jamie Thomson*, moved into the computer games industry as a game designer for *Eidos* back in the mid-to-late 90's. As of this writing, he is now a director of game studio *Black Cactus*, known for their *Warrior Kings* line of games, designed by established game designer and author, *Dave Morris*. He was also responsible for a huge number of 'Choose Your Own Adventure' books back in the 80's and early 90's.

The Way Of The Tiger detailed the path of a young orphaned would-be ninja out to prove himself to his foster-father *Naijishi, the Grand Master*, by battling through three stages of combat against a range of powerful enemies. Only once he had defeated all of the enemies arrayed before him could he call himself a true ninja.
The game was split into three multi-load sections. The first of these was unarmed combat, where the player had to progress across a technically impressive three-level parallax scrolling landscape, being attacked by ninjas, mysterious wraith/dwarf shape-shifters and other strange creatures.
Following the unarmed combat, the player had to fight an armoured skeleton on a narrow bridge above a stream using a pole. The bridge was very slippery and it was easy to be knocked into the stream, forfeiting the bout. Once the skeleton was defeated, other creatures would attack, including club-wielding dwarves and more ninjas.
The final stage of the game — Samurai swordsmanship — took place in the temple in which the hero trained. Here he had to fight his way through the defensive forces until he reached a final showdown with his master. Only once he had won this confrontation could he claim his title.

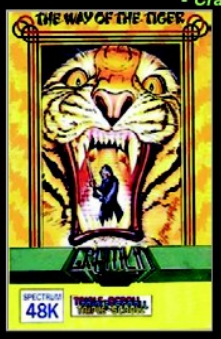
CRASH 93% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

48k



"I didn't much like the constant loading of the game but it does represent very good value for money."

- Crash Magazine, May 1986







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Program: 1987

Five years on from the launch of the **16k Spectrum** and the next wave of serious competition arrived. They were dangerous, they were the future, and most **Spectrum** users knew it.

From one direction came the **Sega Master System** and **Nintendo Entertainment System**, two games consoles which had been very successful in America and the Far East for a few years and were now being launched in Europe. Although only built for playing games, and those games were two or three times the price of **Spectrum** games, the advanced graphics and sound combined with fast load times were very tempting.

From the other side came the next generation of computers, the **Commodore Amiga** and the **Atari ST**, offering arcade quality graphics and sound. They were launched a couple of years back and initially sold for several hundreds of pounds each. Both machines were involved in the creation of professional music as well as television and film production. By the end of 1987, their prices had dropped into the top end of the home computer price range, and their games markets were starting to blossom as a result.

Amstrad was caught on the back foot. Their **CPC** range couldn't compete with these new machines so they looked at the **Spectrum** and went for the cheap option. The new **Spectrum Plus Three** was a **128k Spectrum** with an integrated disk drive. Rather than boost the **Spectrum's** abilities to compete with the **ST** and **Amiga**, it was hoped that the fifteen second load times would make buyers think twice about buying a games console.

The **Plus Three** never really took off. The changes required to incorporate the disk drive created additional backwards compatibility problems. The disk drive itself was a non-standard type which meant their disks were much more expensive than tapes. Combined with a high retail price and the **Plus Three** was mainly taken up by power users for whom tape storage didn't meet their needs.

As for the **Spectrum** games, they were starting to reach their peak. **Head Over Heels** was never bettered and became the definitive isometric 3D game with some critics considering it the best game ever released on the **Spectrum**. **The Sentinel** was a unique classic with its simple game design yet impressive visuals.

There were also a number of game design features that would be developed and maintained through every subsequent generation of computer and games console. **Leaderboard** revolutionised golf games with filled 3D vector graphics. **Driller** took that one stage further and used them to form a true 3D arcade adventure. These techniques live on today in games such as the **Links** golf franchise and the **Tomb Raider** series, plus many other unrelated genres.

Sadly some good things must come to an end. The **Ultimate** label was sold to **US Gold** and quietly closed down after a few uninspiring games. **Ultimate's** founders formed **RARE** and went on to produce console and arcade games.

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

Academy

CRL Group PLC.
Pete Cooke

You Need Schoolin'... I Ain't Foolin'...

CRL's **Academy** 3D engine had many optimizations over **Tau Ceti**, the previous iteration in the series, allowing author *Pete Cooke* to increase both the speed and the visible window of the game. Consequently, the game took on more of an arcade feel than the prequel.

***Pete Cooke*'s *Academy* was released two years after its prequel, *Tau Ceti*, and it was the last game that he was to write for *CRL* before he was enticed away to *Nexus* to write *Micronaut One*. *Micronaut One* was chosen as a project over a third game in the *Tau Ceti* series for two reasons: firstly, he was bored with the game style, and secondly, he did not want to risk angering *CRL*.**

After the fiery destruction of half a planet by a rookie pilot messing up a critical landing, it was decided that all space pilots would have to attend a flight academy where they would learn to fly Skimmers — ideally without destroying any more planets in the process. The player took on the role of one of these rookie pilots and had to complete the **Academy** course of five groups of four missions before he could become a fully fledged pilot. On starting a mission, the player was given a briefing on the mission aims and had to fly, shoot and zoom his way through the tasks presented.

A unique feature of this game was the unprecedented level of configurability. Not only could the player design his own skimmer, but the layout panel (i.e. the screen display) could be configured in almost any fashion the player chose — including the position and type of instruments displayed as well as the panel background colour and pattern. It was a small touch, but one that greatly increased the level of immersion and enjoyment to be had in designing a custom skimmer.

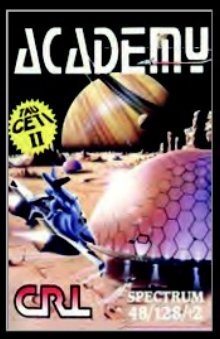
Academy was an advanced game that enjoyed a high level of success. It was an extremely playable and technically accomplished arcade adventure that really gave the player the feeling of being a trainee skimmer pilot.



48k



*"**Academy** has taken some of the best points of **Tau Ceti** and improved on them..."*
- Crash Magazine,

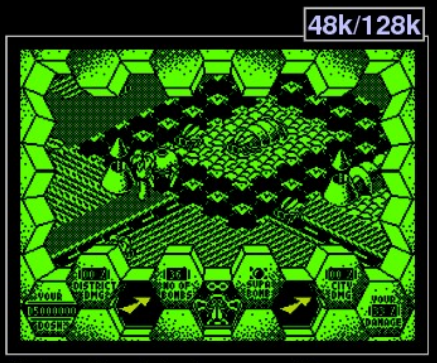






Amaurote

Mastertronic Added Dimension.
John Pickford, Ste Pickford, David Whittaker
This Game Is Full Of Bugs...

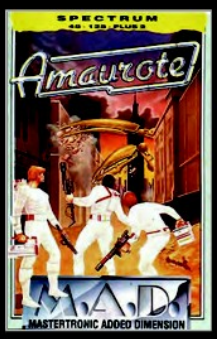


Amaurote — the title being taken from main city in *Sir Thomas Moore*'s famous treatise on the ideal commonwealth, **Utopia** — was released in two versions (a 48k and slightly delayed 128k version) to take advantage of the specific features of each machine. Aside from the addition of an excellent *David Whittaker* tune, the only difference between the 48k and 128k versions was the addition of several so-so cut scenes.

***Amaurote*'s cities were algorithmically generated from a seed formula, which unfortunately meant that the levels were rather characterless and devoid of gameplay hooks. *John Pickford*, one of the programmers, stated that he thought of it more of a technical exercise than a game, despite its pretty looks. He was also the face that could be seen in close-up on one of the 128k version's cut scenes. This went some way to explaining why what is essentially a graphically enhanced update of *Ant Attack* comes across as a soulless imitation of its predecessor.**

In classic 50s B-movie style, all 25 districts of the city of **Amaurote** had been infested with gigantic insects — and it was the job of the player to rid each of the districts of the insects. The player controlled a four-legged *Arachnus* assault vehicle, equipped with bouncing bombs, and a radio for requesting rescue, additional supplies, and a super-bomb.
The insects came in three types, the most numerous being the *drones*. These followed the player incessantly, but fortunately were fairly easy to destroy. The second type were the *scouts*, flying insects that buzzed the player and reported his position back to the third class of insect: the *queen*. The *queen* was responsible for directing the reinforcements towards the player and would generate new reinforcements as the player destroyed them. To prevent this the player had to seek out and destroy the queen, who could only be harmed by a direct hit with the super bomb. Once this was done, mopping up the rest of the insects was fairly simple — if a bit tedious — although it had to be done with care, because stray bombs could destroy city buildings. The citizens of **Amaurote** wanted their city back in one piece.

"I always like original games, and I've never seen anything like this before."
- Crash Magazine, May 1987







CRASH 92% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

Army Moves

Imagine Software Ltd.

Victor Ruiz, Santiago Morga, Manuel Cubedo, Javier Cubedo

Two Words: Insanely Hard.

Army Moves was the first of a series of devastatingly difficult side-scrolling jump and shoot games to come out of Spanish software house, *Dinamic*, to be republished by *Ocean Software* under their *Imagine* label.

***Dinamic* certainly seemed to have the monopoly on rock-hard, *Green Beret*-inspired games. The direct sequel to this game, *Navy Moves* and the conceptual sequels *Game Over* and *Game Over II* were also similar in concept and difficultity.**

In **Army Moves**, a devastatingly hard game from Spanish software house *Dinamic*, the player took on the role of a Special Forces officer whose mission it was to infiltrate a jungle base and steal the plans for a weapon of devastating power from a safe in the General's room.

In order to do this, the player had to fight through several taxing levels to reach the base. Unusually for a 48k game, **Army Moves** required a multi-load — loading the second set of levels from tape as a separate program. Access to this second set of levels was protected by a code-word only obtainable on completion of the first set. The 128k enhanced version of this game allowed both parts to be loaded simultaneously, but still protected the second part using the same mechanism. Apart from music and sound, there were no other enhancements for the 128k version.

The games started off with a missile-armed jeep making its way along a long arched-bridge road (with gaps that had to be jumped) whilst under attack from other jeeps and helicopters. Most players failed to even get past this level but if they did manage it, the next levels allowed them to commandeer a helicopter and make their way to the jungle base.

Once in the jungle the player proceeded on foot through the trees and rivers in order to reach the hidden base. When the player had infiltrated the base and recovered the plans (which was by no means an easy feat) the game was over and the player was declared a hero.

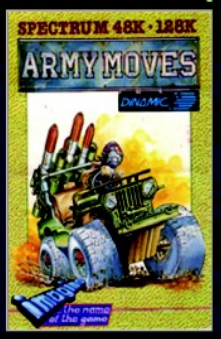
Army Moves was a potentially good game that was unfortunately let down by slightly iffy collision detection and a badly tuned level of difficulty.

Did I mention that this game is *hard*?



"[If you don't die in] the first ten seconds, the only thing you can be sure of is that you're bound to do it in the next ten."

- Your Sinclair, July 1987







CRASH 54% | YOUR SINCLAIR 80% | SINCLAIR 100%

1 ! 8 (5 %

Bubbler

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
U.S. Gold (?)

Bubbling Like Black Gold These Days...



"Let's hope Ultimate does return again to its original form soon."

- Your Sinclair, July 1987







Bubbler, the second of three post-*Stamper* games was most likely the best use of the recently purchased *Ultimate* IP. Pushing the Filmation engine to the absolute limits, it was probably the most technically advanced *Ultimate* game published spoiled only by its tricky rotational controls.

Despite not being written by the original *Ultimate* team, this game is a much sought after collector's item regularly going for high prices on eBay (usually somewhere between £60 and £90). In a bizarre coincidence on the day that this page was written (October 29th 2005), after a *starting* price of £45 and eleven bids, the highest price thus far for this game in an auction was recorded. The final price? £175! Shortly after that auction ended, a copy of *Bubbler* appeared on eBay for the astounding "Buy It Now" price of £200.

In **Bubbler** the player took on the role of a prisoner of the evil wizard *Vadra*. At some point in the past, the player had upset *Vadra* and consequently was turned into an immobile globule of slime. Fortunately for the player, *Vadra* had also imprisoned his former assistant *Kintor*, who managed to endow the player with limited movement and the ability to fire energy bolts. *Kintor* then charged the player with navigating the levels to collect corks that were hidden in trapdoors. Once the player had found a cork, he could use it to stopper the gigantic bottles --- or **Bubbler**s --- that were the source of *Vadra*'s power and were also spewing evil monsters over the land. The more of the bottles that were corked, the weaker *Vadra* became. Once *Vadra* was defeated, *Kintor* would turn back to normal and the spell on the player would be broken.
The player had to leap and bounce around the isometric levels, looking for trapdoors that revealed the hidden magical corks and avoiding or destroying the persistent nasties that poured out of the bottles. As always, the dungeon based levels were a dangerous place --- with tricks and traps designed to catch out the unwary player.
Bubbler was a fun but difficult game that was almost --- but not quite --- believably *Ultimate*.



Dark Sceptre

Firebird Software Ltd.
Beyond Software (Mike Singleton, David Gautrey, Alan Jardine)
PBM: Play By Microdrive?

48k

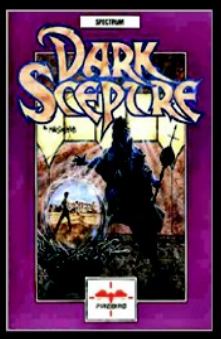


"It still looks impressive more than a year after its essential details were finalised."
- Sinclair User, November 1987

After the huge success of *Mike Singleton*'s **Lords of Midnight** series, his planned *Play By Mail* title, **Dark Sceptre**, was eagerly awaited by many, scoring a lot of pre-release magazine coverage. Unfortunately, the final product (although fascinating) did not hold up well in comparison to his earlier titles.

Two releases were planned for *Dark Sceptre*: a single player version and a multi-player 'play-by-mail' version where turns would be sent and received via *microdrive cartridge*. The latter venture — although visionary — was unfortunately short-lived due in part to the low distribution and legendary unreliability of the *ZX Microdrive* cartridges. The game itself was subject to delays — with a nearly two year gap between its first appearance in a magazine until its eventual release in the last months of 1987.

In this monumental game, which featured some of the largest graphics ever seen on the *ZX Spectrum*, the player took on the role of an overseer of a group of medieval warriors of differing abilities. These characters included the *Thane* — the figurehead and leader, the *Mystic* — skilled with magic, the *Fool* — good at diplomacy, the *Herald* — a messenger and fighter, the *Assassin* — a hired killer, the *Savage* — a resilient Wildman, and the *Reaper* — a skull-faced warrior that struck terror into the heart of his foes. Other characters that the player could control were simply *Thralls* — peasants loyal to the *Thane*.
The aim of the game was to retrieve and destroy the *Dark Sceptre*, a powerful magic weapon that gave the player's enemy his power. The player had to issue orders to his team, recruit new members from the neutral groups in the game, and ultimately figure out how to get the *Dark Sceptre* out of the hands of the enemy's team.
The player controlled his team by giving them 'spoken' orders via a selectable menu. The advertised 'play by mail' version was supposed to allow multiple players to issue multiple orders in a turn-based scenario, having the results returned to them to watch via *microdrive cartridge*, but unfortunately after an initial flurry of advertisements very little was heard about this aspect of the game.







CRASH 88% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

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Deflektor

Gremlin Graphics Software Ltd.
Vortex Software (Costa Panayi, Benn Daglish)

Smoke And Mirrors...

In a rather surprising departure from the norm for *Costa Panayi* his 1987 release, **Deflektor**, was not a 3D game. In fact, it was his first 2D release since his inaugural *Vortex* release, **Android 1**, back in 1983. In spite of this apparent step back in time, the quality of the gameplay shone through to deliver a game that is still compelling and addictive today.

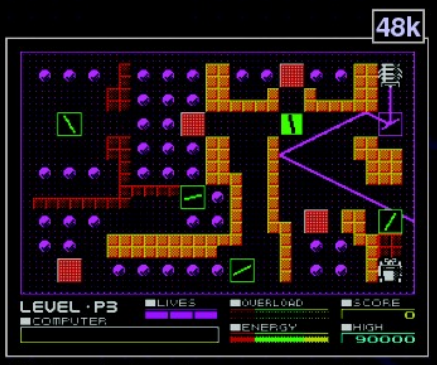
***Deflektor* featured an innovative loading system that actually displayed the game instructions as it loaded. While this was not the first instance of a custom loader displaying useful information, it was still notable due to the continual update of the graphical instructions with a timer counting down the remaining loading time.**

Deflektor was set inside an optical computer that had been invaded by mischievous *Gremlins*. The *Gremlins* scrambled up the alignment of the optical circuits, and the task of the player was to destroy all the energy particles while realigning the mirrors to reconnect the circuit.

There were various constructions within the circuits that affected the path of the laser and these had to be used or avoided to solve the puzzles presented by each level. Some of these constructions included *Polariser*s that allowed light through in only one direction and *Random Polariser*s that randomly redirected the light beam as well as more dangerous items such as *mine*s that raised the overload level of the laser. If the laser overloaded too much then the level would end and had to be restarted. Other features included fibre-optic connections that effectively teleported the laser beam from one area of the level to another. All of these elements combined to form some really tricky puzzles that stumped even the hardiest of players. With only three lives to play with and the ease with which the laser overloaded, this made the game extremely hard to play.

Fortunately, the game provided a practice mode that allowed the player to play through three successive levels without the danger of overload.

Even today, this is a game that is still very playable and is worth firing up in an emulator for whiling away an hour or two.



"That rarest of specimens - an original game that's also chronically addictive."
- Your Sinclair, January 1988







CRASH 77% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 80%

Exolon

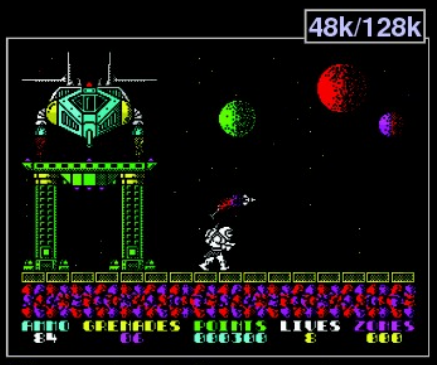
Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Raffaele Cecco, Nick Jones

Is That A Rocket In Your Pocket, Or...?

Another game in a long run of hits for *Hewson Consultants*, **Exolon** solidified their role as a successor for the crown recently abandoned by the decline of *Ultimate*. This streak of quality would last until the end of the decade where the oncoming freight train of the 16-bit market pressured *Hewson* to adapt or die. Unfortunately, they were unable to adapt and faded into obscurity after a few lack-lustre 16-bit conversions of their 8-bit titles.

Although it has been done many times since, the 'development post-mortem' was a relatively novel idea back in the 80's, particularly for such a high profile developer as *Raffaele Cecco*. However, the December 1987 issue of *Sinclair User* featured a post-mortem of *Exolon*, revealing several interesting snippets of information, including that the graphics were actually designed on an *Atari ST* and ported to the *ZX Spectrum* via serial link. Another little known fact that was not revealed is that in order to save time, one of the later levels in the game is simply a mirror image of an earlier level.

The mission in **Exolon** was simple: the player had to jump, shoot and grenade his way through many screens of alien waves, gun emplacements, blockades and platforms.
The player's character, *Vitorc* was armed with a limited amount of ammo and grenades that could be replenished at various points along the journey. However, the novel feature of this game was that the player could find and use an armoured exoskeleton that was much less manoeuvrable than the standard battlesuit, but that could also take a lot more punishment.
Another nice feature of this game was the amount of variety provided by the attacking alien hordes; they were not just the usual 'space invader' type of alien, but instead varied in both size, frequency and attack patterns. Every now and then, huge pulsating alien eggs appeared that had to be destroyed, freeing the trapped aliens within. These then made a bee-line directly for *Vitorc*.
Exolon was a challenging and attractive game that (although it was a touch derivative) still ranked highly among the best of *Hewson*'s published titles.



"Three words say it all. ***Exolon*** *- extreme excellence!"*

- Your Sinclair, August 1987







CRASH 90% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100%

Feud

Bulldog Ltd.
Binary Design Ltd (John Pickford, Ste Pickford)

The Antithesis Of Brotherly Love...

48k/128k



"Your life won't be complete without ***Feud****, especially at the price..."*
- Crash Magazine, March 1987

Mastertronic's *Bulldog* label derived from their acquisition of a financially troubled distributor that owed them money. Having no idea what to do with the newly acquired company (along with a warehouse full of games), they put out this game along with about eleven others in 1987 before discontinuing use of the label.

Feud **was one of the more successful budget games released in 1987 — a year which could truly be described as 'the year of the budget game', as traditional full priced publishers really began to feel the squeeze on their bottom lines from the peaking budget market.** ***Mastertronic*** **recorded their highest combined sales figures over this year, selling somewhere between 4 and 6 million units.**

In **Feud** the player controlled an angry wizard, *Learic*, who had got in an argument with his brother, *Leanoric*, causing a major falling out between them. The game started with the two brothers on opposite sides of the large map, each scheming to destroy the other.
The player then had to race around the playing area collecting the required herbs to create spells as described by his spell book. Each spell required two different herbs, and once he had got the required herbs to cast a spell he then needed to return to his home cauldron and mix the spell into a potion in order to arm it. Meanwhile the computer was controlling the other brother — who was trying to achieve exactly the same thing.
The range of available spells was impressive, ranging from the defensive to the offensive as well as the merely useful. For example, the Teleport spell simplified the creation of new spells by allowing the player to immediately return to his cauldron. The Freeze spell was also useful to render the opponent immobile while he was peppered with bolts from a more destructive spell such as the Lightning spell.
The game continued until one of the brothers was killed — indicated in the status area by the figure of the wizard sinking below the ground until a gravestone appeared. **Feud** was a fun and challenging game that required a map to play effectively, but the long term playability suffered when the optimum strategy of Teleport/Freeze/Lightning was figured out.







CRASH 91% YOUR SINCLAIR 80% SINCLAIR 80%

Game Over

Imagine Software Ltd.
Snatcho

Mmmm... Chock Full Of Nipply Goodness...

48k/128k



Another Spanish import, **Game Over** was the spiritual sequel to both **Army Moves** and **Navy Moves**. While it was not as difficult as those two legendarily difficult games, it still had its fair share of tricky moments. Even though it was a pretty good game in its own right, the furore over the game's cover artwork overshadowed it somewhat, (and probably didn't do the sales any harm either).

The cover of this game featured the evil queen is a rather revealing outfit showing rather a lot of (very nice looking) nipple. However, certain magazines were unhappy with this imagery and refused to run the advert until the offending areolas were airbrushed out. Fortunately for all red-blooded adolescent males everywhere, *Your Sinclair* came to the rescue by giving away a huge poster of the original artwork. While the English release of the game featured the doctored artwork, the original Spanish artwork (shown below) did not. More recently, *Retro Gamer* magazine has reprinted the famed poster, given away with an issue of the magazine.

*"The only decent part of **Game Over** is the loading screen, showing a skimpily dressed girl..."*

- Crash Magazine, September 1987



Game Over set the player as the valiant hero *Arkos* fighting alone against a mighty empire presided over by the evil *Queen Gremla*, a villainess of the old school 'conquer the galaxy' approach.
Starting on the planet Hypsis, the player had to navigate his way from left to right while fighting off a wide variety of green *Orc*-like aliens, robots, mines and other nasties that attacked the player. Gameplay was superficially similar to the arcade game **Green Beret** — a fact it was dinged for in some reviews — but it was still a fun and challenging game.
One of the more memorable parts of the game was the confrontation with the *Giant Orko* — a huge, ground-shaking monster that towered over the player, about a third of a screen high. Similar confrontations occurred at regular points throughout the game but *Orko* was the most impressive.
Game Over was followed by a somewhat lack-lustre sequel and was probably the most accessible of the four *Dinamic* games in this style.



Head Over Heels

Ocean Software Ltd.
Jon Ritman, Bernie Drummond

The Ultimate Ultimate Game...

48k/128k



Head Over heels was considered by many to be the best *ZX Spectrum* games ever to grace the platform. Released by *Ocean* on several 8-bit and 16-bit platforms, it became one of **Jon Ritman**'s most successful titles.

***Head Over Heels* was originally going to be titled *Foot and Mouth*, but this was deemed as a little unseemly for the general populace. It was unfortunately the last 3D isometric game *Jon Ritman* was to produce for the *ZX Spectrum*, although he did later produce one for the *Gameboy* — *Monster Max* — although that title sold poorly due to the publishing company, *Titus*, sitting on it for a year after it had been completed and reviewed in magazines.**

Head Over Heels sets the player as controlling not one, but two cute little creatures — the eponymously named *Head* and *Heels*. Each character had unique and complementary skills. *Head* could jump high and glide on descent but could not move fast, whereas *Heels* could run fast.
The game was set over five appropriately themed worlds — Egyptus, Safari, Book World, Penitentiary and finally, Blacktooth, all of which were under the control of an evil dictator. The aim of the game was initially to reunite *Head* and *Heels* who had been caught and imprisoned on Penitentiary in separate cells. Once they had retrieved their equipment and reunited, they could symbiotically join together to combine their talents. At this stage, they then had to go on a quest through the 300 or so rooms spread across the worlds to retrieve the five crowns of the original rulers, and use them to inspire rebellion — thus overthrowing the control of the evil emperor.
An ingenious feature of the puzzle design in this game was the fact that many of the puzzles had to be solved differently depending on which character the player was controlling. Aside from the excellent gameplay, **Head Over Heels** ranked as the most technically accomplished isometric game to appear on the *ZX Spectrum*.

"Wow! this is the ultimate game!"
- Crash Magazine, April 1987







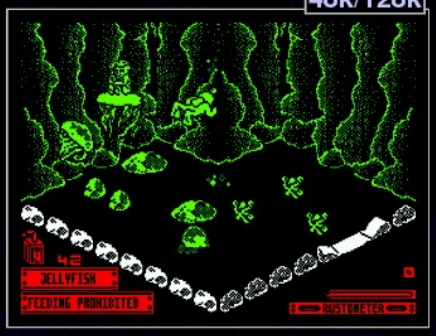
CRASH 97% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100%

Hydrofool

Faster Than Light Ltd.
Roy Carter, Greg Follis, Rob Hubbard

Underwater Robot Vs. Fish In Life Or Death Conflict...

48k/128k



Gargoyle Games sequel to **Sweevo's World** was published under their new 'arcade' label *FTL — Faster Than Light*. As a label, *FTL* produced a few interesting arcade games, but nothing that really scaled the heights of their output under the *Gargoyle Games* label. Like its prequel, an expanded 128k version was also released.

***Hydrofool* was one of the three games that *FTL* published before closing down. A fourth title, *Samurai Dawn* — a Samurai-themed fighting game — was announced in games magazines late in 1986, but was never released.**

Despite the obvious graphical make over, the differences between **Hydrofool** and its prequel, **Sweevo's World** were not as pronounced as it first appeared. The aim of the game was to clean up the aquarium world of Deathbowl, which had become so polluted that the only hope was to find the four plugs and drain the entire planet.
Like its predecessor, the gameplay was based around a series of bad puns. In *Sweevo*'s quest to pull the plugs he came under attack from a variety of different sea-life, and the methods required to kill off the attackers were based around some fairly twisted logic. For example, to kill the *Sea-Horses* a horse-shoe was used. For the *Jelly-Fish*, a spoon would see them off. Other nasties were dispatched by similarly cliched means.
In order to activate the plugs, certain objects had to be collected and placed on special floor plates surrounding the plugs. This had to be done in the correct order or *Sweevo* would find himself cut off from the other levels and unable to complete the game. Transition between levels was via bubble or whirlpool, so if he drained all the water in the wrong place, he would be stuck. On top of this, he needed to keep himself regularly topped up with oil to prevent rusting.
Hydrofool was a good addition to the *Sweevo* family of games, but did not quite live up to the spontaneity and imagination of the prequel.

*"If you've seen **Sweevo's [World]** then don't expect much different - still a great game though."*
- Crash Magazine, June 1987







CRASH 90% | YOUR SINCLAIR 80% | SINCLAIR 100%

1 ! 9) 3 #

I, Ball 2: Quest For The Past

Firebird Software Ltd.
Timothy Closs

More Balls Than You Can Shake A Stick At... Ooer, Missus!



*"**I, Ball 2** is a very playable leap-around-and-blast-everything-in-sight collect-'em-up"*
- Crash Magazine, October 1987







Remarkably, **I, Ball** and its sequel, **I, Ball 2: Quest For The Past** were published roughly six months apart in the span of a single year — 1987. Despite being budget games, they exuded polish and featured high quality speech and colourful graphics. Although superficially similar in appearance, they were very different games to play — with the prequel playing very much like a vertically scrolling **Parodius**-style shoot'em-up — complete with upgradeable weapons and cute graphics.

The author, *Timothy Closs*, worked on several other well received games for the home computer market, including *Kid Gloves* for the *Amiga* and *Atari ST*, and the more recent 2003 release of *Kung Fu Chaos* for the *Microsoft X-Box*.

After rescuing his compatriots, *Lover Ball*, *Eddy Ball*, *Glow Ball* and *No Ball* from the evil *Terry Ball* in the first game, the heroic *I, Ball* returned in the sequel to take part in a dangerous archaeological expedition delving into the history of the ancient Ball race.
The player had to explore fifty mines (each one taking up a single screen) to recover artefacts from the youth of his race. After each five mines, an artefact could be found. When all ten artefacts were found, *I, Ball* could return home as a hero.
Each mine was presented as a difficult platform/maze layout where the player had to jump and bounce around to retrieve a key in order to unlock the exit. Meanwhile, he was under attack from the mutated denizens of the mines, with only limited power-ups available to help defend against the attackers. These power-ups took the form of extra-life fragments (four of which were required to obtain an extra life), magic bombs, and gemstones, which may or may not have had a helpful effect for the player.
I, Ball 2 was a phenomenally difficult game that, due to the size of the graphics and the cramped screen layout, was as frustrating to play as it was fun.

CRASH 90%

Kat Trap

Streetwise (Domark Ltd.)
Design Design Software (Graham Stafford)
***** Insert Pussy Joke Here *****

48k

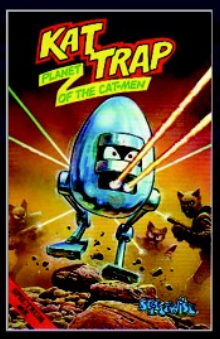


As probably the most popular competition in the history of *Crash Magazine*, the "Genesis — Birth of a Game" contest was announced in issue 29, and culminated in the review of the winning game in issue 36. Despite the high hopes, the game was nothing much to write home about, and the "planned series" of reader-designed games died a swift death.

The competition to design a game attracted many thousands of entries, all of which were whittled down and discarded in favour of *Jonathan Eggleton*'s winning design: *Kat Trap — Planet of the Cat-Men*. Despite the obvious conflict of interest, *Kat Trap* garnered a very respectable review in *Crash* — made particularly conspicuous by the fact that other magazines did not wax quite so lyrically about the title.

Kat Trap, while not being strong on gameplay, did at least benefit from an imaginative story-line. The main character, *MT-Ed* had been sent to a ruined and abandoned Earth to forcibly evict a bunch of interplanetary squatters — the *Kat-Men* — who were understandably reluctant to give up their new home to the returning mass of humanity.
Upon landing on Earth, things immediately took a turn for the worse, with the capture of *MT-Ed*'s battle-droid partner, *Hercules-1*, leaving *MT-Ed* alone and vulnerable with only a few under-powered weapons for protection.
Consequently, *MT-Ed* had to fight his way left-to-right through fourteen themed levels of bad guys, collecting weapon upgrades, extra-lives and other bonuses, attempting to rescue *Hercules-1*, defeat the *Kat* menace, and make the Earth safe for humanity once again.
For a game that started from such a promising beginning, the final result was pretty disappointing. It was fun, but nowhere near as fun as it should have been for this type of game. It's a shame the Genesis competition didn't work out quite as well as it should. Even from the limited selection of other games that were discussed in the *Crash Magazine* articles, it was clear that better game designs than **Kat Trap** were submitted... So why **Kat Trap** was chosen above all others remains an unsolvable mystery.

"...Essentially it is just another quasi-thinking person's scrolling-shoot-out."
- Sinclair User, March 1987







CRASH 84% | YOUR SINCLAIR 60% | SINCLAIR 80%

Martianoids

Ultimate Play The Game, Ashby Computer Graphics Ltd.
U.S. Gold

Ultimate Jumps The Shark...

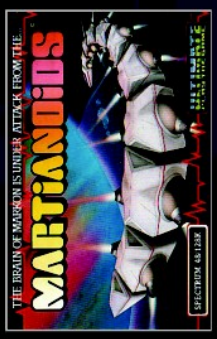


"...Ultimate is back in the game..."
- Sinclair User, April 1987

Martianoids will go down in history as the game that truly heralded the death of *Ultimate* as a great *ZX Spectrum* games publisher. Despite being their last published game, it was also their worst — not even reaching the level of their earliest 16k games back in 1983. Even in the waning years of *Ultimate*, magazines couldn't quite find it in themselves to give an *Ultimate* game a bad review. In fact, even though it is a fundamentally flawed game, **Martianoids** received respectable reviews — averaging 6/10 in most magazines. On the other hand, *Sinclair User* absolutely loved the game, giving it a straight 5/5 accompanied by a very positive review.

***Martianoids* was the only one of *Ultimate*'s 3D games to use an odd 45 degree isometric perspective instead of the more standard 30 degree view. However, one of the odder things about this game was the similarity to *Alien 8* — both in terms of plot and graphics. In fact, the clockwork mouse from *Alien 8* was dropped into *Martianoids* unchanged apart from the differing perspective.**

In **Martianoids**, the player took on the role of a guardian robot (coincidentally similar to the role of the player in **Alien 8**) who was tasked with defending a large computer, the *Brain of Markon*, from alien attack. When the game began, the player appeared in one of the nine sectors of the ship and had to guide the program segment towards the program receiver while defending it from attack by the aliens.
This was done by finding the program guidance poles (that looked like barber's poles) and placing them back in their slots. Once the program reached the receiver, the automated defence mechanisms for that sector were activated and the player could concentrate on the other sectors. Of course, the player also had to keep an eye on his power levels by consuming the strategically placed batteries placed around the level.
As the game progressed more and more aliens attacked and the game became increasingly difficult. Overall, **Martianoids** was an extremely disappointing end to the *Ultimate* legacy.







CRASH 58% | YOUR SINCLAIR 60% | SINCLAIR 100%

Micronaut One

Nexus Productions Ltd.
Pete Cooke

In The Future, Software Bugs Are Real - And Bloody Huge...

Unhappy with the prospect of working on a third game in the **Tau Ceti** series for *CRL*, *Pete Cooke* decided to pursue a new technical challenge. He started over with a clean slate, experimented with some fresh and rather ambitious 3D code, and new publisher *Nexus* was very happy with the end result.

***Crash Magazine*'s own *Robin Candy* did a rather positive review of the game; controversially, it was revealed in the editorial of that very same issue that he was also responsible for the design of the fourth level. Harsh words were exchanged between the editors on whether that was acceptable from a journalistic integrity standpoint. Nevertheless, the tight design, balanced play mechanics and unique portal-based 3D engine let the game speak for itself.**

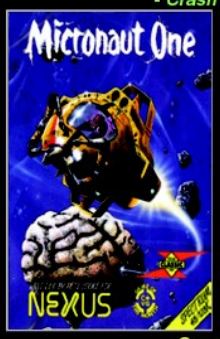
In **Micronaut One** the player had to clear out the internal tunnel network of a large biocomputer that had been infested by mutated fly-like parasites known as *Scrim*. Their eggs hatched into larvae and then developed into mature web-spinning *jellyflies* that were recognised by their umbrella like shape. Just getting rid of the pests was quite a task, but crucially the biocomputer's energy balance also needed to be kept in check as the *Scrim* tended to interfere with it. The player's craft could shoot at the *Scrim* but each shot caused the craft's own energy supplies to deteriorate. They could be replenished either by flying into the occasional energy cloud seen floating through the tunnels or by docking into one of four stations and exchanging energy with the biocomputer. The player also had to use this energy transfer mechanism to ensure that each station's energy level stayed within bounds. Once all *Scrim* were eliminated the player was transported to the next infestation zone. At any time during the game the player could access the ship's computer database in order to read up on the various alien forms that infest the computer thus adding to the overall immersion and atmosphere of this great game.



48k



*"Graphically, **Micronaut One** is a smoother-moving, better-presented version of the 3D tunnel game **Zig Zag**..."*
- Crash Magazine, August 1987







Guest Writer: Mike Lalaounis

Mutants

Ocean Software Ltd.
Sean Pearce, Mark R. Jones

Maybe The French Government Should Blow Up This One Too...



A conversion from a successful *Commodore 64* game, the *ZX Spectrum* version of **Mutants** did not reach the heights of the original, and disappointed a lot of reviewers who expected more from *Denton Designs*.

In fact, only the original *Commodore 64* version of the game was written by the *Denton Design* team. The *ZX Spectrum* version was converted by another team, *Choice Software*, who — although they did a reasonable job — left out a certain 'je ne sai quoi' that made the original game what it was.

In **Mutants** the player took on the role of the intrepid pilot of the *Rainbow Warrior*, a ship controlled by a splinter group of rebels from an interstellar war. Like its contemporary equivalent, the *Rainbow Warrior*'s mission was to clean out a number of regions of space divided into fifteen zones inhabited by genetically engineered mutants — the ultimate destructive weapon in the war.

The mutants came in a number of different forms, all based around geometric patterns similar in concept to Conway's Game of Life. Some spawned children that exploded like fireworks into a new generation of mutants. Others left trails in space similar to spider silk that destroyed the ship on contact. Each zone contained one type of mutant that could only be efficiently destroyed by one of the three weapons the *Rainbow Warrior* could wield. The decision as to which weapon to choose was made at the base space-station, before the player teleported to a zone. However, if the player chose the wrong weapon it was not too disastrous, as he could go back to the teleport pad and return to base to change weapons. The ultimate aim of the game was to pick up pieces of a self-destruct device scattered around the zones and construct it back at the player's base. However, it was more likely that the player will have long abandoned the game out of boredom before reaching this goal.

"...there's no point having pretty graphics if the game is naff...."

- Crash Magazine, August 1987







CRASH 58% YOUR SINCLAIR 60% SINCLAIR 60%

Nebulus

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
John M. Phillips

Suggested Tagline: Who The Hell Keeps Building These Towers?



Author *John Phillips* had a penchant for playing with unusual 3D techniques, as evidenced by his previous *Hewson Consultants* title, **Impossaball**. **Nebulus** was no exception to this rule, with some unique 'rotating cylinder' 3D effects. However, unlike **Impossaball** — a game that some felt was lacking a little in playability — **Nebulus** was a solid and playable game.

***Nebulus* had the distinction of being converted to almost as many hardware platforms as the original *Tetris* (albeit under the name *Castelian* on some platforms). The original design of the game had the player running over the surface of a sphere but, this proved too technically demanding for the machines of the day. It was just as well that this way the case, because it is probably that the game turned out better due to the use of cylindrical towers instead of spherical globes (although this technique was used to great effect in *Super Mario Galaxy* on the *Wii* console).**

The frog-like hero of **Nebulus** had been given the job of activating the self-destruct mechanism of a series of mysterious towers that had been built in the ocean of his home planet. Consequently, he had to travel from tower to tower in his submarine and climb each tower to reach the door at the top, where the self-destruct mechanism was housed.
As he climbed the tower — a difficult and dangerous task in its own right — the player also came under attack from a range of nasties patrolling the platforms on (usually) fixed routes. Every now and then, an evil starburst would enter the screen — knocking the player off the tower unless he could either get into a doorway or reach a platform at a different level before the collision occurred. Failing that, the player would get knocked to a lower platform. If he landed in the sea at the bottom of the tower, a life would be lost.
Despite the unique technology used in **Nebulus**, attention was paid to the game itself, resulting in both a technically impressive and extremely playable twist on the platform genre. **Nebulus** was a fine game, only spoiled slightly by the high degree of frustration involved in climbing the towers.



"...all that clambering back to the top when you've tumbled from a peak can be tiresome."
- Your Sinclair, January 1988







Ranarama

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Steve Turner

Fantasy Paradroid...



After the success of **Quazatron**, *Hewson* decided to milk the concept a little more with a fantasy-flavoured game based around the same concept. The result was the **Paradroid**-esque **Ranarama** that was released to great acclaim in mid-1987 — a fact that is somewhat surprising considering the gameplay is virtually identical to **Quazatron**.

The idea for *Ranarama* came to author *Steve Turner* after the completion of *Quazatron*. He felt that the gameplay would fit well in a fantasy setting. The unique selling point of the game as far as he was concerned was the way that only rooms that players had explored would be visible on screen. However, this wasn't the first game to use this technique. *Catacombs* by *J.K Greye Software* in 1981 for the *ZX81* also used the same technique for player exploration.

Mervyn, the sorcerer's apprentice had found himself in a difficult position. Not only had he inadvertently trapped himself in an evil dungeon whilst hiding from an invasion of warlocks, but he had also turned himself into a frog due to a misunderstanding involving a potion to improve his looks.
In **Ranarama**, the player had to clear each dungeon level of invading warlocks by engaging them in combat — magical or otherwise. Magical combat took the form of a timed unscrambling of the word **Ranarama**. If the player won, the warlock would be defeated and his runes of power scattered from his corpse. They could be used by **Mervyn** to bolster his magical abilities in several areas: Power, Offence, Defence and Effect.
Mervyn started off with only weak spells under each category, but defeating warlocks allowed him to upgrade his powers. In order to beat the game, the player had to defeat all of the warlocks. As **Mervyn** explored the dungeon, he came under attack from the warlocks' various minions, and had to fight his way through to find the warlocks themselves. The minions materialised from magical generators that could be blasted in order to prevent further spawnings. Overall, **Ranarama** was an excellent game that was somewhat overshadowed by its older sci-fi cousin.

*"I grimaced when I heard Hewson were doing a **Gauntlet** variant..."*
- Crash Magazine, March 1987







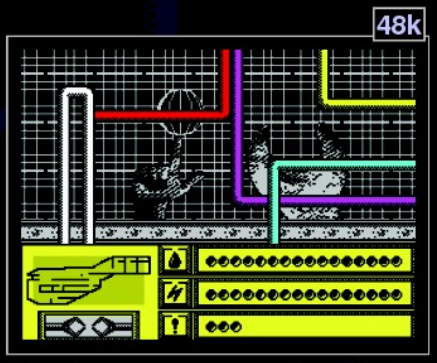
CRASH 90% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

Rasterscan

Mastertronic Ltd.

John Pickford, Steve Hughes, Ste Pickford

I May Be Paranoid, But Not An Android...



Binary Design released another of their strange but compellingly original games on the *Mastertronic* budget label to some rather puzzled responses from the computer press. The instructions for the game were left deliberately vague and the reviews reflected this, with not all reviewers able to figure out how to actually play the game.

***Rasterscan* distinguished itself in *ZX Spectrum* history by being the first game to make use of digitised graphics for anything other than strip poker. However, their use for this game seemed rather arbitrary, as they didn't add anything to the game other than a grainy atmosphere.**

The premise of this odd yet strangely immersive game from *Binary Design* was that the starship *Rasterscan* had somehow been damaged during a deep space mission, it was the task of the one remaining functioning maintenance droid to repair the ship and consequently prevent it plunging into the heart of a star. Unfortunately the droid itself was also damaged at the same time as the ship, and as a result was left barely able to repair the simplest systems on the ship.

The player's task was to control the maintenance droid, (similar in appearance to a basket-ball), and steer it around the ship solving the various logic puzzles that represented the damaged systems. Controlling the well animated droid was a tricky process. The zero gravity environment and inertial movement made it difficult to steer the droid to where the player wanted it to go.

The digitised spanner heads that were spread around the ship were the access points for the logic puzzles, the solving of which repaired a small part of the ship or unlocked a door. Once enough of the puzzles were solved, the player could access a scanner that showed the position of the ship relative to the star. Eventually the player could control the ship's engines, allowing it to be steered away from destruction.

As a game, **Rasterscan** was dripping with atmosphere, despite (or maybe because of) its complete lack of sound. Although the game was very obtuse at first it soon developed into a rewarding and challenging way to spend some time.

CRASH 75% YOUR SINCLAIR 80%

*"I found **Rasterscan** very annoying ... There's lot's here and it represents good value for £1.99"*

- Crash Magazine, May 1987



The Sentinel

Firebird Software Ltd.
Mike Follin, Geoff Crammond, Tim Follin

Pure Science Geek Genius...

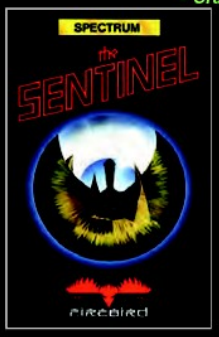


The Sentinel was one of those rare games where all the elements seemed to come together into a perfect whole. Author *Geoff Crammond* had already made a splash with the *Commodore 64* game **Revs**, as well as the *Commodore 64* version of **The Sentinel**. For many, **The Sentinel** was considered to be his best title. It's a close call for many of his games, but it was clearly superior to the awful licensed 'sequel' **The Sentinel Returns** that was released in 1998.

Such was the impact of *The Sentinel* on London-based photographer *Peter Clements* that he was inspired to create a one-off chess board based on the game, with the pieces being based on elements from the game. The pieces were traced from game screenshots and carved in epoxy putty, before finally being cast in polyester resin.

The Sentinel was a uniquely original puzzle-action game in which the player was a robot, placed on a geometric landscape who had to destroy an evil robot, the *Sentinel*, that ruled the landscape. This was complicated by the fact that the player was only able to move via teleportation. Teleportation required three units of energy and worked by creating a new robot where the player chose to go (which had to be visible from his current location). The player then had to absorb the robot body that was left behind before it could be absorbed by the *Sentinel* or one of his cohorts. They could absorb the player if they could see the square that the player's robot was standing on. If they could see the player, but not the square he was on, then they would attempt to convert a nearby tree or boulder into a *Meanie* — capable of forcing the player to teleport to a new (and usually less helpful) location.
In order to defeat the *Sentinel* the player needed to absorb enough energy from the landscape in the form of trees, boulders and minions of the *Sentinel* to be able to teleport to a high enough location to be able to absorb the *Sentinel* itself. When the *Sentinel* was absorbed, the player teleported away from his pedestal and was sent to another of 9999 landscapes with the number of levels advanced being based on the amount of energy left after the final teleport.

*"They told me it would be good, but I didn't expect anything like this. **The Sentinel** is brilliant."*
- Crash Magazine, May 1987







CRASH 97% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 100%

Shockway Rider

48k



Faster Than Light Ltd.
Greg Follis, Roy Carter

Perps A-Plenty... But Where's Dredd?

The dynamic duo of *Greg Follis* and *Roy Carter* struck again in their own inimitable style with fast-action side-scrolling racer/shoot'em-up **Shockway Rider.**

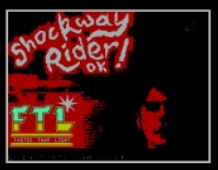
According to the pre-release blurb as reported in the *T'zers* section of the September 1986 issue of *Your Sinclair*, *Shockway Rider* featured a 'revolutionary' new graphics technique known as *Lasermation* — which apparently was little more than parallax scrolling and simple background/foreground sprite scaling. Of course, it's more likely that *T'zer* got her press releases in a twist, and that description was instead meant for *Lightforce*, as evidenced by a similar news piece in *Crash*.
***Shockway Rider* was the last game published by *FTL*. Two subsequent games were announced, *Samurai Dawn* and *George*, an AI title. However due to the rapid deterioration of the software market, these games never saw the light of day.**

Set in the megacities of the 21st century, **Shockway Rider** was a simulation of the nefarious activities of the troubled youth of the future. Bored with the monotony of everyday hi-tech existence in the city of the future, youths had turned the city's mobile walkways into dangerous obstacle courses and had taken to zooming around them, leaping from track to track and throwing bricks, bottles, bombs and whatever else they could find at innocent (and not so innocent) bystanders. The aim of the sport was to ride full circle on the mobile walkways, known as shockways, without being killed in the process.
The player controlled the rider as he hopped between one of three tracks (each moving at a different speed) and tried to avoid the blocks set up to prevent his progress. Regular ammo dumps at the side of the play area could be collected and used to defeat the various opposing thugs, who were not always obvious... Some were disguised as regular citizens and only transformed when the player got too close.
Shockway Rider was probably not the best title to come out of the *Gargoyle Games*/*FTL* label, but it was a reasonable (but often frustrating) game.

CRASH 67% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100%

"Another fine game from the FTL studio, and more than likely a future classic!"
- Your Sinclair, April 1987







Tai-Pan

Ocean Software Ltd.
John Mullins, Clive Paul, T. Fagelman, Mark R. Jones

Rike Praying A Game Of Erite...

The programming team of *Sentient Software* landed the job of creating a game based on best-selling author *James Clavell's* epic novel **Tai-Pan**. What they ended up producing was a rough-around-the-edges yet strangely compelling trading/adventure game that had more similarities to **Elite** than it first appeared.

Considered by many to be the first 'real' 128k game, *Tai-Pan* was developed for 128k machines first, and then stripped down for the 48k version. In fact, the development of the 48k version proved troublesome for the team — requiring them to rework their compression code to fit it in memory and causing a delay of three months between the publishing of the magazine reviews and the appearance of the game in the shops.

Tai-Pan put the player in the shoes of the hero of the novel of the same name. The aim of the game was to reach the status of **Tai-Pan** — a master trader. The game itself was a fairly basic trading/exploring/combat simulation very similar in concept to a 2D version of **Elite**. Starting in the town of Guangzhou, the player had to first find a generous benefactor willing to lend the player the money to purchase a ship. Once this was done, the ship needed crewing and supplies. Crews could be found by either hiring or press-ganging. Hiring cost money but press-ganging would earn a spell in jail if the player was caught by the local law enforcement.

An equipped and crewed ship could then be sailed around from port to port, buying low and selling high in order to make money. If that was not to the player's liking, then an alternative career in piracy could be pursued. This was a rewarding, yet risky activity that introduced yet another sub-game, where the player's crew invaded the victims' ship — as a **Gauntlet**-like battle section.

Tai-Pan was a flawed but playable game, but unless the player was enamoured with the setting or had a strong aversion to 3D space games then **Elite** was a far better game.

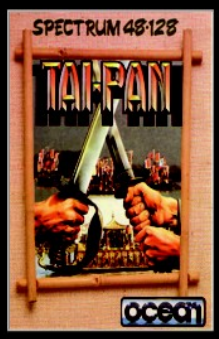


48k/128k



"No individual element is mind-blowing - mostly each bit is pretty good."

- Sinclair User, July 1987







Thrust II

Firebird Software Ltd.
Andrew Rogers
X Innuendo Overload Error, 0:1

48k



"...suffers from some of the worst scrolling of any ZX Spectrum arcade game..."
- Crash Magazine, May 1987

Seeking to capitalize on the phenomenal success of **Thrust** across multiple platforms, *Firebird* released this quirky but inferior sequel to puzzled bemusement from most of the computer magazines. While **Thrust** was fundamentally a vector-based game mainly set on planet surfaces (with a few limited caves), **Thrust 2** set the gameplay in a sprite-based world, with intricate networks of caverns and spent less time on the surface. However, although the sprite-based graphics were more attractive in static screen-shots, the game itself was let down by a poor scrolling implementation rendering the game almost unplayable.

Unlike the original *Thrust*, the implementation and story of *Thrust II* was substantially different on different platforms. While the *ZX Spectrum* version's plotline involved terra-forming a world for the Resistance faction of the first game, the *Commodore 64* version (at least according to *Zzap 64*), involved a Yellow Submarine-like mission to defeat the enemy with the power of music. Whether this was the case, or whether the *Zzap 64* reviewers were simply trying to spice up an otherwise dull review is another question entirely.







Following on from the first game, **Thrust II** provided more of the same gravity-based thrusting action and was markedly worse than the original title. However despite the inferiority of the technology and gameplay it still managed to be a strangely compelling title that a small number of players preferred over the original **Thrust**.
The gameplay itself was fundamentally similar to the original game, with a number of strange exceptions — the main one being the replacement of the ship's standard gun with an area effect 'smart-bomb' weapon which came in a number of varieties, each one keyed to destroy a certain class of android. The andriods were defending the orbs that were required to rebuild the terraforming system and would attempt to kill any orb-stealing player that came near.
Another enhancement from the original **Thrust** — and this time one that actually improved the game — was that the orbs were of different weights, making the manoeuvrability of the ship vary depending on the weight of the orb.



2 @ 0 _ 5 %

Program: 1988

Original games were starting to give way to licenced products. Software companies were cottoning on to the fact that if they get the rights to the latest film, TV show or coin-op then previous experience dictated that those games sold more than other games which didn't have such an endorsement. Indeed, some of the larger labels decided to release nothing but licensed games unless a particular game was truly special. The days of the bedroom coder were numbered as the software houses turned into professional organisations employing teams that churned out game after game.

Some of the games were starting to look samey. Licenced games tended to be either a puzzle game in which the player had to work out what object to use where, or feature a man running about shooting everything that moved. **Robocop** combined puzzles with the latter option to become a monster hit and formed the template for most movie licences released after it.

The competition between the magazines went up a notch with the cover tape wars. There were a few skirmishes the previous year with the odd tape containing an exclusive game or demo copies of new releases, but in 1988 it became the norm for every magazine to have a tape stuck to the front of it.

The games were good to start off with, some were excellent, but soon the magazines were competing on quantity instead of quality with tapes being filled with many mediocre games. Some magazines went as far as putting two tapes onto the cover. **CRASH** soon turned into a pamphlet as they spent most of their budget on tape content whereas **Sinclair User** took the silliness to the highest level with their "**14-Pack**", which was fourteen pieces of software, few of which were likely to be loaded more than once.

Eventually the industry recognised that sales of new games were being damaged due to this influx of "free" games. The magazines were forced to cut down the content of their tapes, but by that time the **Spectrum** games market was in a terminal decline so the move was of little consequence.

All through the year there was talk about next-generation **Spectrums**. With **Clive Sinclair** himself moving onto portable devices with his **Z88** laptop computer, rumours were flying around that **Amstrad** was working on advanced machines with far superior graphics and sound capabilities, massive amounts of memory and a disk drive. Everything that a proposed **Spectrum Plus Four** could and should have been at the time.

It was exciting times, especially with **Amstrad** seen to be meeting up with the designers of a scrapped 1986 **Spectrum** games console. Was the **Spectrum** about to be upgraded to take on the **Atari ST** and **Commodore Amiga**?

No. The **Sinclair PC 200** was such an underpowered **PC** that it was a joke. It didn't help that **Amstrad** sold it without an operating system, monitor, games or even a manual. The machine was an instant flop and **Amstrad** swiftly forgot about it..

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

Cybernoid

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Raffaele Cecco, Nick Jones, J. Dave Rogers
"Manic Miner In Space" - WTF?

48k/128k



After jumping ship from *Mikro-Gen* to *Hewson Consultants*, programmer *Raffaele Cecco* produced a string of fiendishly difficult hit games that far surpassed his first two *Mikro-Gen*-published titles, **Equinox** and **Cop Out**. **Cybernoid** was, by his own admission, *Raffaele Cecco*'s favourite game that he developed, even though he admitted that it was far too difficult — a side effect of becoming too good at the game during development.

Like many other programmers, *Raffaele* did not use a *ZX Spectrum* for development. The game was written using an *IBM PC* with a *Z80* cross assembler. This was then downloaded via parallel cable for testing on the real hardware. As well as the code, the graphics and maps for the game were also designed using more powerful hardware, being created using an art package on an *Atari ST*. Because of this approach, the *Amstrad CPC* version was completed a scant two days after the *ZX Spectrum* version.

Cybernoid set the player against a band of equipment-thieving pirates in their flip-screen underground lair. The player's mission was to enter their lair and destroy the installation one screen at a time in order to retrieve the stolen goods.
Each screen presented a tricky maze of passages that required super-human reflexes and split-second timing to complete — even with the formidable arsenal of weaponry provided in the form of power-ups and collectibles.
Once each screen was completed, the previous screen became inaccessible. In other words, the game played more like a tricky reflex-based logic puzzle than a standard shoot'em-up — rather like a space-aged **Manic Miner**, handling one screen's worth of puzzles at a time.
Like many of *Raffaele Cecco*'s games, **Cybernoid** was visually attractive, fun to play and, for many people, far too difficult to get past the first few screens. However those who persevered past the near-vertical learning curve found a rewarding and challenging game that was only surpassed by its sequel, **Cybernoid II: The Revenge**.

*"**Cybernoid** will have you swearing till your tongue drops off and Eddie Murphy blushes..."*
- Your Sinclair, May 1988







CRASH 96% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100%

2 @ 0 _ 7 '

Dan Dare 2: Mekon's Revenge

48k



Virgin Games Ltd.
Andy Green, Martin Wheeler, Simon Butler

Proof: Stem Cell Research Is Evil...

After the success of the first *Dan Dare* tie-in game, *Virgin* decided to capitalize on that success with an eagerly-awaited sequel, titled **Dan Dare 2: Mekon's Revenge**. While not achieving the heights of the original game, it was a good attempt and was generally considered to be better than the third game in the series that was released in 1990.

***Dan Dare 2* had a unique feature which had not been seen before in any other *ZX Spectrum* game... The player had the choice of playing the hero *or* the villain - each with opposing missions. *Dan Dare*'s mission was to destroy the *Mekon*'s *Supertreen* embryos, while the *Mekon*'s mission was to activate them before *Dan Dare* could get to them.**

Recovering from his inglorious defeat in the first game, the evil Venusian *Mekon* hatched yet another plan for the destruction of Earth and his arch-enemy, *Dan Dare*.
The *Mekon* genetically engineered an army of powerful *Supertreens* and headed towards Earth in a large space-ship, preparing to deposit the *Supertreens* on Earth to cause havoc and mayhem.
Dan's mission was to infiltrate the four levels of the ship and destroy the control boxes for each of the *Supertreen* life-support capsules. As soon as the first was destroyed, a timer began to count down indicating the time remaining before the security systems blow up the level. *Dan* needed to destroy all of the life support capsules and escape to the safety of the next level before the timer hit zero.
The player could also play as the *Mekon*. This mission was similar to *Dan*'s, except that the life-support capsules had to be activated, sending them to Earth so that they did not get destroyed in the blast caused by the security system. This mission was significantly harder than *Dan*'s, because the countdown timer had already started when the game began.
Dan Dare 2 was an excellent game that very nearly outshone the original game. However, for sheer playability and atmosphere, the prequel was simply the better of the two.



*"**Dan Dare 2** is one of those games that only sees the light of day because the original was a hit..."*

- Crash Magazine, February 1988







Earthlight

Firebird Software Ltd.
Pete Cooke

Stonehenge At Sunset...

48k/128k



After the demise of *Nexus* as a publishing company and the subsequent rapid disappearance of **Micronaut One**, it took a while for *Pete Cooke*'s next project to find a home. Simpler than his previous efforts, **Earthlight** was, as was common with *Pete Cooke* games, borne out of a technology demo. Loosely based on **Uridium**, **Earthlight** was a fairly straightforward horizontally scrolling shoot'em-up that played like an amalgam of the aforementioned **Uridium** and *Costa Panayi*'s 1985 helicopter game, **Cyclone**.

Before *Nexus* went out of business, *Pete Cooke* was quoted in a *Crash* interview as having three upcoming projects in the pipeline. The first was an *Atari ST* conversion of *Micronaut One*, the second was a *Freescape*-esque first-person 3D adventure, and the third was described by *Pete Cooke* as follows: "There's a lot of parallax scrolling games — this is the ultimate — perspective scrolling. You can have shadows — you've seen pictures of Stonehenge at sunset — imagine shadows of rocks and boulders actually changing like that as you go by, and just a spaceship over the top with a shadow, zapping things. It's something simple like that." Of the three, only the latter concept saw the light of day, as *Earthlight*.

Despite the immaculate presentation and impressive technology, **Earthlight** was a deceptively simple shoot'em-up that told the story of an alien explorer, *Slaatn*, from Arcturus who had become trapped by a mysterious force-field on Earth's moon.
In order to escape from his *de facto* captivity the player had to control *Slaatn*'s ship through eight moon zones collecting all of the box-like transmitters that controlled the forcefield. Naturally there were defensive systems and angry aliens out to hinder the player and progress relied on managing the limited fuel, missile and shielding capabilities of *Slaatn*'s ship to avoid or destroy all of the defences of a sector whilst collecting the transmitter boxes. **Earthlight**, although superb in look and feel, was something of a let down for aficionados of the *Pete Cooke* magic.



"[It] may not look terribly original to the casual onlooker, [but] the graphics feature a number of very novel touches..."
- Your Sinclair, July 1988







Firefly

Ocean Software Ltd.
Jonathan Smith, Keith Tinman
15 Years Before Joss Whedon Thought Of It...



After breaking away from *Ocean Software* and forming development house *Special FX* with the aim of producing technically stunning best-of-breed games, *Jonathan Smith* metaphorically returned to the fold, allowing *Ocean* to publish *SFX*'s second title, **Firefly**.

Of all the *ZX Spectrum* games written by *Jonathan Smith*, *Firefly* remains his favourite, representing a coming together of several factors into a technically excellent coherent whole. Using an enhanced version of the scrolling algorithm first used in *Cobra*, *Firefly* presented some of the smoothest multi-directional scrolling seen on the *ZX Spectrum*. *Firefly* originally started out as a prototype for *Special FX*'s flagship *ZX Spectrum* title, *Angel*, but this was shelved after a month as they believed it made more sense to focus on a single title across multiple formats.

At its heart, **Firefly** was a mish-mash of sub-games that somehow combined to form a fairly good abstract shoot'em-up. The game was played on two scales, with the top level being a galactic map represented as a 9x5 grid. Each square in the grid was either blank or contained an icon. The icons were a yellow planet (impassable), a blue arrow (representing the chance sub-game) and a green switch. The aim of the game was to reach the green switch. The player could move onto any square (except planets) with his craft and, depending on the nature of the square, would have to play a particular sub-game to capture the square.

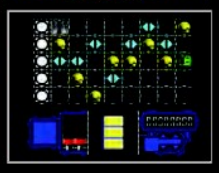
The blue up/down arrow square forced the player to play a game of chance, selecting a rapidly changing thumb up/down icon. If he selected 'Thumbs up' then the square would be cleared and the ship was allowed entry. If he failed, the ship would be damaged and the grid would be randomised.

The second sub-game was a bizarre shoot'em-up, where the player was required to gather four hostile pods within a maze. Once all four pods were collected, the player could enter the generator and destroy it. A similar thumbs up/down game was used here to determine success or failure.

"The varied action is very stimulating, even though success in the rather silly reaction games is so vital to progress."
- Crash Magazine, March 1988







CRASH 92% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 100%

Gauntlet 2

U.S. Gold Ltd.

Tony Porter, Kevin Bulmer, Benn Daglish

Blue Wizard Is About To Die...

48k/128k



Like the previous superb conversion of the original **Gauntlet** game, **Gauntlet 2** similarly brought the feel of the arcade classic home to the humble *ZX Spectrum*. Despite relying on multi-load techniques to fit the entire game onto the 8-bit platform, the programmers succeeded in accurately emulating the arcade classic, leaving out almost nothing but the enhanced arcade graphics.

The arcade version of *Gauntlet 2* considerably expanded on the familiar gameplay of the original title, with a slew of extra monsters and other additional features. One of these features was the 'hidden room' which could be found by following the obscure clues in the game. If the hidden room was found and beaten, the player would be given a six figure code that could be sent to *Atari* for a free *Gauntlet 2* t-shirt and a chance to win a $5000 savings bond.

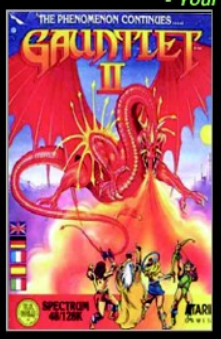
The **Gauntlet** series of games need little explanation to most people, having existed in one form or other since their initial inception. The players — on the *ZX Spectrum* there could be two, whereas the original supported four — took on the role of either *Wizard*, *Warrior*, *Elf* or *Valkyrie*, each with differing levels of skill in magic and physical combat.

The player then had to make his way through a series of mazes, finding the keys, potions and food, unlocking doors, destroying monsters and monster generators, all while attempting to find the exit to the next maze.

What really made this game special was the large variety of monsters and maze features, such as stun tiles, teleporters, and the dreaded *DEATH*, *IT* and *THAT* monsters — not to mention the huge dragons (although the dragons did not make it to the *ZX Spectrum* version, unfortunately).

Even more than its predecessor's conversion, **Gauntlet 2** was an excellent arcade conversion that really brought the feel of the arcades to home computers. Few arcade conversions reached this level of authenticity and feel on the *ZX Spectrum*.

"A super sequel to the much loved dungeon based shoot'em-up. As much of a blast as the first, and about twice as addictive. Metaskillo."
- Your Sinclair, February 1988







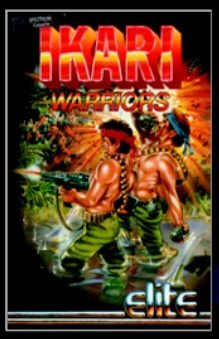
CRASH 65% | YOUR SINCLAIR 80% | SINCLAIR 100%

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Ikari Warriors



"I still haven't found out what "Ikari" means, or even how to pronounce it!"
- Your Sinclair, May 1988







Elite Systems Ltd.
David Shea, Nick Jones

Two Angry Men...

Following in the footsteps of 1985's conversion of arcade title **Commando**, **Ikari Warriors** was a successful conversion of the dual player arcade shoot'em-up. For the *ZX Spectrum*, 1985 was the year when the concept of the arcade conversion began to take off in earnest.

In early 1986, several magazines previewed a version of *Ikari Warriors* that was due to be released a few months later. However, judging from the screenshots in the magazine, this version written by *Dave Perry* looked to be inferior to the final version released by different authors two years later. The reasons for the canning of the allegedly completed earlier version are unknown, but based on the evidence, it's likely it was an issue of code quality.

Ikari Warriors pitted one or two players against an overwhelming army of bad guys, much in the same vein as *Elite*'s conversion of arcade title **Commando** that was released for the Christmas of 1985. **Ikari Warriors** improved on the earlier game by allowing two players to battle cooperatively against the hordes of enemies and also to commandeer enemy tanks and create massive carnage whilst being relatively invulnerable. Even when the players weren't safely ensconced in tanks, they were still heavily armed killing machines equipped with a healthy supply of machine guns and grenades.
At the beginning of the game, the players had crashed in the middle of a jungle on the way to a combat zone. Escaping the crash site, the two heroes realised that they were trapped deep in enemy territory and needed to fight their way through guerrilla-occupied country to escape.
What was surprising about the 1988 release of **Ikari Warriors** is the interval of time between this release and its spiritual prequel, **Commando** — and the fact that there was not any decently comparable game released in the interim period.
For sheer two-player blasting mayhem, **Ikari Warriors** was hard to beat, and was notorious for causing many "You stole my ammo"-type schisms among (former!) friends who played the game together.



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Inside Outing

The Edge Software Ltd.
Michael St. Aubyn

Crime And Punishment...

Inside Outing was a technically accomplished arcade adventure game in which a thief is lured into a mansion and is forced to accept the noble task of finding the landlady's hidden gems. Despite its addictive gameplay and a rather unusual scenario it went generally unnoticed and got lost in the large pool of isometric arcade-adventure games of the time.

***Inside Outing* was just about the only game written by *Michael St. Aubyn* — and what a great game it was. Sporting an unusual 45-degree isometric view, great interactivity and some innovative (for the genre) use of physics, it was an atmospheric and addictive experience that somehow ended up forgotten and underrated. Confusingly, it was released under three different titles all of which were on store shelves simultaneously at one point: *Inside Outing* originally, *Raffles* a bit later and even *Devon Aire: The Hidden Diamond Caper* in the US (on the *Commodore 64*).**

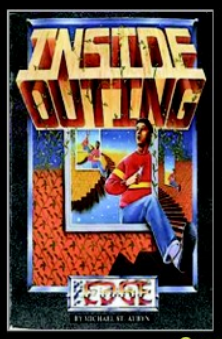
In **Inside Outing**, the player assumed the role of a thief who somehow got himself into a rather unusual situation. It turned out that the decision to "do" the old mansion on the top of the hill wasn't particularly wise. The owner of the estate passed away leaving his widow with the problem of finding the twelve gems that he hid in 'safe' places inside the house without revealing where those might be. As a result *Lady Crutcher* was left with no other option than to lure the most renowned thief into her house by making it look empty and vulnerable. The thief, seeing an opportunity to make a fortune, accepted the challenge to uncover the gems and that's where the game begins.
The house was depicted in great 3D detail and each object or piece of furniture had its own physical properties and could be jumped upon or pushed and pulled independently. No table should be left unmoved, picture unturned, wall-safe unopened or hidden passageway uncovered. Avoiding fatal contact with mice and birds required arcade skills and the player's full attention.



48k



*"At first, **Inside Outing** reminded me of **M.O.V.I.E** - but I was let down."*
- Crash Magazine, February 1988







Guest Writer: Mike Lalaounis

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La Abadia Del Crimen

128k



Opera Soft

Paco Menendez, Juan Delcan

A Rose By Any Other Name...

Despite never being never released in the UK, **La Abadia Del Crimen** (translated as **The Abbey Of Crime**) was probably one of the best 128k-only games ever released on the platform. However, in tribute to this great game an intrepid programmer, *Eddie Duffy*, adapted an emulator snapshot of the original version, translating the majority of the text to English. While this game may not have been originally available in England, it would be a crime to miss out on the unofficial conversion that is downloadable from the internet (with a little help from *Google*).

The original intent of the developers of this game was to release the game as an adaptation of *Umberto Eco*'s novel *The Name Of The Rose*. However, despite several attempts to contact the best-selling author, he never responded to their requests (allegedly because he did not understand what a computer game was at that time), and so it was released as *La Abadia Del Crimen*. Sadly, *Paco Menendez* — the author of this, *Fred* and *Sir Fred* — died in 1999, at the age of 34.

La Abadia Del Crimen's plot closely followed the novel on which it was based. At the beginning of the game (after an overlong exposition by the lead character's apprentice) the player's character, *Guillermo of Occam* arrived at an Italian monastery that had been plagued by a series of terrible murders. While the Franciscan monks inhabiting the monastery attributed the murders to a demonic entity, *Guillermo* sets out to prove that there was a more mundane cause.
The game was an isometric adventure similar to the **Fairlight** games that required the player to solve the murder mysteries while simultaneously observing the rites and obligations that being a monk entail. Failing to follow the rules resulted in expulsion — and game over.
La Abadia Del Crimen was a stunning game that has to be experienced first hand to truly appreciate.

"Sencillamente sensacional. [Simply Sensational.]"

- Micromania, January 1988







Laser Squad

Blade Software Ltd.
Julian Gollop, Nick Gollop

X-COM Zero...

In the years before the *Gollop* twins hit the big time with **UFO** (**X-COM: UFO Defense** in the US), they had had a few practice runs at their innovative tactical combat system on the *ZX Spectrum*. **Laser Squad** was the culmination of their work on this platform, and is probably the best squad-based tactical combat game available for it.

Not many *ZX Spectrum* games sported fully fledged expansion packs. The expansion pack for *Laser Squad* added a complete set of varied new missions that almost constituted a new game in their own right. Sadly, this was to be the only one of the promised series of expansions to be released. However, since then the *Laser Squad* setting has since been reused by the *Gollop*s in their subscription-based play-by-email *PC* title, *Laser Squad Nemesis*.

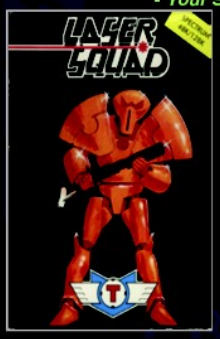
Laser Squad stood apart from other tactical combat games not only due to its excellent and detailed graphics, but also due to the finesse and polish of the combat system. Magazine reviews lauded the accessible way in which the complex subject matter had been presented, noting that it took most players only a few minutes to grasp the basics of the gameplay.
The player was in control of a squad of heavily armed warriors, who were assigned various missions that had to be accomplished within a set of defined limits. The missions were varied and interesting, and often challenging to win — even against the AI, let alone a human opponent (using the *Hotseat* two player option).
For example, the first mission in the game had the player infiltrating the house of an arms dealer protected by several tough security droids. The second mission set the player on the moon trying to infiltrate a computer depot to recover sensitive data. The third mission had the player rescuing some team members who were held captive in a mine.
Fans of the *Gollop* twins' later games (such as the **X-Com** series) owe it to themselves to check out this earlier incarnation of their work.



48k



*"I think **Laser Squad** is mega fab ... [and] that's the opinion of someone who has never been interested in strategy wargaming before."*
- Your Sinclair, November 1988







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Mad Mix Game

U.S. Gold Ltd.

Rafael Gomez, Roberto Potenciano, Gominolas

The Pepsi Challenge...



*"**Mad Mix Game** does to **Pac-Man** what **Arkanoid** does to **Breakout**..."*
- Crash Magazine, November 1988

Originally published by *Toposoft* in Spain, it wasn't until 1988 that the *ZX Spectrum* could finally lay claim to a decent **Pac-Man**/**Pacmania**-style game. Imported by *U.S. Gold* and co-marketed with **Pepsi** (it was subtitled **The Pepsi Challenge** in the UK), this game did fairly well — although not well enough to warrant a UK release of its (superior) sequel, the isometric **Mad Mix 2**. Apparently the game was altered for its UK release, including chopping out the first level and changing the main character to look less like the trademarked *Pac-Man*.

At the 1988 National Computer Game Championships (sponsored by *Newsfield* and *U.S. Gold*) the *Atari ST* version of the *Mad Mix Game* was chosen for the gaming playoff between a very young (pre-*Your Sinclair* and complete with trademark haircut) *Stuart Campbell*, the *ZX Spectrum* winner — and *Mark Young*, the *Commodore 64* winner. Sadly for *ZX Spectrum* fans everywhere, *Mark Young* won the contest by a fairly wide margin: 28,000 points to 20,000 points.







The **Mad Mix Game** took the basic elements of **Pac-Man** and expanded on them to produce a fun little game that, while being recognisably a **Pac-Man** derivative, still managed to pack a lot of variety into its gameplay.

Using elements of play later (and coincidentally) emulated by the **Donkey Kong Country** series of games from *Rare*, **Mad Mix Game** provided the player with transformative power-ups allowing him to defeat the pursuing ghosts by, for example, changing into a rhino and trampling them. Other power-ups and special features were equally imaginative.

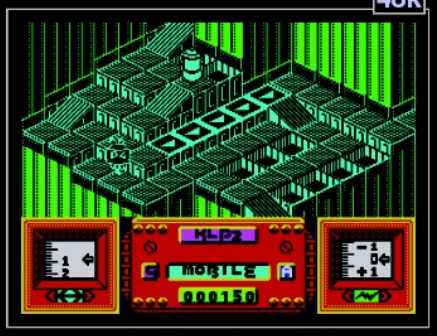
At its core, the game was still a **Pac-Man** derivative and as such, the aim of the game was to eat all of the pellets within a maze while avoiding the *Ghosts*. It was a tried and true gameplay technique that is often ruined by the addition of extra features, but **Mad Mix Game** did not fall foul of this trap and managed to present a respectable face-lift to the old game. Purists still preferred the original, but for those who did not mind a little contemporary progress, **Mad Mix Game** was the *Arnold Schwarzenegger* (complete with steroidal enhancements) of the **Pac-Man** genre.



Magnetron

Firebird Software Ltd.
Steve Turner
KLP-2 Is Back In Action...

48k



The sadly underrated sequel to *Hewson*'s seminal title **Quazatron** jumped publishers before release, ending up with *Firebird Software*, the software arm of *British Telecom*.

During the development of *Magnetron*, *Steve Turner* heard rumours that *Hewson* were experiencing financial difficulties — and this was confirmed when two ex-*Hewson* programmers (*John Cumming* and *Dominic Robinson*) called him up and asked for a job with *Graftgold*. At the same time, another *Hewson* employee, *Debbie Silletoe* left for *Firebird Software* and contacted *Steve Turner* offering to publish his games. Expecting *Hewson* to go bankrupt, he agreed — only to find that *Hewson* pulled through and initiated court proceedings for the publishing rights (despite having no signed agreement). The matter was settled out of court, and achieved nothing other than delaying the release of the game.

Aside from the obvious graphical similarities, the actual gameplay of **Magnetron** bore a strong resemblance to its prequel — the excellent (though jerky) **Quazatron**. Indeed, *KLP-2* (otherwise known as *Klepto*) had to perform a very similar task to the previous game — except that whereas previously he was clearing out a citadel of rogue droids via the use of experimental grapple hardware, he now had to clear out a set of space stations of rogue droids — and in addition to that had to shut down a set of dangerous power reactors (four per station) to prevent the stations exploding. The reactors were shut down by balancing the charges within them — played as a simple maths sub-game. Once all four were shut down, the player was beamed to the next station.

As with **Quazatron**, droid-grappling was a feature that required a tile-sliding sub-game to be played. However, in a divergence from the prequel, winning the sub-game did not allow the player to scavenge the best features of the defeated droid. Instead, *Klepto*'s body remained in place and the defeated droid became a remote-controlled avatar. If this droid was destroyed, control returned to the original body. If *Klepto*'s original body was destroyed the game was over.

*"**Magnetron** should have been called **Quazatron II**..."*

- Crash Magazine, April 1988



CRASH 57% YOUR SINCLAIR 80% SINCLAIR 100%

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Phantom Club

Ocean Ltd.
Dusko Dimitrijevic

"I'm A Superhero, Mother. An Effete British Superhero..."



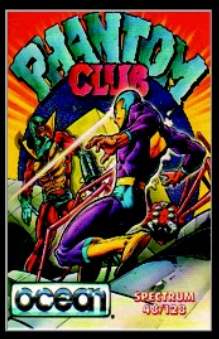
"If you want a lot of chocolate on your biccies, don't join this club."
- Your Sinclair, January 1988

Dusko Dimitrijevic's second game published by *Ocean* (after **M.O.V.I.E**) was released in early 1988. Graphically, it was very similar to the earlier title — not necessarily a good thing seeing as how long the interval between releases was — but the gameplay emphasized more action and shooting than the more adventure-like overtones of **M.O.V.I.E**.

***Dusko Dimitrijevic* produced five or six games for the *ZX Spectrum*: *Bug Byte*'s *No. 1* and *Kung Fu*, *Imagine*'s *Play For Your Life*, *Ocean*'s *M.O.V.I.E* and this one. It is also thought that he may have written *Bug Byte*'s *Sbugetti Junction*. There was some talk on the newsgroup `comp.sys.sinclair` back in 1995 about tracking him down to gain distribution permission for his software but there have been no further mentions of him since then.**

The **Phantom Club** was an elite cadre of superheroes who had rather unfortunately run into a spot of bother with an evil overlord mind-controlling their entire membership — bar one low-level superhero. The player took on the role of the sole unaffected superhero and had to free his brethren from the influence of the mind-control device. This was not an easy process, as he had to fight his way through the five-hundred room **Phantom Club** headquarters using his psychic *brain-blast* powers against his former team-mates — and other automated defences — to accomplish ten missions that would ultimately defeat the overlord.
Not only did the player have to discover what these missions were, he also had to progress through ten mystic levels of skill, starting with *Zelator* (beginner) and culminating with *Ipsisimus* (overlord). Some missions could not be discovered until the player was at the right level, and levelling up required that the player score points — which was done by defeating the enemies throughout the complex.









Rex

Martech Ltd.
Neil Harris, John Anderson, Richard Allen

Ugly-Ass Rhinosaur Goes All Eco-Friendly...

48k



Martech had a patchy history, releasing both good and bad titles over the years. Such variability was common among the *ZX Spectrum* software publishers, but *Martech* certainly seemed to take the stereotype seriously. **Rex** was one of the better titles that they released.

Apart from this game, *Martech* were responsible for the execrable *Zoids* — a rather dull tactical war-game — that strangely received a *Crash* Smash. Allegedly, this was due to the large quantity of *Zoids* toys dropped off at the *Crash Magazine* headquarters.

In **Rex**, the player took on the role of an anthropomorphic rhino mercenary who was hired to infiltrate an ecologically disastrous tower complex belching pollution into the atmosphere of the planet **Zenith**.

The game itself was structured as a platform-based jumper with strong shoot'em-up aspects, thankfully saved from mundanity by a number of novel features that brought a fair degree of innovative originality into the gameplay. One of these innovations was the ability to shoot an enemy multiple times. The first shot was enough to send an alien careening to destruction, but additional shots provided the player with bonus points.

In this very challenging game, the player first had to travel through a network of underground caverns to reach the polluting tower. These caverns were heavily defended by aliens, gun emplacements and missile launchers. Fortunately *Rex* was armed with heavy weaponry (upgrades to which were found scattered around the levels) and a shield. Various reincarnation points could also be found that allowed *Rex* to resume the game from that point if he died at a later stage. This happened quite often, as even when *Rex* was fully powered up, the enemies remained formidable foes.

Once *Rex* has entered the tower itself, (after a second load from tape), he had to fight his way through to destroy the evil mastermind: a pink squidgy blob.

Rex was a technical powerhouse of a game, and was one of the best examples of its type (along with **Myth**), but it did suffer from being a little too hard for its own good.

*"This has got to be the best shoot 'em'up since **Cybernoid**. I love it to death."*
- Your Sinclair, December 1988







CRASH 82% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 88%

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Robocop

Ocean Software Ltd.
Mike Lamb, Dawn Drake, Jonathan Dunn

This Game Is Too Fricking Hard!

48/128k



As one of the better members of an increasing flood of movie tie-ins (conspicuously originating in the most part from *Ocean*), **Robocop** was released just in time for the Christmas season of 1988. Based on the arcade game, the *ZX Spectrum* version is often considered to be the most difficult of the home computer conversions.

After hearing about the success of *Robocop* in the United States, *Ocean* quickly licensed the game rights. In a stroke of marketing genius, they then turned around and sub-licensed the arcade rights to *Data East* — with the intention of converting their arcade game back to home computer platforms and saving them the effort of having to design the game themselves.

The player took on the role of the heroic *Robocop* — and had to stomp angrily from left to right across an urban cityscape to root out the gang responsible for the death of *Murphy* — the murdered cop that formed the organic core of *Robocop*.
Because of the lack of notice of incoming attack and the insane timings required to kill all of the enemies without damage — not to mention *Robocop*'s general sluggishness (he was made of metal) — it was extremely difficult to play the game effectively without memorizing the starting positions of the bad guys. Reflexes alone were not sufficient to do the job.
Worse still, if a bullet hit *Robocop* he froze up for about a quarter of a second — making things trickier still. In fact, **Robocop** had the distinction of being one of the most schizophrenic games in the *ZX Spectrum* scene, with most players finding it indescribably difficult, whilst a (vocal) minority declared it to be "the easiest game ever" — probably just to annoy the majority of people who found it too hard.
An impressive movie conversion it may have been, but overall it was too hard to extract any real enjoyment without extreme perseverance (memory freaks notwithstanding).

CRASH 92% YOUR SINCLAIR 80% SINCLAIR 94%

*"Have a go at **Robocop**, they said. What? Alone? I'd rather go three rounds with Mike Tyson."*
- Your Sinclair, March 1989







Soldier Of Fortune

48k/128k



Firebird Ltd.

David O'Conner, Brendan O'Conner

No, It's The Other One...

One of *Firebird*'s later titles, **Soldier of Fortune** was a competent **Ghosts'n'Goblins** inspired arcade-adventure that may well have gone unnoticed in the annals of *ZX Spectrum* history were it not for the fact that many years later, it was subject to a case of mistaken identity.

Despite being an only just above-average game, *Soldier of Fortune* unwittingly sprung into notoriety by being named the same as an *IBM PC* terrorist-killing FPS title that was released years later. The fact that this game was hosted as a snapshot on the main *ZX Spectrum* nostalgia website *The World of Spectrum* was enough for the website maintainer *Martijn van der Heide* to receive a 'cease and desist' letter from the *IDSA* insisting on an immediate take-down of this and several other titles. Needless to say, he had already received permission from the copyright holders to host the 'offending' files, and so no further action was taken. More amusingly still, news of the mistake spread across news websites around the world, including *Slashdot*.

Sporting a standard 'Swords & Sorcery' style plot, **Soldier of Fortune** put the player in the shoes of *Sarnak*, an orc-like creature who had to quest through many screens of demon-infested caverns (i.e. platforms and ladders) to retrieve a mystical artefact known as the **Zodiac Power Source**. This artefact was stolen by the evil *Krillys* and secreted somewhere in his cavernous stronghold.

Sarnak had to first find six pieces of a magical tablet that could be used to construct each of the four **Elementals** which, once all four were constructed, could be used to summon the power source. Each realm contained a guardian that could only be defeated with the use of an **Elemental**. Once all four elementals were retrieved, *Sarnak* could rebuild the power source and finally confront the evil *Krillys*.

The game itself was standard platform and ladders fare with the addition of many linked, unlockable teleports to augment the maze-like playing area.



*"Give it a go by all means, but don't expect anything as stunning as previous Graftgold efforts like **Uridium** or **Magnetron**."*
- Sinclair User, October 1988







2 @ 2 @ 1 !

Super Trolley

Mastertronic Ltd.
Icon Design Ltd (Andrew Collett, Paul Atkinson, Ed Knight)

Jim Couldn't Fix This...



*"...clever and original ... but badly programmed. It just proves that **Jim** can't **Fix** everything..."*
- Crash Magazine, May 1988

Mastertronic became infamous over the years for producing what amounted to a large pile of animal byproduct. Of course, with a pile that large, it's often reasonable to assume that somewhere underneath is a pony. And while **Mastertronic** certainly did publish some superb games (most of which were released through their premium *M.A.D.* label), **Super Trolley** was unfortunately not one of them... Which was a shame considering the interesting history behind the development of this game.

After a visit to the local supermarket, *Andrew Collett* came up with the idea of a game based around the job of a low-level supermarket employee. Lacking the necessary technical skills to realise his ideas, he did what any self-respecting young kid would do in those circumstances — he wrote into TV's *Jim'll Fix It* program — and surprisingly his idea was picked out by *Jimmy Savile* for use on the program. Of course, it's at that point things started to go wrong...

The game itself started out with a strange 2D screen with several rectangles composed of circles. The player then had to steer a strange raygun-like object over the circles, placing a small dot in the middle of each one. A careful reading of the instructions revealed this to be the 'goods pricing' section of the game, which although tedious and fairly pointless, had to be completed before the game began proper.
The second phase of the game was marginally more interesting, in which the player had to perform certain supermarket-based tasks within a certain time limit without annoying the witch-like shoppers in the process. However, what could have been a promising game was ruined by a plethora of glitches and bugs — most likely caused by a rush to finish the game in time for the airing of the *Jim'll Fix It* TV Show.
Although it seemed fairly original, it was actually similar in concept to the older (and far superior) *Gremlin Graphics* title, **Grumpy Gumphrey Supersleuth**.
Overall, it was worth looking at (if only for the novelty factor) but the lack of polish soon discouraged the player from investigating further.



CRASH 54%

2 @ 2 @ 2 @

Where Time Stood Still

128k



Ocean Software Ltd.
Denton Designs
The Mother Of All Great Escapes...

As the spiritual sequel to **The Great Escape**, this game took the isometric scrolling game to new heights for the 128k machine. Published by *Ocean*, this was widely considered to be the pinnacle of *Denton Design*'s output. According to the March 1989 issue of *Crash Magazine* a 48k conversion was finished and ready for release. However, it never appeared. Roughly two years later, **Wreckers**, set on a space station, would have taken the engine further than before, but unfortunately it never saw the light of day due to the decline of the *ZX Spectrum* games market.

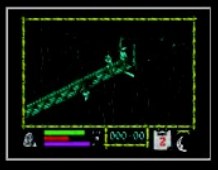
The cover artwork for *Where Time Stood Still* was yet another of *Bob Wakelin*'s pieces, although the back cover was overlaid with a piece of comic artwork stolen from an American comic series. In a web interview, *Bob Wakelin* had the following to say about it: "[The artwork for] *Where Time Stood Still* is one of my favourites. *John Heap* bought the original off me a few years ago — he being one of the team that developed it. [I] Had loads of fun doing the sex-and-dinosaur mix. The comic book panels were added by *Ocean*, a dangerous direct rip from a comic called *Xenozoic Tales*. Good job it wasn't spotted in the US. I saw a pretty detailed demo of the game, which helped inspire me to produce a decent illustration."

Where Time Stood Still put the player in control of a group of four individuals, who had the misfortune to crash-land on a lost plateau. It started with the typical B-movie cast of four: *Jarret* — the action man, *Dirk* — the newlywed athletic Cambridge scholar, *Gloria* — *Dirk*'s wife, the plucky female and *Clive* — an overweight businessman who was *Gloria*'s father. *Jarret* had to lead the crash survivors through a prehistoric landscape, avoiding dinosaurs, weak bridges, cannibals and other B-movie terrors. The team needed to work together, each using their individual skills, to escape from the island in one piece. An interesting feature of this game was the interrelationship between the characters; for example, if *Gloria* died then *Dirk* became fairly useless due to his grief.
Where Time Stood Still was originally intended to be called **Tibet** or **The Land That Time Forgot**, and was a career highlight for *Denton Designs* and one that they would not subsequently top.

"All the thrills of lost worlds and lands that time forgot in a true computer movie!"
- Your Sinclair, August 1988







CRASH 94% YOUR SINCLAIR 90% SINCLAIR 96%

2 @ 2 @ 3 #

Program: 1989

The **Spectrum** games scene peaked during 1989. The best full price games were technically excellent now that programmers had fully mastered the machine and could generate some wonderful effects with it using crisply designed and animated graphics together with some dazzling music. **Chase HQ** wasn't just the best driving game written for the **Spectrum**, it was also an impressive demonstration of what the Spectrum can do when pushed to its limits.

This year was filled with classic games, but there was a distinct shift in the games industry away from the **Spectrum** and towards the increasingly affordable **Atari ST** and **Commodore Amiga**. New games were now designed for the more powerful machines and then selected games were transferred to the **Spectrum** if a conversion was possible. Usually this meant that the games could only run on the larger **128k Spectrums**, and **Carrier Command** would be a good example of that. A disadvantage of this approach was that fewer games were released for the **Spectrum** because some games were impossible to transfer to the seven year old machine.

The software houses tried to boost the shrinking games production schedule by re-releasing their back-catalogue at budget prices. It worked well as newer **Spectrum** owners could buy classics such as **Knight Lore** and **Manic Miner** for two or three pounds each.

The system broke down after a while as the period of time between a game's original release and its subsequent re-release shortened to below a couple of years. Gamers soon figured out that they could save plenty of money if they waited a little time for it to come out on a budget label. This seriously damaged sales of full-priced games forcing some software houses to raise prices to well over ten pounds, whilst others decided to leave the full-price **Spectrum** games market entirely.

Amstrad saw sales of the **Spectrum** itself starting to decline and tried to rejuvenate it by releasing a light gun for it. **Cheetah** matched it with their own light gun, and both guns had half a dozen games each. It was just a passing fad that was trying to match what was happening in the games console market though, and they were soon forgotten about. That was the last time **Amstrad** dabbled in new hardware for the machine.

Of course, that didn't mean that another manufacturer couldn't step in to try and take their place. All through the year, **Miles Gordon Technology** was putting the finishing touches to a new "**SuperSpectrum**" named the **SAM Coupé**. Offering **256k** of memory, **128** colours, six-channel sound that was superior to the **Atari ST**, plus a disk drive and plenty of expansion options, and all for little more than the price of a **Spectrum Plus Three**, it looked like a good upgrade, especially as it could run **Spectrum 48k** games via an emulator.

With a planned launch date of Christmas 1989, the industry watched and waited. Could this small British company really take on **Commodore**, **Atari**, **Sega** and **Nintendo**?

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

Carrier Command

128k

Rainbird Software Ltd.
Andrew Onions
Torpedoes Away!



Carrier Command was the first 16-bit title that *Realtime Games* had produced in their career, and again was another one of the games that the critics said simply could not be ported to the 48k *ZX Spectrum*. However, the 128k model *did* have the required capacity, having already proved the critics wrong with **Starglider** in 1986. They had their work cut out to cram this behemoth of a strategy/action game into a mere 128k of memory, on a computer that was nearly a third of the speed with a quarter of the memory of the *Atari ST*.

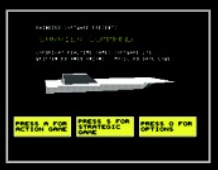
***Realtime* managed to get the *ZX Spectrum* to perform 25,000 calculations per second - an astounding achievement considering the workload needed from the 3.5Mhz processor. Not satisfied with just technical improvements, they also saw fit to improve on the gameplay of the *Atari ST* version, including a much-needed time-lapse facility to speed up travel between islands and a balancing out of the player's weapons to prevent the game becoming too easy. The *Atari ST* version had a flaw that allowed the carrier's superior attack range to overwhelm occupied islands whilst remaining out of range of defensive fire.**

Carrier Command, set in the near future, placed two sea-based carriers at each end of an archipelago of 32 islands, rich in natural resources. The aim was to take over the islands, constructing bases that could extract natural resources, build weapons and craft, or alternatively be a supply stockpile for the players ship. The larger the player's network, the faster supplies could be sent to the carrier. The vessel itself was well equipped, with missile launchers, a laser turret, up to three remote-controlled aircraft, and three amphibious vehicles, also remote-controlled. Although easy to begin with, things got difficult when having to take an enemy's island, attack the enemy carrier itself, or even worse, when the enemy carrier took one of the players' islands, potentially cutting off the supply line to the ship.
The game came with an audio cassette containing a theme tune written by the musician *Dave Lowe*.

CRASH 97% YOUR SINCLAIR 94% SINCLAIR 96%

"The game is immensely absorbing without making you at all seasick!"
- Crash Magazine, March 1989







Guest Writer: The Starglider

2 @ 2 @ 5 %

Chase H.Q.

Ocean Software Ltd.
John O'Brien, Bill Harbison, Jonathan Dunn
Kickin' Ass And Takin' Names...

48K/128K



As one of the better arcade conversions released by *Ocean* (or indeed by any publisher), **Chase H.Q.** brought the hit arcade race and chase game to the humble *ZX Spectrum*. Despite the obvious superiority of the arcade hardware, the programming team pulled off a minor miracle in cramming the game into 48k.

Of the home computer versions, the *ZX Spectrum* and *Amstrad* versions were the best received. The *Commodore 64* version was universally slammed, causing much amusement for *ZX Spectrum* owners and much wailing and gnashing of teeth among owners of the beige box.

In the *Miami Vice* inspired **Chase H.Q.** the player took on the role of a police officer in pursuit of a bunch of nefarious criminals each of whom had in their possession a very fast car and a significant head start. Fortunately the player was equipped with the finest pursuit car the police force could provide and consequently was more than up to the task of catching the speeding criminals.
Gameplay consisted of five levels of chase action, each of which got progressively more difficult with the addition of roadblocks, helicopters and other obstacles. The aim of each level was to catch up to the criminal vehicle within 60 seconds and then collide with it until enough damage was done to the vehicle to ram it off the road. Once the required level of damage was achieved (indicated by an on screen gauge) the criminal's car sputtered to a halt at the side of the road and the level was over.
The action was punctuated by frequent comments from the **Chase H.Q.** operator, *Nancy*, who chimed in with helpful (and not so helpful) comments on the player's progress through the level. The level itself was one of the best renditions of a roadway on the *ZX Spectrum* featuring dips, tunnels, forks and other road features that actually played a role in the game. For example, if the player took the wrong fork during the chase, the criminal was able to increase his lead, and the player had to work much harder to catch up.

*"Nope, **Chase H.Q.** isn't crap. In fact, it's one of the best driving games I've ever seen..."*
- Your Sinclair, February 1990







CRASH 95% | YOUR SINCLAIR 94% | SINCLAIR 96%

Fantasy World Dizzy

48k/128k



Codemasters Ltd.
The Oliver Twins, Neil Adamson, David Whittaker
So, Is He An Egg Or Isn't He?

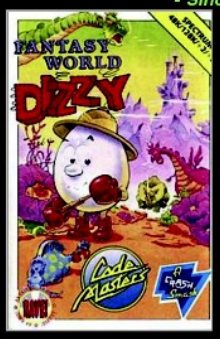
Codemasters' most enduring franchise hero, *Dizzy* featured in no less than thirteen titles. Of these, seven were adventures whilst the remainder were spin-off arcade games. Of the adventures that were released, this one, **Fantasy World Dizzy**, is widely considered to the best of them. *Codemasters* released many other budget titles often based around a common theme, including the **Advanced Simulator Series** featuring an array of weird and wonderful themes and subjects. This quickly became the butt of many jokes including spoof titles that have entered *ZX Spectrum* folklore, such as **Advanced Lawnmower Simulator** and **Advanced Coat-Getting Simulator**.

The enduring popularity of the *Dizzy* series inspired the creation of a web-site, www.yolkfolk.com, which contains a full history of the series and details of the individual games. Also included is a link to a CGI-rendered video of *Dizzy* showing how he might look in a modern game. However, despite the creation of this video, there are no current plans to produce a further *Dizzy* game. On this subject, the twins had the following to say, "...if he were ever to make another appearance it would have to be something special ... He would have to compete with the likes of *Jak & Daxter* and *Ratchet & Clank* — and those types of games require big budgets and many months of development. If there's a publisher willing to commit to that kind of investment, though, then they can definitely count us in."

The **Dizzy** series of games were billed as realistic cartoon adventures, featuring a cute egg-like character who purportedly is not and never was an egg. However, this failed to explain why his race were called the *Yolk-Folk*. Not only that, but the instructions for the game warned the player to keep *Dizzy* away from fire by "not allowing him to turn into a fried egg". **Fantasy World Dizzy** represented the first appearance of *Dizzy*'s extended family and friends. One of these, *Dizzy*'s ovoid girlfriend *Daisy*, had managed to get herself kidnapped by the *Troll* manservant of an evil king, who was holding her captive in the Cloud Castle in Fantasy World. To rescue his beloved, *Dizzy* had to run and jump around the world collecting objects to solve all of the puzzles contained within the game world. However, once he rescued *Daisy*, there was still a further quest for him to solve.

CRASH 94% YOUR SINCLAIR 88% SINCLAIR 81%

"...I could probably review this one without playing it (as certain computer magazines do, hem-hem no names mentioned.)"
- Sinclair User, January 1990







2 @ 2 @ 7

Ghouls'n'Ghosts

US Gold Ltd.
Mike Follin, Ben Jackson, Tim Follin

Ghosties And Ghoulies And Long-Leggedy Beasties...

48k/128k



*"**Ghouls And Ghosts** is really hard. Perhaps a bit too hard to be friendly..."*
- Your Sinclair, December 1989

The *ZX Spectrum* fared pretty well when it came to arcade conversions, at least until arcade machines progressed to 3D graphics beyond the capabilities of the humble 8-bit computer. **Ghouls'n'Ghosts** was no exception. While it fell short of including everything that the arcade game had, it still managed to squeeze in most of the excitement only missing out a few of the more extravagant enemies.

The prequel to *Ghouls'n'Ghosts* was the seminal *Ghosts'n'Goblins*, an excellent arcade title that *Elite Systems* converted to the *ZX Spectrum* back in 1986. Despite being an outstanding conversion, it was still an extremely difficult and frustrating game to play, plagued by "insta-death" syndrome, whereby the player had no way to avoid certain enemy attacks. However, the conversion of the prequel was more faithful, simply because the arcade machine it was based on was (apart from the graphics) only marginally more powerful. The *Ghouls'n'Ghosts* arcade machine was significantly more powerful with three layer parallax scrolling and large colourful sprites — features which did not make it into the *ZX Spectrum* version.







The heroic knight *Arthur* from **Ghosts'n'Goblins** returned in this adventure to rescue his damsel in distress who, once again, had been captured by the forces of evil. The player had to take the knight through five levels of zombie, demon and devil populated caverns, forests and mountains, whilst jumping, climbing and fighting his way through the enemy, until the player reached the castle where *Loki* had the player's girlfriend imprisoned.
Various weapon and armour upgrades were available at certain points throughout the levels, although care needed to be taken not to pick up an inferior weapon such as the firebrand, which fired in a slow high arc and was difficult to aim correctly.
Ghouls'n'Ghosts was a worthwhile conversion and approached the upper limits of the *ZX Spectrum*'s capabilities.

CRASH 92% | YOUR SINCLAIR 91% | SINCLAIR 82%

H.A.T.E.

Gremlin Graphics Software Ltd.
Costa Panayi, Benn Daglish
AKA: Hostile All Terrain Encounter

48k/128k



As *Costa Panayi*'s last 8-bit game, **H.A.T.E.**, released by *Gremlin Graphics* under the *Vortex Software* label holds a prominent position in *ZX Spectrum* history. In fact, *Vortex Software* were probably one of the few programming teams that had released consistently excellent games throughout their career. Their most famous releases were (in chronological order): **Android 1**, **Android 2**, **T.L.L.**, **Cyclone**, **Highway Encounter**, **Alien Highway**, **Revolution**, **Deflektor**, and finally **H.A.T.E.**. Of these titles, the final three, somewhat disappointingly, did not sell as well as the authors expected. This was probably indicative of the waning of the 8-bit games industry rather than the quality of the software as they were all exceptional games.

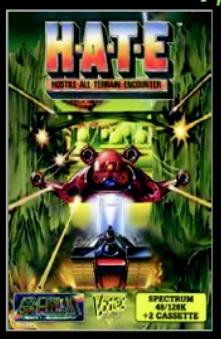
According to a preview in the February 1989 issue of *Your Sinclair* a 16-bit version of *H.A.T.E.* with twice the number of levels as the *ZX Spectrum* version was under development, but apparently was never finished or released. This was to be *Costa Panayi*'s final game. He gave up game programming and went to work for *Fisher Price Toys* as a design consultant.

H.A.T.E. was an isometric scrolling shoot'em-up, similar in appearance to the arcade title **Zaxxon**, except with a great deal more variability and strategy contained in the gameplay. In each level, the player alternated between a plane and a tank and was required to fight across the scrolling landscape to destroy the enemy fighters that were protecting a series of spherical plasma reactors. The player needed to destroy these reactors and collect the glowing cores that then trailed behind the ship in a chain, acting as extra lives. When the player was struck whilst holding a core, the core was destroyed but the ship was left intact. If the player was not holding any cores, the ship would be destroyed and the level restarted. At the end of each level was a force-field. To pass the force-field, the player required at least one trailing core to be able to pass or the ship would be destroyed causing the level to restart.
H.A.T.E. was an excellent game with the characteristic *Vortex Software* touch of originality and addictiveness. It was sad that too few gamers chose to experience the superior gameplay of **H.A.T.E.** — as evidenced by the disappointing sales figures.



"Nothing incredibly imaginative, but what's there is excellently programmed and brilliantly executed..."

- Your Sinclair, June 1989







2 2 9

Maze Mania

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Ray Jones, Ed Campbell, Mak Computer Graphics
The Amazing Maze... Not...

48k

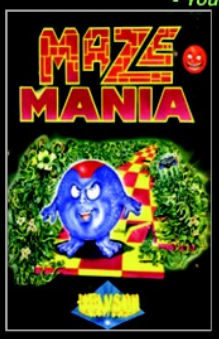


Continuing their slow but inexorable slide into software obscurity, *Hewson Consultants* released this barely average title around mid-1989 to mediocre reviews. Technically, it was not a bad effort but in terms of quality it was overshadowed by many of their own previous software releases. For example, compared to **Quazatron**, released in 1986, or even **Technician Ted**, from 1984, it is clearly not their best effort.

The original plan for this game was to release it on *Hewson*'s budget label, *Rack-it*. However, these plans were changed and it was given a full-price release. Subsequently, the *ZX Spectrum*'s gaming press were of the opinion that this was a less than impressive idea.

In **Maze Mania**, *Flippo the Hedgehog* (or alien ball, depending on preferences), was trapped in an aether-suspended maze of flippable tiles. The aim of the game (similarly to titles such as **Q-Bert**, **Pogo**, or **Pippo**) was to flip the different coloured tiles by jumping on each of them.
Unfortunately for **Flippo**, the maze was also populated by alien beasts which were unsympathetic to the concept of having their environment literally turned upside down. So not only did *Flippo* have to deal with a large maze full of tiles that needed flipping, as well as gaps in the tiles that would send him plummeting into empty space if he failed to jump them, but he also was being pursued by aliens with multiple tentacles.
Collisions with these aliens would drain his energy. Running out of energy or falling into space would lose one of his three lives.
Maze Mania was a fairly average game that soon became repetitive. Perhaps it was indicative of the sagging fortunes of the *ZX Spectrum* games industry that the magazine reviews for it were far more favourable than the conversions to other 8-bit systems. For example, the average percentage score for **Maze Mania** in the *ZX Spectrum* gaming press was in the seventies, whereas the *Commodore 64* version rated a measly 40% in *ZZap 64*.

"Hewson [Consultants] would have done better to have stuck to Plan A and released it on its budget Rack-It label."
- Your Sinclair, October 1989







CRASH 77% | YOUR SINCLAIR 70% | SINCLAIR 74%

Myth: History In The Making

48k/128k



System 3 Software Ltd.
Neil Dodwell, Dave Dew

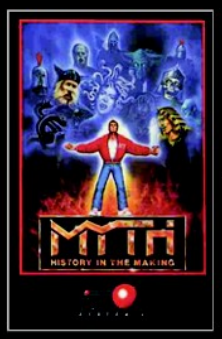
I'm Not Here... This Isn't Happening...

System 3 produced a number of superb games throughout their lifetime. However, they tended to be better at the classic flip-screen arcade adventure format. Their previous game, **Tusker**, didn't quite hit the mark, giving the appearance of being rushed. **Myth**, on the other hand, was an exceptionally polished title from start to finish.

***Myth* relied on some pretty advanced programming techniques to fit it onto the humble *ZX Spectrum*. According to an article published in the November 1989 issue of *Sinclair User* the program used custom sprite compression routines, and was developed on a PC cross-compiler. The programmers' main complaint seemed to be the difference in scrolling capabilities of the *ZX Spectrum* and *Commodore 64*, and the fact that they kept running into memory issues. However, they were justifiably proud of their title, calling it "state of the art" and "far superior to the usual dull, monochrome *ZX Spectrum* games". The developers had plans to produce it for the *Nintendo Gameboy*, and also planned a sequel. Unfortunately nothing ever came to fruition.**

Myth was an epic game set across five time zones: Hell, Ancient Greece in 400 BC, a Viking longboat circa 700 AD, Medieval England circa 1000 AD and Egypt 2600 BC. The player took on the role of a mortal selected by the Gods to undo the damage to the timeline done by an evil God, *Dameron*, who had corrupted previously pure Gods and circumvented the course of human history. The remaining untainted Gods were left virtually powerless and unable to interfere which is why they had pressed a mortal into action on their behalf.
In each zone, the player was required to collect period weapons and fight off supernatural enemies such as skeletons, trolls and other period appropriate nasties. At the end of each zone was a large boss monster that had to be defeated to proceed to the next level. For Hell, the enemy was a demonic *Dragon*, Greece pitted the player against a many-headed *Hydra*, in Scandinavia the player fought the Norse All-Father, *Odin*, finally culminating in a head-to-head battle with *Dameron* himself.
Myth was a superb title that really stretched the hardware to its limits and showed that there was life in the old *Sinclair* beast yet.

"If there's been a better original ZX Spectrum product this year I haven't seen it..."
- Your Sinclair, January 1990







CRASH 96% YOUR SINCLAIR 95% SINCLAIR 93%

2 @ 3 # 1 !

Rock Star Ate My Hamster

Codemasters Ltd.
Colin Jones

Reminds Me Of When I Was Roadying For Motorhead... This One Time...

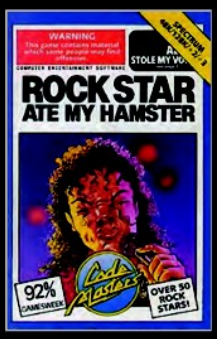


"I should be so lucky. Lucky, lucky, lucky."
- Sinclair User, April 1989

Codemasters were not generally known for their full-price games and especially not for management simulations, but **Rock Star Ate My Hamster** broke the mould on both counts. Released on multiple platforms, **Rock Star Ate My Hamster** rocked just as well on the *ZX Spectrum* as it did on the *Amiga*.

***Rock Star Ate My Hamster* successfully parodied the tacky 'hit-factories' of the 80's, such as the *Stock, Aitken* and *Waterman* partnership.**

Rock Star Ate My Hamster was a simple and accessible financial management game based around a rock music theme with a heavy dose of humour and smut to enliven the action.
This menu-driven game put the player in the role of a wannabe band manager, *Cecil Pitt*, aided by his trusty sidekick *Clive*. The player started with £50,000 to spend building a popular rock act.
After selecting the members of the band, the player was given a number of choices via a menu system. The available choices allowed the player to choose to let the band practice, get some publicity for the band, play a gig (in a range of venues) or give the band gifts. Other options available in the game were to record some songs and release singles and/or albums. Each of the available options could either help or hinder. In the case where the actions hindered the player, the after-effects were rather amusing. For example, asking *Clive* to get some publicity for the band could land the rock star on the front page of **The Stun**, usually with a humorous headline that could be either positive, negative or neutral. For example, negative headlines such as "Wacko Jacko Dies In Orgy" would signal the loss of the rock star in question.
Rock Star Ate My Hamster was a fun take on the management game genre, and an enjoyable title to have whiled away a few hours to.









Stormlord

Hewson Consultants Ltd.
Raffaele Cecco, J. Dave Rogers, Nick Jones

Mmmmm... Naked Fairies In Pots...

Bored with sci-fi themes, *Raffaele Cecco* decided to take his influences from *Tolkien* and *Shakespeare*'s **Midsummer Night's Dream** for this fairy-themed title. **Stormlord** was more of an arcade adventure than his previous arcade oriented titles, with simple puzzles to solve to beat each level. *Hewson* made the most of the success of **Stormlord**, which was probably aided in some small way by the naked fairies. A more advanced sequel, **Stormlord 2: Deliverance** appeared in the following year.

According to an early preview, the 'dwarf-like' graphics for the main character were supposed to be replaced with a strapping barbarian-type character. For whatever reason, this did not occur with this game or indeed the sequel. Also, the 'rather explicit' fairy graphics in the game did not cause any issues with the publisher apart from the removal of a rather suggestive title screen animation. However, the author apparently had difficulty getting their legs right. His solution? Stick them in a pot.

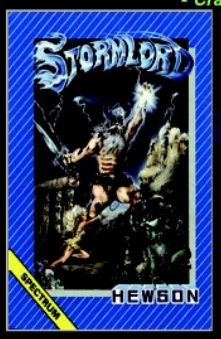
In **Stormlord**, an evil queen took her hatred of fairies to the limit, and had kidnapped every single one of them. It was up to the player as the hero, the eponymous *Stormlord*, to free the five fairies on each level.
Each level was divided into sections that were partitioned by the use of simple puzzles. The player needed to solve these puzzles by using the correct object to get past the obstacles. For example, swarms of bees prevented access to some areas and to distract the swarm and gain access the player needed to use a pot of honey.
Other more dangerous foes required serious action. Fortunately, the player was armed with a magical sword and lightning bolts to fight off some of the more persistent enemies.
Another feature of the game was the use of springboards as a medieval teleport system which catapulted the player to other regions of the level.
Once all five fairies on a level were rescued, the player was thrust into a sub-game where he must collect as many fairy tears as possible. The player was required make the fairies cry by blowing kisses at them, and then collect ten tears to earn an extra life.
Stormlord was an excellent and enduring game that many players found more accessible than *Raffaele Cecco*'s previous titles. The difficulty level seemed to be tuned to a smoother learning curve than his past games.

CRASH 91% YOUR SINCLAIR 93% SINCLAIR 71%

48k/128k



"This is the sort of game we used to expect from Ultimate, and makes as good use of the ZX Spectrum as can be imagined."
- Crash Magazine, May 1989







2 @ 3 # 3 #

Program: 199x

The demise of the **Spectrum** was a long, drawn out affair. With re-releases and magazine cover tapes hitting the full-price market badly, the flood of football games released to mark the 1990 World Cup brought another wave of poor games sales as gamers showed that they only needed one or two soccer games each, not seven.

Some companies were still trying to innovate though. **Codemasters** came up with an ingenious widget which would allow games to be loaded from a hi-fi's compact disc player and through the **Spectrum's** joystick port. They sold one of these gadgets with a one-off 30 game compilation CD and it did rather well.

The **SAM Coupé** fared a lot worse. Although it had good reviews when it was launched, the combination of a lack of decent software together with hardware and software glitches took its toll on its small manufacturer. **MGT** went under soon after the launch, and its successor company **SAM Computers Ltd** lasted for only a couple of years. The **Coupé** was a great hobbyist computer, but without any large financial backing it was always going to be a niche product.

Amstrad decided to kill off the **Spectrum Plus Three** in 1990 so that it wouldn't compete with their new **CPC**-based games console that was to take on a similar **C64**-based console from **Commodore**. Both machines appeared to be the last gasps of the dying 8-bit computer era.

Well before the final **Spectrum Plus Two** was manufactured in 1992, the magazines were getting thinner and thinner as readership went down because gamers were moving on from the **Spectrum** to other machines. **CRASH's** publishers went into liquidation, but the title survived through another publisher before being sold off and "merged" with the struggling **Sinclair User** in 1992. The "**New Sinclair User, Incorporating CRASH**" looked exactly like the old **Sinclair User** apart from having a small **CRASH** logo tucked away in the corner of the cover.

The **Spectrum** users' demographic was changing as the original owners upgraded to new machines, passing their **Spectrums** to their younger siblings. Also new **Spectrums** were being sold so cheaply that they had entered the toy market and were aimed at primary school children. Long-term **Spectrum** owners were saddened to see what little software being released was full of cute cartoon characters and sickeningly sweet plotlines, and were dismayed to see the tone of the magazines also changing their focus from established users to the new wave of kids. Fortunately the expanding puzzle game market partially satisfied demand from older gamers.

Sinclair User closed down in Spring 1993 and for a few months **Your Sinclair** was the only **Spectrum** magazine still being sold in the shops. Sadly all good things must come to an end and **Your Sinclair** marked its final issue in the summer with a staff reunion and reminiscing about the good old days.

All in all, the **Spectrum** era lasted for about eleven years, and what a ride it was...

Nick Humphries, (ysrnry.co.uk)

Castle Master

Incentive Software Ltd.
Matt Furniss

This One Didn't Burn Down, Fall Over, Or Sink Into A Swamp...

Year: 1990

48k

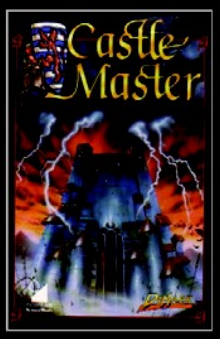


"Incentive seems to have another winner (and another Megagame) on its hands."
- Your Sinclair, May 1990

After success with their various arcade and adventure game titles over the years, *Incentive Software* hit on a winning formula with their **Freescape** series, producing a number of superb 3D arcade-adventures such as **Driller**, **Total Eclipse** and their sequels.

Although they were very detailed and atmospheric, the Freescape series were not renowned for their speed, often taking up to a second to refresh the screen. *Castle Master* used their updated Freescape+ system, resulting in 10% faster rendering and more interactivity. The series culminated in the release of a *3D Construction Kit* that actually allowed the user to create their own Freescape adventures. This was published by *Domark* in mid 1991 for a slightly prohibitive £25.

In **Castle Master**, the player began the game outside of the dreaded *Castle Eternity* prepared to embark on a quest to rescue his captive twin who was imprisoned in the highest tower of the castle. The penalty for failure was for the player and his twin to become wraith-like slaves of the castle's owner, the evil *Magister*. Of course, the first problem the player had to face was how to even get into the castle. After searching the grounds of the castle (and the small hut nearby) the only clue was a small black panel near the portcullis. Throwing a stone at this caused the portcullis to open and the drawbridge to drop.
The castle was built over a network of maze-like catacombs which, like the castle itself, were populated with evil spirits (that could be vanquished with a well-thrown rock). However, the game wasn't just a matter of plugging through castle rooms and shooting the ghosts. Tricky puzzles had to be solved in order to gain access to new areas and keys and potions hidden within the castle needed to be located if the player was to have any chance of rescuing the captive twin.
Castle Master was an excellent and engrossing game. For players who particularly enjoyed the challenge of the castle, the sequel, **Castle Master 2: The Crypt** was a much harder ordeal that followed on from the ending of this game, where the *Magister* immediately imprisoned the player and his twin in the castle crypts.







CRASH 85% | YOUR SINCLAIR 93% | SINCLAIR 81%

2 @ | 3 # | 5 %

Dan Dare 3: The Escape

Year: 1990 48k



Virgin Games Ltd.
David Perry, Nick Bruty

This Isn't Really A Dan Dare Game, Is It?

After the success of the previous two *Dan Dare* games, it was not surprising that publisher *Virgin Games* would try to follow up on this success with a third game in the series. **Dan Dare 3: The Escape** was a stylistic departure from the previous games in the series, employing a much 'chunkier' and more colourful graphics style.

Originally, *Dan Dare 3: The Escape* was not written to be a *Dan Dare* game. The previous incarnation of the game was, according to *Your Sinclair*, to be called "*Crazy Jet Racer* or *Unicycle Racer* or something". However it was felt that the use of the *Dan Dare* license would translate directly to extra sales. This resulted in a game that, although good, broke the continuity of the series by drastically changing the look and feel of the game.

Once again, *Dan Dare* found himself at the mercy of the evil *Mekon*, ruler of Venus and the reptilian *Treens*. However, this time the green menace had been experimenting with gene-splicing and other techniques to mutate otherwise innocuous creatures into murderous nasties. With *Dan* in his clutches, the *Mekon* was planning on subjecting him to the same nefarious treatment. Obviously, *Dan* was generally against this sort of thing, particularly when it involved him directly. The player was responsible for guiding *Dan Dare* in his attempt to escape from the *Mekon*'s mutant-populated lair. *Dan* was equipped with a jet pack and had an extensive arsenal of weapons available.

The aim of the game was to help *Dan* make his way through the multiple levels of the *Mekon*'s lair, fighting off the mutants and collecting keys to open doors while acquiring extra weapons and enough fuel canisters to power the space ship that *Dan* would need to use to escape the *Mekon*'s clutches. At the end of each level, a giant 'projection' of the *Mekon* had to be destroyed before progressing to the next area via a standard 'into-the-screen' 3D tunnel with deadly edges.

Dan Dare 3 was far outclassed by the first two games in the series, and the obviously slapped-on *Dan Dare* theme to this otherwise unremarkable title was far too thin a veneer.

"..[It's] just too small, and don't take too much trying to complete. It's a real shame because the size stops it really being [a] Megagame..."
- Your Sinclair, February 1990







CRASH 92% YOUR SINCLAIR 89% SINCLAIR 93%

Lords Of Chaos

Blade Software Ltd.
Julian Gollop, Nick Gollop, Shaun McClure

Maybe Tanelorn Is In Here Somewhere...

Year: 1990

48k/128k



"Hurrah! Find yourself some treasure, locate weapons, turn them into magic weapons, get out there and kick bottom."
- Your Sinclair, June 1990

Julian and *Nick Gollop* became famous as developers of the best strategy games for the *ZX Spectrum* with a string of hit titles including **Laser Squad**. While the gameplay always remained consistently good, the level of presentation increased substantially with each release. In fact, the prequel to this game was **Chaos**, one of the best, and ugliest-looking strategy games released for the *ZX Spectrum*. The sequel raised the presentation values considerably, but it is arguable whether the gameplay was much of an improvement over the previous version. At its core it was the same game, heavily augmented with exploration and role-playing aspects.
This theme was expanded upon in later years with the **Magic & Mayhem** series on the *PC*, although the addition of the role-playing and questing themes did tend to dilute the original 'warring wizards' atmosphere.

***Lords of Chaos* was planned from the beginning with expansion kits in mind, even though it was released across several 8-bit and 16-bit platforms. Although several kits were planned, only one actually got released. The *Lords of Chaos: Expansion Kit 1* was released across several formats in 1991, but unfortunately did not meet with enough success to warrant any further releases. Ultimately, its success may have been hampered by the fact that about six months had passed between the time this game was reviewed and when it hit the shops.**

Lords of Chaos had a standard sci-fi story of a peaceful mage-ruled world split asunder by a mysterious magical emanation from another plane. The splitting caused the creation of a set of linked worlds which the once-peaceful ruling class of mages are fighting over for absolute control.
The player took on the role of one of these warring mages. The idea of the game was to conquer the mage(s) in each world and travel to the next through a magic portal. Combat between mages was handled similarly to the prequel, **Chaos**, whereby the player conjured up magical creatures to do his bidding.
Lords of Chaos was a deep and challenging strategy RPG that is well worth investigating, even when compared to more modern games. Playability and ambience like this were hard to come by.







CRASH 80% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 82%

2 @ | 3 # | 7 '

Mire Mare

Ultimate Play The Game.
Tim Stamper, Chris Stamper
Unclear Luser Exclusive!!

Year: ????



The disappearance of *Ultimate* from the games industry was a painfully drawn-out affair with a string of several disappointing titles tarnishing their once great image. And then there was **Mire Mare**, their final game, the one to restore their reputation and give a final farewell tribute to their loyal *ZX Spectrum* owning fans... However, it never appeared, leaving in its place a mystery that has perplexed these fans for years.

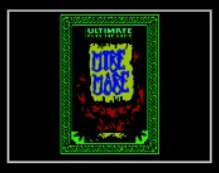
According to an interview with a mysterious *Ultimate* ex-employee the game was virtually complete, to the point of being perfectly playable, and was, in fact, a very good game harking back to the glory days of *Ultimate*. Allegedly *Mire Mare* was completed before *Gunfright*, and the only reason it was not released is that the *Stampers* originally wanted to release it with the old style *Sabre Wulf* box as their grand finale. However, the new owners of *Ultimate*, *U.S. Gold*, wanted to release it directly to their *Kixx* budget label. The *Stampers* were not happy with this situation, and, according to the unnamed source, they claimed that the virtually complete *Mire Mare* was still in an early stage of development and therefore unusable.

Yup. You got me. If this was the first page in the book that you turned to, wondering if I'd managed to get hold of some hitherto unknown information on the world's most wanted *ZX Spectrum* game then I'm sorry to disappoint... but I couldn't go write this book without mentioning the Holy Grail of *ZX Spectrum* gaming. I was going to spin some cock-and-bull story about an obscure Japanese magazine interview, but I decided to just come clean. The screenshots on this page are simply my impression of what it may have looked like.
So, what *is* known about **Mire Mare** — the final game in the *Sabreman* series?
Frankly, very little. One of the exits from **Underwurlde**, the end of **Knight Lore** and the end of **Pentagram** tell *Sabreman* to go forth into the **Mire Mare**.
The sad thing is that unless the *Stampers* have done something to preserve this legendary title, it's only a matter of time before it is lost forever — presuming that it still exists in any form. Hopefully one day it will come to light so it can finally be preserved in its rightful place in *ZX Spectrum* history (if it ever existed in the first place, that is).

"Street date: Throw a dart at a calendar of your choice..."

- Sinclair User, June 1987





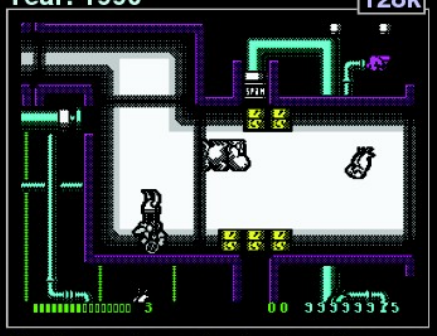


Monty Python

Year: 1990 | 128k

Virgin Games Ltd.
CORE Design

Monty Python's Flying Circus

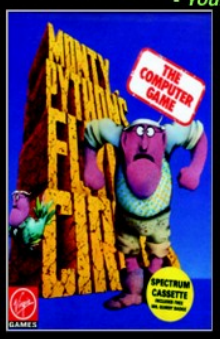


One of the most bizarre licenses to ever appear on home computers, even eclipsing the weirdness of **The Young Ones** and **How To Be A Complete Bastard**, **Monty Python's Flying Circus** finally made an appearance in computerized form on multiple platforms in 1990 courtesy of *Virgin Software*. Based on an amalgam on popular skits, the game contained pretty much all of the fan favourites, including *Eric the Half-A-Bee* and *The Dead Parrot*.

The original design for this game was for each level to be based around a specific popular sketch from the television series. This design was later discarded in favour of a series of levels based around *Terry Gilliam*'s animated interludes, specifically the handkerchief-wearing *Gumby* character that appeared in many of the segments.

Monty Python's Flying Circus bore a strong resemblance to the arcade game **Parodius**, in that it was a shoot'em-up/arcade adventure which stood out from the crowd by means of parody and surrealism.
The player took on the role of *Gumby*, a brainless creature with a liking for Wellington boots and handkerchiefs. In this game, *Gumby* was literally brainless and consequently the object of the game was to collect the four quarters of his escaped brain, which were hidden at the end of each of the four levels.
To retrieve the brain quarters, *Gumby* had to collect enough cans of Spam to trade in for an exchange. The catch was that not only were the cans well defended by various Pythonesque enemies, but they were also well hidden by obstacles such as cheese mounds making the game extremely challenging. As an additional gimmick, *Gumby*'s body was changed out to suit the level he was playing on. For example, the first level was set underwater, so *Gumby* was morphed into a fish.
Although the bizarre setting, themed graphics and additional sub-games such as The Argument Game added spice, at its heart **Monty Python's Flying Circus** was still a fairly standard shoot'em-up.

"A rather spooky arcade adventure with a definite weird French feel to it - except it's British! Spiffing!"
- Your Sinclair, October 1990







CRASH 75% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 88%

Popeye 2

Alternative Software Ltd.
Richard Stevenson, Paul A. Bellamy, Mike J. Lister

Popeye's Back...

Year: 1991 48k

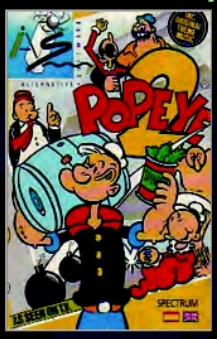


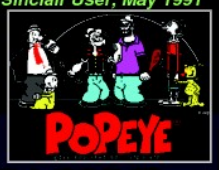
Years after *Don Priestley*'s break-out **Popeye**, publisher *Alternative Software* decided to revitalize the old sea-dog with a new game based on the cartoon franchise. **Popeye 2** was a brave attempt, although not quite up to the strength of the original game. It was certainly better than the awful **Popeye 3**, which transplanted *Popeye* and friends into an intergalactic wrestling match.

The look and feel of the original *Popeye*, although stunning for the time, was not based on any specific technical decision. Instead, *King Features Syndicate*, the owners of the *Popeye* character, insisted that the on-screen representation of the character must closely match the original appearance even down to the colour and stripe of the socks. *Don Priestley* couldn't do this without making the characters in the game one third of the screen height. Interestingly though, this requirement seems to have been dropped for the second and third games. Why this should be the case when it would have been a deal-breaker for the first game remains a mystery.

Loosely based on **Donkey Kong**, **Popeye 2** used the standard *Popeye* plot whereby *Bluto* has kidnapped *Popeye*'s girl, *Olive Oyl*.
In his infinite wisdom, *Bluto* had decided that the best place to carry on his wicked designs with *Olive* was at the top of a building site scaffold. Consequently, *Popeye* wasn't having any of this and headed up the scaffolding to rescue her.
On his way up the scaffolding, he had to deal with other characters from the cartoons, including *Wimpy* — who had to be placated with hamburgers, *Swee'pea* — who got underfoot at inopportune times and other nastier characters that needed to be punched out with the help of the ubiquitous spinach. To make matters worse *Bluto* had also placed bombs in strategic places on the scaffolding which *Popeye* was required to defuse to continue.
For a game aimed at children, **Popeye 2** was pretty a difficult action-platform game. It wasn't bad, but then again it wasn't really that good either.

"Nice sprites do not a good game make. This type of game gets you on the cover of Crash! Not bad, just not great."
- Sinclair User, May 1991







CRASH 60% YOUR SINCLAIR 95% SINCLAIR 73%

Sim City

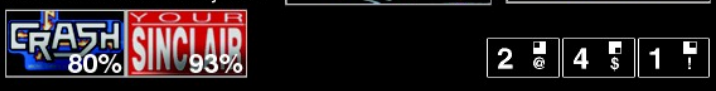
Infogrames
Antony R. Lill, Simon Butler

The Beginning Of A Long, Long, Line Of Games...

Towards the latter days of the 8-bit games industry, some games made the reverse jump from 16-bit beginnings back to the 8-bit machines. Only a few titles made the jump successfully; typically those with more gameplay than horsepower. **Lemmings** was one such game that almost made it to the *ZX Spectrum* intact (apart from dropping the number of *Lemmings* due to speed considerations). The classic game **Sim City** was another such title, and it made the transition to the *ZX Spectrum* virtually intact.

There can't be many gamers who are not familiar with the *Sim City* series of games. They have been updated virtually every two or three years since the inception of the series including three sequels/updates appearing on the *PC* and a whole raft of spin-off games, the most famous being *The Sims* series. *Will Wright*, the game's designer, is virtually a household name amongst gamers and is one of the most popular western game designers in the world today.

Sim City put the player in the god-like role of a city manager in charge of developing a city on a barren piece of land. The player was able to zone out regions as residential, commercial and industrial and could also build the infrastructure required to support the zoning.
The challenge of the game was to manage the different needs of the city. For example, keeping the populace happy by balancing industry needs and pollution, residential environments with amenities and maintaining a good transport infrastructure.
In addition to that, as the city grew in size the needs became more complex, including adequate police and fire protection, stadiums, ports and airports, as well as replacing aging facilities with more modern alternatives as they were invented became an important consideration.. Of course, managing the city and maintaining a positive tax flow would have been easier were it not for the ever present danger of a city-wide disaster, such as tornados, fire, flood, earthquake, plane crashes and monsters.
For the more evil-minded player, the ability to cause one of these disasters at will was just a simple menu choice away.

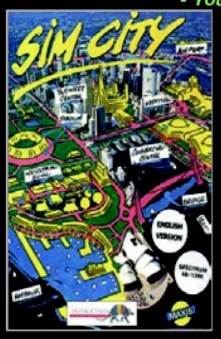


Year: 1990

48k



*"It ... will appeal to just about anybody - even my dad thought it was **'Quite good, I suppose'** and that's saying something!"*
- Your Sinclair, August 1990







2 @ 4 $ 1 !

Steg The Slug

Year: 1992 | 48k/128k



Codemasters Ltd.

Paul Griffiths, Mike Sanderson

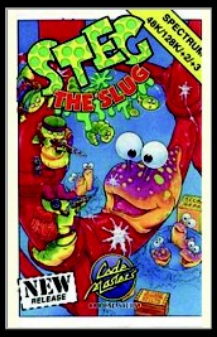
Don't Use The Salt...

Codemasters released **Steg The Slug**, a fairly peculiar game about a slug feeding its young. The authors of the game were responsible for many of other *Codemaster* cartoon-style hits such as some of the *Dizzy* series, the *Seymour* series, and the *CJ* series.

Despite the early review in *Sinclair User* in June of 1992, the game was not actually released until closer to Christmas, mainly due to the fact that the programmers apparently took an unexplained leave of absence during the development. This game was also previewed, but not reviewed in *Crash* magazine. Unfortunately *Crash* folded in April 1992 and was combined with *Sinclair User* (for seven issues while the logo shrank and disappeared from the cover) until that too folded exactly one year later.

Steg The Slug featured the player in the role of the eponymous hero *Steg*, who was responsible for raising his offspring, known as *T'yungunz*.
In each level, the player had to feed *T'yungunz* by catching small worms in bubbles that *Steg* could blow onto them. Once a worm was captured it began to float up to the top of the level where the *T'yungunz* eagerly awaited their food. *Steg* needed to be very careful when blowing these bubbles because if he held his breath for too long (indicated by a power bar) he would suffocate and die.
Unlike most characters in platform games, *Steg* was unable to jump. Instead, he could slide up walls and adhere to vertical and horizontal surfaces using his slug trail. This was often necessary to aid the path of the worm bubbles because there were often obstacles preventing their direct path to the *T'yungunz*.
There were some helpful power-ups that make the job easier, such as robotic legs, jet-packs, increased bubble power and the like, but this was still an incredibly difficult yet compelling game. However, **Steg The Slug** was also a perfect example of the kind of game that characterized the last years of the *ZX Spectrum* games industry. Evolutionary, but not revolutionary.

*"**Steg** is a spanky little slimey [sic] bubble of a game and I want to take it home!"*
- Your Sinclair, December 1992







YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 90%

Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles

Year: 1990 | 48k/128k

Image Works Ltd.
David Perry, Nick Bruty

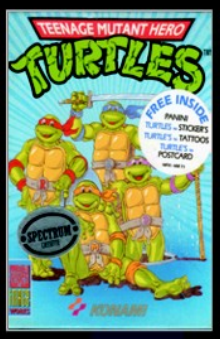
Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles... Remind Me... Why Couldn't We Call Them Ninjas?



*"[The enemies are] ...very reminiscent of the colourful mutants from **Dan Dare III**..."*
- Your Sinclair, January 1991

Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles was a no-brainer for a *ZX Spectrum* release given the huge overlap between the target market of the cartoon series and the fact that the average age of a *ZX Spectrum* owner had decreased. They were now viewed as toys and often treated as hand-me-downs from older brothers and sisters who had moved on to 'bigger and better' 16-bit things. Written by *David Perry*, long time *Mikro-Gen* programmer and later owner of *Shiny Software* (of *Earthworm Jim* and **MDK** fame), **Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles** was an accomplished and polished product.

Despite the waning 8-bit games industry, *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* sold an astonishing 420,000 copies in the first month of release. Even more astonishingly, it remained in a consistently high place in the software charts for the next six months after release.
This was remarkable because sales figures such as this were rare even during the peak of the industry. With an estimated four to five million *ZX Spectrum*s sold overall, this indicates a market penetration of just over 10%, and that's without even taking into account the number of computers that were no longer being used.







TMHT was an adventure/platform game in which the player was responsible for controlling the turtles as they fought against the evil *Shredder*. *Shredder* had been his usual evil self, this time kidnapping the lovely reporter, *April O'Neil*. The turtles needed to run around the streets of New York (shown as a top-down map) and jump down into the sewers or into a building to switch to a platform style beat'em-up. The player could then find upgraded weapons as well as hordes of nasties to take down including the archetypal end of level boss battles, until the ultimate confrontation at *Shredder*'s Technodrome.
TMHT was a fun game that capitalized on the double whammy of a popular children's toy and cartoon series and a well-liked computer system. Older players may have found it a little juvenile (and remarkably similar to **Dan Dare 3**) but it was still a notable game in its own right.

CRASH 80% | YOUR SINCLAIR 90% | SINCLAIR 94%

2 @ | 4 $ | 3 #

endnote

The idea for this book had been floating around my head for several years before I found myself in the position to be able to do anything about it.

However in mid-2005, I found myself with some time on my hands and a burning desire to somehow chronicle my memories of the good times spent with the humble Speccy, back in the good old 80's.

This book is not intended to be an all-inclusive history (it would have to be several thousand pages longer!). Instead, it should be viewed as a record of my personal journey through the world of Sinclair gaming, with the odd diversion here or there to cater to popular demands. Despite being handy with the intricacies of tape-to-tape kung-fu, I still did not get to play every game that was out there.

Still, with the availability of accurate emulators and ready access to huge archives of Spectrum games, it has been possible for me to relive old memories, and even catch up on those games I missed back in the day.

Anyway – enough wibbling on my part. It's been a hard slog writing this book... Like many things that seem fun at first, it proved to be more work than I anticipated. I doubt it would have even been completed were it not for the support I received from the Speccy community at **World of Spectrum**.

Thanks guys. I hope it was worth the wait. Especially this special edition.

* A note on the magazine scores included in this book: Where possible, I have pulled the scores from magazine reviews for each game. In cases where the review was not expressed as a percentage, or where it was presented as a collection of individual scores, I have converted to a percentage by either simple conversion, or in the latter case, averaging the individual scores followed by conversion.

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