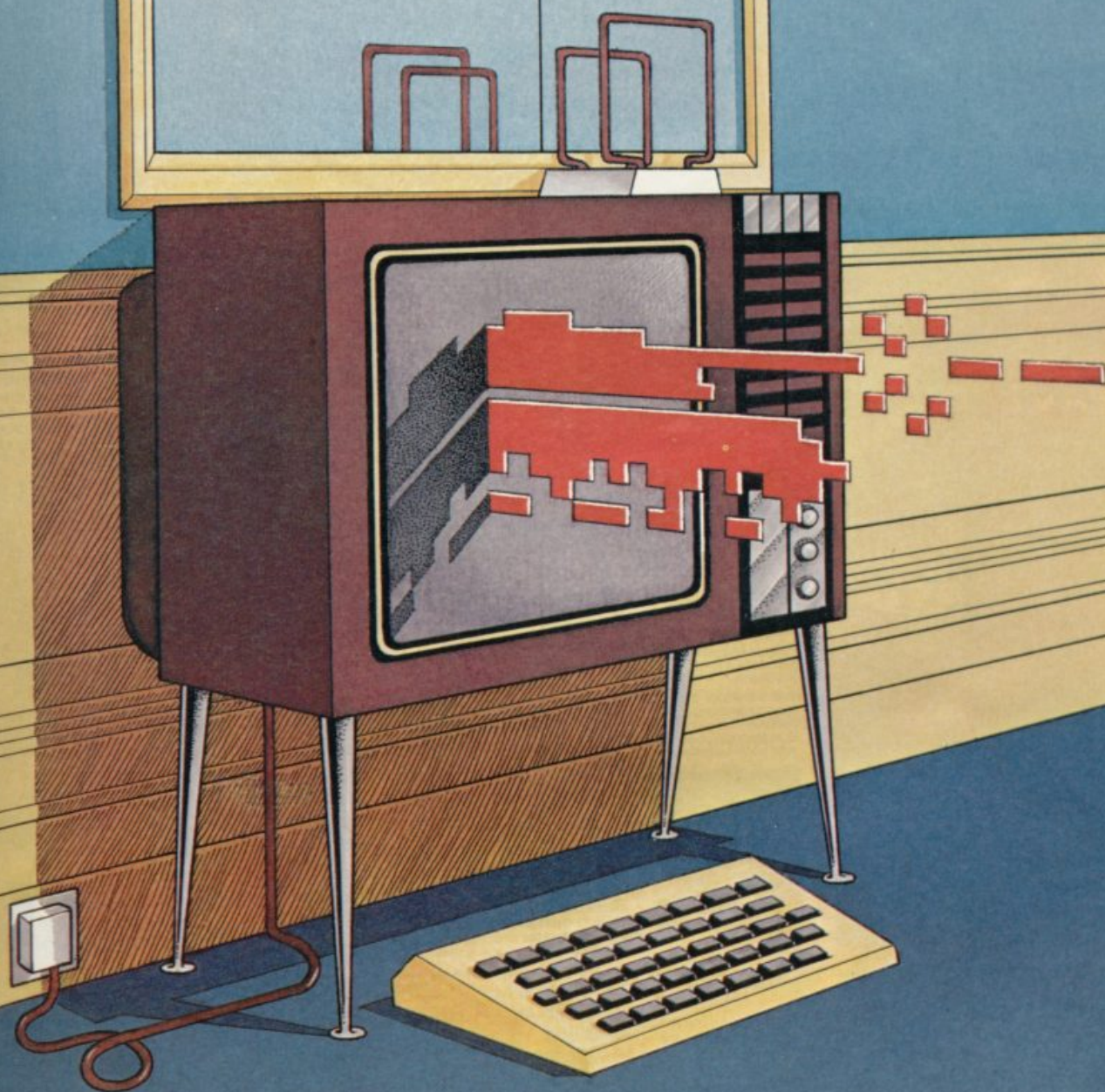


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*The second in our quarterly series
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Ad Astra

BEFORE you groan and shout "Not another space wars game", wait a moment. **Ad Astra** is a little out of the ordinary. Gargoyle Games clearly has put plenty of thought into this nightmare of inter-stellar mayhem. You are piloting a patrol craft through deep space, on the look-out for pirates and hostile aliens. That sounds familiar enough but the accompanying graphics put the first Gargoyle offering into a class of its own.

For a start, the pictures are very big. The game opens with a series of planets between which you must weave to reach open space; as they hurtle towards you they seem to fill the screen.

The 3-D effects extend even to your laser fire, which curls and splutters about the screen as you hurtle from side to side. The action is fast and furious and you can pilot your craft in any of eight directions.

At first, the sheer size of your ship is a problem. It seems impossible to avoid being trapped in the corner by a hail of missiles.

Ad Astra is a very welcome addition to the plethora of space games and on the strength of this Gargoyle is clearly a team to watch.

AD ASTRA
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston,
Cursor type, Interface II
Gilbert Factor: 8

The Atlas Assignment

IN AN ADVENTURE game, death usually results from carelessness, bad planning and timing or merely an excess of the gung-ho mentality. It can then become exasperating when all your careful work is erased at a stroke because an arcade section has been included which requires only manual dexterity as a survival skill.

The Atlas Assignment, written by Martyn Davis, author of *The Island*, is such a program, in the main following a pure text format but studded with a trio of arcade action sequences. There will no doubt be many players who enjoy those facets of the game as much as the puzzle-solving in the rest of it.

The full machine code game casts the player as a secret agent in pursuit of *Atlas*, a formidable spy who has somehow lifted the American nuclear defence plans and intends to sell them. The adventure will take you globe-trotting and, to be fair, the arcade portions are billed as shoot-outs. The remainder of the game follows a classic adventure pattern and a great deal of ingenuity and thought is required even to reach the first sudden death exercise.

You will need some understanding of map-work, sociability to obtain information, and plenty of time to figure it out. All the usual adventure facilities and commands are included, though it is not the complex kind of adventure in which speech is possible. Most of the characters are passive and do not interact in *Hobbit* or *Valhalla* style. If the test of an adventure is that you have to keep trying, **The Atlas Assignment** from Virgin Games will suit you.

ATLAS ASSIGNMENT
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Gilbert Factor: 7



Avenger

THERE ARE many variants of the classic arcade games available and it would take a game with considerable originality to cause any real excitement. **Avenger** from Abacus for any Spectrum is not one of them, using the Scramble format as its setting and the destruction of a presumably highly evil extra-terrestrial civilisation as its purpose.

The alien planet is mountainous and littered with supply bases, missile sites, atomic reactors and interceptor launch pads. Along that landscape you must manoeuvre your ship, protected by its five shields, and blow the aliens away before they succeed in blowing you away.

The ship is supplied with laser and bombs. There are five levels of difficulty, though the tasks remain the same, and movement is keyboard-based, with no joystick option. Action is two-dimensional and, though the machine code graphics are generally competent, the ship moves along rather jerkily.

The aliens are swift and deadly in a reasonably tough arcade clone but perhaps we may soon have games where humans will need to use intelligence and subtlety in peaceful dealings with other beings.

AVENGER
Memory: Any Spectrum
Price: £5.95
Gilbert Factor: 5

Basic Utilities

BASIC UTILITIES is the first product of a new software company, Jaysoft. It is a collection of five routines for the 16K and 48K Spectrum. The code, 3,856 bytes, stored at the top of memory is called by a **RAND USR** when needed, at which point you are presented with a menu. It will also work with a Micro-drive attached.

The routines are **REM FILL**, a routine which creates a **REM** at line 0 of any length or adds to it if it already exists. If line 0 is not a **REM**, no change is made. **VARDUMP** lists the current state of all the variables. **BLOCK DELETE** deletes a specified block of lines. **RENUMBER** works on **GOTO**, **GOSUB**, **RESTORE**, **LIST**, **RUN** and **LINE**.

TELESCOPE can shorten a Basic program in three ways — by deleting all **REM** lines, substituting variables for commonly-used line numbers, and by making separate lines into multi-statement ones. Each line is stepped through and **Y** or **N** is pressed to join it on to the previous one.

The program is slightly over-priced considering the other available programs on the market but is, nevertheless, a very useful collection.



BASIC UTILITIES
Memory: 16K
Price: £5.95
Gilbert Factor: 6



Blade Alley

STAR WARS appears to have been the main inspiration behind **Blade Alley**, in which you must fly your ion-driven interceptor along a defensive trench while avoiding or firing at the enemy craft hurtling towards you.

The three-dimensional effects and perspective of the game are realistic, with shadows under each craft adding that extra touch of sophistication, and the player's fighter vessel handles well on either the keyboard or joystick.

You have three lives to enable you to notch a score which might take you from the rank of space cadet to leader and eventually admiral.

The enemy craft prove difficult to hit and although it is possible to stay in the game by weaving your way between them, achieving an impressive score is a laborious and possibly discouraging task.

The game offers six screens, with varying backgrounds and additional hazards such as hopping aliens to increase the player's difficulties.

Blade Alley is produced by PSS, 452 Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry.

BLADE ALLEY
Memory: 48K
Price: £6.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 6

Byte

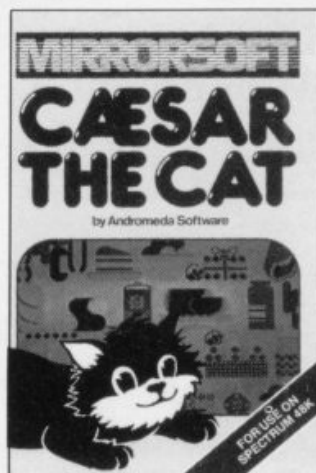
BYTE is an adventure game with a difference, according to CCS, which produced this offering. You play the role of a computer and move round a simple grid of rooms hunting for various circuits. There are seven levels of difficulty and you have statistics based on RAM, languages known, speed of operation and the like.

So far, so good, although the heavy-handed jocularity of it all raises more groans than laughs after a time, but there are other reasons why Byte is 'an adventure game with a difference'. For a start, it must rank as one of the slowest adventures written. It seems to be programmed almost entirely in Basic and the response time consequently is poor. Second, the program insists on going through a series of routines every time you type in a command, including an uninspired jingle, a listing of your character statistics, and a statement of what you can see. That all takes time, slowing the game to a truly awesome crawl.

The descriptions of rooms and their contents have a wonderful simplicity. They go something like this. 'You are in room 3,1 on level 1. You can see: Ark.' You then type in your command, such as 'o' for open or 'w' for west. The computer thinks about your letter, tells you what it means, and finally does something about it.

With all that and no graphics, CCS seems to have taken a perverse step backwards with its game; it lacks even the more basic elements of old-fashioned text-only adventures. The result is unlikely to be of use to anyone, except possibly as a cure for insomnia.

BYTE
Memory: 48K
Price: £6.00
Gilbert Factor: 3



Caesar the Cat

FANCY YOURSELF as a good mouser? If so, sharpen your computerised claws and get into the larder — the family has a plague of hungry mice and if you cannot move **Caesar the Cat** round the screen fast enough there will be no more fish for you.

Caesar is the guardian of four shelves of assorted food and its aim is not only to catch as many ravenous rodents as possible but also to beat the score clock counting down to zero at high speed.

Caesar must take the mice out of the larder door for the score to register. Easy? Not really, as there are jars around which, if knocked over, will reduce the score still further. There are three waves of mice. Items will disappear from the cupboard as the mice munch at them. Catch the full 30 and stores will be replenished — but only to attract more mice.

Caesar can be moved with convenient keys or there is a Kempston joystick option. The graphics are clear and in colourful cartoon style which may appeal to younger age groups. The game, from Mirrorsoft, is nevertheless likely to attract all the family.

CAESAR THE CAT
Memory: 48K
Price: £8.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 7

Castle Blackstar

ATTENTION all battle-weary adventurers. Once again the call has gone out for a real live hero to investigate the traps and treasure, monsters and magic of some dank, perversely unmappable castle in a forgotten corner of Fantasyland.

One ought to yawn, turn the lamp low, put out the griffin and go to bed, but for aficionados of secret chambers hedged about by impenetrable logic puzzles the delights of playing the game seemingly never flag.

If you were bored by the last fantasy adventure you played, **Castle Blackstar** is unlikely to excite you wildly. That said, the SCR team has produced a competent text-only adventure.

The computer accepts most of the usual commands and has a 200-word vocabulary.

A modest prize is offered to the first few adventurers to reach the bitter end and return the Orb of Artemis to its rightful place.

One welcome feature is the ease of movement round the castle and its environs. Andrew Cummins of SCR, says most of the problems are accessible independently of each other, so there is no need to spend days beating your brains out on one problem before you proceed to the next.

The program is apparently the first in a series of related quests. It remains to be seen whether players have the stamina to keep up with the series but **Castle Blackstar** should keep the peculiar minds of adventure freaks hyperactive for a month or so at least.

CASTLE BLACKSTAR
Memory: 48K
Price: £8.95
Gilbert Factor: 7

Chuckman

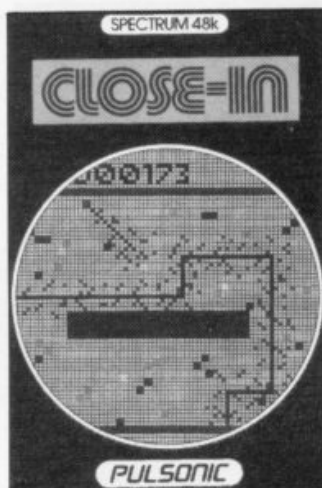
INSTRUCTIONS to games which appear on-screen should be clear and uncluttered, especially if they are there to act as some inducement to play. In **Chuckman** from Add-on for the 48K Spectrum they are guaranteed to give you a headache if you look at them for too long, as the densely-worded page is backed by a multi-coloured checkerboard which flashes and changes about twice a second.

That makes it difficult to absorb them without reaching for the aspirin. Never mind, that is the only criticism of an otherwise excellent program.

The Chuckman is a skateboarding bomb disposal expert who must search the winding paths of a huge maze to find a toolkit. With that he can defuse the ticking time-bomb located somewhere in the labyrinth. That is not his only problem, since he needs to find food to maintain his energy, wheelbarrows of sand to fill the pits which block the way, and roller skates to ward off the giant boots which threaten his progress. A shovel is also handy to hem in the stomping boots.

Instructions apart, Chuckman is a finely-crafted arcade-action program. The pixel graphics are smooth and well-designed, with a fast response to the keyboard commands. There is also a Kempston joystick option. The Chuckman is a quirky little figure who, if you stop moving him, will stand hands on hips and tapping his foot. There are various status indicators beside the main maze screen and a map is provided, though it will show only part of the full labyrinth and will drain energy if used. The game should have very broad appeal.

CHUCKMAN
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 8



Close-in

CLOSE-IN is one of those abstract games where you move round the screen drawing a line behind you, while your opponent does likewise. The object is to avoid colliding with your opponent's or your own trail and to cause your opponent to crash by surrounding him.

The version from Pulsonic offers a bare minimum of graphics — two simple lines generated by the players and a set of five mazes which can be superimposed to provide added difficulty.

That such a simple game should require a 48K machine seems extraordinary, even with five screen configurations and a number of skill levels.

The game can be played by two players or against the computer. Two players will have difficulty manipulating eight directional keys each on the same small keyboard and the solitary player may feel aggrieved by the apparent ability of the Spectrum to start again from a new position in mid-game.

There are better variations on the theme available and if Pulsonic is serious about selling the game, it should consider finding how to use a joystick with it at least.

CLOSE-IN
Memory: 48K
Price: £2.95
Gilbert Factor: 4



Colditz

ADVENTURE ADDICTS should find plenty to occupy them in **Colditz**, a well-constructed game from Phipps Associates. The aim is to escape from the infamous German prisoner-of-war camp and at the same time release an eminent scientist whose knowledge is vital to the allied war effort.

The castle is a complex labyrinth of rooms, courtyards, crypts and tunnels. The adventure is liable to be terminated abruptly at any time by the arrival of guards, falling to your death, or being electrocuted on the wire fence, and there are also a generous number of useful objects to be found such as a glass, a hacksaw and a crowbar.

It is essential to keep track of your movements, as well as what the various objects can achieve, if you are to have any chance of finding the correct escape route and managing to bring out the prisoner.

Colditz features graphics which do not add a great deal to the action but fortunately do not slow it, as each new picture reveals itself quickly and efficiently. There is a HELP command and a SAVE facility if you feel that escaping from Colditz cannot be achieved in one day. TAKE ALL is another useful command enabling you to pick up all the objects found in one place without having to type in the name of each.

Colditz is available from Phipps Associates, 172 Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT19 0SD.

COLDITZ
Memory: 48K
Price: £6.95
Gilbert Factor: 8



Di-lithium Lift

EVEN with the memory limitations of the 16K Spectrum, **Di-lithium Lift** is a slim offering. The aliens are guarding a vault of Di-lithium crystals, and in this distant relative of Pac-man you have to zig-zag about the screen, picking up crystals while avoiding the lasers of two droids.

The action may be fast but the display employs user-defined graphics rather than true high-resolution programming. The use of sound is rudimentary as well, with standard bleeps and simple scales; even Spectrum owners should expect something more sophisticated than that.

It is possible that Hewson is aiming the game at what is considered to be a younger market. If so, that might excuse the simple concept but not the lack-lustre presentation.

Di-lithium Lift might have been acceptable two years ago and with some advanced graphics programming it might make the grade today. As it is, it is a disappointment.



DI-LITHIUM LIFT
Memory: 16K
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 3

Ed-on

IN THESE DAYS of perspective graphics and complex simulations which tax the mind as well as the joystick fingers, a game like **Ed-On**, from Add-On Electronics, is a little disappointing.

It is billed as a car racing game in which the player steers his vehicle round a circuit accelerating and decelerating.

The object is to collect the maximum amount of dots while changing lanes to avoid the other car on the circuit. The other machine will do its best to collide with the player's. The circuit is a grid-maze and the vehicles are small UDG symbols. Steering is by the keyboard or you may use a Kempston joystick.

Five lives are allowed in each game. The difficulty increases as you become more successful and more opposing cars will appear after the first screen, making the action tougher and more dangerous — a kind of motorised Pac-man, in fact.

It is no state-of-the-art game and the graphic display offers little excitement. The program is fast, however, and the task set is difficult given this speed. At times it seemed as if the computer was cheating, as the enemy car would tend to leap across sections to meet the other.

Steering is easiest with a joystick, though the keyboard controls are simple and well-placed. Manual dexterity and reaction speed are the only qualities needed.

Even if that is all you want from a computer game, there are more interesting games available and it had no really addictive pull to it. All in all, an average program with nothing to raise it above so many others.

ED-ON

Memory: Any Spectrum
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 4



Energy 30,000

ENERGY 30,000 by Elm Computers for the 48K Spectrum transports you to the year 30000, where uranium stocks are diminishing and you have to collect pink tar — yes, pink — to fuel the reactors.

To help you in the task you have a bulldozer with which to push it. Various nasties try to prevent you doing so and usually succeed.

Part of the program was compiled with the Wye Valley Compiler and it shows. All the graphics are simple UDGs and move in low resolution. It is difficult to tell which parts were not compiled.

If the game is interesting in the first place a compiler is acceptable but in this case it makes a mediocre game into a fast mediocre game.



ENERGY 30,000

Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 3

Fantasia Diamond

MOST ADVENTURE players would agree that the more complex the program the better, and that, despite the aggravation and the desperate searching of Roget's *Thesaurus*, the solving of even the simplest tasks — simple that is to the uninvolved observer — can provide enormous satisfaction.

If you are a player who values such brain-numbing programs and do not mind plenty of hard work, **Fantasia Diamond** from Hewson Consultants is ideal. The huge diamond of the title was a family heirloom until it was purloined and taken to a vast fortress beyond the river. Boris the master spy has already failed to win it back and the task falls to you to recover it — and Boris as well, a straightforward plot with no easy solution.

The setting is a nebulous world where ghastly pixies rub shoulders with toy robots, where you journey from modern houses to magical underground cavern systems. You must eat and drink to survive and take care to use the relationships you develop with other characters to the full.

For, like *The Hobbit*, the others have lives of their own and will help only if they decide to do so. Complex language analysis is used and sentences can be entered in almost standard English. All the usual adventure conventions such as score, inventory and so on are available to the player. Speech has some effect on other characters and there is a useful repeat facility with which you can enter the same command time and again in the hope that people's attitudes will change.



Fred

IN **FRED**, from Quicksilver, which runs in 48K you are invited to guide the intrepid hero round such a dank and deadly charnel house. Fred journeys along the passageways by way of the keyboard or a Kempston joystick and ascends shafts by ropes provided conveniently.

The main aims are to collect as much loot as possible and also to find your way from the tomb. That is not a simple task, as the guardians are constantly on the prowl; some, like the ghosts, can pass through walls or teleport down the shafts.

The cartoon-style graphics are attractive and colourful, the passageways scrolling as **Fred** moves across or climbs the ropes. Motion is smooth and you can define keys to suit your taste. It is a game which takes ingenuity and care to get through and is novel in concept. If you shoot at anything which moves you will not survive for long without more ammunition.

Fred will not appeal to those seeking fast, furious, violent action but it is well-designed and fun to play, though it may not be addictive in the usual sense. Watch for flying mummies.

FANTASIA DIAMOND

Memory: 48K
Price: £7.95
Gilbert Factor: 7

FRED

Memory: 48K Spectrum
Price: £6.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 6

Glug Glug

DON YOUR diving suit, load your spear gun and prepare to do battle with the monsters of the deep. While you are down there, get rich quick by bringing up the treasure lying on the ocean floor. That is the basic story-line of **Glug Glug**, an arcade game by CRL for the 48K Spectrum.

Using the keyboard, Kempston or Protek joystick, the diver figure must be dropped to the sea bed as quickly as possible to pick up various items of plunder. The skill is in avoiding the animal life below the surface — piranhas, sharks, giant squid, jellyfish and the like, all of which are looking for a fast meal. If you are not fast enough with the gun and winch then it is Davey Jones' locker for you.

Instructions are laid out clearly on the insert and the graphic display is smooth and fast. The sound is suitably watery and when you are caught by the fish the diver vanishes with the requisite glug-glug. There are 32 skill levels according to the cassette insert. After level seven things hot up considerably and you will be lucky to get the whole way through.



GLUG GLUG
Memory: 48K Spectrum
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston or Protek
Gilbert Factor: 6



Harry Goes Home

AN INGENIOUS idea saves **Harry Goes Home** from Pulsonic from being altogether negligible. Written in Basic, the program features primitive graphics and slow action but it provides an absorbing game which calls for some fine strategic thinking.

Harry has for some reason to cross a minefield, picking up a key on his way, to enter his house.

The mines are not shown but at the top of the screen after each move is a report telling you whether there are one, two or no mines beside Harry.

With care and forethought, it is possible to pick one's way through the mines but getting Harry home leads only to another more difficult screen with more mines.

At the end of each screen, you can press a key to see where the hidden mines were. You are also told how many moves you made before reaching home or being blown up.

Clear presentation adds appeal to a simple game which makes good use of the response potential of the computer.

HARRY GOES HOME
Memory: 48K
Price: £2.95
Gilbert Factor: 6

HURG

HURG is not a game but a games designer. Melbourne House claims it is the most powerful game design program ever presented on any microcomputer. That may be so, and it may not. It is certainly a competent program to help you design arcade games but it necessarily limits the scope you have. You will not be able to create a new version of Manic Miner or Atic Atac. You will not even be able to emulate the Melbourne House Penetrator. You will, however, after many hours of practice, be able to create your own version of Donkey Kong or Galaxians without too much difficulty.

There are several impressive features to the program. First, it is menu-driven, like the Quicksilver Games Designer. On loading, you are presented with a series of choices on the screen. Choosing 'Play Game' allows you to test whatever game on which you are working. Choosing 'Edit Game' will take you to a new menu with more choices, like writing a title page or specifying conditions for proceeding to a new stage of the game — e.g., when all the space invaders are destroyed.

The most striking feature of the program is that it can be controlled almost exclusively by a joystick. All you have to do is use a Kempston and shift the cursor round the screen until you find the option you want. Then you hit the fire button and the choice is made. It sounds simple, doesn't it? It is — and it is not.

There is a fundamental problem with such a program. That is not the fault of Melbourne House, which has produced as good an arcade game designer as any on the market. The problem is that such a program can be only an idiot slave.

If you do not have a clear, detailed concept of the game you want to create you will

have an unplayable mess. Good games do not depend on good programming but in the first instance on good ideas. At some stage or other we all buy a turkey. It may have wonderful graphics, be very fast and all the rest of it, but if the idea is not good, the program cannot save it. A turkey may have beautiful plumage but it remains a turkey.

What **HURG** can do is eliminate much of the tedium of programming — it still takes a long time to create a game but nowhere as long as it would starting from scratch — but what it will never do by itself is give you the originality and inspiration of top games designers.

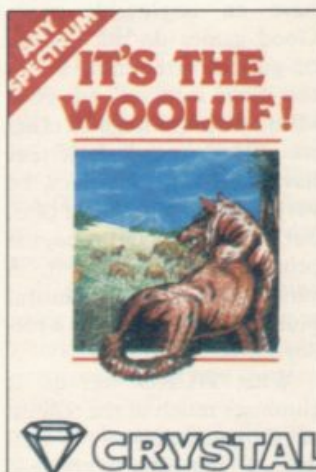
If you want to get to grips with the problems facing designers, **HURG** will help you by removing the drudgery from programming.

You may even make money. Melbourne House is offering cash prizes for the best games created with **HURG** but if you want a game up and running in two hours, forget it. **HURG** is good but as yet there is no commercial substitute for inspiration.

The program is fully-documented with a 36-page booklet and three example games showing some of the features of the program.



HURG
Memory: 48K
Price: £14.95
Joystick: Kempston
Interface II
Gilbert Factor: 8



It's the Wooluf

IT'S THE WOOLUF is another of those infuriating sheepdog games where you have to guide your energetic collie round the fields, rounding up the sheep and steering them safely into the pen.

Crystal Computing has provided all the usual hazards — a river, woody copses, and the big bad wolf which sneaks along between the clumps of trees waiting to jump out and devour your dwindling flock.

Although it is a fast-moving implementation, there seems to be no particular reason for releasing another version of an already much-imitated game. Since there is no joystick option, nor any choice of control keys provided, **It's the Wooluf** seems unlikely to stand its ground against products already on the market.

On the other hand, jaded shepherds with portable power units may derive some light relief from the program.



IT'S THE WOOLUF
Memory: 16K
Price: £6.50
Gilbert Factor: 5

Jericho Road

JERICO ROAD is that rare thing among programs, an adventure with a moral purpose. You have been transported back to biblical times and must make a journey to Jericho.

On the way you encounter characters from the Bible and participate in stories such as the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Written by a minister — the cassette insert does not indicate from which denomination, so perhaps we can regard this as an ecumenical adventure — the program seems to have a feel for the times.

You can even pray for guidance, which makes a change from the usual adventurer's despairing cry for help and at least some of the hints are in the form of biblical references, sending you flipping through the pages of the good book.

Unfortunately the vocabulary is a little limited and the computer was erratic about accepting standard abbreviations such as W for west.

To compensate, there are a few simple graphics to enliven the text from time to time.

There are two versions, one for novices and one for more advanced players.

If you do not know much about the Bible you had better try the simple version first, or you will probably spend more time languishing in a Roman jail than proceeding with your pilgrimage.

Jericho Road is a gentle, original and enjoyable adventure. How far it will appeal to customers used to more bloodthirsty fare is another matter but it may prove a more digestible alternative to the weekly school divinity period. It is available from Shards Software.

JERICO ROAD
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.75
Gilbert Factor: 7



Jet Set Willy

MANIC MINER was one of last year's classic Spectrum games and now programmer Matthew Smith has brought Willy back again in an equally zany sequel, **Jet Set Willy**. Willy is living the decadent life after striking it rich down the mine but his housekeeper revolts after one party too many and will not let Willy go to bed until he has cleared all the mess.

So you have to guide the debauched playboy round his enormous mansion full of lethal traps and the strange blend of domestic and diabolic mayhem we might expect from Smith on previous form.

It is worth the initial trouble. The graphics are clear, fast-moving, and varied, depicting ghosts, mad monks and animated toilet seats with equal smoothness and precision. Tactics need to be varied as well; only quick reactions will save you from the predatory security guards, whereas forethought is required to negotiate your way through the hazards of the giant Metatree or the unspeakable menace in the kitchens.

Software Projects offers a case of champagne to the first person to solve the game.

JET SET WILLY
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Joystick: AGF, Protek, Kempston, ZX, Soundstik
Gilbert Factor: 9

Krakatoa

DO NOT let the title of **Krakatoa** from Abbex mislead you into assuming that the volcano will play a large part in the game, which is essentially a chopper attack/rescue format.

As the pilot of a well-armed helicopter in the Java Seas, you will have to overcome a number of obstacles to bring the hapless civilians of Volcanic Island to safety at your base.

Your prime task is to protect a supertanker from the multiple waves of V1 flying bombs which threaten the ship. Submarines also attack from beneath the waves, leaving floating sailors to be rescued.

In the brief interludes between each assault you may also find time to over-fly the spewing magma of the volcano and attempt to rescue the villagers by winning them up. The chopper will need re-arming and fuelling at various times and you lose precious time in that way as the tanker is undefended in the interim.

Abbex has produced a slick and compulsive arcade game with clear, steady graphics and a fast-moving and difficult scenario. In addition, the lower screen contains long-range radar and other status indicators. Movement of the chopper is by keyboard only, which is perhaps the only major flaw in the program, apart from the brief screen display explaining the movement keys.

There are no printed instructions on the insert. Nevertheless, it is a quality game for the 48K Spectrum, highly-addictive and entertaining. You will face many problems in deciding priorities and your flying ability will be pushed to the limit.

KRAKATOA
Memory: 48K Spectrum
Price: £5.95
Gilbert Factor: 8

Letterfont

LETTERFONT from Allanson Computing is a utility program which will give you up to six type-styles on a 48K Spectrum. There is also the option to design your own. The type-styles available are Countdown, a modern hi-tech type face, italic, type-face similar to that of an old-style typewriter, bold, gothic and sync, based on the type-style of the Sinclair logo.

The program can load any or all of those and works by altering the system variable CHARS at addresses 23606 and 23607. They are used to point to the character set, normally held in ROM.

When you want to design your own type-style you are presented with an 8 × 8 grid, as in the Horizons tape, and can use either one of the defined characters or start from scratch. You can also copy styles from one set to another. Details are included to save the styles and then use them in your programs.

The idea of having different characters is not new but this is a reasonable implementation; only three of the six sets will probably be of any use but the number you can create is infinite.



LETTERFONT
Memory: 16K
Price: £4.95
Gilbert Factor: 8



Master Toolkit

MASTER TOOLKIT by OCP for the 16K/48K Spectrum is a collection of 27 routines to make programing easier. The routines include a clock, with alarm, which can be displaying the time continually, even when back in Basic, and routines to delete, re-number lines, find, list or substitute a given string for another string or variable and display a list of variables. You can delete all REM statements, lower RAMTOP and print the amount of free memory.

The useful routines are Trace, where each line number is displayed as it is executed and ON ERROR GOTO and BREAK, where when the program stops running and tries to print a report code, i.e., when BREAK is pressed, a jump is made to a specific line.

The Pack routine squeezes as much as possible into multi-statement lines, taking note of IFs, REMs and GOTOs.

You are also given 10 programmable function keys, which can be used from Basic. It is very comprehensive and worth buying if you do much programming.

MASTER TOOLKIT
Memory: 16K
Price: £9.95
Gilbert Factor: 7



Mazecube

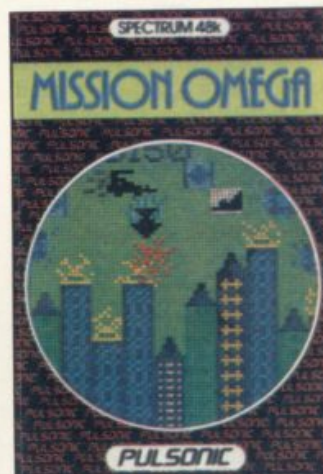
MAZECUBE for the 48K Spectrum by PAL Software is a new idea in maze games. The maze covers the six sides of a cube and there are 48 pound notes which the little man has to pick up. When he picks up a note a gate blocks his path at that point. The number of paces taken to pick up all 48 are counted and the winner is the one with the least. To make things more interesting there are 24 mazes, plus one for practice.

As he moves round the maze you can rotate it to view it from different sides and the man also changes profile. To help you recognise him the instructions include a cube which can be cut out to make a maze man.

It is a well-implemented idea. It would have been marginally better if the cube could have been bigger but overall it is well-thought-out. The game is written entirely in Basic, which shows you do not necessarily need machine code if the idea is right.



MAZECUBE
Memory: 48K
Price: £6.95
Gilbert Factor: 6



Mission Omega

MOST PEOPLE will probably have played a version of Mission Omega under some other name, such as City Bomber or Blitz. From an aircraft which flies a little lower each time it crosses the screen, you must flatten the buildings below to avoid crashing into them as you lose altitude gradually. In this version, you must shoot horizontally at the meteors; enemy aircraft also complicate a pilot's task. Points are scored for each building, meteor or aircraft destroyed.

Some effort has been made to enliven and improve this now rather tired scenario. You can determine the level of play by changing the speed of your aircraft, the height of the buildings, and the number of meteors and enemy aircraft. When you crash, a damage report is issued and a dirge is played. Even at the fastest speed, the action is slow and flickery and the graphics are scarcely impressive, with the buildings looking more like pencils than elegant skyscrapers.

Mission Omega is distributed by Warwick Distribution, 3 Standard Road, Park Royal, London NW10 6EX.

MISSION OMEGA
Memory: 48K
Price: £2.95
Gilbert Factor: 4

Moon Buggy

MOSQUITO-LIKE aliens swirl above your armoured car as you bounce your way across the pitted surface of some distant moon. Armour-piercing missiles home-in from the sides and all you can do is to keep firing and drive with the utmost care in **Moon Buggy** for any Spectrum. The game will be familiar to high-scoring arcade aces as a tough variant of the shoot-'em-up space games.

The buggy is meant to be a slow tracked vehicle fitted with gizmos which will hurl the machine into the air, enabling it to avoid the craters and cracks. If the tank falls into a hole the wheels will fall off and you have lost one of your five lives. For protection the buggy fires shots up and sideways. The aliens become progressively smarter and there are 16 types to contend with on eight screens.

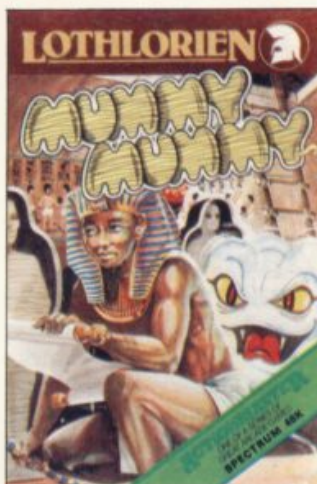
The sprite graphics are smooth, well-designed, with brilliant colours. Action is fast and edgy, timing being very important once the player attempts to drive away.

It makes sense to find a wide, flat place to stop and fight it out, risking driving only when there are few aliens remaining.

A good score can be run up in that way, whereas travelling is extremely difficult and hazardous. The cassette instructions are clear but the trouble is they are incorrect. To load you must LOAD-""CODE and that all-important instruction has been bungled on the insert. That is a pity, as Moon Buggy is an exciting game, though the format remains fundamentally the same throughout. If you are an arcade freak you will enjoy the Visions program even if you curse because of falling into too many craters.

MOON BUGGY

Memory: Any Spectrum
Price: £6.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 6



Mummy Mummy

THE OBJECT of **Mummy Mummy** is to bury yourself. You are an Egyptian mummy rudely awakened from the slumber of centuries by archaeologist Mad Clive. Now you must wander through your pyramid seeking the mystic cartouches which hold the key to your burial rites.

The screen shows a cross-section of the pyramid, which consists of a series of tunnels connected by ladders. The tunnels are inhabited by monsters and ghosts which you must trap by digging holes for them to fall through. They in their turn will try to block your progress by cornering you.

Although the game is challenging, you need a large number of cartouches to win and the mechanics of running up and down ladders and digging holes become tedious after a time. It is a pity Lothlorien could not have introduced more variety into the game, as the initial idea was inventive.



MUMMY MUMMY

Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Gilbert Factor: 6



Orion

YOUR FIRST encounter with **Orion**, from Software Projects for the 48K Spectrum, will be crucial in deciding whether you want to continue with the game. The laser rifle sound which presumably is meant to encourage you to enter play is excruciating, as is much of the noise during the action. Warning — switch out any amplifier you may be using.

The setting, at least as described on the insert, is vaguely galactic, your mission being to rescue 100 of your Beta androids from the clutches of Nedab, a space fiend, and his green Zygon guards who are also aided and abetted by purple power guzzlers. There are 25 grid-shaped caverns through which you must drive your Orion buggy, collecting four frog-like androids from each. You will be destroyed if you come into contact with the Zygons, though the buggy has force shields for protection. Movement is by the keyboard or Kempston or Soundstik joysticks.

The program is, in fact, a Pac-man variant, not offering much of any real originality, though the game is well-made and colourful. The graphics can be confusing at times, especially if you have to use the family's back-up monochrome set, and it is all too easy to mix up who you are, who they are and where you are. Despite the professional production, the concept is well-worn and will appeal mainly to inveterate maze-runners hopelessly addicted to guzzling ghosts.

ORION

Memory: 48K
Price: £6
Joysticks: Kempston or Soundstik
Gilbert Factor: 5



Paratroopers

A NUMBER of computer games are firmly grounded on the pleasures of zapping anything which moves and as long as the enemy is represented as Martians or monsters, nobody minds too much. **Paratroopers**, however, makes no attempt to disguise its warlike theme.

The object is to prevent a swarm of paratroopers landing by firing your anti-aircraft gun at the helicopters from which they jump or at the paratroopers.

If you allow three paratroopers to land either side of you, a tank will appear and blow you to smithereens.

The graphics and explosive effects of **Paratroopers** are extremely effective but so much realism can be regarded as a disadvantage. The storyline also lacks variety, so that however much you like lining up things in your sights and firing — shooting at paratroopers becomes monotonous in the long run. Produced by Rabbit Software, 380 Station Road, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 2DE.



PARATROOPERS

Memory: 48K
Price: £5.99
Joystick: Protek
Gilbert Factor: 4

Pedro

THE 3D perspective style of graphics so cleverly demonstrated in Ant Attack is bound to breed offshoots. **Pedro** from Imagine for the 48K Spectrum is in a similar mould, though the graphics are not so complex and the theme not so absorbing or original. The scene is a carefully-tended garden in Old Mexico where Pedro the gardener has created a fine flower garden. The quality of the blooms is such that all the animals in the area sneak in to browse on them and Pedro stands guard to protect his work from their ravages.

He can choose either to jump on them with his boots or try to block their way with bricks and compost, convenient stacks of which are placed around the walled precinct. A shady tramp will appear now and then in an attempt to steal seeds from Pedro's store. He, too, has to be driven off if the garden is to be preserved intact, for Pedro can re-seed the flower beds with his stock if he can find the time.

Rats, ants, cats and stags assail poor Pedro and he must move very fast to keep his score mounting, since a clock is also ticking away the seconds. The dogs even lift their legs to the plants.

Pedro is moved by the keyboard or by a range of joystick options, though the keyboard was difficult to co-ordinate given the speed of action. The graphics are attractive but flickery at times and it will take the player a time to get used to the system of movement. The theme may not have as broad an appeal as more aggressive games but the program is of excellent quality, requiring practice and skilful handling to attain high scores.

PEDRO

Memory: 48K

Price: £5.50

Joysticks: Fuller, Sinclair, Kempston, AGF, Protek, Arrow keys

Gilbert Factor: 7



Sorcery

ARCADE ACTION is combined with a scenario reminiscent of many adventure games in **Sorcery** from Virgin Games. Assuming the role of the last great sorcerer still at liberty, you are travelling to Stonehenge in an attempt to rescue three captive fellow sorcerers before the evil Necromancer turns them all to stone. Flying is among the sorcerer's magical skills and mastering his movement is one of the challenges.

Each screen represents a different section of the journey — woods, wastelands, castle, river and so on — and as the sorcerer exits from one scene it scrolls to the next. Various hazards pursue him; an encounter with any of those reduces the sorcerer's strength.

What with the time factor, encounters with demons, and the possibility of falling into the river and drowning, it is difficult to get anywhere near Stonehenge, a full 15 screens away, let alone arrive with the correct equipment to foil the wicked Necromancer. The attempt is addictive and lively graphics provide an appropriate atmosphere.

Sorcery is from Virgin Games, 61-63 Portobello Road, London W11 3DD.

SORCERY

Memory: 48K

Price: £5.95

Gilbert Factor: 7

Special Operations

THERE is a game called **Squad Leader**, a board war-game where players fight out small platoon-level World War Two operations with cardboard counters and a set of very complex rules.

While **Special Operations** is obviously not based on **Squad Leader**, the **Lothlorien** game has a similar setting and clearly belongs to the tradition of board games requiring strategic thought.

In **Special Operations** you must choose a small team of commandos to complete one of seven missions centred on a top secret enemy compound.

You may be required to photograph the compound from a distance or to mount a full-scale operation to sabotage whatever evil weapon is being produced there.

The members of your team will have two special skills — one you know immediately and the other you can find by interviewing likely candidates before the mission begins, although there is not sufficient time to interview everybody.

Which characters you choose is a vital part of the game, as you will need to select those skills which best suit the mission you have chosen.

Because of the variety of personnel from which to choose, **Special Operations** has a role-playing flavour about it. The test of a good role-playing game is how far it enables you to succeed by entering into character rather than thinking all the time about the rules. **Special Operations** seems to achieve that within the confines of a computer-moderated game.

The scenarios begin by having you parachuted into a heavily-wooded area near the enemy compound. You will move round the grid-like map avoiding or fighting the German patrols until you reach your objective. The maps

may be inaccurate. All you can be sure of is what you can see immediately you.

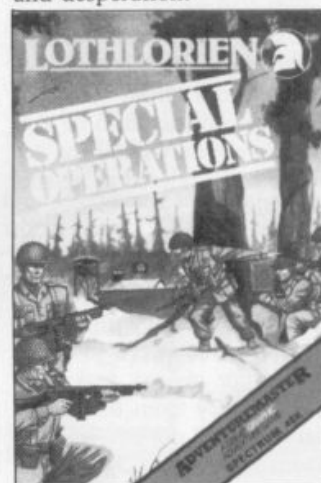
The program has a separate combat routine. A map is drawn on the screen showing your position and you choose targets for your men and manoeuvre them about the terrain using the available cover to protect them.

All kinds of tactics are possible at that stage. You can try outflanking the enemy or pinning them down with covering fire while sending your men into the open to attack.

Special Operations is not a fast-moving, all-action game. It requires imagination and careful planning to play well but for those who enjoy a more thoughtful game the experience is rewarding.

The seven scenarios are slightly different each time you play, as is the range of characters available. Alternatively, you can use the Save Game option to keep the same team and set-up for a sustained campaign working through all seven scenarios in order.

Lothlorien has produced a welcome addition to the range of strategy war-games available and deserves praise for its success in creating the proper atmosphere of stealth and desperation.



SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Memory: 48K

Price: £5.95

Gilbert Factor: 8



Spectasort

SPECTASORT for the 16K/48K Spectrum is a companion program to Spectadraw. It can either be used on its own to generate permutations or MERGED on a 48K machine with Spectadraw to use its predictions.

Using a statistical method it generates 10 eight-from-10 permutations from the 14 matches considered to be the most likely draws and the 10 matches considered to be the least likely.

With any program of this kind it is anyone's guess whether the method will win more money than a pin and a blindfold. If it were so good the author would make so much money from the pools that he would not need to sell cassettes.

SPECTASORT

Memory: 16K
Price: £9.95
Gilbert Factor: 4

Supercode

SUPERCODE for the 16K/48K Spectrum by CP Software is aptly named. What else could you call a collection of 102 machine code programming aids? Details of each routine are given in the instructions, including the start addresses, so that you can use them in your programs. Eighty-eight of the routines are re-locatable.

Many of the routines are useful in games writing, letting you scroll in eight directions in high- or low-resolution or the attributes. Other routines produce a number of sounds and there are also six ways of protecting a program, including ON ERROR, GOTO and ON BREAK GOTO.

All the usual toolkit type of routines are available, block delete, remkill, compress and two kinds of re-number, plus other useful utilities such as hex-dec converters, hex loader, tape head reader and many more. There is even one which accents letters.

There are one or two omissions, such as trace, but it must be the most comprehensive collection available. Even Microdrive users are not forgotten, as there is a routine included to save the whole thing to cartridge.

CODE TOOL KIT SUPER RE-NUMBER MACHINE CODE
DOL KIT 2 BYTE CONVERT MACHINE CODE
T REMKILL CONDENSE MACHINE CODE
ERROR GOTO MACHINE CODE
ER MACHINE CODE
MACHINE CODE TOOL KIT
E CODE TOOL KIT
DOL KIT VARIABLES
DOL KIT 24-LINE PRINT
IR DRAW MACHINE CODE
MACHINE CODE TOOL KIT
E CODE TOOL KIT
E CODE TOOL KIT
T RECORD SOUND MACHINE CODE
RACTER SOUND MACHINE CODE
T PROGRAM MACHINE CODE
MACHINE CODE TOOL KIT
DOL KIT EXPAND MACHINE CODE
MACHINE CODE TOOL KIT
E CODE TOOL KIT
E CODE TOOL KIT
T CHECKER BOARD MACHINE CODE
C CODE IS MACHINE CODE
MACHINE CODE TOOL KIT
E CODE TOOL KIT
T STRINGS TO UPPER CASE MACHINE CODE



SUPERCODE

Memory: 16K
Price: £9.95
Gilbert Factor: 8



3D Lunattack

YOU KNOW the story. They need some poor sap to pilot the latest Z5 Luna Hover Fighter through hordes of enemy tanks and aircraft and missiles on a suicide mission to destroy the aliens' base.

The screen shows the view from your cockpit — a bleak, dark landscape teeming with hostile craft. At the bottom of the screen there is an array of instruments — radar, laser beams, missiles, shields, temperature gauge and the like. The controls are difficult to handle and of the type where you lose position rapidly through having to over-correct continually. A joystick is probably vital but it is difficult to survive long enough to find how to use even that with any skill.

That is clearly one for the cognoscenti, the experienced veterans of shoot-'em-up programs, and Hewson Consultants proudly calls it the latest and most difficult in its Seiddab saga. To go with the game there is a taped pep-talk and briefing from your laconic commanding officer.

If your fingers are used to coping with the alien hordes you might get something from this. Newcomers and klutzes had better go elsewhere for death or glory.

3D LUNATTACK

Memory: 48K
Price: £7.95
Gilbert Factor: 6

Timebomb

IN SPITE of simple graphics and the unforgivable way in which it massacres the well-loved *Für Elise* by Beethoven, **Timebomb** is likely to win an enthusiastic following among those who enjoy an entertaining and novel game.

On a screen representing a grid of blue squares you must guide the hero Cedric towards a series of six bombs in time to prevent them exploding. Each bomb is set to explode after 30 seconds and as soon as one is defused another appears at a random place on the screen. You score points as you pass over the squares and lose one of your three lives whenever a bomb explodes.

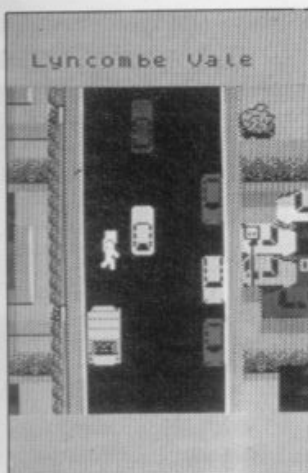
Adding to the complexity of the plot are bonus points to be gained from picking up flags or reaching a bomb quickly, and hazards to be avoided such as skulls and boots. What really makes the game interesting is the way in which the blue squares disappear once Cedric has stepped on them, making it impossible to go back over the same route. There is also a scrolling facility enabling you to line up Cedric with a bomb without losing any of his squares, as well as a wrap-around facility which allows you to go off the edge of the screen and re-appear at the opposite end rather than go to the trouble of crossing it.

As the bombs tick away, snap decisions must be taken as to which route is the quickest, safest and most productive of points, while nimble fingers are needed to guide Cedric safely and smoothly to his target.

Timebomb appears to have found the proper balance for an amusing and addictive game. It is produced by CDS Micro Systems.

TIMEBOMB

Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 7



Trashman

IT IS a tough life working on the bins in the excellent **Trashman** from New Generation. The arcade game simulates a day in the life of a dustman as he collects the rubbish bins of suburbia and empties them into the dustcart. Unfortunately there is a time limit on each series of jobs, indicated by a decreasing bonus score. When it reaches zero, the residents complain about you and you get the sack.

The screen displays a realistic view of small-town side streets with pretty red-brick houses in 3-D perspective. When you reach the top of the screen the display moves to the next section of road.

The race against time would be difficult enough without all the extra hazards. If you walk on the grass you lose bonus points fast and there is traffic to avoid when you cross the road. The driver has a mind of his own and will not wait if you are slow, but drives on, forcing you to run after him. There are also vicious dogs which leap out to bite your ankles and slow you.

You can increase your bonus by chatting to friendly residents who may give you tips.

TRASHMAN
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston,
Cursor, ZX Interface
Gilbert Factor: 8

Tribble Trubble

SOMEWHERE in the remote reaches of the galaxy, on the backward and barren planet Noom, Brian Skywalker, space shepherd extraordinaire, is having a spot of trouble with his tribbles. Tribbles are engaging but maddening items of alien livestock which will not stay where you put them and have no concept of personal safety.

That is a pity, as almost every other lifeform on Noom thinks that tribbles make a very tasty snack. In **Tribble Trubble** from Software Projects, Brian's Noom-rovers, full of captured tribbles, has broken down at the foot of Firebug mountain and, somehow or other, you must help him herd his flock to safety through five screens of hazards. That is no mean task, as while you are digging for gems and bridging the waterfall with rocks to provide your means of escape, those tribbles are wriggling out of your ship and have to be rounded-up and stowed back in the hold. Otherwise, the firebugs will nip down for some fast food and you will be out of business.

The program features attractive, fast graphics and a series of complex and taxing problems which encourage you to return again and again to the game. You can use either the keyboard or a Kempston joystick for movement and there is a full demonstration mode at the beginning of the game, coupled with entertaining music. **Tribble Trubble** is a highly amusing and original arcade-style game. It demands a great deal from the player but gives good value and is a refreshing change from zapping aliens.

TRIBBLE TRUBBLE
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 8



Trom

IF YOU thought **Trom** might bear some resemblance to the film of almost the same name, forget it.

The cassette insert has a confusing tale of collecting bits while avoiding pixels and nibbles. There are some bouncing bytes knocking around as well.

It seems dK'Tronics could not think of any remotely credible background for what proves to be a thoroughly uninspiring game.

Briefly, you have to run round the screen picking up red blobs — 'bits' — and carry them to a fiery furnace. The 'bytes' look like purple bars and rebound from the walls. Other features try to track you down and shoot you.

The game is easy to play and there are three levels of difficulty. Successive screens appear to produce only more of the same and the only positive feature is a facility for choosing which keys you use for the controls.

Unbelievably, there appears to be no provision for the use of a joystick.

dK'Tronics has produced many good games in the past. **Trom** is certainly not one of them.

TROM
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Gilbert Factor: 4

TT-S

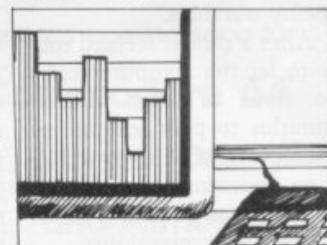
TT-S from Timedata is a collection of five programs for the 16K/48K Spectrum, designed to make life easier for programmers. It was written originally by Timedata programmers for their use.

GAMMA is 4,410 bytes of re-locatable code which give you an extra 10 keywords and also prevent you entering NEW or deleting a line accidentally. The extra keywords are AUTO, which generates line numbers automatically; RENUMBER; block DELETE; MOVE, FIND a string; TRACE on and off; FREE, the number of free bytes; VARIABLE dump; and HELP, which lists the new keywords.

To enter one of the new commands Symbol Shift and 0 are pressed to change to a T cursor, followed by the relevant key. The program can be used with a Microdrive.

SCREEN is a useful high-resolution drawing program with all the usual commands, such as fill and text insertion, but excludes circle. UDG displays six UDGs in an enlarged 3 × 2 block. As you change them you can also see the real size display change.

TAPE is a standard tape head reader which gives details of the type of program, name, length and auto-run line number. RAM is a memory test program which tests each bit in each byte of user RAM, including the screen. The collection has something for everyone and is well worth buying.



TT-S
Memory: 16K
Price: £7.95
Gilbert Factor: 8

Wilfred

MILITARY strategy games should be complex and well-devised if they are to satisfy war-gamers and should enable the player to develop tactical skills. Programs like Johnny Reb and Apocalypse are examples which demonstrate those qualities. Regrettably, **Wilfred the Hairy, Olaf the Hungry** from Microbyte does not fulfil those requirements and left the reviewer wondering why the game has been produced in such an apparently unfinished state.

The intention of the programmer seems to have been to create a world-wide, map-based conflict between two armies captained by the aforementioned heroes. The computer acts as one and the player takes on the role of the other.

You may move your "piece", drawn as a rather sketchy warrior, across the continents, returning when your ammunition is exhausted to your equally sketchy base. There are no easily-distinguishable screen prompts to show when it is your turn and instructions are very limited.

It really seems as if the computer is hogging all the play, leaving you a few brief moments in which to move round the board and deposit flag markers to show your territory. There is no effective combat sequence, except a small graphics window which displays sea fights using a movable cannon and enemy warships.

After a time it seemed easier to let the computer carry on alone as there was no stimulus to play and no excitement or skill if you did. It is an undistinguished and tedious game offering little originality or playability.

WILFRED
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.50
Gilbert Factor: 2



Zig-Zag

AS Pamela Stephenson once warbled on *Not the Nine O'Clock News*: "Nice video, shame about the song". **Zig-Zag** from dK'Tronics is a beautifully-presented game with excellent graphics and smooth, fast action, but it suffers from a repetitive and not specially original concept.

You have to patrol your sector seeking the Scarabaqs, beetle-like nasties with pointed teeth. Each sector is a network of corridors portrayed on the screen in 3D-style graphics. The Scarabaqs supposedly hold the data necessary to enter the next sector and as you progress through the game you have to capture more Scarabaqs at each level.

The screen display is cockpit-style and apart from the view of the corridors you have status indicators and a direction indicator.

The graphics are very fine. The cockpit view changes swiftly and smoothly and the Scarabaqs look suitably bug-eyed and vicious when cornered. It would have been pleasant to see more variety in the game rather than a mere increase in difficulty with each new level.

ZIG-ZAG
Memory: 48K
Price: £5.95
Gilbert Factor: 7

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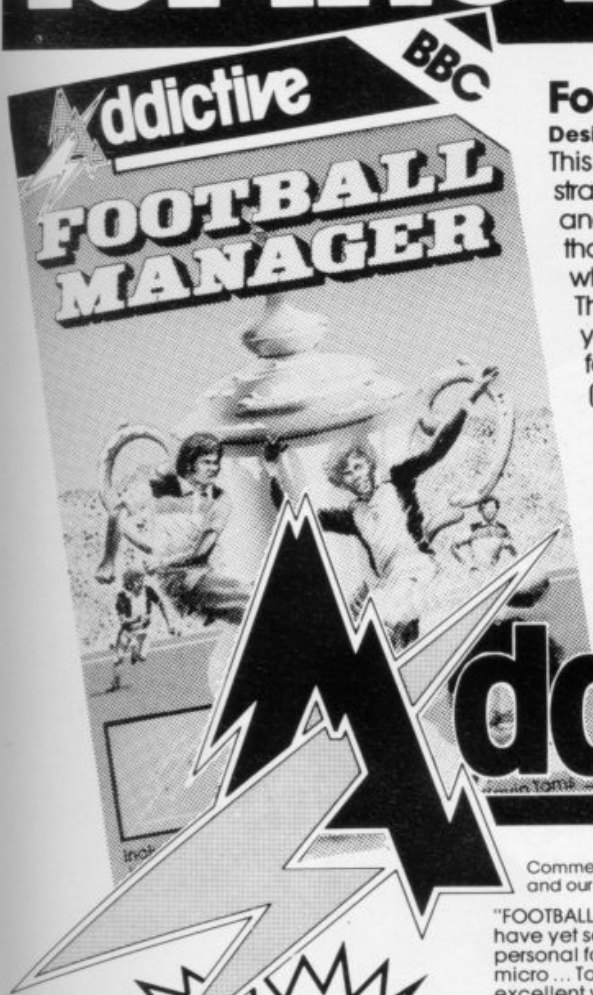
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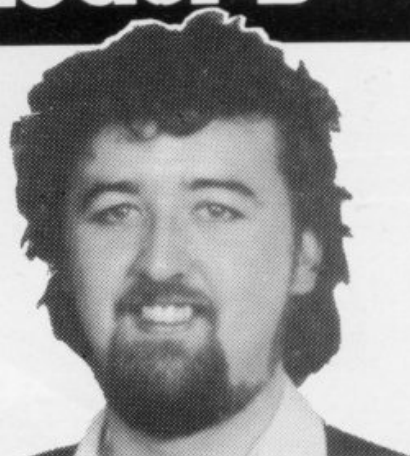
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^{*} ZX81 Chart
Home Computing Weekly 21/2/84

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