

Alchemist Research

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WHO ARE WE?

Alchemist Research is the UK's leading Spectrum and emulator user group. It was established in 1986 and is the people's choice for anything Spectrum, winner of the Crashed magazine award for Best Spectrum Service in 1995-96. We work closely with only the best Spectrum services, who will confirm our unrivalled service. All letters are answered personally, friendly and promptly - yet to be matched by any other Spectrum user groups.

Please make any money orders payable to MR A. DAVIS.

OUR MAGAZINE

AlchNews is now the world's largest Spectrum tape and disk magazine. Latest issues have been the equivalent of 384 pages of solid A4 text! The magazine covers all aspects of the Spectrum, including regular sections on: Basic programming, news, software & PD reviews / tutorials, adventure writing & playing, machine code, languages, +3 computing, +D, Opus, Microdrive, communications, fiction, humour, the unexplained, hardware projects, CP/M, music, adverts and much more. AlchNews has dozens of writers, many of which are leading figures in the Spectrum scene.

The magazine also incorporates folded magazines of the past, including SARUG, Sinclair News, 1982, and the Marshall Cavendish INPUT series.

AlchNews is available on any Spectrum format (except 3" disk and Microdrive) for just £1. Subscription fee is £4 per year. For a free sample of the latest or any back issues, just send media and SAE, stating which issues you'd like. The magazine is also available for the SAM Coupe and PC Z80 Emulator, a free shareware copy is provided.

COMPLETE SPECTRUM SUPPORT

Alchemist Research is the only service which operates a Spectrum helpline, totally devoid of any subscription or other charges. We aim to solve any problem you may be experiencing, be it hardware or software. Other than INDUG, Alchemist Research is the only group who receives official and regular support on +D bugs and fixer programs. We are also in close contact with some of the world's best software programmers. We have masterminded several hardware projects, including 128k keypad devices, +3 external drives, RS232 communications and a multi-group project of 'essential manuals', beginning with a Spectrum 128k definitive technical manual. We can master disk conversions of your programs should you not have the facilities and aid in any aspect of your programming.

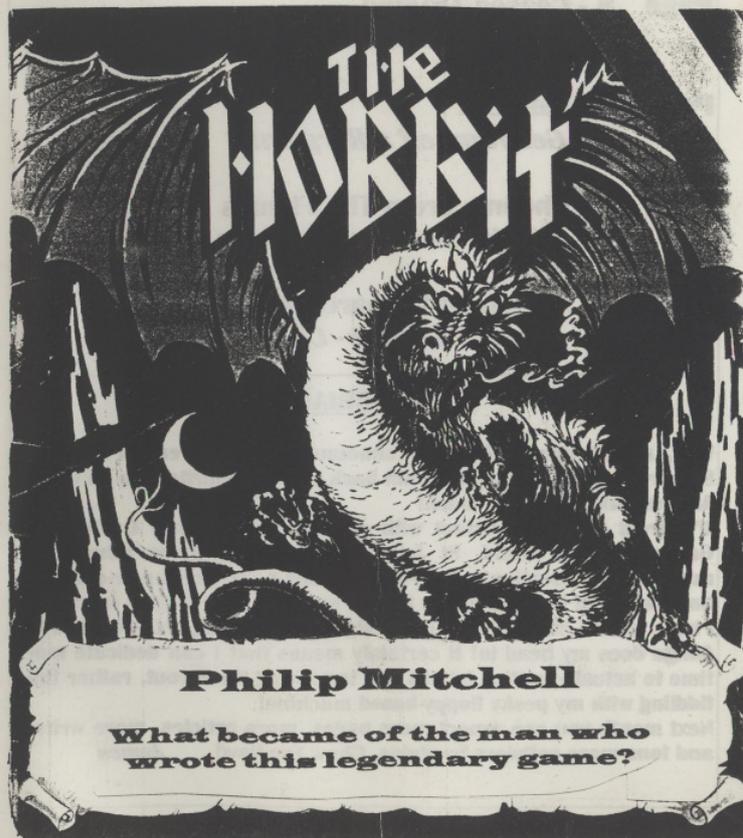
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CLASSIX

Issue 1

"Don't Look Back In Anger"

40p



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EDITORIAL

Well, at last here it is! After announcing my retirement from the Spectrum scene last years, I am back in my favourite role as editor. And how nice it is to be back!

It's great to be in contact with old friends like Andy Davis, Lloyd Garland, Lilian Brand, St John Swainson and many others (too numerable to mention!). I am also making some great new contacts, and I am glad to see that the Speccy scene is as strong as ever!

I hope you all like Classix - it's designed on a laptop PC, because the Amiga does my head in! It certainly means that I can dedicate more time to actually writing letters and improving the layout, rather than fiddling with my pesky floppy-based machine!

Next month you can expect more pages, more articles, more writers and tons more software bargains. Chow For Now! *James*



CLASSIX INVESTIGATES: THE MAN BEHIND THE HOBBIT



COVER STORY

The Adventures of Philip Mitchell.

A personal view by Richard Hewison.

A number of people might be thinking "Who is Philip Mitchell?". Well, the truthful answer is - I don't really know! My research failed to uncover any information regarding the man himself. However, what I do know is that he was (and probably still is somewhere) a programmer who, back in the early 1980's, headed a team of fellow programmers to create a couple of classic adventure games on the early 8 bit machines like the 48k ZX Spectrum, the Commodore 64 and the BBC Micro Model B. Philip worked for Beam Software (Australian in origin I think) and if you still need a clue then his first game on the Spectrum caused quite a stir for being probably one of the first ever text adventures to be accompanied by graphics. It was of course that classic of early adventures - The Hobbit, based on J.R.R Tolkien's famous novel.

Melbourne House published 'The Hobbit' in 1983 initially on the 48k Spectrum and later on the Commodore 64, 48k Oric 1 and a text only version on the Acorn BBC Micro. (Graphics were omitted on the latter due to the memory limitations of only having 32k to play with!). The recommended retail price was a then very steep £14.95 (compared to the average Spectrum game cost of between £5.95 and £7.95). The game itself came adorned with a painting of Smaug the Dragon on the cover. Inside the black box was a small booklet and the cassette, nestled snugly into a flimsy plastic holder.

My first look at 'The Hobbit' came on a friends expanded 16k Spectrum, as I didn't have one of the rubber keyed wonders at the time. The loading screen was a fair rendition of the box artwork and after about five or six minutes the game had loaded. For a second the screen turned white and then the first location graphic was drawn onto the screen. Up until then I'd never seen graphics in an adventure (having only played text adventures on the BBC) and I was very impressed! As any 'Hobbit' player will know, the first location was the "...comfortable tunnel like hall...". The picture showed a roundish green door at the end of a hall with a chest sitting in the middle of a cyan (purple) floor. Each line was drawn on screen as I watched, then the floor was filled with cyan ink. I was a little disappointed to see the picture scroll up the screen to make way for the remainder of the location text but by that time I was already hooked, especially when Gandalf proceeded to give me a map. He then opened the round green door and walked out on me! Thorin just kept telling me to "Hurry up!" (It was only later that he started sitting down and "...singing about gold").

'The Hobbit' was the first adventure to incorporate what could now only loosely be described as artificial intelligence. However, in its day it was a revelation, as was the parser that allowed complex commands to be typed in using the ENGLISH command language. It had a vocabulary of 800 words and allowed not only the use of verbs and nouns (e.g TAKE BISCUIT) but it also allowed adverbs (e.g QUICKLY TAKE BISCUIT), prepositions (e.g WITH, UNDER, ON, OFF) and it allowed you to string a number of commands together with the use of "AND". You could also talk to other characters in the game using the SAY TO command and by doing this you could give them commands to perform for you. In fact, on a number of occasions there was no way of solving some of the puzzles unless you asked Thorin and Gandalf to help you out. All these features were naturally a major improvement on other inferior adventures available at the time. Of course the parser still failed to understand plenty of what I typed in, but the delay in responding when it didn't understand was at least a lot shorter than when it did!

'The Hobbit' was also the first text adventure that I had seen that ran in real time. If you sat and typed nothing in for a while the game would WAIT and time would pass in the game world. It was possible for

hand border the hobbit faces were shown. If certain faces were displayed in the border of the pages behind the front then they weren't in the same location as the hobbit you currently controlled.

This innovative (and never repeated since) style had its problems. The update time was slow. Each time you moved to a new location, you had to wait for each one of the other characters to follow you there. (This not only applied in the text but the faces had to be removed from the other page borders then placed in the front page border to signify that there were now in the same location). After a while this became rather annoying and there was no way of turning it off.

'Lord of the Rings - Part One' did have a few location graphics but they were obviously thrown in as an after thought as they were limited in number and were very poor. The game starts in the same 'comfortable' location as 'The Hobbit' did, but you wouldn't have been able to tell from the new location graphic. Very little was actually drawn, with the plonking down of large slabs of meaningless colour preferred to trying to produce a proper location graphic.

The game manual admitted that extra events had been thrown in that weren't in the novel but it also stated they were 'totally in keeping with the fantasy world created by Tolkien'. This is a debatable point. I can't be certain but I'm reasonably sure there weren't any 'Heavy metal Orc bands' in 'The Fellowship of the Ring' or any of the other novels!

I didn't like 'Lord of the Rings - Part One'. The system used was trying to be too complex for a humble 8 bit computer to cope with properly. The graphics were very poor and you had to be some kind of patient mind reading insomniac to solve it! (Apologies to all those who did solve it, but I found it slow and very frustrating).

It took two years for the second part of 'Lord of the Rings' to appear, but appear it did in mid 1987. However, compared to the first part, 'The Shadows of Mordor' was quite small, coming on only 1 cassette packaged in crystal cassette case. It was at least a lot cheaper (only £7.95) as a result. The cover illustration showed Frodo standing beneath a giant spider, impaling it with a glowing blade. Nearby lay Sam, cocooned and awaiting his fate. On a 48k Spectrum the game was text only. On a 128k machine graphics would pop up every so often on their own. (48k users could view all of the graphics as a slide show loaded separately from the game). The graphics were a major improvement over those found in 'Part One', but they were still quite crude when compared to other illustrated adventures of the time (Terry Greer's pictures in the Interceptor games Heroes of Karn, Jewels of Babylon etc. on the spectrum come to mind).

'The Shadows of Mordor' was naturally based on the key events described in J.R.R Tolkien's second book in the series 'The Two Towers'. You started the game by choosing whether you were to play Frodo or Sam, and it didn't take long to find Smeagol lurking around. To get him to help, you had to tie him up with rope and make him promise to behave himself before you let him go free! A great deal of co-operation was then required to build a raft to cross the swamp. The Black Riders made an occasional appearance but they were very easy to avoid. By simply waiting in the same location they would fly off and leave you alone!

'Mordor' wasn't very large when compared to other adventure releases of the time. It only had a couple of real tricky puzzles and most of those involved getting other people to perform tasks for you.

TRADE ADVERTISEMENTS

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The plot involved murder and the discovery of a body in peaceful Leatherhead. As the plot progressed things become more involved until by the end the case concerned foreign spies and a threat against the whole of the United Kingdom. As Sherlock Holmes, the player had to collect evidence and present it to Lestrade. If all went well the game progressed nicely. If not, you could easily get stuck at one point and miss the next set of vital clues as a result. Timing was crucial.

One interesting trivia item was that the extensive vocabulary understood by the ENGLISH parser didn't understand the surname 'Holmes'!

I got the impression that 'Sherlock' didn't go down as well with the game buying public (or the magazines of the time) as it's predecessor had. I found it a frustrating game at times. Quite often you could do exactly what you were supposed to do to uncover a clue yet it would not work.



Later on I learnt that if you did certain actions earlier in the game (like sitting in Watson's armchair in the initial location whilst he was still in it instead of sitting in your own) then important parts of the plot would fail to trigger off later on, even though the two were completely unrelated as far as the plot was concerned. This kind of bug was unfortunately common place.

Some people actually took great delight in finding new bugs. The evaporating river in 'The Hobbit' is a prime example which I witnessed on a couple of occasions. Unfortunately the kind of bugs present in 'Sherlock' got me right up to the end but the final shoot out failed to occur, even though everyone who needed to be there was in place ready and raring to go!

(Melbourne House didn't publish a book to help players stuck in 'Sherlock' like they had done with 'The Hobbit'. All they did was send out a rather unhelpful hint sheet that was very thin on content).

With 'Sherlock' out of the way, Philip Mitchell turned his attention back to the land of Hobbits, Elves and Middle Earth. It took another year and a bit to complete, but 'Lord of the Rings' Part One finally appeared in late 1985. It came in a box the size of a brick. This was so that the game could house the first paperback instalment 'Fellowship of the Ring'. It was a nice idea, but the price of the game was now £15.95 which I think made it the most expensive Spectrum game ever at the time. The box also had to accommodate two cassettes this time around, as the game was so large that it had to be split into two parts. On completing the first part, you could save your game and load it into the start of the second part to continue. The second part could be played on its own, but as a result it was harder to complete without the advantage of having done the first. Also included was a beginners version of the first part for inexperienced adventurers who needed to get to grips with the system.

There were a couple of innovative features included in 'Lord of the Rings - Part One'. For a start you could control up to four characters (Frodo, Sam, Pippin or Merry) and you could quite happily switch between them. The screen layout was different from anything I'd seen before. Each Hobbit had his own face illustration and the character you were currently in control of would appear at the top of the screen. The main part of the game was displayed on what looked like the top sheet of four pages of paper. In the left

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characters to wander off on their own and it was even possible for important key personalities like Gandalf to get killed in a different location whilst you were doing something else. In the event of this happening the only way out was to restart the game, as Gandalf was a rather important character.

'The Hobbit' was extraordinarily successful and looking back it is now obvious that we wouldn't have got half of the adventures that we eventually did on the Spectrum if the Hobbit hadn't been as successful as it was. Popular Computing Weekly started a weekly adventure helpline column (penned by Tony Bridge, who has since become as infamous as Lord Lucan for not being seen for many years!). Countless people would write in asking for help. The most popular problems were "How do I get out of the Goblins Dungeon?", "How do I escape from the pale bulbous eyes?", "How do I get the ring?", and "How do I escape from the Elven King's dungeon?". Some people got stuck in the game at the same point for over a year before they would be rescued. Adventurers today seldom get stuck like that anymore, mainly due to our accumulated experience and the fact that there are more people playing adventures and more adventures to play. The plethora of magazines today give solutions and tips each month covering all of the major adventure releases. Back in the early 80's, we were still an underground community by comparison.

Melbourne House even went as far as publishing an entire book dedicated to playing and solving The Hobbit with maps and various tips and hints. Whilst hintbooks are almost common place today, back in 1983 they were unheard of.

(The Hobbit was later released in a special disk only version for the Commodore 64 with music and I think it might even have had extra location graphics. A BBC disk version also appeared if I remember correctly).

With The Hobbit a great success (despite the numerous bugs - more on those later!), Philip Mitchell and his team could have done the obvious and moved straight onto 'Lord of the Rings' (which they also had the license for). However, instead they chose to leave Middle Earth behind for the moment and concentrate on another literary legend instead. After 15 months of hard work they revealed 'Sherlock', based on the exploits of Sherlock Holmes. The game appeared in late 1984 for the 48k Spectrum and the Commodore 64 and again cost £14.95.

Throughout the development of 'Sherlock' it was not known if graphics would be included. Memory was tight but in the end a few pictures made it in, although less in volume (and some might say quality) they served their purpose. The plot wasn't based on any one Sherlock Holmes novel, but rather it tried to emulate the spirit and flavour of the novels with a new case for the infamous detective designed specifically for the game by Philip Mitchell.

'Sherlock' used a refined but superficially similar system to 'The Hobbit'. The ENGLISH parser remained intact, although the commands you could give to the other characters (Lestrade, Watson etc) became more complex. The real time element raised its annoying head again. Time played an important part in solving the game. To emphasise the point, a digital clock display appeared on screen at all times. As with many who dunnit style games since (Mag Scrolls 'Corruption' comes to mind), you had to be in a certain place at a certain time if you were to have any chance of solving the case. The game itself was spread over a couple of days and involved an amount of travelling in handsome black cabs and using the railway time table that came in the box to catch trains to and from such exotic locations as Leatherhead. (I can remember someone pointing out that in reality you can't actually get a train to Leatherhead from Kings Cross Station as you can in the game, not even back in Victorian times).

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I remember finishing the game without really knowing how. One moment I was wandering around and the next moment I was being told I'd won! The end of the game left you on the edge of Mordor, having got past Black Riders, Orcs, swamps and giant spiders along the way. Unfortunately, the wait for part three proved to be infinite because Melbourne House was sold to a rival publisher, (Virgin Mastertronic I think).

Beam sent out video cassettes to a number of prospective publishers in 1988 outlining their latest products, including the third (and final) part of 'Lord of the Rings'. I don't know whether programming had started on part three, because what was on the video was a text only adventure that could easily have been part two on the Spectrum. As it turns out the third part never appeared in any shape or form and the license ended up going to Interplay (who have since turned out two rather average r.p.g products).

Looking back, my personal favourite is still 'The Hobbit'. My strongest memories of the other games are the slow game system, the poor graphics and the bugs. In a strange way Philip Mitchell & his team were ahead of their time - the 8 bit machines just couldn't cope with the game system they created. If they had a good PC to create their games on who knows what they could have gone on to achieve?

Thanks must go to Sue Medley and John Wilson for their invaluable assistance in researching this article.

*This article originally appeared in the now folded fanzine
RED HERRING*

Our thanks also go out to Richard for his assistance with regard to the re-publishing of excellent article (ED)

****NEWS****NEWS****NEWS****NEWS****NEWS****
Spellunkler Rises Again!!!

Readers of my old fanzine *Spellunkler* will be interested to know that Alec Carswell of 16 Montgomery Avenue, Betth, Ayrshire KA15 1EL is resurrecting the 'zine. Send SAE for details.

Ceased Trading By Richard Swann

"Once upon a time, there was a software house. It produced wonderful games for the Spectrum, before suddenly, to everyone's surprise, it ran out of money, called in the receivers, and quickly went out of sight."

The above description could apply to any number of software houses. Since the advent of the Spectrum, there have been a huge amount of software companies, many of which produced some incredibly popular games while they were around.

The question has to be asked then, if they produced top quality software, why aren't they around now?

First of all, there's the fact that it's all very well producing one hit game, but when you've done it once, you've got to do it again and again. One hit game doesn't sell forever, and it's a software house's job to ensure the games come rolling out. One good example of this is Software Projects, who produced a fair crop of games before releasing the Jet Set Willy games and then pretty much disappearing. I haven't got any information about Software Projects going into receivership, but I think it's safe to assume that they just wound down and stopped. (They seem to have, but apparently the Amiga version of JSW has since appeared from "a" Software Projects, so this may not be true.)

Having just said that, it's no good just turning out a whole load of games if they're about as exciting as mowing the lawn (Anyone remember Lawn Mower Simulator, which a Your Sinclair reader wrote for a laugh? - ED). If a software house releases a string of hopeless games in a row, then the public catch on pretty quickly, ignore all the games, meaning the software house runs out of money. One particular example is a little known software house called Alpha Omega, which turned out a load of pathetic games in 1987. Despite a change of name to the Power House and bundling free extras with each game, the quality of the games was as poor as ever, and the company went into liquidation very quickly.

But even if the games are good, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to sell like wildfire. Remember Deus Ex Machina. It was a superbly original and exciting game (at least that's what people say), but because it was so different to the norm, the public didn't want to know about it. Automata (the producers) released a string of bizarre (cult) games such as Deus Ex Machina, PiMania and My Name Is Uncle Groucho. You Win A Fat Cigar, but sales of D.E.M. were so bad the company shut up shop quickly (nevertheless, Mel Croucher, the joint head of Automata went on to success in computer journalism, and wrote the SAM Manual). (One of Mel's pet projects, ID, was later released on the short-lived "Nu-Wave" label from CRL. CRL later folded, owing a lot of money to programmers such as Fergus McNeil).

The current computer games business revolves around licences. Ten years ago, all games were highly original, and indeed originality was an important factor in games early on. Nowadays, it's very different. The most popular games are those which have some connection with a book, a film, a TV programme or a famous celebrity. It certainly helps sales - anyone remember World Cup Carnival? In case you don't, it was the official Mexico '86 computer game, with loads of freebies inside the box. It appeared that nobody minded about the game being abysmal (and the terrible reviews which followed), people bought it because it was to do with the World Cup, and the game landed in the number one spot for weeks! (Even worse than that, the actual game was an aging title formerly published by Artic - who had long since passed away - which looked rather dated when it first appeared and was available at prices such as 99p in some places. World Cup Carnival cost at least £10!). (And if you're still interested in sampling it, we have two copies of Artic's World Cup in stock readers! - ED).

When software houses suddenly discovered that tie-ins sold, they all made them as quickly as possible. The only snag was that the games needed to be officially licensed by the book, film or TV company before they could be released. This resulted in huge bids from software houses, running into six figures. Those who got the licences made mediocre games and sold them in their millions. Those who didn't made good games which no-one had ever heard of, failed to sell them, and promptly went out of business.

Another problem with software houses is over-advertising. Obviously advertising in a computer magazine, or even on TV and radio, is the quickest way to sell something, especially if it's licensed. However, big catchy adverts cost a lot of money, and therefore have to be successful if the company wants to stay in the black. If they fail, the company can easily run out of money.

A good example is the original Imagine, which promised two "mega-games", accompanied by huge advertisements. When they failed to produce the money for the advertising space, they had no choice but to go into receivership. (One of the mega-games, apparently co-funded by Sinclair, ended up being released as the first title from new company Psynosis: formed from some ex-Imagine staff. The game appeared on the ST and NOT the Spectrum.)

So what happens when a company goes bust? Well, there are basically three things which that can happen. Firstly, it can be transferred across to another company (in the case of Imagine to the development team Denton Designs or, more recently, MGT to SAMCO). Secondly, it can be bought out by another company and incorporated into it (as in the case of Ocean-Imagine).

Finally, it can just disappear off the face of the earth; this normally happens to bad software houses, as good ones are nearly always bought up. (Sadly, this is not always the case. An example of a formerly excellent company was MikroGen. They were forced into receivership after a large investment in a software/hardware game combination (Mikro+) failed to sell, leaving them in severe financial crisis for ages, and eventually leading to their downfall. Unfortunately, the company never returned.)

Listed below are a few software houses which have ceased trading, been bought up, or have changed significantly. If the company was bought up, the buyer is given in brackets. Any other relevant info is also given in brackets, in chronological order:

ABACUS, ACTIVISION (ceased trading in UK, still existing in US and France), ADDICTIVE GAMES (Prism), ADVANCE, ADVENTURE INTERNATIONAL (U.S. Gold), ALLIGATA, ALPHA OMEGA (Became Power House, ceased trading), Alphabattim (became Cytadine, development only), A 'n' F (Argus, Grandslam, ceased trading), ANIROG, ARCADE, ARGUS (Grandslam, ceased trading), ARIOLSOFT, ATARISOFT, AUTOMATA (Old software rights passed to Players/interceptor), BEYOND (Telecomsoft, Microprose), BUDGIE, BUG-BYTE (Argus, Grandslam, ceased trading), CARNELL (Mastertronic, Virgin), CSD (Alternative), CHEETAHSAFT (became Cheetah Marketing, now hardware only), CRYSTAL (became Design Design, now development only, named Walking Circles), DIGITAL FANTASIA (Adventure International, US Gold), DATABYTE (Prism), DJL SOFTWARE (now development only), DKTRONICS (hardware only, now ceased trading, with hardware owned by Datel), DORIC (became DORCAS, now ceased trading), DURELL (Elite), FANTASY, FRONT RUNNER (Prism), GAMES MACHINE, GRANDSLAM, INCENTIVE (Domark, with Incentive now development house for SuperScape 3D system), IMAGINE (Ocean, with Imagine team becoming Denton Designs & Psynosis, LEVEL 9 (Telecomsoft, Microprose), LYVERSOF, LOTHLORIEN (Argus, Grandslam, ceased trading), MARTECH (became Screen 7, now part of Alternative), MASTERTRONIC (Virgin, now called Tronix), MELBOURNE HOUSE (Mastertronic, Virgin), MGT (SAMCO, and SAM Tek), MICROMANIA, MIKRO-GEN (CSD, ceased trading), NEW GENERATION (Virgin), NEXUS, NOBLE HOUSE, PHIPPS ASSOCIATES, POPPYSOFT, POSTERN, POWER HOUSE, PROCOM, QUICKSILVA (Argus, Grandslam, ceased trading), RABBIT (Virgin), R&R, RICHARD SHEPHERD, RICHARD WILCOX (became Elite), SEVERN, SILVERSOFT (CRL), SOFTEK (launched side-label The Edge, the phased out), STARZONE, TELECOMSOFT (Microprose), TERMINAL, TYNESOF, ULTIMATE (US Gold, with parent firm RARE now making Nintendo games), VISIONS, VORTEX (US Gold). ***This List is By No Means Exhaustive***

NB: This article by Richard Swann was originally published in ZAT, Issue 16, October-November 1992.

Sale List

Catering for ZX81, 16k, 48k, 128k,
128k+2, 128k+2a & 128k +3!

Send all correspondence to JAMES WADDINGTON,
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@ Denotes Budget Game # Denotes missing inlay/instructions

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Phoenix From The Flames

-DR DESTRUCTO-

Re-Reviewed by St John Swainson

Published By Bulldog

This little game was released in 1987 for the measly price of £1.99. Its one of those games where you would look at the box and decide not to buy it because it looks a big budgety. However, if you were feeling rich and bought it, you were rewarded with a game better than the majority of full price games.

Dr Destructo is an evil man with an evil name and an evil plan to take over the world. In 7 days, he will launch his attack so you have little time to stop him. All you have is a small aircraft with which to destroy his huge array of forces. This task can be made easier if a friend takes control of another aircraft because you both appear on the screen at the same time. As with most 2 player games, this option makes it more enjoyable as well as giving double the firepower.

Each of the 21 screens has a ship, submarine or island stretched along the length of the bottom of it. Swarming above this are a large assortment of aircraft, satellites, spaceships and helicopters. The installation at the bottom is destroyed by shooting down the aircraft. They crash to the ground and make a dent in the installation. When enough aircraft hit the spot, a hole is created through which water spurts. When there are 3 or more holes, it will sink. As with all great games, this teaches you an important lesson about life: if you are on an island, don't dig too many holes. (Very deep! - ED).

Shooting down the aircraft can prove extremely difficult. Some are destroyed simply by flying into them but most kill you if you touch them. Some drop bombs or fire missiles. UFO's disappear and then reappear in a different part of the screen, often at inappropriate moments. Some take 2 shots to destroy and others will kill you even as they are falling to the ground in flames. You have 9 lives and get an extra one for each screen completed but this is not nearly enough.

The graphics are rather good. Each of the installations are different, and are also large and well detailed. The aircraft are very varied and colourful but this can occasionally result in a spot of colour clash. The game is fast even with such a packed screen although there is a slight speed loss with 2 players. Sound is 48k only and is adequate despite the lack of a title tune.

Controlling your plane is initially confusing. The screen is viewed side on and you fly at a constant speed. Left and right make you loop the loop in one direction or the other. This means you can fly in any direction you want. Up gives you a burst of speed which is useful to escape sticky situations. Down drops a bomb (one per screen) and fire fires, surprisingly. It is easy to master and easy to use and makes a change from the usual control methods.

This is a great little games packed full with action. It is not an arcade conversion, film tie-in or a conversion from another machine so it doesn't have to make the specy do things it can't and then charge more for the licence (excellent point - ED). It just sets out to be a good playable games and it succeeds marvelously.

Ratings

Graphics 90%

Sound 44%

Playability 94%

Addictiveness 89%

Overall 92%

You've Gotta Laff!

Bus stop shocker



Shocked passengers waiting at Britain's first talking bus stop have been subjected to torrents of abuse. A hacker tapped into Leeds Bus Station's system and answered passengers' queries with four-letter outbursts.

Even with technology being as advanced as it is, some 'hi-tec' gadgets still tend to backfire on their owners.

This gem was published in The Yorkshire Evening Post some months ago. But the question remains, has the hacker involved since been BUSTED?!