



Desert Island Disks

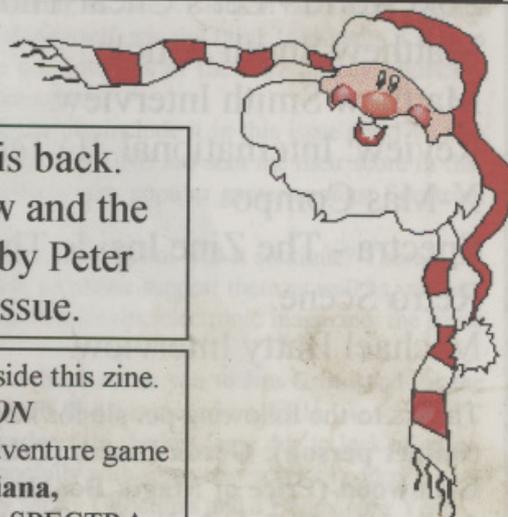
Issue 4



December 1999 Price: £2



Matthew Smith is back.
Read the interview and the
exclusive article by Peter
Mella in this issue.



SPECTRA - The zine inside this zine.

COMPETITION

Win a copy of the new Adventure game
A Hero For Soriana,
which is also reviewed in **SPECTRA.**

Extra X-Mas Compo.
Win a bunch of Sports
Simulation games on

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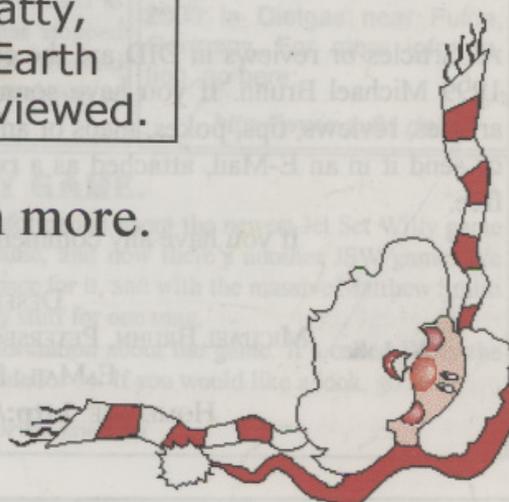
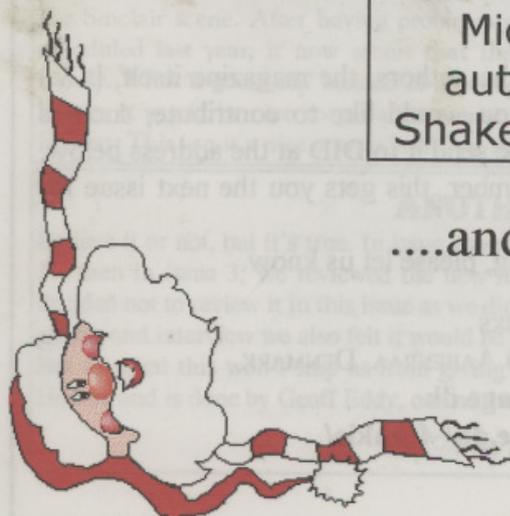


Find the free
Price of Magik
Tips & Maps
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Klass of '99.
Read all about this great
conversion.

Michael Batty,
author of Earth
Shaker interviewed.

....and much more.



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Next issue will be available (hopefully) April 2000. If you want to order a copy, then follow these instructions.

Living in the United Kingdom, please send cheque for £2 to: **Joyce Cook, 32 Dursley Road, Trowbridge, Wilts, BA14 0NP, England.**

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If you have any comments on the mag, please let us know.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

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Editorial - The Editor Speaks Up.

Since the last issue of Desert Island Disks one of the biggest mysteries on the Spectrum scene has been solved. The long awaited return of Matthew Smith is a fact. The guy who wrote legendary games like Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy has finally returned. In this issue of DID we are proud to bring you the first interview with Matt after his return. The interview was by Peter Mella and have already been printed in Crashed, but we thought that it would be best to print it in DID as well, in case some of you don't buy Crashed (who am I kidding). But as we were the first fanzine who asked Peter if it was all right to print his interview, Peter was so nice to give us the exclusive rights to print his article about Matthew as well. Nice, read it all here in DID. Enjoy.

What can I say, another year is coming to an end, and we can't say that it's been a great year for the Speccy. More fanzines have closed down, and it seems that making PC conversions of old Speccy classics is getting more important than making new games for the machine itself, which I think is a shame. I'm also not too happy about the lack of interest in new ideas, like our Invaders of the Lost Speccy highscore database, what's wrong? Are you afraid of showing people your scores?

Due to the lack of interest in the IotLS database, I've decided not to include it in this issue and I've also decided to extend the Bomb Jack competition until next issue, as NO ONE has sent me their score in that game. And here I was thinking that Bomb Jack was and still is a very popular game amongst Spectrum users. Was I wrong?

I can't complain about support for the fanzine itself, as it's been HUGE, but will it continue? There's not that many fanzines left anymore due to people's lack of interest, so please support them as well as you can. If you just write one article every year and send it to your favourite fanzine/electronic magazine, the scene will survive.

I hope you all like our little extra Christmas gift included. A huge thank you to Jim Grimwood for the maps and tips, and we here at DID will continue to bring you stuff like this, once in a while.

One last thing. We had to leave out the contacts list we introduced in the last issue due to lack of space, which is great. If space allows it, it will be back next issue, hopefully with some new services added.

Well, that's it from me this year. I just want to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

NEWS

Z88 External Console for Windows.

Use a PC as a terminal to the Z88 to display the Z88 screen on the PC and/or allow the PC keyboard to control the Z88.

Interested? Then visit the creator Dennis Groning's website at:

<http://www.algonet.se/~dennisgr/z88.htm>

No more Outlet.

Sad, but true. The last Outlet will be released this month (December 1999). Outlet was a very popular electronic magazine, that goes way back to the 80's.

The end of Format?

It seems that the editor of Format Bob Brenchley has disappeared from the Sinclair scene. After having problems getting Format released as scheduled last year, it now seems that the publication has stopped totally. What is going on? Instead of ignoring people's phone calls and letters, it would be nice to get a statement about the whereabouts of Format. This is not a nice way to leave the scene.

ZX81 users meeting.

The 4th ZX-TEAM meeting is being held on the 17-19 March 2000 in Dietgas near Fulda, Germany. For more information, go here:

<http://www.zx81.de>

ANOTHER WILLY GAME.

Believe it or not, but it's true. In issue 2 we gave you the information about the newest Jet Set Willy game J4, then in issue 3, we reviewed the new Manic Miner game, and now there's another JSW game. We decided not to review it in this issue as we didn't have the space for it, and with the massive Matthew Smith article and interview we also felt it would be too much Willy stuff for one mag.

But as usual this won't stop us from giving you all the information about the game. It's called Willy the Hacker and is done by Geoff Eddy, one of the guys responsible for J4. If you would like a look, go here:

<http://www.cix.co.uk/~morven/jsw.html>

NEW GAME — NEW GAME — NEW GAME — NEW GAME — NEW GAME

Game: Hedda's Revenge
 Company: Adventure Probe
 Author: Edwina Brown
 Released: 1999
 Type: Adventure game
 Price: £2
 Machine: 128K

Graphics	□□□□□□□□□□0
Text	■□□□□□□□□□8
Playability	■□□□□□□□□□9
Lastability	■□□□□□□□□□8
Overall	■□□□□□□□□□8

Available on: **Tape, 5.25" and 3.5 +D disc and PC (x128 emulator supplied on the disc)**
 Order from: **Adventure Probe, 52 Burford Road, Liverpool L16 6AQ, U.K.**

"My name is Alfred and once again I am off on a mission. The captain of the golf club has been to see me. Although only a tiny club they have, over the years, won fifteen trophies. These were proudly displayed in the clubhouse for all to see. Now, he tells me, they are gone. The suspected culprit is Hedda, who is well known for playing such tricks, but they have no proof and no clue as to where she may have put them. He says will I please help them. I tell him I will do my best, and satisfied, he takes his leave. Hunting around I find my haversack; I will wear this to carry the trophies when I find them."

So that is what you have to do. Simply solve lots of puzzles and return all 15 trophies to the Golf Clubhouse. After your success in finding the alphabet in "Hide and Seek", Hedda is out for revenge by stealing the golf trophies and scattering them throughout Seahaven.

Those of you who have played "Hide and Seek" will recognise many of the locations, but Edwina has very cleverly added some more. For instance, you can now go inside the Dragonfly Inn, walk along the bank of the stream, cross a bridge (when repaired) to an old lady's cottage, and the downs where a shepherd is looking after his sheep. Do you remember that dog that gave so much trouble when you tried to get the letter "G"? Well, this time you will have to find a way of dealing with him so you can enter the cottage, which belongs to Hedda.

There are some old "friends", like Ned and Ted, but most of the characters are new to the players. For those who haven't played "Hide and Seek" (and if not, why not?) perhaps I should explain that Seahaven is a lovely fantasy seaside town, and when you meet say, the farmer's wife, she is in fact described as a plump, rosy-faced fairy, and the shepherd is a bearded elf. There are more characters who, in the best tradition of adventures, need your help before they will or can help you. One example is the old man whose dog has run away. Bring it back to him and he will give you something that will (half) help you with another character. Not surprisingly, the well is still at the top of the hill, and I think the puzzle here is an excellent one, especially when you consider how many times a well has been used in adventure games.

This is a PAWed game, with all the usual features, and abbreviations are available for such inputs as, for example, LOOK IN (LOIN), SEARCH (SR), EXAMINE (X), RE-DESCRIBE (R), RAMSAVE (RS), etc. As it is a 128K game, unfortunately it is only available on tape (or 3.5" +D disc on request) for a 128K Spectrum, and the PC under Spectrum emulation. May I assure anyone who has not tried playing a text adventure on their PC under Spectrum emulation that it will run on most computers, and in my experience it is preferable to playing it on a Spectrum. I am used to an external disc drive

and +D on my Spectrum, but believe me I am still amazed how quickly the game loads from the hard drive into the emulator. Saving a position as a snapshot is simple, and loading even simpler. I also find the screen display to my liking as it is full size with large bright text which I find very easy to read. I prefer to keep the emulator, game and saves for each adventure together in the same directory as it is easier to find the saves later when I want to delete them.

As with Edwina's other games, "Hedda's Revenge" is a delightful fantasy with interesting characters and puzzles in a believable setting. There really isn't much more I can say without spoiling the adventure for you.

Barbara Gibb

Desert Island Disks

Last issue, Spectra editor St. John Swainson told us which games he would bring along on a deserted island. This issue we've asked someone really famous :-)

At least all of you who travel the highways of the internet know who Martijn van der Heide is, don't you?

He's the guy responsible for the largest Spectrum archive on the entire net, called World Of Spectrum. Besides maintaining this huge archive and running the famous Missing In Action list, he also put a lot of work into contacting old programmers and software houses to get their permissions to have their games online at World Of Spectrum.

Now let's see which 5 games Martijn would bring along with him. Here we go:

1. KNIGHT LORE - Ultimate

Not because this is a new game for me (I finished it a lot of times), but because it is so good and it has my fondest memories. I was stunned by the graphics at the time and still really enjoy playing this game. We used to do contests for fastest finish a couple of years ago, but I never won ;-(

2. WILD WEST HERO - Timescape

One of my all-time favourites! Pretty crap graphics (oops) but one of the few action games that I can play without dying in 3 seconds... This game is still loaded up several times a year when my old Speccy buddies are visiting. We all feel the same about this game!

3. MICRONAUT ONE - Nexus

I love flying that machine! Pete Cooke was a genius. Fast and smooth graphics and still responds to the keyboard/joystick.

4. GLIDER RIDER - Quicksilva

Great game, excellent music too. I think this was the first 128K game I saw apart from the games that you got along with the machine (I only recall getting Daley Thompson's Supertest and Never-Ending Story - were there more?)

5. ABU SIMBEL PROFANATION - Gremlin Graphics

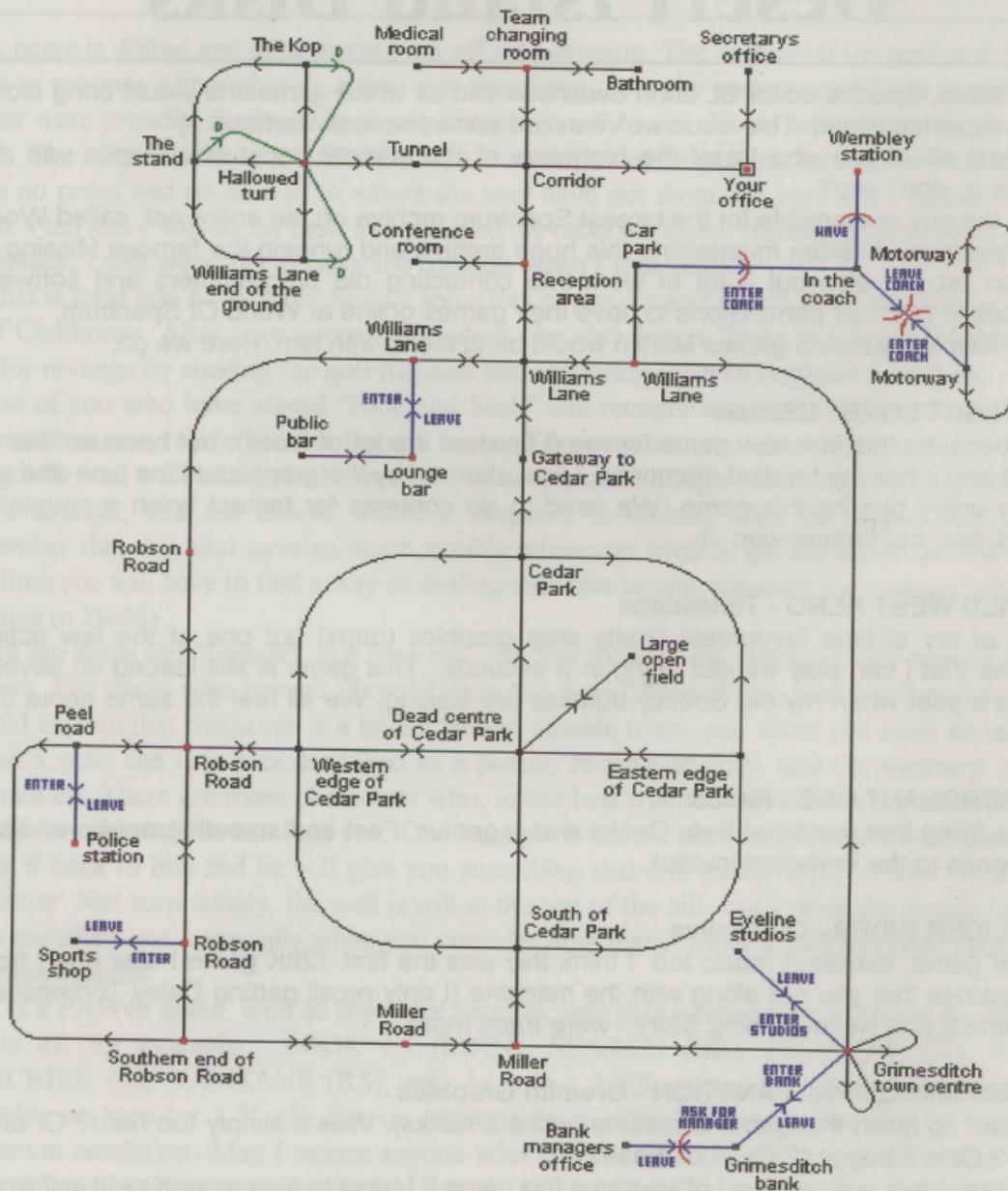
I *have* to finish this game sometime (without hacks). Was it simply too hard? Or am I crap? Or is it bugged? Or all of these?

You may have noticed that I often name this game if I have to give examples. It just won't go out of my mind for some reason...

Pokeworld

It's here where you'll find Maps, Pokes and Tips for various games.
If you have any problems with certain games, ask us for help.

Remember when Rob Cattani asked for help on Football Frenzy in issue 2? Well, we couldn't give him much help, but since then I've been lucky enough to stumble into the following map on the internet. As I contacted Zeljko Juric the creator of the map to ask him if he would mind me printing it, he even gave me a full solution to the game. Enjoy this great map, and watch out for part one of the solution on the next page, in case you think that's too much help.



Main symbols used on maps:

- A location with a picture
- A location without a picture
- A location with something like a picture, or a location on which a picture is shown only under some special conditions
- ◻ ◻ Starting location, with and without a picture
- ◻ ◻ Location on which game continues after certain conditions (Limbo in Adventureland, Hospital in Urban upstart, etc.)
- ↔ Normal bidirectional path (N/ S/ E/ W/ NE/ NW/ SE/ SW)
W=left, E=right, N=up, S=down
- ↕ Up/down bidirectional path
- ENTER ↔ LEAVE Bidirectional path, where standard movement commands cannot be used (for example LEAVE/ENTER or GO CAVE)
Appropriate word is shown beside the arrow
- ← Various unidirectional paths
- ↔ - II -
- ↔ - II -
- ↔ A path which is open only under certain conditions (doors, secret passages, etc.)
- ↓ False direction (a trap)

Football Frenzy Solution (Part One)

SEARCH DESK (you will find the club cheque book), SEARCH DESK (a bank statement), READ STATEMENT (you have only 3000 pounds), WAIT (your secretary will enter with a lot of demands), EXAMINE DEMANDS (total demands are 3075), PAY DEMANDS (which, you have not enough for all of them), PAY ALL EXCEPT MA WILLIS (refusing all other demands would have serious consequences), CALL SECRETARY (she needs a cheque book), TAKE CHEQUE BOOK, GIVE HER CHEQUE BOOK, W, N (players will ask you whether Rory would play up front or midfield), SAY FRONT (important, else you will lose the match later), W, SEARCH CABINET (you will found a packet of settlums), E, S, E, WAIT (until Miss Jones says that you would go home), N, TAKE LETTERS, EXAMINE LETTERS (Miss Jones forgot to post them), S, WAIT (until Mrs Willis enters), LOOK (she is angry because you refused her demand, so she refuses to wash the football kit), TAKE KIT, W, S, S, W, W, S, W, INSERT LETTERS (into the postbox), E, N, N, E, N, N, N (Rory will tell to you about his problems), E (in the bathroom), DROP KIT, WASH KIT (still not clean), SCRUB KIT WITH SOAP (ok, but now you must dry it), TAKE KIT, W, PUT KIT OVER HEATER, S (it's getting late), E, SLEEP (a new day, you hear a noise in the corridor), W (what a hell, the changing rooms are on fire), N, EXAMINE FIRE (a fire brigade is needed), S, E, CALL FIRE BRIGADE, W, N, TALK WITH CHIEF (he will tell that it was stupidity drying the kit on the heater; then firemen will extinguish the fire), LOOK, EXAMINE ASHES (remains of the kit), S, E (Miss Jones enters), TALK WITH MISS JONES (she will tell to you what is planned for today; by the way, the phone will ring too), ANSWER PHONE (oh, you must find extra tickets for Mr Bomb; also Mrs Jones will receive another call - the coach firm has no vehicles available for Saturday), CALL ANOTHER COACH FIRM, W, S, W (in the conference room), ANSWER QUESTIONS (now one pressman will ask you unpleasant question about your favourite star, Rory), SAY NO (pressmen will leave - why not to lie), E, N, E (how to buy a new kit), SEARCH SELF (you will found a watch), EXAMINE WATCH (expensive), W, S, S, W, ENTER PUB, W, EXAMINE MAN (a ticket tout), ASK MAN FOR TICKET (he is interesting for your watch), SELL WATCH (ok, you will get tickets; now it is a time for going to the bank), E, LEAVE PUB, E, E, E, ENTER BANK.

That's it for this issue. Part two will be printed in the next issue. In case you can't wait that long, ask and we'll send you a printout of the whole solution. But how about trying to complete it yourself from here?

Dr. Destructo - Bulldog

With a little delay, I think that we have managed to help Rob Cattani with Football Frenzy for which Rob asked for help in issue 2. Now, it's our very own Spectra Editor St. John Swainson, who is looking for some help. The game that troubles him, is Dr. Destructo. He asks:

I can't get past screen 17 (Paranoia) and it seems impossible to me. None of the planes damage the island. Please help.

The help is here, with some pokes I managed to get to that screen. What you have to do is shoot the planes exactly above one of the four statues. The planes crash down immediately when they are shot. So, shoot a plane right over a statue and the destruction can start. It takes some time before it starts to show an effect. Here are also some pokes for this game. Hope this helps.

Infinite Lives: 39136,0

Invincible: 39119,0

Infinite Days: 42517,0

STAR FLAWS - ZENOBI SOFTWARE

Yes, more adventure stuff. Barbara Gibb has sent us some hints to Star Flaws, which St. John Swainson reviewed in Spectra last issue. Barbara is Editor of the fanzine Adventure Probe, so she should know what she's talking about. Here we go:

- * To avoid being killed when going down the ramp - drop something smelly.
- * Which button do I press in the lift? - the card found in the alcove gives you a clue.
- * Keep getting killed by the general? - you have to use a direction and an instruction to kill as a single input.
- * The egg in the garbage vault is a red herring, but you get 3% for finding it.
- * How do I wake the sleeping princess? - give her a cup of coffee of course.
- * How do I get the princess to follow me? - input SAY TO PRINCESS "FOLLOW ME" (quotes necessary).

Andy Ryals' Pokeworld Pokes

Hello friends and welcome to another pokeworld pokes article, this month we have a wide and varied collection of pokes for you, these are all the games that appeared in DID3! Well without further ado, let's get hacking!

As with most RobSoft games it's compiled, so I did not hack the TOWER game, plus what the hell are you supposed to hack in this game exactly. If you hack the number of moves you have taken then this is pretty Sad. The Subscan hack was harder than I thought it would be but we got there.

OK chaps, hope you like this lot, see you next issue.

Game	Poke	Effect	Author	Year
Eugene - Lord of the Bathroom	36106,0 34798,0	Immune Oxygen	Manic Miner Technologies	1999
River Raid	24251,0	Infinite Lives	Activision	1984
Kikstart 2	47780,201	Infinite Time	Mastertronic	1988
Subscan	37257,X	X = Boats	Robsoft	1999
Switchblade	38475,0:39345,0 38435,201	Infinite Lives Infinite Energy	Gremlin Graphics	1991

That's it for this issue. Remember that besides Andy hacking all games mentioned in this issue of DID, we'll also give you the last part of the Football Frenzy solution in the next issue.

Matthew Smith

Article & Interview by Peter J. Mella

Editorial comment: Yes, it's unbelievable. Just as most of us had given up on ever finding out where Matthew Smith, the programmer of such great games as Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy had been hiding himself, someone posted Matthew's homepage address in the Sinclair newsgroup comp.sys.sinclair. At first many of us didn't believe that it was the real Matthew Smith, but it was. Now read Peter J. Mella's great article about Matt, and then read his interview with the god himself. A HUGE thank you to Peter for allowing us to bring both the interview and the article in this issue of DID.

MATTHEW SMITH: INTERNATIONAL COMPUTER PROGRAMMER OF MYSTERY

Matthew Smith was a megastar during the heyday of the Speccy, and that is no exaggeration. No British programmer at the time had as much respect, success and column-inches as he did, and his games were, and still are, considered benchmarks of quality. In fact there were even rumours at one time that he was just a code name for a computer or team of publishers, in order to increase Manic Miner's legendary status! Always a mysterious character, Matthew seemed to vanish in around 1990, and speculation was rife among his fans in the emulation community. His status was elevated to that of missing celebrities such as Lord Lucan, and his whereabouts were a hotly discussed subject on newsgroups and websites.



The 3 different Manic Miner inlays.

Recently, however, Matthew has resurfaced with his own website, and has given me his first on-line interview. As a companion to it, here is his story, including contributions from people he worked with, and fans of his games. (Note: The interview material was gathered when Matthew was still a "missing person", and this article is a bit smaller than initially planned 'cos all the speculative stuff is redundant!)

Matthew Smith was born in Surrey, but grew up in the Liverpool town of Wallasey. As a youth in the he was interested in electronics, and soon got into the new home computers that were coming out in the early years of the 80's. By 1983, at the tender age of 16, he had a three game contract with Liverpool software house Bug-byte, and the first game he made was called Styx. Not the most impressive of game, it featured a man with a laser gun, who had to travel through a one screen level, and kill the Grim Reaper. It was Matthew's second game, however, that cemented the legend.

Manic Miner was a game loosely based on the Atari hit Miner 49'er. It introduced the world to Speccy icon Miner Willy. The surreal humour was almost unheard of in computer and video games so far. The traditional little green men aliens that had populated most games so far, MM was full of kangaroos, penguins, toilets, and a huge bouncy version of rival programmer Eugene Evans. It's hard to imagine this causing a stir, when we're used to the bizarre humour of games like Earthworm Jim, and the incomprehen-

sible weirdness of most Nintendo and Squaresoft games, but the relatively tame craziness of Manic Miner was enough for people to question Smith's mental state! What really caught people's eye, though, was the technical innovation that Manic Miner showed.

There were a few things you couldn't do on the Speccy, or at least that's what people thought. One was flicker-free graphics, and the other was continuous sound. But Manic Miner contained all of these, as well as a massive 20, fixed-layout levels. To top this the pixel-perfect gameplay was terrific. At the time it was the most impressive title around, and it sold very, very well, making Matthew Smith pretty rich.

"When Matthew wanted to show me what graphics he had created when he was working on Manic Miner, I suggested that we wire up the phones directly to the Spectrum's tape leads," remembers Chris Cannon. "Because we were so eager to try it, we simply sliced the ends off the leads and spliced them directly onto the phone microphone and ear piece wires. It worked a treat. Eugene from Eugene's Lair was first transmitted electronically across two dodgy phone hook-ups from the Wirral to Bootle, by Mat saving the screen memory and me loading at the same time!"

"If there is one true classic then Manic Miner is it," says Keith Ainsworth, maintainer of Retrogamer fanzine. "If you compare it to the others of the time you'll see how far ahead it was: Great graphics that were animated. Continuous music plus sound effects. Plenty of screens and pixel perfect challenging game play. What more could you want?"

After the success of the game, Matthew left Bug-byte along with one of it's founders, Alan Maton, and some other programmers including Chris Cannon, for the new company Software Projects, of which he was a shareholder. Utilising a legal loophole, Matthew withdrew Manic Miner from circulation, and then took it with him to Software Projects, re-releasing it in a slightly different version.

"Everyone thought that we had always planned to take Miner away from Bug-byte," said Alan Maton in a 1984 PCW interview, "but it wasn't like that at all. The idea of Software Projects had been kicking around for a while."

The follow up to Manic Miner was Jet Set Willy, which arrived in 1984. A massive 60-screen platform game, it was similar in style and gameplay to Manic Miner, but the player was able to travel between the rooms freely collecting objects. The game's production was followed avidly in the gaming press, and when the game finally arrived it was even bigger than Manic Miner. For a while it was the biggest-selling computer game in British history, but there were problems.

The game was unfinishable due to a few unforeseen bugs. The main one was a caterpillar baddy in "The Attic" room, which corrupted other screens on the return journey. Software Projects actually managed to claim that this was a feature of the game, making the player seek out a harder route, but still released some official pokes that solved the problems. This did nothing to deter people from the game, however, and if anything increased the legend of Matthew Smith.

The follow up to Jet Set Willy was supposed to be "The MegaTree", a semi-isometric game starring Miner Willy. The press knew it as "Willy Meets The Taxman", which was an in-joke referring to Matthew Smith's own tax troubles.

"The third Miner Willy game was called "MegaTree" - an expansion of the Banyan Tree - during the development phase," says Stuart James Fotheringham. "Willy Meets The Taxman" was a joke title to keep the games press interested."

Marc Dawson adds: "There was no Willy meets the Taxman, that was a joke due to how much Mathew had made. It's real title was "The Mega Tree". It was a semi isometric type game, all we really ever got going was lots of mini trees running around in isometric with Miner Willy."

But the game never materialised. "We hadn't got past the discussion and planning phase in a month of work, and only had one draft screen working," says Stuart Fotheringham. "Tommy Barton (who was the money behind Software Projects) wasn't impressed and cancelled the project"

The only project that Matthew Smith was ever publicly attached to was Attack of The Mutant Zombie Flesh-Eating Chickens From Mars (AOTMZFEFCM) in 1987. This was advertised in computer magazines,



High Score 000000 Score 000000

The slightly different Software Projects version, which included the SP logo in 'The Warehouse'.

and there was even an interview in Sinclair User with Matthew Smith at the time. But again, nothing materialised, and the truth behind the game has been the source of great speculation until now (find out the truth in the interview).

After this nothing was heard of publicly from Matthew Smith, and his fans in the emulation community speculated wildly about his did so much interest arise in a who only ever released three Chris Cannon: "It really is MM was such a departure were around for the Spectrum fact that he was so young at mysterious as far as the press seemed to boost interest in him. The hype behind JSW must have a lot to answer for, too."

Stuart Fotheringham: "Matthew Smith disappeared from public view at the height of his 'fame', after delivering two highly influential and best selling games, which is a well trodden path in other media to gaining 'cult' status"

Stephen Smith, author of the 'Where's Matthew Smith' webpage, says, "[His disappearance] probably did increase his status, in the same way it increased John Lennon's, by pushing him to 'legend' status, because there's nothing else to go on but his much-admired past."

The games are still held up as benchmarks of quality today, and are kept alive through the use of emulators and the loyal Speccy enthusiasts still working their rubber-keyed wonder.

"Someone in the British gaming press said Mario 64 would never have existed without Manic Miner," says Keith Ainsworth of Retrogamer fanzine. "That's an exaggeration as the Americans I know have never heard of the game (they could have seen the C64 version). But in Europe there is no question that Matthew set a trend for platformers that was carried right through to the 16 bit consoles."



Jet Set Willy, the follow up to Manic Miner. Later JSW 2 was released, but Matthew Smith was only involved in the graphics for that game.

"[The games] were excellent," says Marc Dawson, "He also wrote a number of games on the TRS-80 which were all pretty good fun. Also when he finished a game it was polished something that even today people do not do"

"Just about everybody has heard of [the games]," says Andy Noble, author of Manic Miner PC, "and, judging by the amount of emails I get, every body has at least played one of them once. So it has to have rubbed off on the kids who have now turned into games producers."

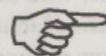
"MM and JSW were influential on a whole generation of "bedroom" programmers in the UK," says Stuart Fotheringham, "which I believe goes some way to explaining why the UK has one of the world's highest number of computer programmers per head of population, if not the highest, depending on whose figures you believe. So I think MM and JSW (and the whole 8-bit scene) not only influenced the games industry, but the UK IT industry as a whole."

The mysteries surrounding one of the most influential games programmers this country has ever seen have finally

been solved, and the great Matthew Smith is back and programming once again. Now it seems that Specusers will have to find themselves another case to solve... now whatever did happen to 'Mire Mare'...?

Thanks a lot to Stuart James Fotheringham, Chris Cannon, Marc Dawson, Stephen Smith, Andy Noble, Keith Ainsworth, James Langmead, Steve Layland, and, of course, Matthew Smith himself for help with this article.

You've read the article, now turn to the next page and read that interview.



Matthew Smith

Interviewed by Peter J. Mella

MATT'S BACK!

Here it is! Matthew Smith is back on the Net after a good few years of speculation, and here's the first new interview you'll find. Find out where he's been, whether the rumours are true, and the truth behind AOTMZFEFCM.

The obvious one first. Where have you been?

I stayed in Wallasey until Jan 95 when I moved to Holland. I was deported in Oct 97 and I'm now back in Wallasey.

Did you really go missing in the Lord Lucan/Shergar sense, or was it more a case of just keeping off the Net for a bit?

I was never missing. I was kept off the net originally by connivance and later by poverty. I now own my 5th modem and this is the first time I have been able to maintain an email account long enough for correspondence. This is thanks to Freeserve and to Telecom for the itemised bill.

Does the amount of speculation and attention about you on the web surprise you?

Yes I am surprised and flattered.

Have you seen Stephen Smith's "Where's Matthew Smith" site? If so, what do you make of it?

Yes I've seen the site. It was very helpful in finding Chris, Stoo, Marc and Steve Wetherill who worked with me. Most of the people who contributed to the site are genuine.

Matthew Smith's Software History:

- 1983 Styx - Bug Byte
- 1983 Manic Miner - Bug Byte / Software Projects
- 1983 Birds and the Bees, the - Bug Byte (Graphics)
- 1984 Jet Set Willy 1 - Software Projects
- 1984 Andre's Night Off - C&VG type in program
- 1985 Jet Set Willy 2 - Software Projects (Graphics)

There are many rumours about your activities over the years. What's the truth (if any) behind these?...

1. You worked in a computer store down south?

False.

2. You worked on a RISC User stall at a computer fair?

False.

3. You rang "Caeser The Geezer"'s show on Talk Radio when the subject was people who had been famous in the past?

False.

4. You e-mailed Andy Noble about his PC conversion of Manic Miner?

True.

5. You've been staying at a commune in the Netherlands and working as a motorbike mechanic?

True, but it was pedal bikes.

6. You've changed your name by deed poll to "Matthew From-Earth"?

Not Deed Poll. I am Matt from Earth though. I thought it would save confusion with other Matthew Smiths. Matt is now no.6 most common boys name in UK. The only other one I can think of immediately was the writer of the BBC cartoon Jamie and his Magic Torch. That wasn't me. I sign things Matt Smith, Matt Smith from Earth or Matt from Earth. When I went to Holland I found that Van der Aarde is a fairly common name.

What's the daftest story you've heard about yourself?

I've heard some daft ones. Everything is exaggerated so much it sounds preposterous until the grain of truth is located. I'm not going to publicise the slanderous stuff which has left me poor all these years.

A lot has been written about the wild times you and your colleagues had while working at Software Projects. What's your side of this? And is the infamous "toga" incident true?

Yes, wild times. We rocked. Yes, I'm afraid I did wear a Toga to several non-roman events. It was in the spirit of John Belushi in Animal House.

How ground-breaking was "The Mega-tree" going to be?

Megatree would have been mighty fine if we could have finished it. Nearly every idea surfaced later in 16-bit games.

Why did production of the game stop?

My partners were too impatient and greedy.

The biggest mystery among Speccy-types is what happened to Attack of the Mutant Zombie Flesh Eating Chickens From Mars. The rumour is that it was finally renamed 'Star Paws' and released on the C64. What exactly is the truth behind the game?

The version on Stephen Smith's site is accurate. Star Paws was the C64 version to be written in parallel. However I was writing a speccy game, and MM & JSW had shown that a C64 can't play a good speccy game. The C64 programmer John Darnell went his own way and finished his version as Star Paws.

What was this game going to be like?

The game was a speccy version of the Warner Bros. Roadrunner cartoon. I started with the credits with all the music and the That's all Folk's and everything. Then we lost the license to the cartoon and I had to adapt what I had. I fell out with Tommy Barton because he had my phone line cut (Modem #2). I found out later his son had run up a huge bill ringing wank-lines.

Another game of yours I keep hearing about is a real-rules Soccer game. How far did you get on this?

The Footy Game (called 'Footy') was a top down scrolling game like kick-off or sensi. The sprites were slightly bigger and had seperately animated limbs. The animation engine was complete but the AI never got written. The goalkeepers jumped up and down on the ball while all the other players ran in a 5 yd circle around it. It was quite amusing to watch. The physics of the ball were accurately modelled. I abandoned the game while inputting 3d tables for every limb in every position for ball collision and control.

What software (if any) have you written since your days at Software Projects?

I have not had a decent machine for writing software. Everything I've tried to finish has become stuck due to lack of memory or a decent compiler or a working disk drive. When I work in a factory I'm too tired to write and when I quit the factory I usually start a new program. I thought this 486 I have now would last until I publish something but it's struggling now.



Have you got any intention of writing any more games?

Soon, hopefully. If my machine was up to it, I would be putting levels and monsters into Unreal or Quake.

What do you think of the video games market today?

There is too much distance between the producers and the consumers. Most people are afraid to try to program.

What's your view of the emulation scene? Do you object to people distributing your old games on the Net?

I only really care if they are making money. Then I want my share.

Have you seen the PC versions of Manic Miner, Jet Set Willy and Styx?

I've seen Andy Noble's versions of all but Styx. I think they are excellent and he has instinctively captured what I couldn't convey to the C64 programmers. Chris Lancaster (first rejected version) & the equally bad published version.

Why do you think that Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy are still held up as examples of video game excellence today?

They were deceptively simple to play. The colors were bold and steady. There were visible objectives. There was incentive to progress (no level codes except the cheat tho') The tune was jolly.

Have you got any big plans for the future?

See my site.

Finally, any final comments about your days as an 8-bit megastar?

I wish I'd been sober in the morning more often. I would not go into business with non-programmers again unless I had 51%.

If you want to check out Peter Mella's Website go here:

<http://www.pmella.freemove.co.uk/copy-of-the-spectrum-site/index.htm>

and if you like to take a look at Matthew Smith's Website, this is where you can find it:

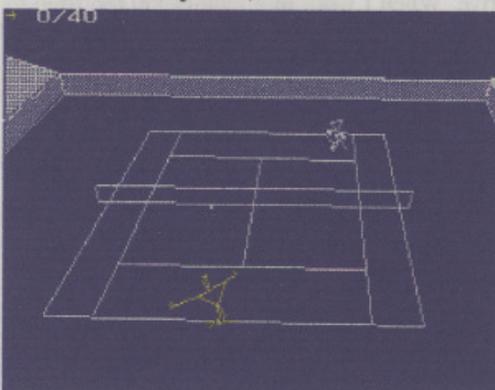
<http://www.the-good-stuff.freemove.co.uk>.

Game: International 3D Tennis
 Company: Palace Software
 Author: Sensible Software
 Released: 1990
 Type: Tennis Simulator
 Joystick: Sinclair 1 & 2
 Machine: 48K/128K

Graphics ■■■■■□□□□□ 5
 Sound ■■■■■□□□□□ 6
 Playability ■■■■■□□□□□ J 7 / K 5
 Addictiveness ■■■■■□□□□□ 6
 Overall ■■■■■□□□□□ 6

Looking back at the good old days, we were a damn tolerant bunch, weren't we? Especially with games ported down from the 16 bits or the arcades to our little Speccy. Sometimes they were just awful, but most times we forgave, smiled, and though "they tried their best".

Now in retrospect, we realise some games should have been left in the new ideas folder. One such example is the subject of this review, International 3D Tennis. The title gives it away, obviously. What you've got is a tennis simulation that dares to be different. Instead of the usual sprites, we are treated to vector graphics that could be seen from 10 different



Look at those stick figures, this is vector graphics.

viewpoints. The stadium was drawn in vector graphics, as was the scoreboard.

And as for the players...they too were drawn vector style, and as such gained a certain notoriety because of their stick-like bodies and triangle - yes, triangle - heads. With these graphics, they could 'realistically' swing at the ball, run, walk, sway slightly at the base line as the opponent prepared to deliver their serve, even come to the net and shake hands at the end of the match.

There are the usual game options to tinker with; match length, opponent difficulty, change name; and there are a few famous (from that time) players to go up against (Lendl, McEnroe, Cash and the like). There's also an option (on the 128k) to play through a whole season, picking and choosing which tournaments to play in. Another nice touch was that as you play in a tournament, the stadium becomes larger as you enter the quarterfinals, the semis and then the final itself too, with the 128k version filling them with colour.

All sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? You're right, hombre.

The biggest flaw is the speed. It's one of the main attractions of the sport to see someone return a 120mph serve, or whip a lightning fast passing shot down the line, but this aspect is lacking in this game. With all the data being processed, the game plays extremely slow. In the time it took for you to serve to your opponent, you could see maybe three or four exchanges in a real life game of tennis.

There are no sounds on the 48k, and the crowd on 128k isn't very good at all. The Wimbledon theme makes up for it though, as is the tune when you win a tournament.

Controls seem a bit suspect, too. You can only move your player after you've hit the ball. If or when your opponent returns, the computer takes over, manoeuvring you into the flight of the ball. You can still move your player closer or further away from the ball in order to

hit it right, but it's a system which needs perseverance.

Controlling where your ball goes isn't too bad, but there can be problems for beginners. On Amateur and Semi-Pro levels, there's a flashing box which appears to let you know when to swing at the ball. But this isn't always reliable, and if you're competitive like me (or if you like to blame anything or anyone other than yourself), you'll be hurling volleys of another kind at the screen.

As you swing for the incoming ball, each direction on the joystick represents an area on the opponent's side of the court. Push the joystick away, and you go for a long shot, pull the joystick back, and you get a short drop shot. The height of the ball makes all the difference; the ball will need to be above waist height to get a drop shot over the net, or low to get a long shot inside the base line. On Pro level, you can also add top or back spin.

The same system works similarly on the serve, and holding the fire button down determines the power of the serve. It'll take a while to master all these controls, and you'll need to, in order to beat the best.

Other problems aren't so forgiving, and these include some of the features mentioned above, which again sound good in theory, but don't work in practice. Of those ten different viewpoints, only four or so are practical. On the 3D scoreboard, some numbers are difficult to read. And if you're playing the season option, you can only save in between tournaments, you can't even save in between matches. Which isn't so bad if you're playing a one-set-to-win, four round tournament, but if you're playing best of five sets at Wimbledon (which means six rounds), you're gonna be playing for a hell of a time, or you'll have to just give up and quit the tournament, in order to save your position.

It's hard to take a stand on something like this. Do you say the programmers were trying to over-achieve, trying to do too much with limited resources, or do we at least commend them for having the guts to take a gamble, in spite of the odds? We'd never have got classics like Rainbow Islands or R-Type if someone didn't think "what the hell, let's go for it". I suppose International 3D Tennis is an example of when that gamble goes wrong.

Another big example of this was the conversion of Outrun, but the sheer popularity and status of that game, meant most of us were prepared to overlook that fact, when maybe we shouldn't have. International 3D Tennis didn't enjoy that luxury, and therefore doesn't get away with it. It's not a poor game but it sure doesn't deliver what it promises, either.

John McIntosh

X-MAS COMPO

Speaking of Tennis games, can you name the 2 Tennis games below? If yes, then you might be the lucky person who'll win 5 original Sport Simulation games for the Spectrum. They are World Cup Football, Formula 1 Simulator, Brian Jacks Superstar Challenge, Daley Thompson's Decathlon & Winter Games. Send your answer by post or send me an E-mail. Good luck.



SPECTRA

BY ST. JOHN SWAINSON

It's time once more for battleship Spectra to blast off into the blazing light surrounding all things Spectrum. How's that for a crap start? Blinkin good, I reckon. I'm sure things can only go downhill from here. Its like when Chris Evans walks onto our TV screens at the start of a programme. The moronic grin makes you cringe but you know things will get worse when he opens his mouth. Here is my Chris Evans formula, verified by numerous scientific experiments: Chris Evans = scream abuse at TV while changing channel.

Let's begin with an extended visit to

ADVENTURE COVE

There's nothing quite like a new Speccy game. Except possibly an old Speccy game. But if you have a new Speccy game, you've got something that only a handful of terribly skill people have got. There must be thousands of copies of The Hobbit still in existence but there are very few copies of A Hero For Soriana. But the question is, party munchkins, is it worth being one of the select few to own a copy of A Hero For Soriana? Let's look through the round window and see.

A Hero For Soriana is published by Adventure Probe Software, the only people I know of that are still producing new Speccy games. It is written by Karen Tyres and costs a barg £2. And everyone likes a barg. But a barg is only a barg if the item in question is any good. After all, you can get a C64 for £5 and that is most certainly an unbarg.

This is a text only adventure, despite requiring 128K of memory.

Soriana is in need of a Hero. She has been imprisoned in some remote tower by an horrible witch. The witch exists because the action takes place in a strange magical land. Soriana is, in case you had not guessed, a hideous tarted up gnome. Actually, this game takes the original approach of making her a beautiful princess. But that's ok. Why have crap video footage and books to set up a story when this has the same effect?

You start off at a crossroads. Within easy walking distance of this is a castle, a dense forest, a cliff with a old tree at the top and a marsh which you sink into. There are many locations you can visit and objects you can collect without solving any difficult puzzles. This means you initially think you are doing quite well but unfortunately, your score will be a spectacular 0 out of 170. You score 5 points for each difficult puzzle you solve and I have only got 20 so far - 12% in other words. At least I haven't spent days playing it. Er. I do not subscribe to the view that you need to know anything about a subject in order to write about it.

The text descriptions are good and there is an answer for most of the sensible things you can type in. The 128K certainly seems to have been put to good use with the descriptions and they help to create a good atmosphere for the game. The puzzles are good - logical and requiring some thought to solve. Examples include how to get a

long ladder out of a tower room which has a window but is only accessible by a spiral staircase, a door without a handle which only opens inwards and a unicorn trapped in some brambles. Any thoughts? If you drop the ladder out of the window, it shatters and it is too long to get down the staircase. Could the rope, the string, the chisel, the straw or the beef madras be of any use? Hint: its not the last one because that does not exist.

To round things off nicely, there is a good selection of commands the game understands. It even knows the difference between searching in something and examining something which many adventures do not.

There is nothing really wrong with this game. It should provide a challenge to hardened adventurers and is not so difficult as to put off fools like me. All in all, I can recommend it as a veritable barg to be gobbled up by everyone.

Graphics	■□□□□□□□□□1
Text	■■■■■■■■■■□□8
Playability	■■■■■■■■■■□□8
Lastability	■■■■■■■■■■□9
Overall	■■■■■■■■■■□□8

COMPETITION

What better prize to give away this issue than an 8 rated new Speccy game? Burp those entries to 7 Upper Hill Rise, Rickmansworth, Herts, WD3 2NU, England. The usual question must be answered - what is your name and address? As a general point here, it is DID's policy NOT to print any letters you send us. So you are welcome to send us whatever Speccy ramblings you desire. (If, of course,

you would like something printed in DID, please let us know and we will send you a big sloppy kiss in return. Temptation.)

I am hoping that by next issue, I will have solved enough puzzles to include some tips about A Hero For Soriana and possibly some other games. If however, you want some tips that would actually help you with the game, by far the best burger is Adventure Probe. This zine is still going strong at £2 every month and has passed the 150 issue mark. Their address is 52 Burford Road, Liverpool, L16 6AQ, England.

ZENOBI

Zenobi Software is the Big Daddy of Speccy adventure game producers. Since 1986, they have been producing games at a phenomenal rate - over 300 releases including compilations. Many of their games have appeared on magazine coverpages. Their best selling game (so probably the biggest selling independent Speccy game ever) was Agatha's Folly by Linda Wright. Obviously, I researched that last fact - you didn't actually think I knew what I was talking about did you?

Unfortunately, thanks to the Internet Geeks making their games available on the internet for free, Zenobi can no longer sell enough games to make it financially viable to release any new games. Zenobi has nevertheless refused to die and has produced a Speccy software product which is very simple to review.

This product is a compilation. But not any ordinary compilation. It is the best

collection of Speccy games ever released. For the megabarg price of £6.99, you can own every Zenobi adventure ever released. The only problem is that it comes on a CD which has to be run on a PC under emulation. This has to knock two points off the overall score as it makes the games unavailable to real Speccy users. However, if you have a PC and can tolerate emulators, this compilation has everything. There are many different types of adventure present: easy, difficult, funny, themed, classic, multi-part and graphic. Excellent stuff.

Graphics	■■■■■■■■□□□	7
Text	■■■■■■■■■■■■■	10
Playability	■■■■■■■■■■■■■	10
Lastability	■■■■■■■■■■■■■	10
Overall	■■■■■■■■□□□	8

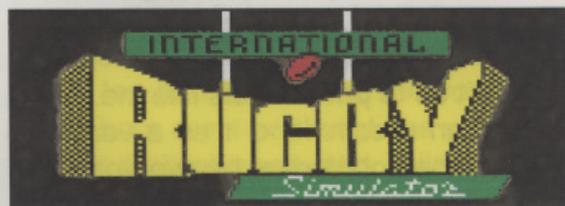
BOING

Its time for another new column. This is for all those unusual things released for the Speccy over the years. There have been quite a few of these things and a prime example is Sinclair Archaeology. This is a recent addition to the library of Speccy books that have been published. And its certainly an expensive one at 12 of your earth pounds. It is still available (from 54 Easthill Drive, Portsedale, Brighton, BN41 2FD, England - cheques to the author Enrico Tedeschi) but its only really worth buying if you are a bit of a nutter.

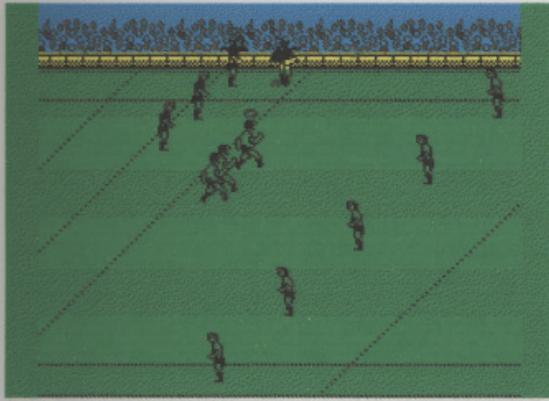
Sinclair Archaeology details all of the things produced by Clive Sinclair. This includes calculators, radios, TVs, electric vehicles and, of course, computers. Each item has a small description and lots of photocopies of things like in-

structions, adverts and diagrams. There are also letters to the author offering Microdrives and Interface 1s which say things like "I am sure you will be delighted with the extra speed, capacity and sophistication which these new peripherals will add to your Spectrum." There are 18 A4 black and white pages on the Spectrum, ZX81, ZX80 etc. Basically, this book is for people who collect Sinclair (as opposed to Spectrum) products. If you are one of these people, you will love the book but if not, it is an expensive way to keep yourself amused for an hour or so.

This is the space in which Crap Games would usually appear. Unfortunately, due to somebody else's fault, it will not do so this issue.



International Rugby Simulator is a game I bought around 1988 when it was released. I suppose I was expecting it to match up to Codemasters' other excellent Simulators of the time like BMX, ATV and Pro Ski. It failed to do this in such a spectacular way that I have not even considered loading the game in the last 10 years. What an ideal candidate for the Crap Games column, I thought. So I saved it from the bottom of the pile and karate chopped it into my Speccy. Much to my disappointment, I found that the game actually has things going for it and could easily be played for an hour without resetting in a barrage of laughter. No Crap Game, then, but still worth a review.



As you can see, the graphics are not great. Things get even less clear when the players start moving about and some of the scrums (where 6 or 7 players all jump on top of each other) merge into a random collection of pixels. A useful innovation here is that the border of the screen changes colour according to who has the ball. You can also tell who has the ball by the fact that all the other players run towards him in an attempt to merge with him. The trouble is, the only thing you can do to win the ball is hope your computer controlled players merge with the player in possession of the ball. You cannot tackle, foul or merge when you are in control of a player and it is pure luck if you manage to intercept the ball. This makes the game very irritating and boring if your team does not have the ball. When your team does have the ball, you have to run towards the opposition's end of the pitch. You can pass to your team members or kick the ball and chase after it. Or you can hogg the ball yourself and run all over the pitch getting nowhere like a crazed Michael Owen.

If either team gets merged, the teams line up and push against each other. Yep, we are in joystick waggling territory here. The quicker you waggle, the more likely you are to win. If you win, you get the ball. Should your player get

to the opposition's end of the pitch with the ball, you get a 'try' and lots of points. You then get the opportunity for a 'conversion' where you kick the ball over the posts.

There is a bit of skill involved in the game, but nothing to keep you playing more than a couple of matches. The computer is easy to beat due to its poor waggling and silly passes. The only interesting bit is therefore to see how many points you can score. This is not very interesting after a while because there are only so many things you can do - pass left or right and run in one of three forward directions. Although you can change formation, there are no great strategic decisions or good movements you can do. If you had a mate to control the opposition, things would be a bit more interesting. But then, if you got a mate round to play on the Speccy, you would not choose to play this game.

The controls are sluggish and pressing the same keys in the same situation occasionally produces different results. Plus there is the usual annoying feature that when you press the key to try to gain control of the player nearest the ball, you are given control of someone miles away from the ball. On the plus side, there is some passable 128K music and some funny commentary - "Yeaaaaaaaah!! What a superb kick!!" But it is a poor game. Just not quite poor enough to be a Crap Game.

Graphics	■■■■■■■■■■3
Sound	■■■■■■■■■■7
Playability	■■■■■■■■■■J3/K3
Addictiveness	■■■■■■■■■■1
Overall	■■■■■■■■■■2

Before we go on to look at a better Codemasters' Simulator, can I just say

SHUT YOUR MOUTH

to all you mobile phone users out there. Of course, I am only saying this because I am inferior to you for not having a mobile phone, I do not have lots of friends who are desperate to speak to me as often as possible, I have a rubbish job because I do not need to be 'contactable' and I am generally uncool. So really, I should just



say that I am sorry. Grand Prix Simulator was one of the very first Simulators on the market. At the time, there were not many single screen overhead racing games so this was a must own game. Since then, however, an absurd amount of similar games have been released, not least by Codemasters themselves. Super Sprint, Super Off Road, BMX Simulator, 3D Stock Cars and Badlands are just some of the better ones. So how does Grand Prix Simulator stand up in the fading light of 1999?

Codemasters themselves must have thought it was a pretty poor game as there is no quote from a Darling on the back cover including the word 'amazing'. However, there is an endorsement inside by "one of Britain's brightest new stars in Grand Prix Racing". Yep, its Johnny Dumfires, who has since gone on to become a multiple world champion Whelk rider. I ex-

pect. The tiny cars you drive round the 14 circuits are controlled by you and the computer (plus a friend if available). You cannot crash into each other but you certainly can crash into the things at the side of the road. And, irritatingly enough, you can crash into the attribute squares of the objects at the side of the road. In other words, you can crash into something that is not there. The other thing that drives you mad is the bridges which you can get utterly lost under. But at least that is purely due to my poor driving ability.

The cars are harder to drive than a 2CV. They skid all over the shop. You often end up sliding sideways round sharp corners. And if you hit some slippery oil, you have had it. There are no extras you can collect to improve your car so you just have to learn how to control it. I generally prefer this because you complete each track as a result of your ability rather than the add ons you have. That's why I am so bad at it.



The music is 48K only and is pretty good. This means it uses the same 'instruments' as other good 48K music - buzzing synthesizers, in other words. There is also some good speech at the beginning of each race telling you when to go. The sounds are by David Whittaker, groove god, who was instru-

mental in introducing 3 channel music into Speccy games.

This is a difficult game to give an overall score to. There is nothing really wrong with it - it's challenging, skillful, addictive, responsive and generally quite nice. The problem is it is not as good as the Stock Car games, BMX Simulator or Super Off Road. If you have one of these, Grand Prix Simulator won't be blasting out of your Speccy very often. But then, you have to own every Speccy game ever released, so buy it. Immediately!

Graphics	■■■■■□□□□□	5
Sound	■■■■■■■■■□□	8
Playability	■■■■■■■■■□□	J 8 / K 8
Addictiveness	■■■■■■■■■□	9
Overall	■■■■■■■■■□□	8

TOP 10 BEST GRAPHICS

1. Thanatos
2. Draconus
3. The Great Escape
4. Myth
5. Exolon
6. Dan Dare
7. Nebulus
8. Operation Wolf
9. Uridium
10. Pro Ski Simulator

What makes good graphics? Size (Thanatos), speed (Uridium), technical ability (Nebulus) or colour (Dan Dare)? Who knows. These are all blitheringly good, anyway. Till next time. Enjoy yourself.

Retro Scene

Spectrum games makes its way to the PC.

This column will concentrate on keeping you all up to date on what is happening on the Conversion scene. In the last issue we gave you all the information on Styx PC and prepared you for some of the coming games, remember? Since the last issue 6 new conversions have been released. The most interesting of them all is Klass of '99. I told you about it in the last issue and for those of you who remember you'll know that it's a remake of Dave Reidy's classic Skool Daze. Klass of '99 was programmed by Richard Jordan, who also did the graphics together with John Blythe & Graham Goring. Klass of '99 also has great music and sounds which is by Matt Simmonds.

But is the game as good as we all hoped for? Yes, it is. Take a look at the picture below, and I'm sure you'll agree that it looks great. If you like Skool Daze, you'll love Klass of '99. Another big point in favour of Klass of '99 (besides the great graphics) is that the story line has been rewritten, meaning there's some totally new puzzles to solve.

The ramblings of the teachers have also changed, and it is also possible to include your own game text or change it into your own language, as it's just a plain text file in which you can make changes as you like.

This column is not meant to go into details of what the game(s) are all about as most conversions have the exact same plot as the original Speccy version, so we'll keep it with that with Klass of '99 as well, but as said above it's got a totally new plot, and along with the game you'll get the story text, which is a little warm up story, written by Graham Goring. Very funny.

Go here to download Klass of '99: <http://www.retrospec.co.uk/rjordan/klass/index.htm>

Besides this terrific Skool Daze remake, you can also find new remakes of the following games on the net: Pssst, Headbanger's Heaven, Cookie, Birds and the Bees & Jumping Jack.

I haven't managed to get Jumping Jack to work on any of my PC's yet, but from what I've read on c.s.s. it's great. If I get it to work, I'll fill you in about it in the next issue of DID. Until then, go zap those teachers in Klass of '99. Congratulations, Richard Jordan.



Michael Batty

Interviewed by Michael Bruhn

Remember him? He's the guy who gave us all that terrific cover tape game Earth Shaker. Probably one of the best cover tape games ever released for the Spectrum. I took the opportunity to interview Michael when he contacted me about my Type-In section on the Desert Island Disks homepage. Enjoy.

How old are you?

29 - born 17.9.1970.

What are you up to these days?

Trying to get a permanent job as a lecturer in a British University. Recently I've been lecturing mathematics on a temporary basis at the National University of Ireland, Galway.

When did you get your first computer?

My brother, David, got a spectrum in 1983 when he was 11. He had more vision than me even then. But I got just as hooked as him. I got one the following year to stop the fighting.

What did you use it for in the beginning, playing games?

Yes - but I also started programming immediately. Among the first games we had were Spectral Panic, Kong (Ocean), Deathchase, Ground Attack and Manic Miner.

What is your favourite Spectrum game of all time?

I played Chuckie Egg by A 'n' F more than anything else. I think level 47 was as far as I got. The playability of this game is as good as it gets - after a while you can be very agile about bouncing around the screen and grabbing onto ladders. Other favourites have to be Manic Miner, Jet Set Willy, Boulder Dash and Knight Lore. And Jetpac. And Sabre Wulf. And Dynamite Dan and Quazatron and Arkanoid and ...

Level 47? Believe it or not, I've only managed to get to level 8. I absolutely love the game, but I'm probably the worst Chuckie Egg player in the world. Which Spectrum games are you really crap at?
Ones where I can't work out what the hell you're supposed to do, or haven't got the patience to work it out. E.g. Lords of Midnight, Zoids, Fat Worm Blows a Sparky ...

When did you start to learn programming?

I learnt BASIC straight away - aged 13. I couldn't put that orange manual down. Then I started on machine code about a year later.

What was the first program you made called, and what was it all about?

It was a sexy little number called "Doe a Deer" which beeped the tune and printed the words line by line. Missing in action now, unfortunately. Has anybody got a copy?

Your breakthrough came with the excellent cover tape game Earth Shaker, why did you make a Boulder Dash clone?

I started Earth Shaker about 4 years before it appeared in Your Sinclair. A Boulder Dash clone seemed like a reasonably easy thing to program. I thought Boulder Dash was great and played it for ages. I'm still fascinated by the way you can get such complicated behaviour and realistic avalanches by using a few simple rules. Earth shaker just grew - I kept leaving it and going back to it. But it was the first machine code game I managed to actually finish. I didn't even have an assembler back then and, ridiculous though it sounds, poked the whole thing in gradually from BASIC! It started life as "Rockfall", didn't scroll, and had graphics one character large. The name changed when we did C. Day Lewis's poem "The Magic Mountain" in english literature at school:

*"Let us now praise famous men,
Not your earth-shakers, not the dynamiters,
But who in the Home Counties or the Khyber,
Trimming their nails to meet an ill wind,
Facing the Adversary with a clean collar,
Justified the system."*

See - those lessons must have been some use!



Earth Shaker author
Michael Batty.

Michael Batty's Software History:

1990 Earth Shaker - Your Sinclair covertape
1990 Full Throttle 2 - Zeppelin
1991 T'ai Chi Tortoise - Zeppelin

Did you try to get Earth Shaker released by a software company, before you sent it to Your Sinclair?

Yes - Zeppelin were the first I tried. They offered me a job on the basis of seeing Earth Shaker, but were reluctant to publish it because at the time I think First Star were trying to sue people who made Boulder Dash clones. Then I tried Mastertronic, who didn't reply. CDS said they "didn't feel it was suitable for inclusion in their CDS/Blue Ribbon range". Alternative were next. They went bankrupt or something. Then Atlantis, who came up with the best excuse yet - that they couldn't get it to load. I can't remember whether or not I sent them another copy. There didn't seem much point as the first one had worked perfectly.

Why did you choose to send it to Your Sinclair?

Because I couldn't think of any more software companies. Also I was studying for a maths degree at Edinburgh at the time and fancied earning a bit of quick beer money. I could also rationalise the decision by saying that a game gets a very wide audience if it is published as a cover tape. I spent a LOT of time on Earth Shaker and thought it would be nice if a few people got to actually play it. When someone found a poke for infinite lives I was convinced this was the case!

How much cash did YS pay you for Earth Shaker?

£100 and my soul was theirs. I think I even had to bargain with them to get that. Do you know they had put it in the "crap games corner" a couple of months before? I was pissed off about this and wrote a letter of complaint, but at least the editor phoned me up, apologised, and offered to put it on the cover.

Your next game was Full Throttle 2. Why Zeppelin?

Zeppelin games was based at Houghton-le-Spring, which is a few miles away from Chester-le-Street in County Durham, England, where I'm from. So it made sense to work for them as I used to stay with my parents during the university holidays, when I did my programming. I answered an advert in a magazine (Your Sinclair, probably) which was recruiting new programmers, and thought they were a nice crowd of people when I met them.

How did it end up being called Full Throttle 2, was it Derek Brewster's idea?

The original game was by Mervyn Estcourt, not Derek Brewster. Zeppelin had bought the copyright to Estcourt's games so were at liberty to call a game "Full Throttle 2". I worked out where Full Throttle's offset tables were by listening to it load (sad or what) and pinched them. Zeppelin had gave me a half-finished version to complete that someone else had started. I hate doing that so I ditched it and started from scratch. The same was true for TCT. Regrettably I didn't keep copies of these scrapped versions.

Is it just me or don't you think that FT2 is way too hard?

It probably is. The trouble is when you write a game you inadvertently get very good at it when you're constantly play-testing it. It's a good idea to get someone independent to do this. I only had 10 weeks to write it. Believe it or not, when it was almost finished I did take Zeppelin's advice to make it easier. If you take the corners at the right speed you shouldn't crash into too many other bikes. FT2 clearly wasn't as good as Full Throttle, though, just had better sound and graphics. Estcourt had the playability exactly right, which is what really counts.

T'ai Chi Tortoise, your next game got some great reviews. Do you think it was the best game you have made?

I prefer Earth Shaker myself, but I was still pleased with TCT. I was more organised about it as it was a tall order to do it in ten weeks. Eventually it took 13 weeks. It's far too hard and I don't think I've ever completed it without infinite lives.

Did you come up with that rescue the cheese plot for T'ai Chi Tortoise yourself?

No - Zeppelin were to blame for that one, but I liked it and decided to take it in and bring it up as my own. It was suitably surreal and ironic for such a daft game title.

How well did your 2 commercially released games sell? Were they satisfied at Zeppelin?

Royalties statements were sometimes vague and I'm not sure how good the distribution was. To be honest I was too lazy to bother finding out. I don't think I'll ever make much of a capitalist. Zeppelin were pleased with my work, unless they were lying.

How come none of your games were reviewed in Sinclair User?

I'm not sure really. Good question. Was Sinclair User still around then?

Yes, they went on until 1992. Maybe they didn't review your games because you sent Earth Shaker to Your Sinclair. Could that be?

I doubt if it was any petulance on their part. More likely that Zeppelin never sent them copies to review in the first place. As far as I could tell, magazines depended on software companies to provide tapes of new games (unless you were Ultimate or something).

Did you start on another game after T'ai Chi Tortoise, that was meant to be released by Zeppelin for the Spectrum?

No I didn't. At some point they wanted me to make a tennis simulation, but I think that was before Tai Chi Tortoise. I was going to try and make it with 3D parallax scrolling. It was probably meant to be released in time for Wimbledon. I didn't have time to do it as mathematical physics and statistics were clamouring for my time.

Well, you told me about your idea to make Earth Shaker 2, what's the story?

This is like people plugging their books on chat shows ... I've been "thinking about it" for 10 years. So don't hold your breath! I have got some good ideas for it. It's going to have a lot more types of objects. It will be called "World Snooker" and the bubbles will be replaced by spinning planet earths which can bump into each other like snooker balls. I'd also like it to feature magnets, water, ice, bombs and much, much more. In fact it would be nice if you could design your own laws of physics. I'll stop there before it sounds too much like "Bandersnatch" or "Zombie Flesh-eating Chickens from Mars".

What music do you like?

Funky seventies disco music. The Beatles, esp. John Lennon. Oasis. Mozart.

Any favourite movies?

Er ... "Clockwise" with John Cleese? Very British humour. I never go to the cinema, so it depends what's on the telly. I also like Monty Python and Blake's 7. Why didn't anyone write a spectrum adventure about Blake's 7?

Favourite food?

Beer.

Favourite Sport?

Only pub games like pool and darts. I also like snooker but I'm crap and never improve.

Favourite Football Team?

I'm not really into football that much. But Newcastle if I have to say anything.

THE END

Second hand Z88 wanted. If you have one for sale please contact:

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