

July 2014

Issue #2

THE SPECTRUM SHOW

Magazine



Arcade Clone Shoot Out

Imagine Software Special



FLASHBACK 84

GAME REVIEWS

HARDWARE

SPECIAL FEATURES

Includes material not in the show!

The magazine of the show dedicated to the Sinclair ZX Spectrum



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EDITORIAL

Hello and welcome to issue 2 of The Spectrum Show Magazine.

With this issue I decided to try and polish the layout up a little bit, and take into account the fact that magazines usually have two pages side by side. With this in mind, I strongly recommend setting your viewer to this format if you can.

I have also made the decision to extend the reviews and features contained here instead of (mainly) pasting the script for the video shows and adding some pictures.

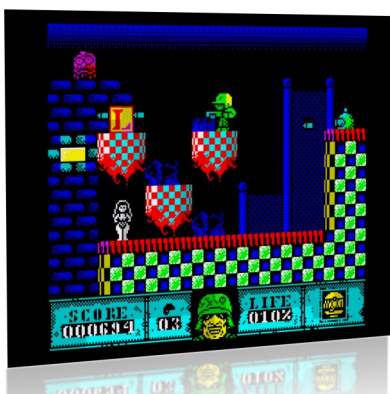
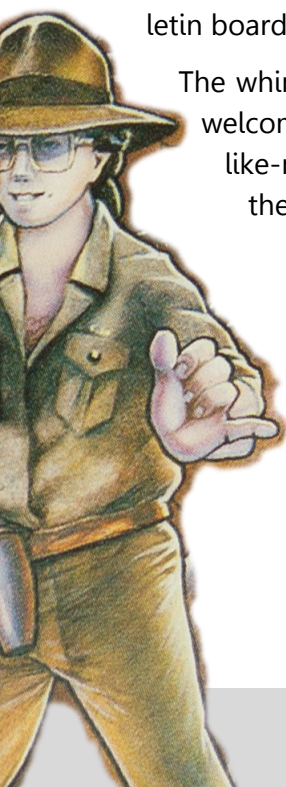
With all these changes, this is the third version of this issue, having started again from scratch as my original ideas fell apart! I think I am now happy with the look, at least for now.

In April 2014 we passed the two year anniversary of the show. Little did I know, two years ago, that I would still be here producing a well-watched video show.

It is all possible due to the very active retro scene on the internet with websites providing content and news for practically every micro.

Back in the 80's this kind of global communication was in its infancy, and we dreamt of something like the internet. Back then it was 300 baud, dial up bulletin boards, something that I still miss.

The whining bleeps, the click and the message welcoming you to a new world. A world of like-minded people who wanted to share their thoughts and opinions.



It was all overseen by the Sysop (Systems Operator), a title I held for many years, having my own Spectrum, Amiga and PC BBS.



Me and my BBS in 1988

The Sysop would, most of the time, be sat watching the users exploring his system, always ready to jump in and chat and to instantly ban users if they overstepped the line.

Many systems had hidden areas, secret places that held pornography, pirate software or hacking assistance. It was all very exciting, and I think something that is missing from modern communications.

Most of us take for granted that when we switch on our computers, the internet is there. Websites will be there, stuffed full of content, the culmination of many people and years of hard work.

Please don't take these for granted

HELP NEEDED!

If you want to write a review or article for this magazine, please contact me via my blog.
www.randomkak.blogspot.com

PIRATES AHOY



It has been brought to light that a Portuguese company has been pirating software on a massive scale, causing many UK companies to take action.

The company, called Microbaite Software, has been copying games, duplicating cassette sleeves and putting the titles out for sale illegally.

Each tape they sell includes two top selling Spectrum games, all duplicated without permission from the actual companies involved. At least 100 of the games are from Quicksilver, and managing director Rod Cousins is not impressed.

Other companies effected include Melbourne House, Psion, Ocean, Hewson, Ultimate, Silversoft, Bugbyte, Mikrogen, Artic and practically most of the top software houses.

WIRELESS RAT



The first cordless joystick has been released for the Spectrum, with versions for other computers soon to follow.

The Remote Action Transmitter, or RAT for short, operates in the same way as a television remote control, using infrared to send commands to an interface connected to the Spectrum.

It can be used up to thirty feet away, and is compatible with many games like Atic Atac, Hunchback and Trashman.

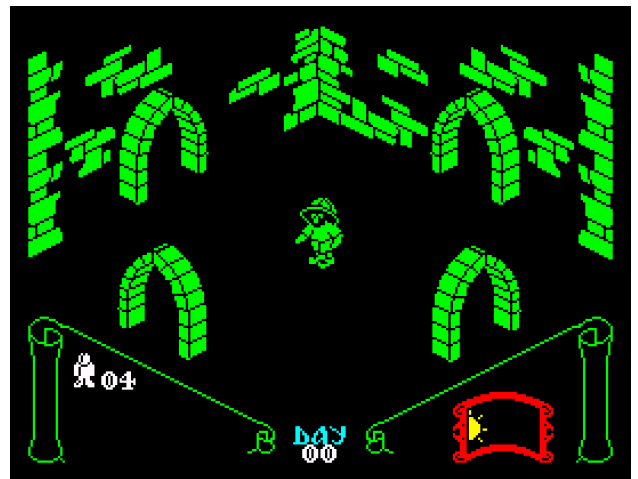
PROFITS DOWN

Sinclair's profit has not risen as high as expected, coming in at just £14.28 million – a rise of £253,000.

Sir Clive put the disappointing results down to the QL issues and the development of the Pocket Television.

Despite this, the turnover has risen by an impressive 42% to £77m – put down to high demand for the Spectrum both in the UK and overseas.

KNIGHT LORE WOWS

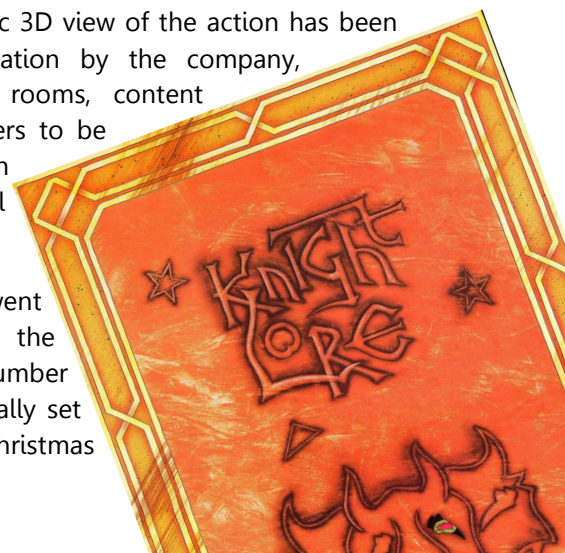


With the launch of Ultimate Play The Games latest title, Knight Lore, the collective jaws of various magazine staff are well and truly on the floor.

The quality and style are something that surpasses every other game for the Spectrum, and reviewers everywhere have been left astonished as to how this could be done with a humble Spectrum.

The isometric 3D view of the action has been named Filimation by the company, and allows rooms, content and characters to be portrayed in wonderful 3D.

The game went straight into the charts at number 1 and is ideally set for the Christmas period.



PLUS PROBLEMS



Sinclair's newly designed Spectrum, the Spectrum Plus, has run into reliability issues, and the number of replacements needed has caused a shortage of the computer.

High street retailers like Boots and WH Smith are saying it is a real problem, especially around the Christmas period.

The problems lie with the new QL style keyboard, with many machines having loose keys, but Sinclair in reply, say the situation is not as bad as people are making out.

PARKER PULL OUT



American software company Parker Brothers have pulled out of the software market in the UK.

Any and all products planned for 1985 have now been withdrawn and that includes the previously announced ROM cartridge games for Sinclair's Interface 2.

Parker say the market is no longer viable for ROM games due to their cost, and the fact that the whole ROM game format never took off for the Spectrum.

You can see more about Interface 2 in our feature elsewhere in this magazine.

SOFT SHOP

In previous news we heard of a new distribution solution that allowed games to be delivered electronically to special machines located within game shops.

Another similar system will also be providing this service by the name of Soft-Shop.

Customers buy tickets that are inserted into the machine. The game of their choice is then loaded onto tape a 16 times the normal speed.

Cassette inlays are printed and the customer walks away with their purchase.

This new system comes from Rose Tech, who, working with top software suppliers, anticipate the first 60 units to be in stores by January 1985, already loaded with the top 50 games for various machines.

IN SPACE...

Continuing the current film/game tie-in fad, Argus Press has acquired the rights to produce games based on the Ridley Scott film Alien.



The game will be a strategy game allowing you to control the commander of the ship, commanding the members of the crew in a bid to outwit the alien.

The game will be released for the Commodore and Spectrum.

SINCLAIR C5

The new electric car, designed by Sinclair, is due to go on sale in January for around £400.

The car is said to suit short journeys, commuting or leisure activities and has a top speed of 15mph.

Being just 6.5 foot long and having a range of just 24 miles, you better make sure you know where the nearest plug socket is!



Tape To Disc

For those lucky enough to purchase the Spectrum +3, it would seem the days of slow tape loading were over, with Amstrad's decision to replace the cassettes deck, as seen in the +2, with a 3 inch disk drive.

However, as with any new media format, and like its predecessor the Microdrive, the hardware was only half of the story. To make it work you had to be able to get your existing software collection onto those new fast discs.

Because of software piracy however, tapes had increasingly sophisticated protection schemes on them making the task of transfer seemingly impossible. It was hard enough to even just load the tapes sometimes!

Like the Microdrive, as the unit became available, a host of transfer options began to open up, the best was the Multiface 3. A hardware plugin that allowed users to freeze and save the game to disc quickly and easily. But for those without this unit, the only option, at least in the 80's, was a software transfer utility.

There were several of these on the market, but after trying several with no success, I had to turn to more modern methods of software transfer. After trying a few options I found two to be satisfactory, however none are straight forward and I think there is hole in the market for a nice Windows tool to do it all for

48K GAME TRANSFER

To transfer 48K games you will need the following;

1. Spectrum emulator.
2. SnapToTap utility (from World Of Spectrum).
3. TapToWav utility (from World Of Spectrum).
4. Audio editor (e.g. Audacity).
5. A little knowledge of BASIC.

The process has a few steps, but once you get used to it, it can become very quick. Using this method I managed to get about ten games on each side of disk plus a little loader program.

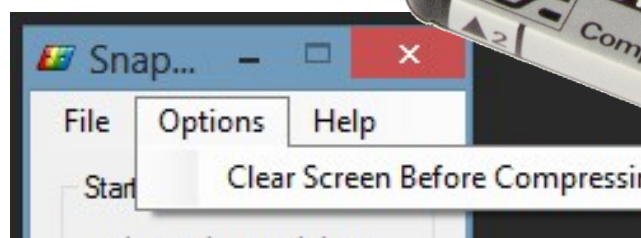
First choose your game. For this feature I am going to use Chuckie Egg.

Next load the game into the emulator. At a point in the game where the screen is cleared, usually after dying or just before the main intro screen, pause the emulator and save the game out as a SNA file.

Load up SNAP2TAP. Set it for a blank screen – this re-

duces the size of the overall finished game and stops screen corruption when loading.

Drag the SNA file into it.



You will now have a TAP file containing a compressed, single load version of the game.

If you can play this TAP file and load it into your real Spectrum +3, you can jump ahead – if it won't load then you will need to convert it into a WAV so you can ramp up the volume a bit.

Using TAP2WAV, convert it and load it into your audio editor, ramp up the volume and either save it, or try loading it from there. When you get it to load, you are ready for the next stage..

.. the modern way

It will look like the code below (the addresses will be different as these are based on the memory the game uses, in this particular case it is for Chuckie egg.)

```
10 CLEAR VAL "54554": LOAD "v2"  
CODE: RANDOMIZE USR VAL "54555"
```

Now we need to make a few changes. I usually set the colours, clear the screen, print a press any key message and add a pause. This is to allow the drive motor to

stop – otherwise the game will run and the drive motor will keep going! It is also important to remove the randomize line, and change the code load to the name of the game file. In this case PART2.

Your listing will now look like this.

```
10 BORDER 0: INK 4: PAPER 0: CLS  
11 CLEAR VAL "54554"  
12 LOAD "egg2" CODE  
13 PRINT AT 10,8; "Press Any Key"  
14 PAUSE 0  
20 RANDOMIZE USR VAL "54555"
```

Notice the name of the code to be loaded – in this case egg2, but you use whatever you need. Just make sure you

remember it.

Now, set the Spectrum to use the disk drive (enter LOAD "a:") and save this, making it auto run by using SAVE "egg" LINE 0

Once saved go back to the code in the loader and remove all of the code below line 12, leaving just lines 10,11 and 12.

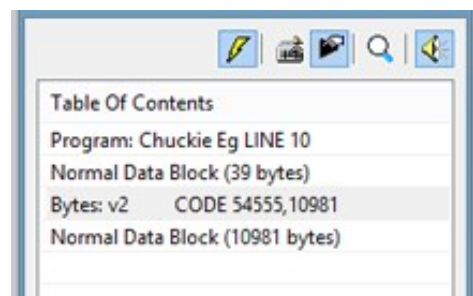
Set the Spectrum to use the Tape again. (LOAD "t:")

Run the program – this will now load the code.

Now, set back your Spectrum to use the disk drive again so we can save out the second part of the game to disc.

Before that though, we need to get the size and address of the code.

In the emulator, drag the TAP file into it and look at the tape browser. Here you will see the second part of the game code, its loading address and its size. Note these down. Use these settings to save the code to disc using the name you entered into your loader.





Tape To Disc

the modern way

For example:

```
SAVE "egg2" CODE 54555,10981
```

Notice I saved the code as egg2, the same name used in the initial loader – very important!

That's it. Now have your first game converted to disc.

To test it, reboot your Spectrum and load part one.

```
LOAD "egg"
```

Once you have a few games on disc, you can write a simple menu program that auto loads and offers you a choice of games. To do this, write a small basic program like the one below, that lists the games and gives a key to press for each one.

MAKE YOUR OWN DISC MENU

```
10 BORDER 0: PAPER 0: INK 4: CLS
12 PRINT AT 1,8; "GAME DISC"
14 PRINT AT 3,10; "1 - CHUCKIE EGG"
16 PRINT AT 5,10; "2 - SPACE RAIDERS"
18 PRINT AT 7,10; "3 - PLANETOIDS"
50 PAUSE 0
52 IF INKEY$="1" THEN LOAD "EGG"
54 IF INKEY$="2" THEN LOAD "SPACE"
56 IF INKEY$="3" THEN LOAD "PLANET"
60 BEEP 0.5,1
62 GOTO 10
```

Of course you can change the colours and positioning for your own personal tastes. Now save this to disc using SAVE "DISK" LINE 0

Now, reboot your Spectrum and just hit return.. there you have a game selector that loads your games.

As mentioned before, it's a pity that SNAP2TAP only works with 48k games, but at least it works.



COSMIC RAIDERS

Mikro-Gen 1983



Mikro-Gen were around from the very early days of the Spectrum, and indeed the ZX81 prior to that. The first batch of games they produced were mainly arcade clones.

Cosmic Raiders, released in 1983, was one such game, and despite its flickering graphics and random crashes, it is one of the games I remember fondly, maybe because it was one of the first games I actually completed.

The game is a cross between Defender and Scramble, seeing you pilot your fighter across a landscape, fighting off alien enemies and finally reaching the mother ship at the far left.

A map at the top of screen shows the area you have to traverse, like defender, however you can't fly through the landscape.

On the way you have to protect people from being abducted and of course shoot anything that moves.

The aliens will be familiar to anyone who has played Defender, and their actions are very similar. Some pick up humans and take them away, returning as more aggressive enemies, some split into smaller aliens and

swarm after you.

While ever one of the mother aliens are present, enemies will continue to appear, so getting rid of these means you then have a fixed number to clear.

Once you get to the mother ship, you have to destroy the two main aliens, that look strangely like swastikas, and this completes the level.

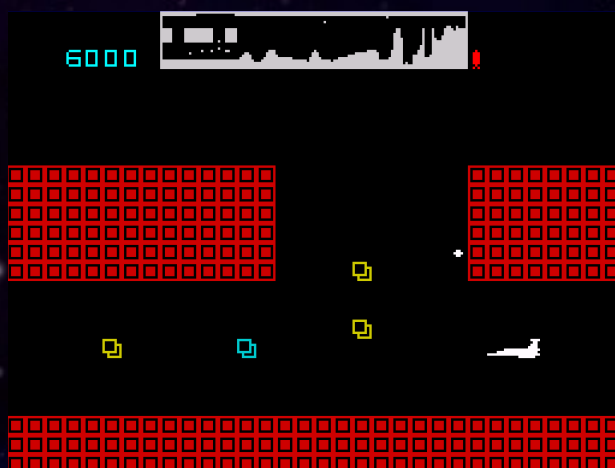
To help you on your mission you have the usual laser plus three smart bombs that when detonated, destroy anything on screen.

The graphics are basic and the sound is adequate, the scrolling could be smoother, but as a quick shoot-em-up fix, I still enjoy this game.

The random crashes are a different matter though, and the default controls, using 2 and 4 for up and down, 8 for thrust and SPACE for the smart bomb, can take a while to get used to.

Switching direction is done by the lower left of the bottom row of keys, again tricky at first.

Despite these problems, this game is one I find myself loading up for a quick blast now and again.





Imagine 1988

Rastan the arcade game, released in 1987 by Taito, was a side scrolling, sword wielding smash-em-up, featuring a muscled barbarian type, on his way to slay a dragon.

The large colourful graphics and nearly full screen scrolling made this a challenge to port to home machines, but the Spectrum version stands up pretty well.

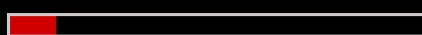
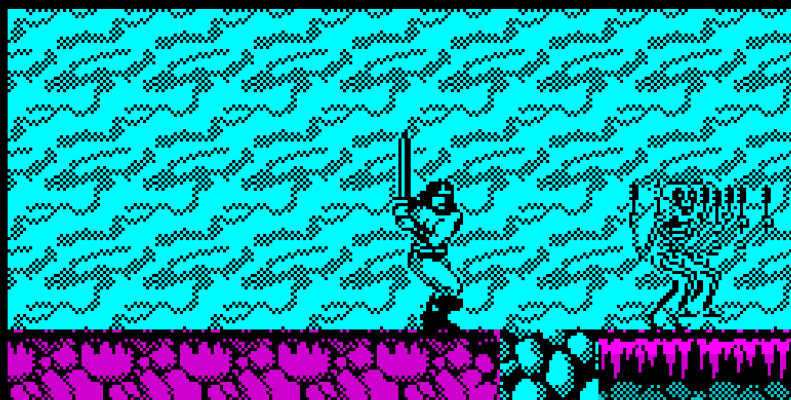
Released in 1988, the spectrum version sticks to the original in almost every way. It has large scrolling landscapes that use the BRIGHT mode well to give added depth and shading. The sprites too, are large well animated, looking very much like their arcade counterparts.

Due to the palette limitations though, they are monochrome and take on the colour of the background. Despite the sprite mask, this often makes it tricky to see them, particularly against textured backgrounds.

The Spectrum version does not have the trapdoors of the arcade, that the character had to smash through, instead there is just a hole that leads to the underground sections that has to be jumped over or dropped down. This isn't much of a problem though unless you are besieged by enemies and drop down by accident.

Most of the arcade game's features and levels have been re-created including the enemy sprites, collectable items, rope swings, more powerful weapons and level layout. This makes it ideal for fans of the game, as they will be instantly at home.

SCORE 0000500 HI 0000500 ROUNDB 1



5

I am not really a fan of this type of genre, in either the arcade or on the Spectrum, but did find myself enjoying this hack and slash game. Probably because the game-play was forgiving enough to allow progress, unlike, for example, Ghosts and Goblins.

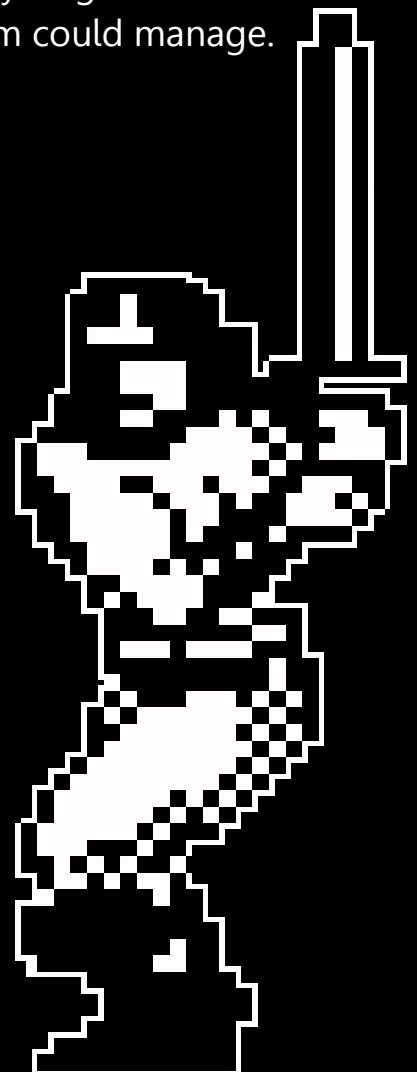
Difficulty is set just about right, and I completed level one after about four attempts. This pretty much matched my experience on the arcade version, so top marks for accuracy.

Level two caused some problems with the rope swings proving tricky to negotiate, harder than the arcade game in fact to the point it became frustrating.



The music has been lifted from the arcade too, and is particularly nice on the 128K machine, where it plays throughout the game. The 48K version is obviously not as good and only plays on the intro.

Overall, a great conversion and probably as good as the Spectrum could manage.



Cisco Heat

Image Works 1991

Cisco heat was an arcade game, released in 1990 by Jaleco Entertainment, and sees you driving your police car through the street of San Francisco trying to complete the section in a given time limit.

The game was a fast 3D driving game with 90 degree corners, jumps and lots of traffic to avoid.

The arcade game I found to be below average, so what about the Spectrum version?

Initially the game was a pain to load. It failed on the +3 all together and when I got it loaded in +2 mode, it crashed if I pressed the space bar!

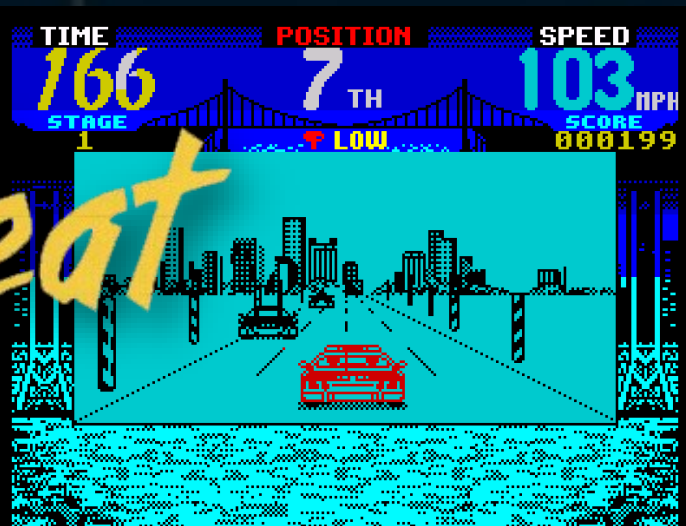
The trick is to let it load to the game screen and then press zero, it will load the level data and then you are ready to go, pressing zero again will start the game.

The game windows is small, with a wide surround and large timers and speed indicators.

The awful tune that plays away does not go away whilst playing, and I couldn't find how to switch it off, and after a few plays got very annoying.

On to the game itself, and my first impressions were, it was terrible...

Yes it had hills, yes it had jumps, but the view was so terrible you had trouble seeing up coming obstacles.



Control was ok using the cursor keys and enter to change gear, but you can't get away from the poor visuals.

The time limits are very harsh, giving you very little room for errors. If you crash more than once, you probably won't make the finish line.

When you crash, your car spins in the air, like Outrun, but because of colour clash you can't really appreciate it, it's just a blur of pixels...

Each crash obviously slows you down, loosing you valuable time.

Because of this, I never managed to get past the first section, and not for want of trying, I had about ten attempts, failing each time...

And my driving did not really improve because the game throws things at you too quickly to allow fast manoeuvring, as you reach the crown of a hill, you are sometimes instantly met with a large lorry, no time to move at all, and so time is lost.

Feature wise it has most of the arcade elements. 90 degree corners, other cars, large lorries, street cars, jumps, crossings and hills. Sadly the gameplay lets it down badly.

Using an infinite time poke, I found the other levels to be just the same except with more tight turns meaning you have even less chance of finishing if you are anything but an expert at driving games. Even then I think it would be tricky.

The most annoying thing is when a car blocks you. Your speed drops to around 35mph and you just hear a clicking noise. Because the sprites are the same, you sometimes can't tell, and this causes delays in games that doesn't give you much room to slow down.

Overall a poor game in most aspects, and that tune drives you mad!!!



FRED

Quicksilva 1984

Fearless Fred the intrepid archaeologist finds himself in the creepy catacombs of tootiecarmoon. His task is to get out, collecting any treasures on the way.

Fred has only his trusty gun with five bullets for protection and luckily there are bullets laying around to reload, but they don't help much if a ghost turns up!

Fred released in 1984 by Quicksilva is a side on arcade maze game, almost like a side on Maziacs with more features.

The huge pyramid scrolls somewhat jerkily as Fred moves around, jumping gaps and climbing ropes. There are evil things in here, and all will sap Fred's strength if he comes into contact with them.

There are acid drops that he has to dodge, rats that he has to jump over, for some reason he can't shoot them. Ghosts that float around through walls and although they can be shot, it doesn't destroy them, it just makes them change direction.

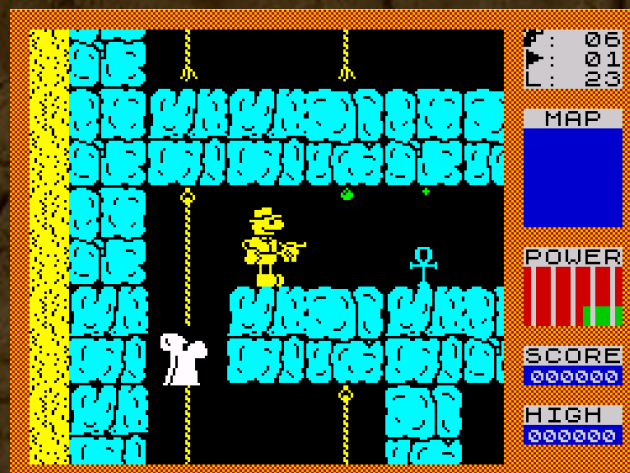
Chameleons on the walls, to avoid these Fred has to swap sides of the rope. Mummies, Vampires and skeletons, all of which need shooting, or of course you can always run away.

You may be lucky enough to find a map, this will show you the layout to help you reach the exit.

So, the object is to run around, climbing higher, because the exit is at the top, avoid the many nasties, collect treasure and shoot things if required.

The game is a nice mixture of things that come together to form a rather enjoyable game, only let down by the jerky scrolling.

According to the game, the maze is different every game and there are five levels of play, if you can get that far I remem-

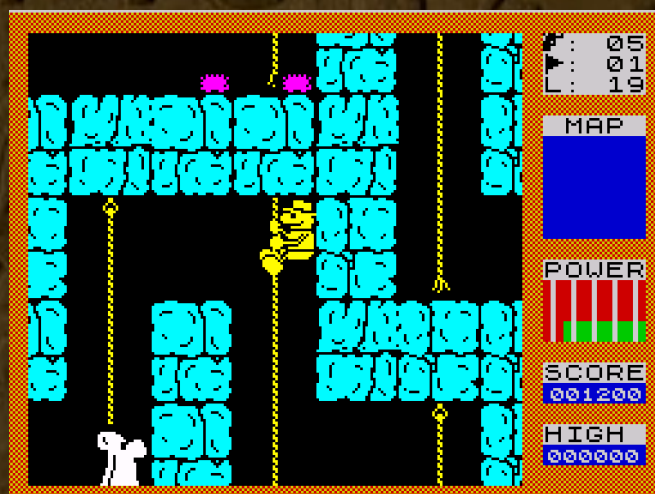


ber as a teenager finding the exit, and being ecstatic, I still get a buzz when I find it.

This game can be relaxing to play, the pace is slow but at the same time you get the feeling of not knowing what will happen next, especially on the later levels.

You could just be walking up a corridor when a mummy can come crashing down a tunnel from above, or a vampire bat can suddenly appear from a side passage, or a ghost appear from a solid wall.

If you like this pace of gameplay and can put up with the jerky scrolling, this is a great little game and I can promise you, once you find your first exit you'll be back for more.



GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

SCORE
24100



LIVES
5

TIME
2:13



Ghosts N Goblins was released into the arcade in 1985, and proved to be a huge success.

You play Sir Arthur, out on a quest to get back the princess, stolen away by an evil demon. Along the way you can pick up different weapons, replenish your armour and collect bonus points, but each section has a time limit attached, meaning its action all the way.

The arcade game is considered very difficult due to the time limit and the number of hits the player can take before he dies; which is only two. One removes his armour, the second kills him if he hasn't found any replacements.

I don't like this game...

I will say from the start that, contrary to many play-

ers, I don't like this game. Not because of any pre-conceptions about the company (that's for another day), but because I wasted a long time trying to make it past the first level just so I could create this review.

Let's start from the beginning....

The graphics are average. The sprites are about the right size for the Spectrum screen and are well defined. They all move smoothly and things look OK, that is unless you find yourself stood next to a gravestone or other block.

Unlike the arcade where moving and jumping are not stopped by objects, here you can find yourself stuck. The only way out is a vertical jump, which means your progress is held up and gives the enemies time to close in. All very frus-





trating.

The levels match the arcade but with obviously not the same amount of detail or colour. This could have been improved, but I think it is like this to keep the scrolling smooth.

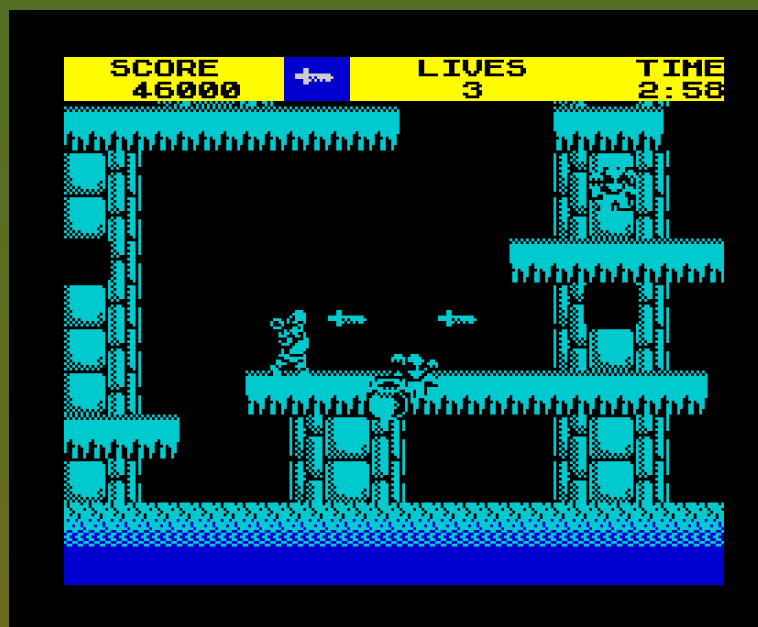
The layout is in horizontal layers, so the attributes remain static allowing the graphics to scroll smoothly.

The sound is terrible. Yes, it's only a 48k Spectrum, but we should expect better. Things are limited to just simple clicks when something gets killed. There is no firing sound, no bonus sound and no enemy fire sound, so there can be long periods of silence.

The arcade game allowed me to get to the end of level 1 after just three plays. Maybe I was lucky, but the game I felt was forgiving enough.

The Spectrum version however, after almost two hours of playing, I still hadn't got past the first boss on the first level. Most of the time I couldn't even get that far.

This leads to frustration and several times I had to walk away, make a brew, read some emails and then try again, it was just so infuriating.



After a further two hours I finally got to the second stage of the first level, this took another 30 minutes to beat, using a saved game.

Then level two arrived, this was harder than the first, with monsters popping up right next to the player, moving around randomly, and an awful colour scheme that made locating enemies difficult at best.

I am not a brilliant game player, but games should be the same difficulty as their arcade counterparts. For me then, this game represent a poor conversion that is just too difficult to play.



Released in 1982 under license by Williams, this fondly remembered arcade game had many redeeming features and remains a firm favourite for retro fans. By this time the graphics and sound capabilities of arcade machines had improved from the single coloured sprites and simple monophonic tones found emanating from the early cabs.

The bright colourful graphics with parallax scrolling and lovely animated buggy instantly drew players to it but the main attraction was the jolly tune that played as you manoeuvred along the moon's surface. So could any of the Spectrum clones match the arcade machine?

Could Do Better

At the bottom of the list, the games that were really bad included **Casey Jones** from Blaby Computing (right). This game replaced the moon buggy of the original with a steam locomotive, and takes inspiration from the 60's television show of the same name. Aliens are replaced with hamburgers and the whole thing falls flat on its face.

Several of the games were written in BASIC and because of this suffered from the usual problems of poor sound, jerky graphics and poor control. **Escape From Alderon** by Magnum Computing obviously goes for a Star Wars spin on things and is truly appalling. **Return To The Moon** (Tlauli-ran) and **Terra Plen** (Thrydhent Vision Systems) are also at the bottom of the list due to clunky graphics, poor or totally missing sound and terrible controls.

The mediocre games are at least in machine code and provide the player with a decent experience, mostly. **Hoverkrat** from Andreas Zallmann Software (right) is a 'nearly' game. The pauses in between playing when you lose a life is annoying and graphics, sound and game-play just miss the mark.



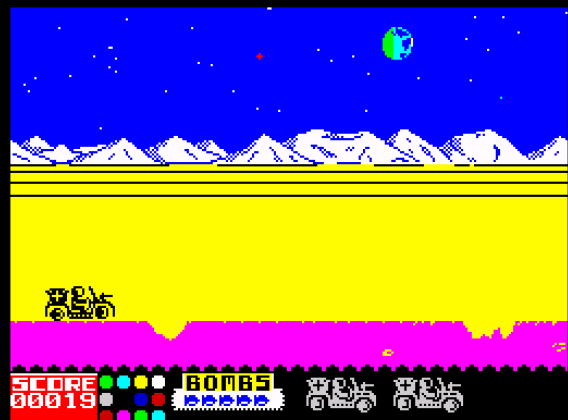


Kamikaze Buggie by Tweety Soft moves away from the norm and gives us a weird hybrid between Moon Patrol and Space Invaders. Jumping is almost uncontrollable, the buggy flying around the screen in all directions regardless of which buttons you press. The aliens drop to the ground and scuttle across the land causing further hazards.



Improving...

A game with great graphics but flawed game-play is **Lunar Rover** from Data Design Systems (right). Jumping is based on how long you hold down the jump key and proves very tricky to master, meaning despite the game looking good, it soon become frustrating. The aliens are also missing, being replaced by meteors that fly horizontally across the screen.



SCORE 0000050 LIVES 4 HI 0000000

Still in the mediocre section we have several games with the same name; **Moon Buggy**. Anirog's version is very colourful and action packed but the jumping is tricky. How far the buggy jumps is based on how fast you are going, but there is no indication of this on screen. Guessing the length of the jump usually ends in disaster, causing frustration.



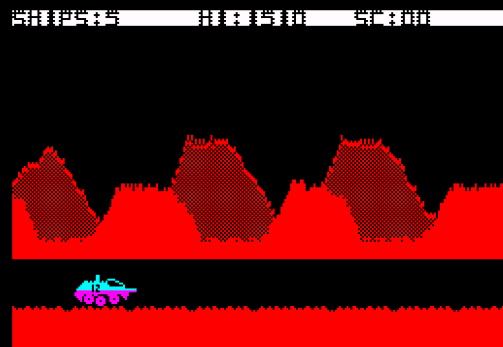
Vision Software's **Moon Buggy** lacks many of the arcade features to the extent it is almost a different game. The landscape does not scroll there are just craters to avoid and the whole thing appears to be a variant of Space Invaders. Despite these problems though, it has fast, smooth graphics and decent sound.



Moon Patrol Shoot Out

Could Do Better

Moon Patrol – the unknown game (right) by an unknown author in an unknown year, has some of the arcade features and the game-play is quite good. Sadly it seems unfinished, which is a pity.



Nearly There

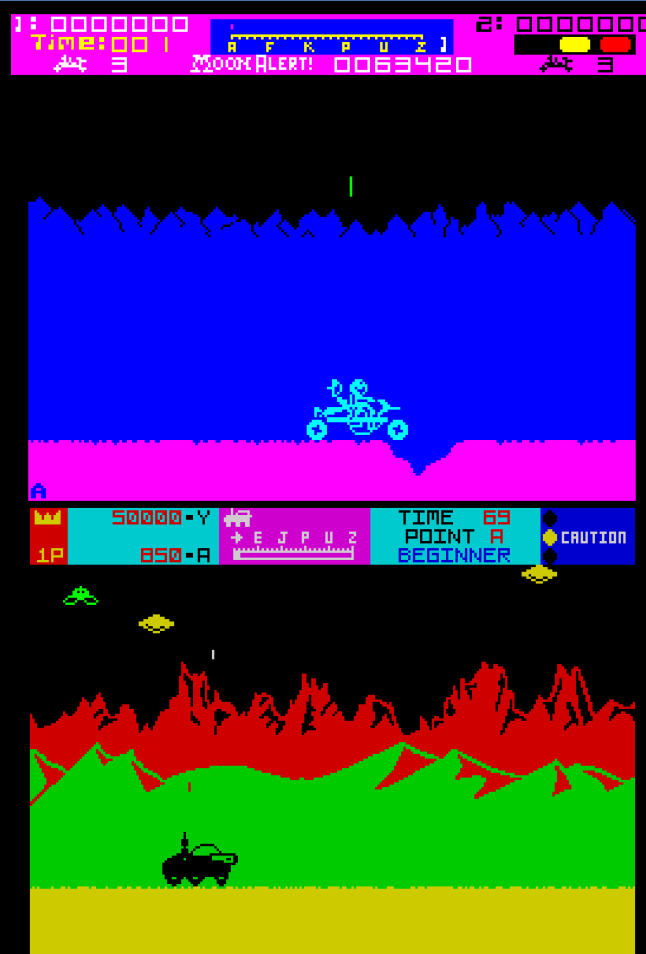
Now we have reached the top of the pile, and the two games that will fight it out for the crown.

Moon Alert from Ocean is a great game with large smooth graphics that sadly flicker sometimes. Most of the arcade elements are present, sound is good and game-play is spot on. The arcade's tanks are missing, replaced by mines and for some reason the music from Indiana Jones is played when you complete a level.

This for me was the best version, but I had never played the other contender.

The official version, **Moon Patrol** from Atarisoft (right), proves to be excellent, as you would expect from an official conversion. All of the arcade elements are there, even the tune, and the landscape detail is great. Game-play is superb and the only bad point is the lack of sound effects. Despite this though, this is a quality game.

The Winner: Moon Patrol by Atarisoft.



ENERGY WARRIOR

It's the year 2079 and the earth has been neglected by the human race, with only a few areas of natural beauty left. These areas must be defended at all costs, and that's where you come in....

You are a warden responsible for keeping out the aliens that threaten to ruin these last few areas.

As you've guessed, Energy Warrior is a horizontal shoot-em-up... just what I like...

You fly around shooting various aliens that come at you in different formations. Some just fly on set paths, others swirl about and are attracted to you. Luckily your ship handles well and your laser can blast them into little bits.

You also have smart bombs, although in this game they are called blitz bombs. These wipe out any alien on screen.

Like all good shoot-em-ups, there are power-ups.

These appear after shooting certain aliens and change on a rotation basis allowing you to pick up energy, aura, blitz bombs and keys. Keys allow you to travel to the next area, of which they are ten to complete.

On first play the game seemed not quite right, this was because it wasn't like most horizontal shoot-em-ups in that the movement is not constant.

The movement is controlled by you, so you can stay still if you want. Once you get used to that, the game soon begins to grow on you.

The graphics are really nice with four levels of parallax scrolling and some good detail in the backgrounds.

Sound could have been better though, with just a few effects for firing and explosions. There is also no music on 48k Machines.

The aliens are depicted in various forms, some typically alien like, others rather odd. For example you will find snowmen and what look like burgers. You will also get hu-



man heads and cakes!

After a few plays I found myself enjoying this game and wanting to try again to get further.

The graphics for each level change to keep things interesting and all in all it's a nice blaster.

It takes much from Defender and adds multiple levels and detailed graphics while at the same time slowing down the gameplay to a more manageable speed.

The end result is rather a nice little gem...

Give it a try...



Tape Magazines

It was inevitable that someone would take the step of producing a magazine in electronic format, either for free inclusion in an existing magazine or to be sold separately.

Advantages of this idea were obvious; less space to store your ever increasing magazine collection, real screen shots of games, type-in games that actually worked and didn't require typing in, and that nice feeling that you were moving into the future with electronic publishing; something that is only just maturing with the tablet revolution.

The disadvantages of course were that you couldn't just pick it up and flick to a review or article. You obviously had to work your way through the tape, section by section.

The first tape magazine for the Spectrum was *Spectrum Computing*, launched in May 1983 by Argus Publications. The contents were a range of features, game reviews, games and useful routines.



The games initially were just BASIC type-ins, saving you from all the hard work, but because of the new electronic format and the removal of pages worth of code, the games could be much more complex and even be in machine code, such as Archaeologist from issue 18 of *Spectrum Computing*, a nice little jet set willy clone with smooth animated sprites and good gameplay.

The layout of the magazine left a lot to be desired, but did improve over time with the inclusion of larger text, navigation and border effects.

Other tape based magazines took up that challenge too, improving readability, operation and navigation.

Hot on the heels of *Spectrum Computing* came *16/48*

released in November 1983. Attractively mounted on a colourful card, this had quite a large following and a much improved look. It all felt a bit more professional than *Spectrum Computing* at the time. Taking two sides of a cassette, *16/48* included good quality games, reviews, news and even an adventure help section. I always looked forward to reading this section as I was terrible at adventures.

BASIC games giving way to better machine code ones...

The games followed the same path *Spectrum Computing*, with BASIC games giving way to better machine code ones.

Later editions of *16/48* magazine came with an on-going graphic adventure called The Long Way Home, no doubt a mar-



keting ploy to get you to buy the next issue.

Other tape magazines quickly followed.

Outlet joined the others in March 1987 and ran for over 140 issues, including reviews, routines and features. The magazine was available in various formats including tape, Microdrive and disk.

Spectrum Adventurer began publishing in 1986 and obviously deals with just adventure games. The tape consisted of the usual editorials, game reviews and adventure help.

Spectrum Discovery Club was a disk magazine produced for Directory Opus users and was available on Opus disk only.

The idea had now well and truly caught on...

The idea had now well and truly caught on, with numerous magazines available across different formats.

As the 8bit machine lost popularity to the 16bit ones, so the magazines lost favour with the public and slowly vanished.

Sadly it seems the idea of producing a magazine for the Spectrum on tape or disk has faded too. There were a few Russian ones around, but they seem to have dried up recently.

It's still nice to sit down and read through a few issues of these magazines. It puts you back where the action

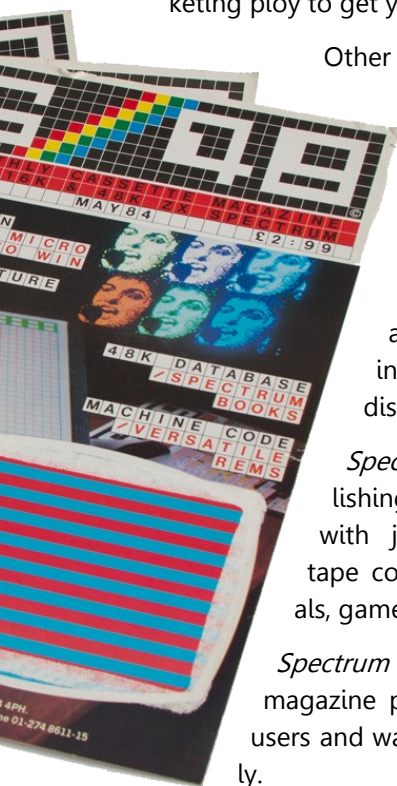


was, and gives you an insight into what was happening at the time, and you feel a little closer to those days when the Spectrum was king.

So when your trendy friend brags about his iPad or your mate starts harping on about magazines on his tablet, you can hold your head up and claim it all started on the Spectrum and you've been reading electronic magazines since 1983.

Not that they'll probably understand!

Grrrr mumble mumble mumble....



INTERGALACTIC SPACE RESCUE

Cyringstan 2013

Your skills are needed by the Intergalactic Space Rescue Service to rescue stranded spaceships and their crews.

To help you, their distress signals can be picked up and used to track them, giving you a good idea of their location within the grid.

The grid is a 10 x 10 area, each sector representing a place in space. You cannot tell what lies within these spaces; it could be open space, a planet or even asteroids.

Hitting asteroids loses you fuel, of which you have a limited supply. Locating a planet will allow you to refuel and continue your task.

There are also worm holes that whisk you off to another sector in the grid.

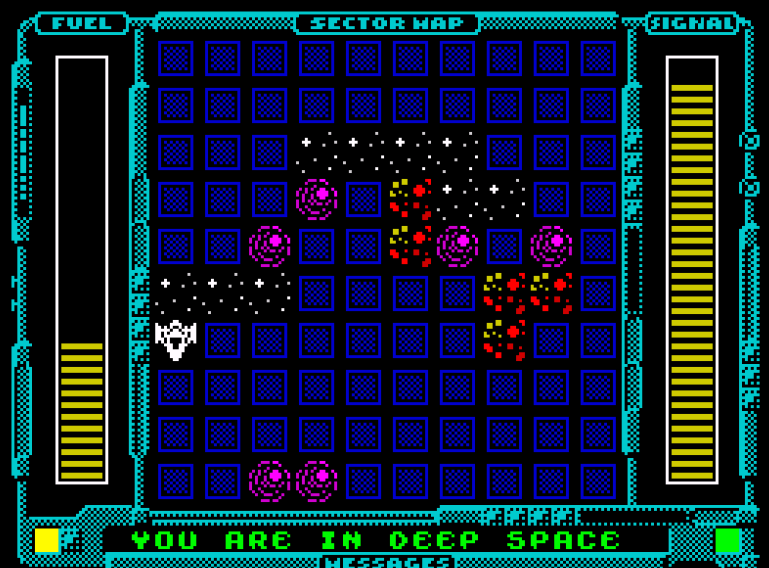
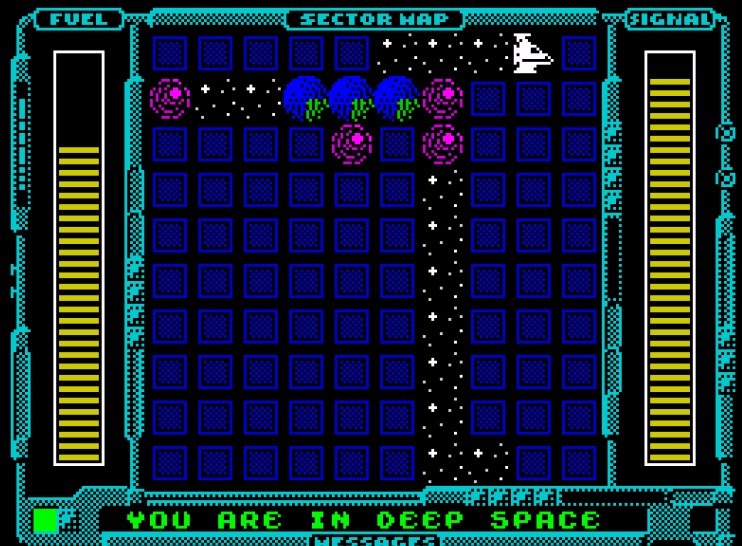
The screen shows your fuel and distance to the stranded spaceship. This lets you navigate through the sectors.

The whole game concept reminded me of *Mined Out* from Quicksilver, which is no bad thing despite your ship moving only in character squares.

This type of game though does need that kind of limited movement, after all it is a strategy game rather than a fast paced arcade shooter.

The graphics are nice but sound is only used when colliding with things, which is a pity. The game is only 16k however, but there must be room for a little bleep for each of your moves. Otherwise, the game is silent when moving through empty space.

Overall though a great game that can easily get you engrossed for a few minutes or a few hours.



SGT. HELMET ZERO

After two warring nations had ceased hostilities, refugees were still held by automated systems and a hero is needed to go out and rescue them, step forward Sgt Helmet.

This game, released in 2009 by the Mojo Twins is one of the most colourful games I have seen on the Spectrum, and it still manages to play and move really well.

Sgt Helmet is plunged into a strange land where he has to fight his way across platforms inhabited by creatures called Sputs, and guarded by automatic gun turrets.

Your health goes down quickly when hit, but luckily when you destroy a gun turret, you can replenish your health back to 100%.

This is a major part of the game, and although the Sputs can be largely ignored, doing so with turrets will give you a real short game.

There are four levels to get through, each holding ten refugees, and each level getting harder.

Some of the jumps are really tricky to complete, so mastering the jump control is essential if you want to get far in this game.

The trickiest ones are when you have to jump from beneath a platform, jumping both sideways and up, so you can reach safety.

Most of these tricky jumps allow you to return to the lower platform if you miss-time things, and again, mastering this will get you far in the game. If you do miss the jump you have to quickly change direction as your player falls, and missing a platform means death.

The music that plays along is great and really suits the game, and it certainly gets you hooked in as you bound across the screen, blasting away.

What a great game!

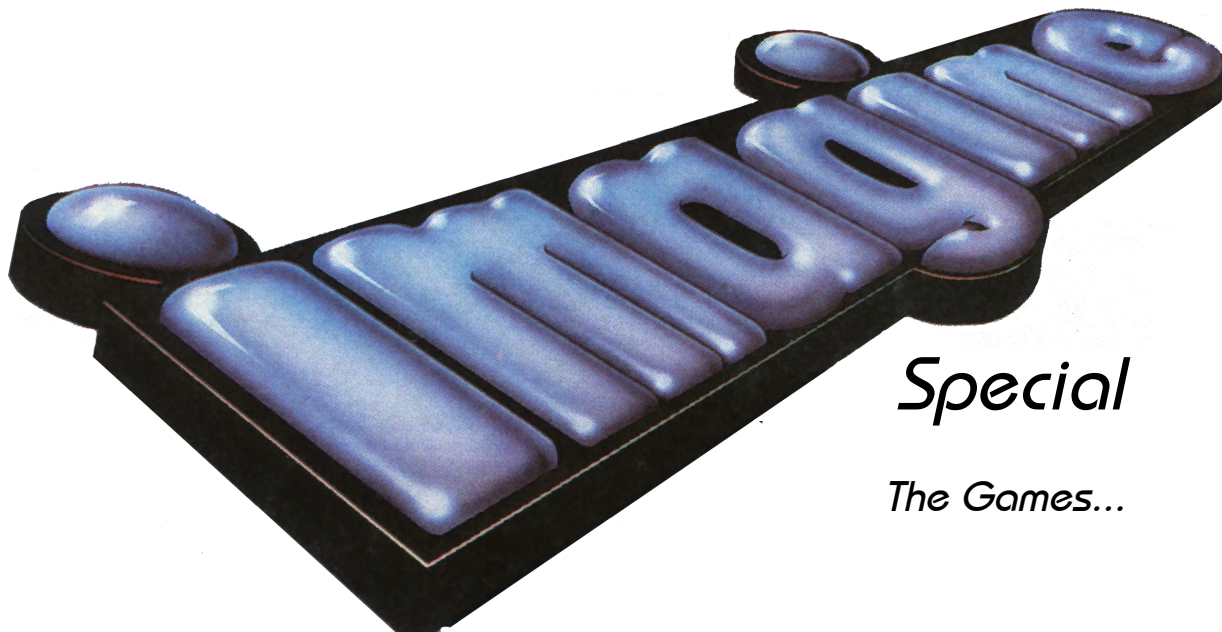
The graphics are very impressive, and the overall game-play and pace are spot on.

This is not an easy game though, so patience will pay off, especially once you learn how to control the jumping.

It took me a few attempts to learn the jumping control, and as I played each game, I got further...

A great game that is highly recommended...





Special

The Games...

Imagine Software were one of the pioneering companies to emerge into the games scene and went on to take advantage of hype and the media to portray a mega-successful business.

Initially formed in November 1982 by ex-employees of neighbouring Liverpool based Bug-Byte Software, the founding members, Mark Butler, Eugene Evans and Dave Lawson sprang into the lime light with their very first game.

The company grew and eventually became a victim of its own hype. In the same blaze of publicity, they spectacularly went bust, highlights of which were caught by a TV documentary crew filming the now infamous Commercial Break program.

Although an important storey, this feature is not about the details of the trials and tribulations of Imagine, instead we are going to focus on games. The dates of release are best estimates based on the first reviews and editorials in magazines, but are hopefully as accurate as I can get..

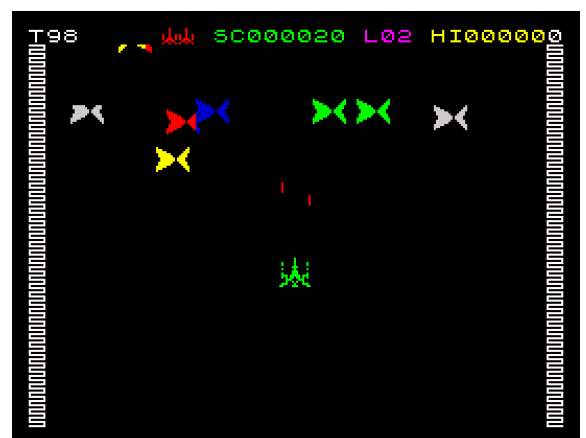
Their very first game was the one that set them on their way and built up a large sum of money, allowing the company to survive.

Arcadia



Arcadia was a shoot-em-up, and although the game is average by today's standards, at the time of its release, the market was in its infancy.

You control the starship Arcadia, defending the planet from the invading Atarian nation, a nod towards the game console company, rapidly taking over the home games market.



Arcadia shot up the charts and was a firm favourite for many gamers. The game remained in the top ten for over 6 months, bringing the new company much needed cash.

Where other similar games at the time had character based graphics, jerky movement and poor sound, this game delivered smooth graphics, good sound, great player explosions and bags of playability.



Different levels with changing aliens and attack patterns was head and shoulders above the current batch of poor games.

Each level lasted a set time, the counter at the top left indicated how much time was left. Should you destroy all aliens before the time ended, the attack wave started again, this gave the game two strategies; kill everything in sight for a high score, or kill everything except one or two and wait for the timer to run out to progress to the next level.. The only problem with this last option was the lasers sometimes fired themselves meaning you could inadvertently destroy the last alien when you didn't want to.

Today it is still not a bad game to play if you can ignore the flickering and seemingly random occasions when the ship seems to move and fire on its own.

Schizoids

With their first hit on the market, all eyes were turned to the follow-up. How could their second release match up to Arcadia? The answer was, it couldn't.

Schizoids was released in May 1983, and the cover art made promises the game just didn't deliver. Sadly the game was pretty poor. It was a cross between Asteroids and Crazy Comets, with flickering wire-frame graphics and poor game mechanics.

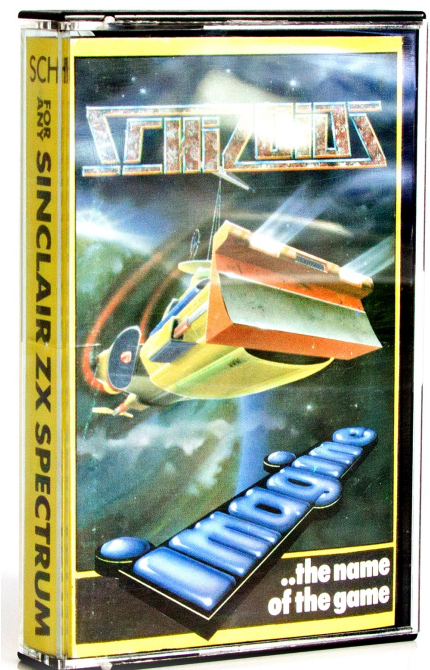
You have signed up to be a space dustman and you have to push debris into the black hole. Being a black hole however, means it can also pull you in, so you have to be sure to keep clear. Various wire-frame objects appear like cubes or triangles, spinning through space, and your dozer has an anti-momentum shovel that can withstand direct hits.

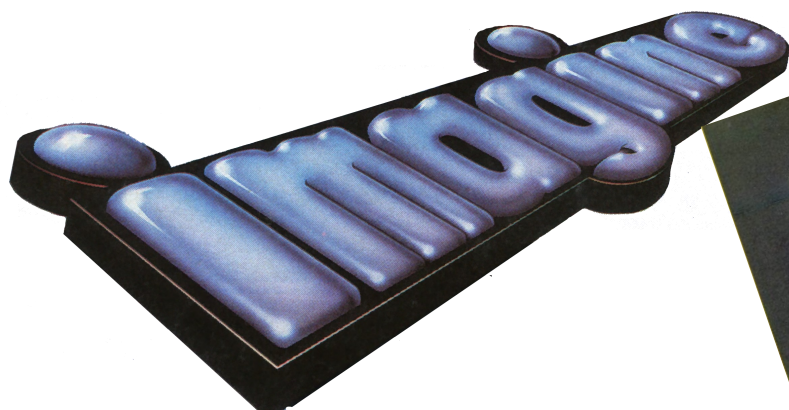
The controls are like those of Asteroids, rotate and thrust, and using these you have to manoeuvre behind the objects and guide them towards the black hole. Like Asteroids, the screen wraps, however it sometimes doesn't follow the rules of physics. Most of the time you can leave one side and enter on the other, sometimes you can't, and sometime you just explode!

Your space dozer also explodes for no reason when you are pushing an object, and often it vanishes from the screen for a few seconds, leaving you wondering where it will appear from. The game idea was fine, but the execution was a little off the mark and most of the time you just avoid the objects and hope they fall into the black hole themselves.

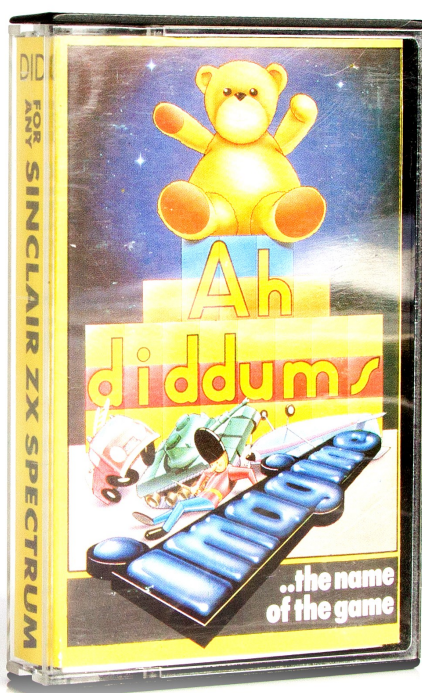
All in all, a bit of a let down.

Next to be released were three games, all arriving between April and June 1983





Ah Diddums



Again moving away from typical arcade games, this cute collect-em-up saw you playing a teddy bear that had to escape from a series of toy boxes to be allowed to comfort a crying child.

To get out of the box, teddy had to collect blocks to build some stairs. The blocks were different colours and had to be placed

in the right order to correctly build the steps. Of course it wasn't that easy, and the other toys were out to stop you.

Teddy had objects he could use, like a beach ball or a pee shooter, that when thrown or fired, would destroy the nasty toys. He could also ask his friend Jack-In-The-box for help. If he bumped into jack, the other toys would fall asleep for a short while, allowing ted to go about his business.

If you destroy all toys in the box, a large lump of plasticine arrives, which cannot be killed, and

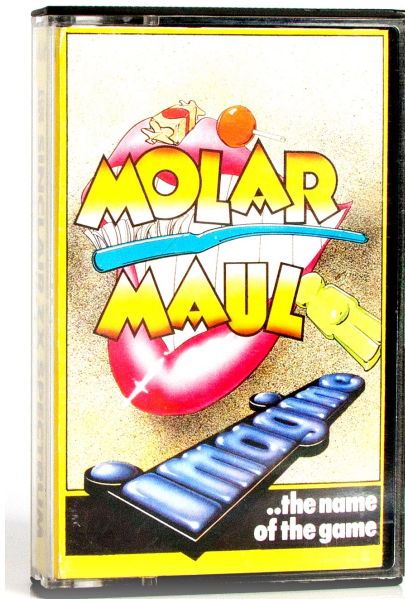
chases Ted around the toy box.

The game boasted 99 levels (or toy boxes) to get through, so it's not an easy game to complete. The graphics were nice and cute and well-drawn, but like earlier games, flickered badly. Game-play wise, it certainly improved on Schizoids, and actually was quite nice to play. The difficulty level was about right and the only problem was lining up the blocks correctly. This usually involved standing somewhere near the steps and repeatedly dropping and collecting blocks until they appeared in the right order.

As the levels progress, the screen becomes full of nasty toys, and the first thing you go for is the beach ball. This can bounce off several walls taking out quite a few toys. A small train top right, if allowed to get to the steps, will scatter any blocks placed their back around the toy box, so yet another thing to watch out for.



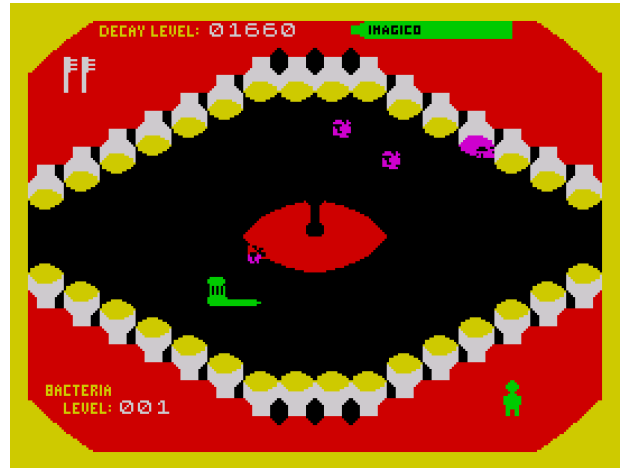
Molar Maul



Molar Maul was supposedly inspired by a trip to the dentists and saw the player controlling a tooth brush, trying to ward off invading germs, or as the inlay states, the DK menace. Obviously a sneaky dig aimed at their rival DK'Tronics.

The game was, despite being original, only mediocre at best. The DK floated around, latching onto teeth, slowly changing the colour until eventually the tooth dies.

A toothpaste tube provides a cleaning agent, Magico Toothpaste, that has to be collected on the brush and taken to the worst damaged tooth to be brushed on. Now and again a sweet appears causing more problems, as these feed the DK menace.

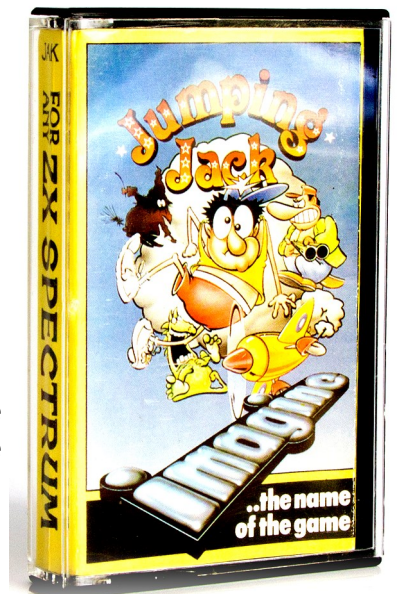


The graphics are nice and smooth, but the main problem with his game is lining the brush up with the toothpaste tube. Unless you are in a pixel perfect place, you won't get any paste.

Overall, the game is quite playable, only marred by the problem of aligning the brush, and the fact that the only sound is the tune that plays between each level.

Jumping Jack

Jumping Jack was probably the best game in this set for pure playability alone. You control Jack, a stick man that won't tell you his rhyme unless you help him get to the top of the screen. To get to the top, you have to guide jack through a series of holes that move across horizontal platforms. Once at the top, Jack will tell you a line from his rhyme, and a new screen begins.



As each level is complete, further hazards are added, these include aeroplanes, men with guns and blue ghosts.





ing him for a few seconds.

Timing is everything with this game, as it a little bit of luck. Fall down once and if the holes lined up badly, you could easily find yourself right back down at the bottom of the screen. If you fall down a level you don't lose a life, but hitting the bottom, ground level, will.

Jumping Jack is a great little game that many players still like, and I got caught up during this review and lost about 30 minutes, you just have to go back and try to get further.

Unbeknown to everyone though, this young company had little more than a year left.

As June ended, and July arrived, Imagine gave us two more games, available in larger boxes if you had the extra cash.

Zip-Zap



Zip-Zap released in July 83 was a kind of mad Robotron game, but without the style. The idea behind the game was you are a sole surviving robot of pre-colonisation team sent to a remote planet to prepare it for habitation. Unluckily the natives are not happy with this, and start attacking. To make things worse, the robot is damaged and cannot stop moving.

To keep going you have to pick up fuel blocks that are then added to the transporter. Once all four fuel blocks are in place, you can transport to the next level.

The screen is full of angry aliens that meander about, and colliding with them reduces your energy. If your energy reaches 0 the game ends. Should you complete a level your energy is replenished and it all starts again but with different aliens.

The graphics are basic, with the aliens although animated, being dull shapes with little definition. The robot does have a laser to fire, although it often seems useless, and the best policy is not to run into the aliens rather than trying to shoot them.

The game, given the hype that went along with it, was uninspiring for me, unlike its sibling advertised at the same time...

Jumping Jack...

More enemies appear as each level is completed. Colliding with these will knock out Jack for a few seconds. If he is unlucky, during this time a hole will come along and send him crashing down the lower level, again knock-



Zzoom

Zzoom released around the same time as Zip-Zap sees you flying the fastest craft known to man. You head off with the sole aim of protecting refugees from genocide. Not an ideal game scenario, and I'm sure something better could have been thought up.

Your Ground Skimmer is equipped with lasers and missiles, and both are needed depending on the enemy at hand. Initially its planes, but later levels include submarines and tanks. With these new enemies comes a different terrain, with three variations, green landscape, desert and ocean.

As the levels progress the terrain and enemies are mixed differently and eventually you get multiple enemies per level. The planes are the most tricky, the submarines and tanks can usually be dealt with by staying just above the horizon and using your missiles.

The enemy can fire back and a message will flash onscreen to inform you of this. If not destroyed, the missile, or as the game calls it, the exotron, it can do serious damage to your shield.

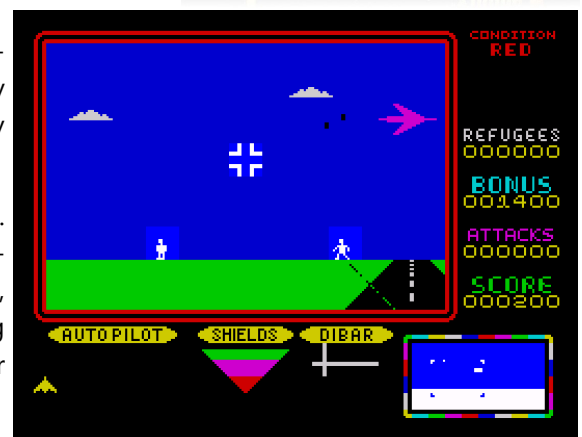
You can also crash into the ground if you fly too low, something you have to keep in mind while tracking the planes as they dive in.

The refugees either walk along the ground or are sat in boats, sometimes waving at you, which is fun addition. If they get hit, either by the enemy or your own fire, they leap into the air and die or slowly sink into the sea.

This 3D shooter is, in my opinion, one of the better Imagine games. The graphics are nice and smooth, the sound is good and the playability is top notch. I spent ages playing this game when it came out, and once I got used to the controls again, I lost over an hour blasting away and saving refugees. A great all round game, especially for 1983.

There was a long break from releases after Zzoom of around 5 months with Imagine not putting anything out, even missing the lucrative Christmas period, which in software terms is the peak time to sell games.

As 1984 arrived... Imagine were back....





Alchemist

Alchemist, released in January 84 was Imagine's first foray into the trendy arcade-adventure market. Some versions came with a gold case, supposedly to emphasise the idea of the games name, but strangely this is not an element of the game.

You play a wizard, depicted by a large sprite, that has the ability to change into an eagle. This can be used to navigate sections that the human form cannot get to.

The idea is that you have been summoned to battle an evil warlock, and to defeat him you must collect four sections of a magic scroll, scattered within a castle. Picking up one piece at a time you have to return it to a specific location ready to be used. The warlock has sent enemies to kill you, but luckily you have a lightning bolt to fight back, and there are also other weapons and spells you can collect on the way.



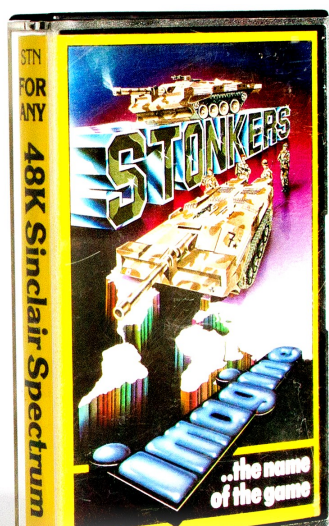
You also have to keep an eye on your health and pickup any food you find lying about.

Overall, a change in direction for Imagine, moving away from straight actions games into a more puzzle, role playing graphic adventure.

When I first bought this I failed to see the attraction, but after watching the RZX playback and finding out what you are supposed to do, it made my review playing much more fun.

A nice departure for Imagine then.. but one that would not save them.

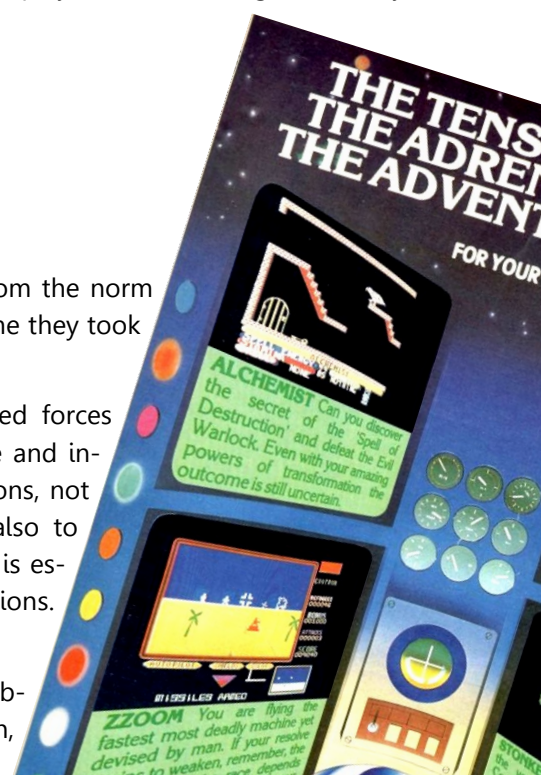
Stonkers



Stonkers, released in January 1984 was a break from the norm for Imagine, and instead of giving us an arcade game they took a brave decision to release a strategy war game.

The aim is simple. Defeat the computer controlled forces within the map provided. The game is less simple and involves controlling infantry, artillery and tank divisions, not only to attack and destroy the opposition, but also to protect important areas such as the port. The port is essential, as it is used to supply your army with provisions. Without it, your army will slowly grind to a halt.

Of course, the enemy has the same problems, so obviously attacking their port would be a good plan,



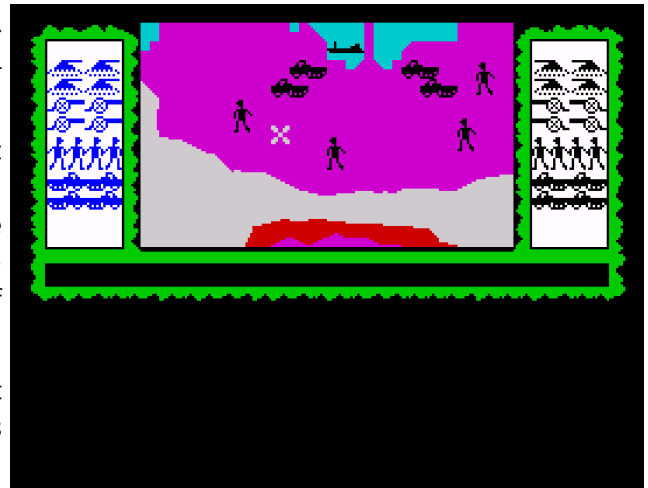
that is if the opponent hasn't placed divisions there to guard it. There is also a bridge which is also important to take control of.

You can view the entire map, or zoom in to areas and see what your troops are doing and what the enemy are doing. You can issue orders to move individual units around, and should the two sides get close enough, a battle will commence. The winner will be decided on whole range of statistics like number of units, firepower and of course supplies.

This is by no means a fast paced game, but then again it is not meant to be. A full game can take a while to play through as you try to out think and out manoeuvre the computer army.

Not my cup of tea, but not a bad game and something different to what most other companies were releasing at the time.

On the downside, the game was famously unstable, with crashes being a very frequent occurrence.

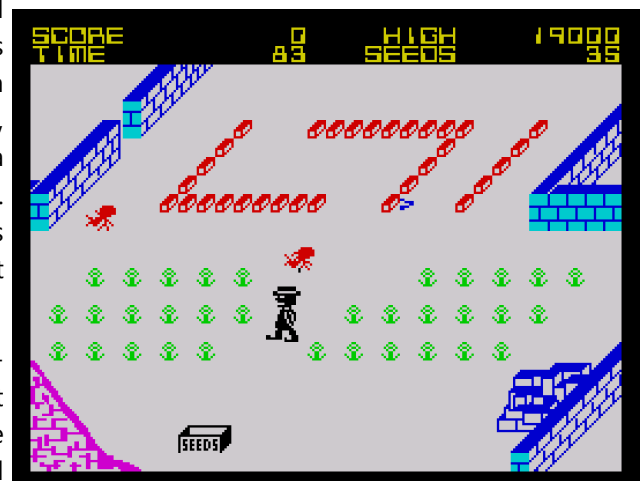


Pedro



Pedro released around February/March 1984 was originally to be part of a Marshal Cavendish deal, and was to accompany a new magazine called Input. The game however, was rejected because it wasn't up to scratch.

You control a Mexican gardener who has to protect his prize plants from the marauding animals and the local tramp. You can use bricks or compost from the lower corners of the screen to block the entrances to the garden, this can stop the animals getting in. Should they get in, they will start to eat the plants.



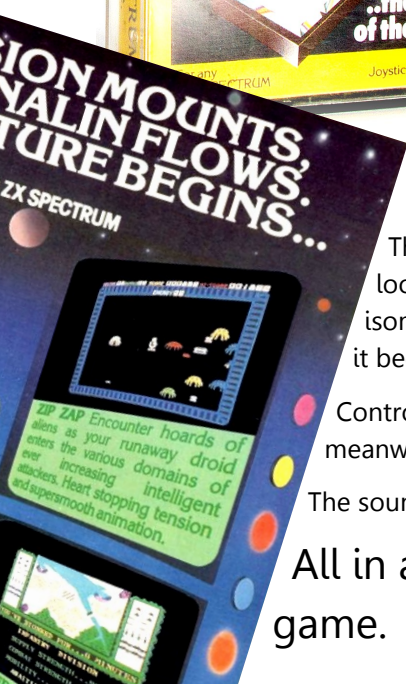
At this point Pedro can chase them away or even jump on them. A box of seeds can be used to re-plant the precious crop but the tramp can steel these if not chased away.

The graphics are not very good. Yes they are smooth, but the colours used make this game look very amateurish and rather like a type-in game from a magazine. The garden is shown in isometric 3D, but this just gets in the way, and I think this could have been a better game had it been viewed straight down.

Control is tricky, you have to align Pedro exactly before you can pick up bricks, compost or seeds, meanwhile your crop is being ravaged by various animals.

The sound is poor and there's not very much of it.

All in all you can see why Marshal Cavendish rejected this game.





Trouble Ahead...

As Pedro launched, the signs were beginning to show that Imagine were in trouble and losing this contract didn't help. To try and get some money back, they released it as a stand alone game. This obviously didn't help and sales were low.

Now advertising the Mega-Games (Psychapse and Bandersnatch), Imagine were putting most of their eggs into the same basket while at the same time struggling to keep revenue coming in.

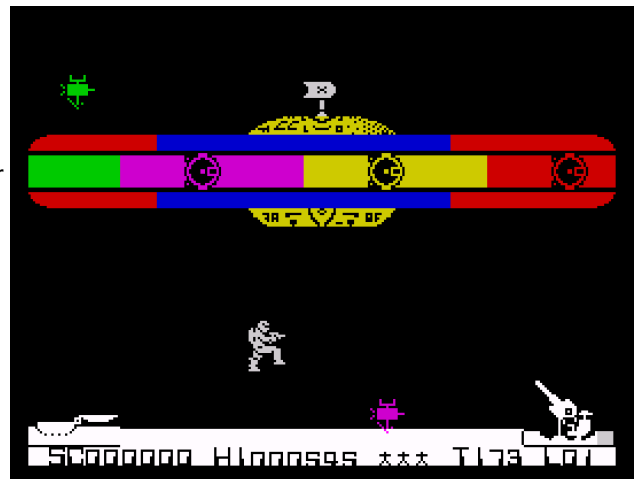
At this stage in Imagine's history, there is some conjecture as which is the official final game of the company, taking into account the company was wound up on July 9th.

There are two contenders, firstly Cosmic Cruiser, released in June or July, depending on who you believe, and BC Bill released around August.

Cosmic Cruiser



This was the first game to feature the new cassette design which lends the credence that this game was not part of the previous collection, or maybe that Imagine were trying to raise their game and bring something new to their packaging. This was however a time of turmoil at Imagine, with the company in the process of being wound up, with legal threats mounting. So this game was released around the time the company went bust.



The game itself is pretty poor in almost every aspect, in particular and most importantly, gameplay.

The idea is to blast holes in the large alien ship, and then fly up inside. Once inside you have to rescue prisoners and return them to your own ship.

Shooting the doors open is fairly easy. Getting into the ship is fairly easy. Rescuing anyone is almost impossible. Time after time you get caught by the aliens, and that can be pretty painful!

If you are unlucky enough to collide with an alien outside the ship, they just grab you and drag you off. Nowhere in particular, but while they do this there is nothing you can do, just wait to die and start again...

Animation is sometimes jerky and the sound is terrible. What were Imagine thinking? Was this a rushed game just to get something onto the shelves? It certainly feels like it. Very disappointing.

BC Bill



This game was certainly released after Cosmic Cruiser, hitting the shelves around July or August, at which point Imagine as a company did not exist. Whether it was being written previously and just didn't make it out in time or was produced after the demise of the company, is up for discussion, however the same people given writing credits are the same as for Cosmic Cruiser.



The game begins with a nice tune and control selection screen. It took me a while to get out of this and I had to dig in the instructions first! Once you make a selection you have to press Y to start the game.

The idea is that Bill has to go around clubbing women on the head and dragging them back to his cave for some prehistoric romance. Once he has one or more women, the kids start appearing, and all of them need feeding.

Bill has to keep clubbing the various animals and dragging them back to the cave to keep his growing family fed. The large blue dinosaur however must be avoided or Bill will end up as Rex food.

This game is much more playable than Cosmic Cruiser although by no means perfect. It slows down when there is a lot on screen, however the control is responsive. The sound is good, as is the graphics and animation and there is some nice music that plays too.

Overall, a below average game though, even for 1984.

Epilogue

Imagine lasted just 20 months and produced 11 or 12 games, and collapsed in spectacular fashion.

Their much hyped mega-games never saw the light of day and the company name and assets were bought by Baeu Jolly who quickly put out cheap compilations using the familiar label.

The name Imagine lived on through various publishers, producing some nice games, but the true imagine games are all in this feature.

The company, the hype, the art work, the marketing and the games encompassed that period in computing history, fuelled many debates and certainly left its mark for ever.



The ROM Revolution

In May 1983, Sinclair and Psion announced to the world that they are working together on a new interface for the Spectrum. This new unit would allow games to be loaded instantly from cartridges, similar to games consoles and of course the Spectrum's rival, the Commodore 64.

Another benefit of this new system would be to throw a spanner in the works of the increasing piracy market. It will be far more costly to duplicate a ROM cartridge than a cassette, and impossible for playground pirates.

The interface was duly launched in October and was initially available by mail order only. At launch there were just three titles available, Planetoids, Backgammon and Space Raiders, all Psion/Sinclair products. These were later followed by Chess.

The final six appeared in December; Hungry Horace, Horace and The Spiders, Jetpac, Pssst, Transam and Cookie.

Ultimate Play The Game padding out an otherwise average collection.

The interface itself was not much larger than the average joystick adapter, being 11.5cm x 9cm including the edge connector and just 3cm high. It included two joystick ports that supported Sinclair joysticks only, so no Kempston option.

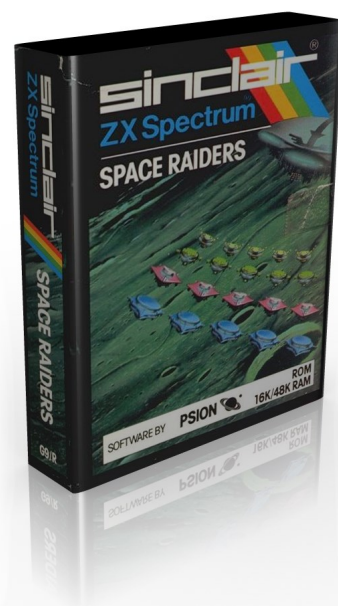
A small plastic flap on top lifted up to allow the cartridges to be plugged in, without any safeguard. It also had a pass-through port, but that only worked with the Sinclair Printer, which was a bit of an oversight really.

Internally the device consisted of a fairly simple PCB setup, with a single chip to handle the joystick ports. The rest of the work is done by the Spectrum itself, using existing connections and logic.

The cartridges came in cardboard boxes, a little larger than their cassette counterparts. Inside, a thin piece of moulded plastic held them in place and a large accompanying booklet completed the package.

The cartridges themselves were nice and small, including the edge connector they measured just 4.5cm x 5.3cm and only 1.2cm thick. A plastic housing protected the innards and a small red rubber skirt protected the connector. Compared to other cartridges, they were tiny for their day, just a little larger than those of the Nintendo DS and slightly smaller than the Gameboy but they were much smaller than the equivalent Commodore 64, or Atari cartridges.

Connecting to the Spectrum was easy, just plug it in, making sure the power was off first of course. Open the flap, slot the cartridge in place and turn the power back on. The game would load instantly, well it doesn't actually load at all.





The Spectrum recognised the unit was connected and that a ROM cartridge was plugged in. It would then page out the ROM of the machine and page in the cartridge ROM in its place, but there were problems with this method.

None of the operating system functions were available.

These were paged out, so if a game required a save routine, it had to be written into the cartridge. There were also several problems that I think stopped this little unit being more popular. These were many fold, all could have been overcome and all could have meant for a better solution and may have meant the device had a longer life than it did.

The interface was only compatible with the 16k, 48k, Plus and 128k. This was due to Amstrad changing the rear connector signals on the +2's and +3.

Limiting the games to 16k was a serious problem and was caused by how the interface worked. 48k games were now the normal format, 16k could just not compete anymore.

The unit itself looked nice and suited the 48k machine really cool. It worked really well and had it not been for the problems I could easily see this being a big seller.

As it was, it wasn't and they now sell for large sums on eBay, along with the ROM cartridges. It is common for good condition cartridges to sell for £50 or more.



The Problems

Non-standard joystick ports.

Joystick ports were configured in a strange way. Port 1 was mapped to the keys 1,2,3,4 and 5, while port 2 mapped to 6,7,8,9 and 0. This meant the normal joysticks, such as Kempston compatible ones, did not work, neither, so I found out, did Sinclair joysticks – even with the ROM games!

No real pass-through port.

The pass-through port would only allow a Sinclair printer to be connected.

16k Limit on games.

Because the ROM games had to fit onto the same space as the Spectrum's ROM, they had to be 16k.

Low number of launch titles.

There were only a few titles available at launch, only ten titles in total.

No safeguarding.

There was nothing to stop users plugging in cartridges whilst the power was on causing untold damage.





Galaxian was created and developed by Namco and distributed by Midway in 1979.

The creator's main aim was to improve on the standard Space Invaders game adding a multitude of new features including mini-music intro, multi-coloured animated sprites, swooping aliens, scrolling star field and icons to depict progress and lives.

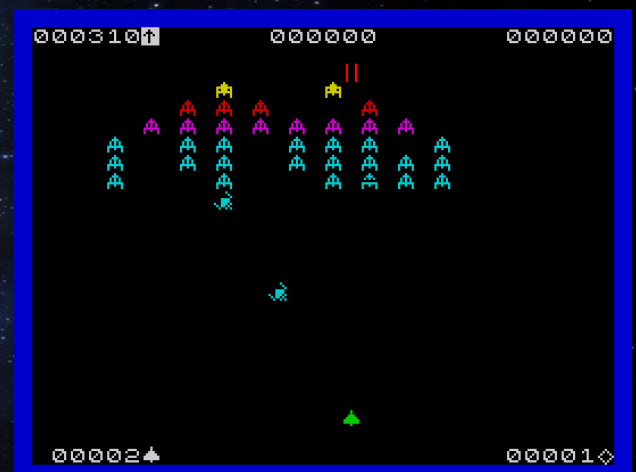
The game was an instant success and still remains popular today, and it is one of my all-time favourite arcade games.

I thought that this shoot-out would be mammoth due to the huge amounts of clones there are, but I was surprised by just how few they were. There were a lot of similar shoot-em-ups to Galaxian on the Spectrum and it can sometimes prove difficult to separate genres, but I tried to be quite strict.

Lets Get Started

Of the games, several fell straight into the poor category, with jerky, character based graphics, poor or no sound and terrible controls. **Birds** (Interface Publications), **Convy** (Spectrum Computing - right), **Galactic Raiders** (Titan Programs), **Kamikaze** (A&F) and **Space Defender** (Spectrum Computing) all provide a poor experience.

Moving into the middle ground and we get some pretty good games.





Classic Axians from Bubble Bus at least looks like the arcade game although there is no scrolling star field.

The aliens are large, too large I think given the aspect ratio of the screen and this gives the player very little room to manoeuvre. They are nicely animated and move smoothly though, swooping down just like the arcade version.

Sound is adequate but the down side is the pace of the game, making it very difficult to get past the first sheet.

Because of the size of the aliens, the tiny amount of room you have and the actual game speed makes this game more difficult than it should be. Not a bad effort overall, but the difficulty curve is far too high.

Galactians from DK'Tronics had numerous options that allows you to customise the game to suite your needs. When the game starts, we get a good representation of the arcade game with good looking aliens and nice smooth movement and animation.

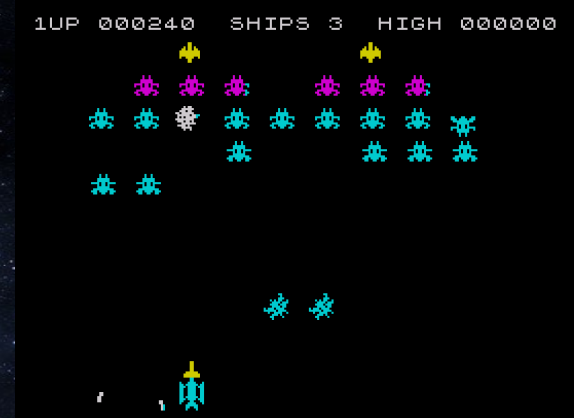
The game speed is a little slow, even on the higher difficulty levels, that just increase the swoop rate of the aliens. The player ship is a little too large and somehow doesn't match the rest of the

graphics.

Overall this is a good game, but a touch more speed and smaller player ship would have helped.

Galakzions from Mikro-Gen looks really nice and even has a scrolling star field; but the aliens are not animated, even when swooping. The score panel is a bit of a distraction with a yellow background and taking up far too much space.

This could have been improved with a few simple things; smaller player ship, animated aliens and a score panel that didn't have a yellow background. Apart from that though, a decent efforts from Mikro-gen.



GALAXIAN SHOOT OUT

Galaxians from Artic Computing gives a great gaming experience, with nice animated and smooth graphics. The screen aspect ratio is changed by a large control panel on the right that contains your score and lives, and this narrows the play field.

Although there is no star field, you do get a great game that keeps drawing you back.

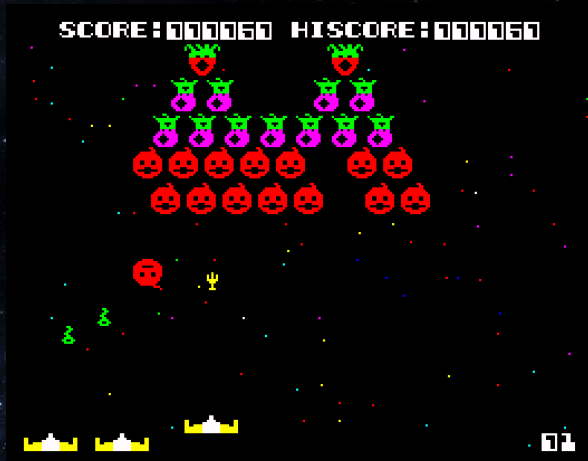
Sound and control are good and the only downside is the lack of a fire sound. Apart from that, a really well written game that could have taken top spot if it hadn't been for another game.



Vegetable Crash from Kuma Computers gives us the basic game but removes the aliens and gives us vegetables to shoot.

Rows of vegetables line up, nicely drawn and animated, occasionally swooping down, and you have to dodge or shoot them. All standard stuff but very nicely done.

If you like splattering tomatoes, this is the game for you!



Galaxy Warlords by R&R Software proved impossible to play when I did my original comparisons. Despite trying multiple emulators and numerous settings I could not get the game to work at all.

It recognised key presses, as it allowed you to actually begin the game, but then did not allow control of the ship.

After a bit of messing about and trying other options, I discovered that I can get the game to play if I used the compilation version (linked from the game entry on WOS).

There is no loader for the game so you have to use LOAD "" CODE and only works on 48k machine!

Once loaded, you can now play the game... but was it worth it? No!.



The graphics are large and move in character jumps, or at least 4 pixels at a time. The sound is OK for this type of game using the standard machine code zap effect. Because of the large graphics, gameplay is tricky, as there is hardly any room to move.

I don't know why I bothered to get his working really!

GALAXIAN SHOOT OUT WINNER

The winner of this arcade shoot out is the official port from Atarisoft, **Galaxian**.

As you would expect this is very close to the arcade game and even has not only a scrolling star field but a multi-coloured scrolling star field.

The attract mode is present, setting out the scoring systems and from then on we have a nearly perfect arcade conversion. The only thing missing is the firing sound.

The aliens are all present, correctly drawn and animated, the player ship is right and the game mechanics are spot on. If I had to moan about something, it would be the display of the scores. These are slightly too big for my liking.

Apart from that this is a cracking game and as close as you will get to the real thing on a Spectrum.

If only the real thing will do though, you can play the arcade game using MAME.



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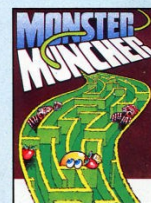
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