

ALCHNEWS

ISSUE 34, NOVEMBER 2000



THIS ISSUE:

**EMULATING AN AMIGA
GETTING TO GRIPS WITH GAC
ZX PARTY 2000 REVIEW
GOODBYE TO *CRASHED*
INCENTIVE'S *DRILLER***

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CREDITS

BIG THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING CONTRIBUTORS:

Bernd Gmeineder of Amiga Sector One for his help with using LHA on the Amiga emulator. Without him, we wouldn't have converted the Spectrum emulators.
Ian Greenway provided in-depth technical help on his ASP Spectrum – Amiga Emulator.
Rob Mosely for proving me with an Amiga disk image of *Spectrum* .
Phil South for letting me use his *Driller* article.
Various regulars on comp.sys.sinclair for their comments about *Driller*.
Matt Westcott for his excellent review of the *ZX Party* show.

BOLLOCKS TO: Those on *comp.sys.sinclair* for their snide attitudes and comments.

EDITORIAL

After all the build up, I must admit I was left feeling that the last issue was a bit of a let-down. Due to pressure from a number of areas to get the magazine out, I felt that I had to rush the production. In hindsight, I wish I'd left a couple of things out, the digs at *PD Power* included. Afterwards, I felt like I'd kicked a sick dog.

Despite this, I thought that, for my first time, the magazine wasn't that bad. Then it came to duplicating it! Printing from *Microsoft Publisher* is a very odd business indeed and I still haven't really mastered it. Getting something as simple as page numbers seemed extremely complicated in the help guide and then all my hard work of adjusting the pictures was spoiled by a copier with a bad attitude (it was a machine by the way, not a person!).

So, I had five hundred copies to staple and get out, or bin and start again, delaying the magazine even further. I opted for the former. They do say that a publication isn't perfect until you absolutely hate it. And hate it I did!

Thankfully, your feedback has been great. There were a few initial concerns over the name of the magazine and as to how much Z88 material it would contain. I suppose that I can only put as much in as I get. At time of writing that comes to *Jack Lawrie's Z88 Hints & Tips* series. But, no doubt all that will change when you read this.

I've spent a lot of time these past

few months with emulators. I've refined the Alchemist *EMULATOR HEAVEN* CD, and have been experimenting quite a lot with Amiga emulators.

The Amiga was a nice machine in it's time, spoiled only by some arrogant users who took a swipe at the Spectrum and its followers wherever they could. They refused to accept that their machine would go the same way and are still sat there waiting for it's resurrection, like those waiting for the world to end on numerous dates predicted by Nostrodamus and various cult leaders. Fools. Thankfully, times have changed. While setting up the emulator I asked a lot of questions and the scene is full of very nice, helpful people whom I'll mention later on in the article in question.

It's sad to hear that Dave Fountain is finally packing in *Crashed*. Let's hope public support, his new PC and the ease to create a magazine with *Publisher* convinces him to continue, if even on a smaller scale. Whatever his decision, he should be applauded for what work he did do with the magazine. Stumbling from editor to editor, it was on it's last legs but Dave turned it around to be the biggest and best Spectrum mag around.

Andy Davis.

PS Don't forget that ALL programs mentioned in this issue are available for download, free of charge, from our website.

NEWS

GOODBYE CRASHED

The news that we've all been dreading has finally come. In an email on Friday 25th August, editor Dave Fountain announced:

"I've taken the decision to cease production. This is due to a new job, a new house, a new location etc. and it's just not possible to donate the time and resources as I used to. The kitty is empty again, its just not working as it should, which is a shame as I enjoyed it."

"Good luck to everyone else still running fanzines etc. I'm still around keeping an eye out and still have my Speccy set up and ready to go. Look out for... something on the internet... Probably."

Dave painstakingly *emailed* the last issue page by page to a number of readers with email facilities.

So that leaves just *AlchNews*, *Desert Island Disks*, *SPC*, *SUCcession*, and (gulp), *PD Power*.

ZX PARTY RESULTS

The great *ZX PARTY*, where demo fans and programmers from all over Europe meet up,

was held at the end of August in the internet café *VIRTUAL* at Wroclaw in Poland. Read Matt Westcott's review later in this issue.

NOT GOODBYE TO DID

It was a big but most welcome surprise to see issue 6 (September 2000) of *DESERT ISLAND DISKS!* There was no mention of any closure but it did report on the demise of *HACKERS HANGOUT*.

The issue was an excellent (as usual) 22 page colour production with the next issue promised in January 2001. My favourite bit was *Spectra* by Milton Snook (surely not a made up name?) but I feel I must disagree with him comments that anything Speccy related that Amstrad made was bad - the +3 was brilliant. Ok, so it had a crap drive, but it had ROM page swapping and CP/M.

KEITH AINSWORTH ON TV!

Anyone who has been watching the BBC Two TV series "*I love the 1970's*" will have been extremely shocked to see *Retrogamer* editor Keith Ainsworth being interviewed about the classic *Space Invaders* arcade game in the 1978

episode! As if we hadn't suffered enough, Keith is doing more TV work shortly! He'd like me to point out that he will sign autographs for a couple of quid and throw in a copy of his top selling magazine to boot! Latest issue is reviewed in *Rival Rags* section later.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY DRILLER

Did you know / care (delete as applicable) that Incentive's classic *DRILLER* is thirteen years old? Now you do. Read our special later in this issue.

ALCHNEWS INDEX REVISED

The AlchNews Index - a thorough guide to all the major articles in every issue - has finally been revised. It previously only held information up-to issue 26 but has been updated right to issue 32. Featuring the Index in it's current state would take up the entire magazine alone, so in the meantime you can find it on our web site.

ALCHEMISTRESEARCH.COM

The new web address for Alchemist Research is now simply:

www.alchemistresearch.com

We thought we'd take the decision to register the name before somebody else did and tried to sell it to us for an inflated price!

SUBSCRIBERS DISCOUNTS

A **VERY** big thank-you to everyone who took the plunge and re-subscribed to the magazine, especially all of those whom I've not had the pleasure of being in contact with before. Thank you for your faith in us and the magazine. To show our appreciation, subscribers get the following benefits:

10% DISCOUNT FROM ANY ORDER AT E.E.C

10% OFF RESUBSCRIPTION TO ALCHNEWS (WHEN DUE)

HALF PRICE ON ALL ALCHEMIST PRODUCED CDs

NEW COLUMNS

We've had a request to revise our old '*Personals Trading Post*' section, where you can advertise ANY items free of charge. There is no limit on wording or whatever it is you want to buy, sell or trade. The section will begin from next issue so send in your classifieds now.

EMULATOR UPDATES

Two so far: *REALSPEC* now on V7 (beta) and *YASE* is now 0.8a

END

EMULEARNING

An old series and title resurrected again (sorry, couldn't think of a better word). This, for new readers, is a look into the world of emulators. Dave Fountain made a comment (don't know if he meant it at us) in the last issue of *Crashed*, saying "*Don't emulate - innovate*". That's all very well if you have the time, money and resources to go out buying old pieces of kit. For this article that would have meant heavy investment in a Commodore Amiga, extra drives, memory and tons of software. Nope, I just went on the internet, did a bit of research and a couple of hours of downloading and I had a pretty powerful Amiga system.



Well, that's let the cat out of the bag. Yes, this issue we are taking a look at the Amiga. A very big player back in the eighties but now on the techno scrap heap with the rest. But that

will be denied by any Amiga user! For some reason they are absolutely resilient about their beloved computer dying and I just can't see why. Ok, I am a little biased. I got into the mainstream computing scene a little later than most. When people had ZX81s, I had a Commodore Vic-20. When people had Spectrums, I had an Oric-1. Continue through the QL and almost to an Elan Enterprise (close shave there) until my very first Spectrum+ back in 1987. From then on there was no stopping me - +2s, +3s, rubber keyed 48s, a couple of 128s and more hardware than I care to remember. (Stay with me, this is going somewhere)

By the time Amstrad strolled onto the Sinclair scene, we were already being verbally abused by ST owners (despite their crappy machine having the same sound chip as the 128!) and then the Amiga. Amiga users slated Spectrum users wherever and whenever the opportunity arose. Their snide comments hurt, especially when I could not afford an Amiga. But, I bit my tongue and bided my time, for I knew that the Amiga would suffer the same fate as the Spectrum. In fact, it did more so, with failed business ventures galore - promises of a wonderful new

machine from companies who bought out whomever had the rights at the time. Even today they sit waiting for the second coming of the Amiga. Better have a comfy chair to hand 'cos it ain't gonna happen!



Above: *ha ha ha ha ha ha!*

BURY THE HATCHET

But that's all in the past. Lets rejoice in the global world of emulating and emulate what, to be fair, is a damn fine machine.

The major release that everyone took into their homes was the A500. Boasting a 7.5Mhz M68000 processor and 512k internal memory, internal 880k 3.5" floppy drive, decent sound and plenty of ports and options to upgrade both internally and externally. It had an interface (Workbench) that users still prefer over Windows to this day! It's main use was in games and music - sound MODule files and 'tracker' programs that even made their way to the Spectrum (*Soundtracker, Sampletracker and*

SQTracker).

After that came the A600 in 1991, with similar spec. to the A500 but with more memory, and hard drive options. The A1200 followed shortly after with a new graphics chipset and 14Mhz clock speed.



Above: *An A600*

EMULATING

With the Amiga being a powerful machine, it has taken for PC technology to advance to the present state for an accurate emulation. After all, this isn't a simple Spectrum here! A Pentium 250 is the minimum recommended to run an Amiga emulator.

And there isn't a great deal of choice either. Just two contenders - Bernd Schmidt's *UAE* which was originally for Unix but a Windows version appeared around 1997, and Peter Schau's *FELLOW*.

I'm going to concentrate on UAE, although you may find the non-Windows dependent *FELLOW* more to your liking.

The latest version, 088R8, is simple to install but you will need to do a lot of browsing to actually get it to work. You see, the emulator won't work without the ROM images. The emulator has been written with real Amiga users in mind who can get a ROM image from their genuine machine. Those without can obtain them *legally* from a company called CLOANTO who distribute the *Amiga Forever* CD-ROM containing the files and much more legal stuff. But, a quick browse on a few Amiga sites and you'll find them. But, the first place to start is:

<http://www.codeport.com/UAE/>

...for the emulator. While you're at it, have a look for CONFIGURATION files. These are settings which give you different Amigas. They are just simple files but specify certain ROM and RAM to give a particular Amiga. These will be on the Alchemist web site with some more downloads specific to this article (see later).

GAMING

Right. You've got the emulator and ROM images, what do you

do now? Well, the best thing to do to put the emulator through it's places is to try a few games. There are a whole host of sites containing ADFs - **Amiga Disk Files**, an image of an Amiga floppy disk containing the game or program in question. Beware though as some games came on more than one disk. Originally you'd have to insert the next disk when prompted, but on *UAE* you can simply put each virtual disk into a virtual drive. The sites I found best were:

AMIGA EMULATION ZONE

<http://www.amigaemulation.com/downloads/browse.asp>

LE CHUCK'S AMIGA HEAVEN

<http://amiga.supergamez.hu/EngIntroSet.html>

TOP UK GAMERS

<http://www.top.ukgamers.net/>

ULTIMATE AMIGA SITES

<http://amigatopsites.hypermart.net/uas/topsites.html>

All sites list their games in alphabetical order, although the



Tom Carlson

same games are not necessarily on all sites. A good place to start is with a game that you remember from another computer. ELITE or CARRIER COMMAND for example. My particular favourite was F18 Interceptor - a fine flight combat simulator.

ADVANCED EMULATING

So you've played the games, what now? Well how about doing what most Amiga users have been doing for a few years - emulating a Spectrum?!

The prime reason that classic magazine *THE ZX FILES* was launched, was to provide support for Amiga owners emulating the Spectrum. And there is no shortage of emulators for the Spectrum:

KGB by KGB Support BBS

Spectrum version 1.7 by Peter McGavin

ZXAM version 2.0 by Toni Pomar

ZX-Spectrum version 4.71 by Jeroen Kwast

Spectrum 128K emulator version 0.2 by Alberto Ordóñez

CBSpeccy version 0.25b by Code Busters

Sp version 0.75b by Ian Greenway

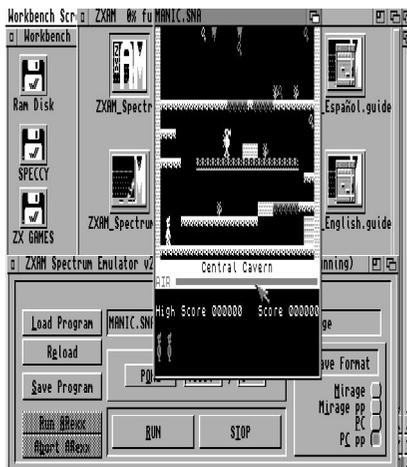
Despite being an excellent emulator, there are things it cannot do and a couple of these programs will not work properly.

After trying each one in turn, I found the following:

CBSPECCY: Starts up but crashes when you try and go to the Spectrum from the options page.

KGB: Boots and runs but screen corruption means you can't see anything.

SPECTRUM 1.7: No problems here. A very popular emulator by



all accounts.

SPECTRUM128: Again, no problems, just a little slow.

ZXAM: Began slow and with just four colours in a window. (see below), but after trying the faster version, also supplied, full colour and VERY fast!

However, I must stress that I'm not an Amiga expert and ran each emulator under an A1200 with certain configurations of memory. By all means experiment to see if you can get any to work or just work better, and let us know.

All of the emulators can be found on the **WORLD OF SPECTRUM site:**

<http://www.void.demon.nl/spectrum.html>

The only problem is that the files are not in a standard ZIP file but as LHA compressed files - the chosen compression format of the Amiga. Transferring them across is tricky but not impossible. I'll explain how to do this in a moment, but you will find them as standard ZIP files on the Alchemist Research web site.

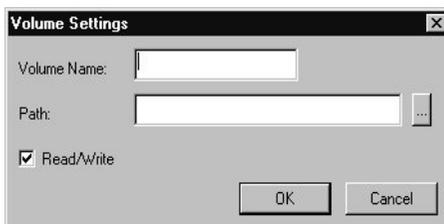
First you will need to emulate an Amiga with the most friendly OS. That would be the A1200 with the WORKBENCH disk in drive 0. You will also need a compression utility called LHA. It's very like the old PKZIP and PKUNZIP program.

Before you start the emulator, put the zipped emulator (it should have the extension *.LHA* in its name and the LHA program in a folder on your hard drive.

Start up *WinUAE* and select your configuration. If you're using my configuration files then use the A1200 Speccy. Highlight it and click LOAD.

Now click on the FLOPPIES tab and put the WORKBENCH 3.1 disk into virtual drive 0.

Next, click on the HARD DRIVES tab and select add directory. Give the directory a name and then click the box at the end of the path window to browse and select the folder on your hard drive which contains the emulator and LHA program.



Above: Setting a 'virtual' hard drive

You may like to set up a second virtual drive containing Spectrum games. I've used the *World Of Spectrum* CD on my system and called it GAMES. Note that whatever you call the volume is not made permanent on your

system, it's only for the benefit of WinUAE's file system. When you're complete, click OK and the emulator will start. After a few seconds you'll be presented with the workbench screen:



The screen above shows the emulator in full swing on the workbench screen. You'll see I've got (from top down), a RAM disk (standard on this system), a floppy disk (imaginatively titled disk 'SPECCY') in drive DF1 containing Peter McGavin's SPECTRUM, a disk called ZX GAMES which is the games directory of my WORLD OF SPECTRUM CD and, finally, my workbench floppy disk in drive DF0. To the right of them you'll see the ZXAM emulator folder.

UNPACKING THE EMULATOR

We do this by first double clicking on the disk icon containing the emulator and LHA program. A new window will open and you'll be presented with nothing. Move the mouse to the top of the

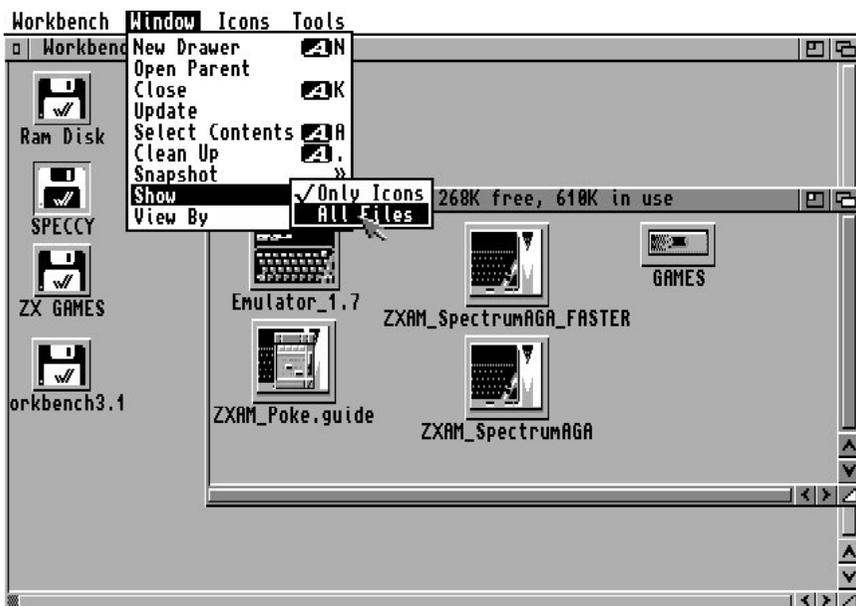
screen and hold the right mouse button. Click where it says WINDOW and then SHOW and left click where it says ALL FILES (see next page).

Now, double click on LHA.DAT and it will open a command line. It needs to say something like:

LHA.DAT x emulatorname.LZH

Press RETURN and the program will extract all files from the compressed archive and place them into the same folder.

To see them you'll need to close the window by clicking on the top left corner, and then double clicking on the disk icon to open it again. In the folder you should now see, besides LHA.DAT and the LZH archived emulator, lots of other programs, ROMs, doc files and perhaps even games and sample programs to try. Some emulators, like ZXAM,



create extra folders containing games and support files.

Now double click on the appropriate emulator icon and you should have a Speccy! Some emulators, like Peter McGavin's SPECTRUM, start up straight away and you will have to move your mouse to the top of the screen and press the right button to bring up filing options. Others, such as ZXAM have a control panel where you can make adjustments of load. To quit the ZXAM, press PAGEDOWN. Quit SPECTRUM with ESCAPE.

The best way to test each emulator is to try a sample program. I tested each with the old favourite MANIC MINER. It

performed quite adequately on most emulators - considering of course that we are actually running an emulator on an emulator!

You will find the configuration files, the LHA program and the best working Spectrum emulators - already uncompressed and converted at our site:

www.alcemiastresearch.com



WORD ON THE WEB

<http://www.specchums.org/>

Run by Daren Percy, this is a natty little Spectrum area, part of the *Spectrum webring*, of which Alchemist Research and all the other well known and leading sites are a part.

Specchums runs a vote on the top ten Speccy games. Like an on-line news poll, you can click on your favourite game from an exhaustive list and then add some comments as to why you think it is the best. The votes, figures and voter's comments are featured on the home page.

Another interesting area is the *CSS rogues' gallery*; with pictures and a brief description of the leading contributors on the comp.sys.sinclair news group. There's also a messaging service where you can send a SMS (text) message to any mobile phone!

www.theunderdogs.org



Now here's a site that I've been after for years. It's a retro gaming site, but for the PC, and features reviews, screenshots,

manuals and actual downloads of hundreds of games.

Games can be found under three different cross references: year, genre or name.

It was thanks to Bill Bennett, who passed me the site details, and allowed me to download the actual PC version of *Driller* to be featured in this issue's review. It also had all the sequels and even the 3D Construction Kit was available for download. Many Spectrum classics are also there: *Elite*, *Carrier Command* (which is brilliant), *Stunt Car Racer* and even *Trantor: The Last Stormtrooper*.

If you're into old games and fancy seeing how they performed on the 16 bit computers (all run on any PC in DOS by the way!), this is well worth a look.

RIP OFF OF THE MONTH!

This is certainly **not** a recommendation.

<http://training.netgates.co.uk/emulink/specemu.htm>

The guy who runs this site has blatantly nabbed loads of material from other sites, including *WOS*. Make your feelings known to him!



The game of late 1987 and early 1988 was, without a doubt, DRILLER. It heralded a whole new era in strategy and action and turned around the fortunes of INCENTIVE, responsible for the GRAPHIC ADVENTURE CREATOR - a program which revolutionised the adventure game - just a couple of years earlier.

Driller had a big impact on the software scene at the time. Not only was the game one of the first to break the ten pound price

barrier - it was a staggering £14.99, a huge amount to pay for a game at that time. But it also came in a big A5-sized card, the first of many.

Inside was a plastic moulded cassette holder with space for two cassettes. One space was occupied by the game, the other was empty - thoughtfully left for a blank tape to keep your game saves perhaps?

The box also included instructions, a cardboard flat-

packed cube model of the planet, which you could assemble, and a short novel, explaining a little behind the plot of the game. Which we all know. Mitral, A moon orbiting an inhabited planet is about to explode. Your mission is to place drilling platforms on each of the eighteen 'sides' of the moon. You also had to contend with automatic laser guards at various places on the planet, teleporters, traps and tasks that wouldn't look out of place on *The Crystal Maze*. There was also rumours of a flying craft hidden in a hangar on one part of the moon. A rumour that turned out to be true and greatly assisted in mapping the game onto the aforementioned model globe. (I chose not to spoil mine and made replicas on the back of wallpaper.)

Each side of the moon had a different colour and were named after various stars and moons in our solar system: Procyon, Pollux etc.

But, was the game impossible? It seemed so, for you could only access seventeen of the eighteen sides. Several people sent in maps to *Crash* and other magazines, but uncompleted. It wasn't until a couple of months later that someone figured out the combination of switches required at virtually four opposite

corners of the planet to unlock the final side.

To make your task just that little bit harder you have only four hours - in real time too - to complete your mission, and there are plenty of alarms, lasers, trips and traps to make it just that little bit harder. All this has a detrimental effect on your ship's fuel and shields. Luckily there are plenty of crystals lying and hidden around the planet to replenish your supply. Or use a couple of POKEs!

Freescape, the language (?) used to create the game was hailed as 'the new dimension' by *Incentive*. Try to image that the environment is one big globe. You are placed right in the centre and as you move, the globe, with objects and places on it, moves around.

According to *Incentive* at the time, it took 14 month's of design for the game, with no less than twenty thousand **billion** different views from your ship's window. The 3D is genuinely solid - you can run it to it, climb over it, or even under. It relies on various degrees of shading due to Spectrum colour clash and processing power (we are talking Z80 after all!). This can sometimes look a little poor and some objects do get obscured, but there's no way around that.

Driller

Incentive £14.95 Jan 1988 YS25

GRAPHICS
PLAYABILITY
VALUE FOR MONEY
ADDICTIVENESS



*One of the most original 3D games of the year.
Beautifully programmed and absorbing
problems. Skillo!*



Phil South

Isn't this a tune by Michael Jackson? But seriously folks, *Driller* is actually the first release from Incentive Software based on its *Freescape* (TM) system. *Freescape* (TM), and yes it IS trademarked, is a new concept in 3D games, where every object in the game can be viewed from any direction. The effect of the graphics is quite stunning, and surprisingly playable in spite of a slight delay between 'screen', as the picture updates itself for a change of view.

The gameplay is actually a sort of arcade adventure, although there are a couple of other levels you can play it on. You are on the mining moon of Mitral, a small meteorite-pitted satellite of the planet Ewath.

Over the surface of the moon 18 drilling platforms have been raised which join together to form a polyhedral surface. On each surface, buildings have been erected, hangers for the various scout ships and excavators, vehicles used by the miners, and sheds for storing the Rubicon energy crystals. The moon has been evacuated, due to a build-up of gas under the surface, and you have been charged with the task of releasing it. You do this by roaming around the surface, and signalling for drilling rigs to be teleported down to your current position. Then the amount of gas you've released is then shown as a percentage, and your score relative to your performance.

There's a lot in *Driller*, and the most fun you get out of it is just exploring around the *Freescape* (TM) environment, peeking under, over and around things that present themselves, manipulating switches by firing at them, activating lifts, docking with other vehicles, and seeking out and using Rubicon crystals to replenish your energy. You can just play it as an arcade game, going around shooting things and picking up points, but the best way to enjoy *Driller* is on all levels at once, as a shoot'em up, as an adventure and as a strategy game.

The graphics are really brilliantly rendered, and the buildings and walls all work in perspective from wherever you view them. The two vehicles you get to drive, the excavator and skimmer, are quite fast considering how much the computer is doing between screens, and the problems you have to solve are quite hard unless you do lots of experimentation.

The game took a year to build, and it shows in the quality of the workmanship and the gameplay. I can tell that people are going to be sending in tips for this for months to come. Superb!

YS Cross-references

	Driller/Incentive	YS24	PRE
	Driller/Hit Squad	YS65	97
	Driller (in Virtual Worlds)	YS69	90

Phil South has kindly authorised this site

Phil is now running Ideas Included 3D Graphics and animation.

LOOKING FOR EX-YS WRITERS! Do you know where any are?

WE WANT YOUR SCREENSHOTS! [Click here for more details.](#)

READERS NOTE: The original YS articles on this site were written many many years ago, and should provide no indication WHATSOEVER of the author's present writing style. Judge these people on their current work, not articles they wrote ten-to-fifteen years ago.

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Left: Phil South's YS review.

The drilling machine that you control is stationary until you press the controls. A press forward once takes it one step forward and then stops. You can alter the distance and angle you turn or move around, as well as move to three different height positions. You can also look up and down (very useful with such a small playing window) and tilt left to right, although I didn't see the need for it. The flying craft also had the same controls - it just 'hovered' until you moved.

The control window (pictured)



featured a range of dials, including your position in three dimensions (vital for drilling), side and plan orientation, shield and energy status, timer and score.

REVIEWS

The magazine reviews were full of nothing but praise. *Crash* magazine gave it their cover picture and a two page spread. Mike Dunn said *“Driller is one of the best Spectrum games ever. The graphics are amazing. Driller offers so much, it's a must for any Spectrum-owner.”*

Nick Robert's, also of *Crash*, said *“There's just so much packed into Driller you can find something different every time you play. It's an amazing achievement, considering that whenever you move, all the graphics have to be recalculated and filled in again.”*

Crash gave it the following rating:

Presentation	93%
Graphics	98%
Playability	96%
Addictive qualities	97%
OVERALL	97%

One of their highest scores of all time!

FELLOW VERSIONS

Driller was a multi-platform game (no pun intended!). It was available for the Spectrum on tape and +3 disk, Commodore 64 and Amstrad CPC. Not mentioned in the literature were versions for the PC and Amiga.

Surprisingly, all versions look

and play the same! The key controls are no different and all the rooms and objects are laid out exactly the same. The only differences are in the sounds and shading. *Below: Spec, PC, CPC*



versions of the hangars.

PLAYING TODAY

So, thirteen years on, what do people remember of this game? I asked the regulars of the *comp.sys.sinclair* newsgroup. I posted a request for *any* comments on the game for this article and got no replies. When I posted another message thanking them for their lack of support, I got the following, along with a whole heap of abuse - mainly from people who don't know or give a shit about what's still happening OFF the internet. Most of those who sent abuse didn't know that for their troubles they'd get a free copy of the magazine and that AlchNews was produced without profit. If they'd visited my website and actually read some copies of AlchNews, they'd know that from issue one we've been giving complimentary copies to anyone who contributes. They were surprisingly quiet after that!

Llama-Wax Len: For what it's worth, I don't think it makes it particularly more playable. Certainly the increased speed makes it better, but I never liked the controls system.

David L: Well I've not played Driller for ages - but I think I've set myself a challenge at the weekend :) BTW- has anyone ever seen the PC version of

Driller? Identical to the CPC version it seems.

Spike1: As you have access to a news reader (if you can call lookout excess a news reader), why can't YOU run it on an emulator yourself and find out how quick it can be?

Jeff Braine of Retrospec: Why don't YOU load it into an emulator and speed it up? And just for the record, I'm sure none of us gives a stuff about your paying readers unless you're planning on paying us for our work.



Zeprfrew: I think of Driller as being a technology demo made into a game. As it is, it is impressive (although, more impressive when you look at a screenshot than actually play it), but ultimately frustrating to play. I don't mind the odd shooting bit, and I don't mind slow updates or an awkward interface, but with both factors together, it forced

me to give up on it.

Using an emulator to speed up the game does make it smoother, but it also means that you get shot at more often. Annoying. I'm sure with the use of pokes it would be easier, but that's one of those things that I've been meaning to get to one day, but never did.

Titch Tracey: I see. You are annoyed, because you need this info to make money, and no-one has given you any opinions for free.

Bill Bennett: I thought it was a top game, myself, but - as pointed out by other posters - painfully slow. (Too much, too soon, for a Spectrum?) Still, if your reflexes are as crap as mine, no bad thing in a game. I particularly liked the cardboard map ball-thing, and the way the game screens looped round and linked up in 3 dimensions.



ZX PARTY 2000

WROCLAW, POLAND, AUGUST 2000

REVIEWED BY MATT WESTCOTT

After the airport antics and adventures I had getting to Slovakia for the Forever party back in March, I decided to go for the simple (and cheap) option this time: all the way to Poland on a 22-hour coach journey. Well, after the coach broke down, it ended up being a 25-hour coach journey. Phileas Fogg never had this trouble.

In some ways this party was in the shadow of a bigger event on the Spectrum calendar, Chaos Constructions, which had taken place a week previously. Nevertheless, it did mean that we had the chance to see some of the latest hot-off-the-keyboards demos from Russia before they were on general release.

In fact, ZX Party was worlds away from the huge sprawling multi-format parties common in Russia. This was a much more friendly, close-knit affair, restricted to Spectrum fans and consequently having more alcohol available with no risk of large-scale riots. At one point Yerzmyey handed me a bottle of cherry liquor, announcing that it was the most disgusting alcoholic drink available in

Poland. It was gorgeous.

Not that drinking was the only thing going on, of course. A select few stayed sober to put the finishing touches to their 1K intros. And, since the party was based in an internet café, there was a fair bit of Quake Death match playing and surfing going on. You know you're a real computer geek when you travel thousands of miles to meet people, and then end up talking to them in an internet chat room. It did help with the language barrier, though...

The music competition was brought to us courtesy of a bit of hardware wizardry, namely the ZXVGS system created by Yarek Adamski. The entries were stored as emulator files on a PC, and instantly loaded on a real Spectrum via an RS232 connection for authentic AY-chip sound. Unfortunately, hardware problems meant that we could only get the set-up running on a black and white telly, so the other competitions had to take place with the aid of an emulator.

Although there weren't a great deal of entries for the music

competition, we were treated to a striking range of musical styles, a refreshing change from the usual fare of non-stop euro-techno tracks. We had jazz from LA Esq., electro-rock from X-Agon and a new-age melodic piece from TDM. In the end it was Yerzmyey who used the AY chip to its utmost and claimed first place.

This party also saw the first competition win for Hannah, graphic artist for Crazytronic. Crazytronic's work is always a visual feast, and the entry this time, a countryside scene, was no exception. But the award for bravery must go to Exin, who usually works on the C64 but grappled with the Speccy's attribute system especially for the party.

The intros continued to show off the ingenuity that can be squeezed into 1024 bytes of code. Icabod, Mike and SS brought us dancing stars, swirling pixels and floating tunnels, but it was a head-to-head contest for first place. The eventual winner was my entry 'Quattro Formaggio', based on a trick borrowed from one of the Atari demos I saw on my last trip, along with a splash of music, which seems to have become my trademark now. Baze followed

closely behind with some nifty 3D choreography entitled 'Dig-It'.

The demo competition was a real pleasure to watch, not only because very few parties this year have attracted enough entries to hold a full competition, but also because it raised a defiant two-fingered salute to that section of the scene who are intent on getting their name in lights as an 'E11T3 5cEn3R'. Hellboj and Factor6 earned quite a few cheers (and the lion's share of the votes) with their portrayal of, er, a certain part of the human anatomy flying through space. No, we weren't drunk at all, honest... Other contributions were Zabhm0 from Plonba Inc, eulogising the simple pleasures of smoking tobacco (or something), Cassiopeia's return from a 6 year absence from the Speccy with a massive music collection named Power Of Love, and Sputnik's eponymous first demo making the most of the 48K beeper.

So there you have it... not the biggest event of its kind, but great fun, and a clear sign that the Spectrum is alive and well across Europe. Beer, internet and Spectrums: it's a sure fire recipe for a good time.

Matt.

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH GAC

On the Spectrum adventure scene, 1987 was a lean year with few major releases. Games costing more than £3 were rare, and even the ubiquitous budget range was outnumbered by a mass of mail-order home-grown software. The commercial releases were distinguishable only by their packaging and sometimes their graphics, but the quality of ideas and writing to be found in the best home-grown adventures was of a very high standard.

The reason for this preponderance of good software is that adventure utilities have at last come of age, allowing many amateurs to produce a professional-looking adventure. Of course, if you want to write something worth playing, you'll still need a flair for atmospheric prose and a good imagination!

This article compares the two major adventure-writing utilities, those awkward-sounding acronyms GAC and PAW (Incentive's Graphic Adventure Creator and Gilsoft's Professional Adventure Writer).

If you've used any of the so-called 'arcade-game

generators' you'll no doubt have noticed that all they really let you do is alter movement patterns, graphics and the map of a game rather than allow you to design anything really innovative or different. But there's much more freedom in what you can do with an adventure creator. Though Gilsoft's The Quill tends to produce adventures with a rather cloned appearance, GAC and PAW offer the user more opportunity to change the look and style of the game.

Most adventures can be divided into three main segments. There is a database which contains such things as all the text describing locations and objects, and the messages and vocabulary. There's a parser which allows the player to type in a command and then decodes the input. And there's an interpreter: this is the heart of the adventure, where the computer examines the player's input and works out what messages or location descriptions should be output.

Essentially, the interpreter is the part which handles the exchange of information between the player and the computer.

When a programmer writes an adventure from scratch, he has to write the parser and interpreter in machine code. Now with an adventure-creator there is no need to write any code - the utility supplies the parser, provides the bare bones of the interpreter and then allows you to describe the rest of it in terms of English words and expressions. For example, with PAW if you want something to happen only when the player is carrying a certain object you use the word CARRIED. In effect you are using a very simple and user-friendly programming language.

PAW and GAC are both rather good adventure creators and both deserved the Smashes they received when reviewed in CRASH (in Issues 40 and 32 respectively). And they cost the same: £22.95 on cassette, £27.95 on microdrive (there's now a +3 disk version of PAW as well). Now that GAC is freely available, we'll take a look at what it can do.

SLICK AND SIMILAR

The presentation tries hard to justify the apparently high price tag; a single cassette wallows in a huge plastic case. The cassette contains the main program and a 'quick start'

database with some basic vocabulary command, along with short but impressive demonstration games.

GAC has a well-written, informative, detailed manual, so the new user should have no problem getting to grips with the utilities straight away.

GAC games sit complete in memory, giving you about 23K of free memory to write in.

There's a simple menu at GAC's front end; selecting an option from this takes you through a series of question-and-answer inputs. Pressing BREAK takes you back to the main menu again.

ADVANCED PARSER.

GAC has an advanced parser which allows sentences with up to two nouns, a verb, an adverb and a preposition. These sentences can be chained with conjunctions or punctuation to create really complex commands.

The program will recognise "IT", so GET RING AND WEAR IT is catered for. It splits vocabulary into three categories: verbs, nouns and adverbs/prepositions. Up to 255 words are awed in each category, and as many as you desire can be synonyms (for

example, GET and TAKE can be treated by the parser as the same word).

It can cope with up to 9,999 locations, this should be more than sufficient for any creation. GAC also offers 255 messages for the author's use. User-friendly adventures require a lot of messages and the writer of a large adventure may well find himself pushed for space.

Up to 255 objects can be implemented. Commendably, GAC lets you define the weight of each object -thus a chest of treasure can take up more space than an apple does in the player's inventory. Or you can twist the laws of physics and make a feather weigh more than a boulder!

Your adventure can be text-only, or use graphics; but it has a fixed picture size. Anyway, reasonably good graphics can be simply produced. It employs the 'drawstring' technique: all illustrations are stored as a list of the commands that were used to create them.

The pictures are basically formed by drawing and filling shapes. GAC features a facility for elastic rectangles and ellipses. But has only two fill patterns.

When it comes to testing out the

adventure, GAC has useful options which allow the user to examine the status of the various flags and program counters during play. This is great for debugging. GAC has 256 on/off switches and 128 variables that can hold values ranging from 0 to 255.

Naturally, all the normal facilities such as saving and loading the database and checking on the amount of memory left, are available .

The meat of the finished adventure is the set of tables of instructions and commands which deal with all the inputs and actions of the player. GAC offers three types of table: high priority, low-priority and local conditions.

The high-priority table is checked first of all; in play, that's where the program checks whether the player is in darkness, for example. Low-priority conditions include such things as responses for GET ting an object, and local conditions apply only to specific locations; OPENING a DOOR would be covered in the local-conditions table, for instance.

Each table consists of a sequence of lines with a format of IF (conditions) (actions) END so a typical line might read:

'IF (VERB (18) AND (NOUN 50)
OR NOUN (51))) MESS 20)
WAIT END'

which gives the conditions the look of a simple programming language. It's a shame that syntax errors within a line are not high lighted, and that only one line can be viewed at a time-once programs get complex this makes debugging rather awkward. But GAC is flexible in that all numbers can be replaced with arguments such as the contents of a certain flag or a random number; this allows you to implement such things as random messages. The CONN condition is especially useful.

The process tables operate in the same way, but the verb and noun are used simply as a label for the author's own reference. Process 1 is called every time a

location is described, and is the equivalent of the GAC high priority table. Process Z is called after every input or timeout, and this is where events beyond the player's control take place.

The best facility of all is PAW's ability to create another 253 sub-processes, which can then be called as subroutines from response or process tables. Call can be nested up to ten levels, and the processes can even call be recursive (call themselves). Sensibly used, this facility contributes to programs which are beautifully structured and hence easy to debug and alter.

GAC is an excellent utility. Download it now from our website and experiment. Next issue we'll show how to load in GAC made games.

End.

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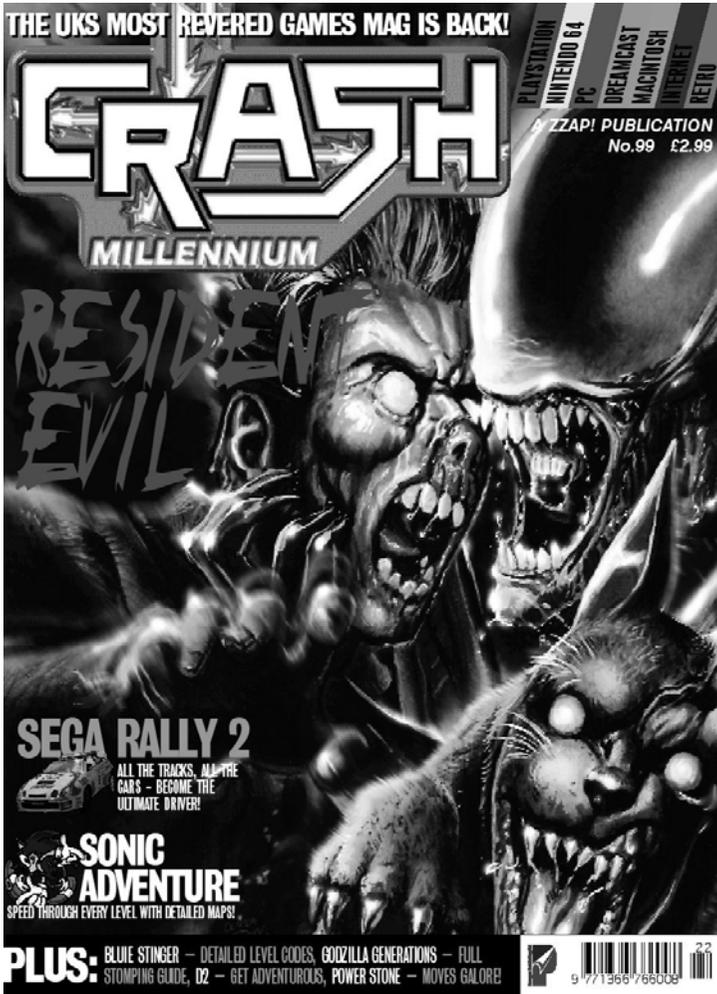
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SPECIAL!

IS CRASH BACK?

Sadly not. This cover is a mock up, created by Nick Roberts, formerly of CRASH but now head honcho of PARAGON PUBLISHING.

It would be nice to think that it were to come back, it would still have a place on the news stands!



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This magazine is the original brainchild of Bill Richardson and Darren Branagh and was taken over by Andy Davis & Linzi Hunter in June 2000 and merged with the electronic Sinclair magazine ALCHNEWS.

Readership figures were approximately 1500 but since the magazine is no longer free on the internet, is now sadly approximately 600. Address all correspondence, submissions, comments and complaints to the above address / email.

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