April 2014

THE SPECTRUM SHOW

ISSUE #1

ADVENTURE ROOTS

The history of Adventure games

FLASHBACK 84

GAME REVIEWS

HARDWARE

SPECIAL FEATURES

Includes material not in the show!

EDITORIAL

Welcome!

Welcome to the second Spectrum Show magazine, strangely called issue 1. I hope you enjoyed the first one and that this one continues to deliver the things you like.

It is a real pity that the Spectrum scene does not have a regular PDF magazine as I am sure people would be interested in one. I know there have been several attempts before and indeed I was going to try one myself. Instead I opted for the video version, but I think there is still a place for a well produced magazine.

The Spectrum scene is probably one of the most vibrant on the internet for 8bit computers, and there are many contributors, but what turns a consumer into a provider?

I would suspect there are many fans of the Spectrum who regularly read the forums, watch YouTube videos, download games and consume the content made by others. There are less providers however.

There is certainly very little, if any, money to be made from creating content, so what is the incentive?

For me, it's a hobby, but more than that. Ever since I can remember I have always liked to create things. Building things from meccano, making go-karts from old prams, creating secret dens for my gang.. The list goes on.

There is something special about looking at the thing you have created knowing that you, and you alone were responsible. With the age of communications these things can now be shared. Some may not like what you have done, but that isn't the point.

When I create something and share it, if just one person likes it, that's a bonus. Thanks for reading.

The shows continue on YouTube...

HELP WANTED!

If you want to help with articles, reviews or features, please contact me.
www.randomkak.blogspot.com

CONTENTS

WAR OF THE WORLDS

A recent deal between CRl and ORP will see the release of a game based on the HG Wells book *War Of The Worlds.*

The game will be released on six home micros including the Spectrum early this year.

The game, according to CRL, is already in progress and will take the form of ten separate mini arcade games, each representing an element of the story.

MOD BLOCK ANTI-COPY IDEA

A new system that could effectively stop home pirating has been forced to end and the company told to stop further research.

The system that not only stops back-up copies but also tape to tape copies, seems so good that the MOD has stepped in, served a secrecy notice on JLC, the company involved, and all patents pulled.

JLC has been ordered to send all related material to the MOD and never speak of it again!

The system imprints a second signal underneath the main data which is undetectable, but without it, the program would not load. This signal cannot be reproduced by back-up or tape to tape duplication.

The MOD didn't want this technology to become public, scared that it could also be used to hide messages in telephone conversations or online transfers.

The move has caused many companies to complain and the Guild of Software Houses have demanded that, if the MOD refuse to release the technology, they should compensate the companies for lost revenue.

END OF THE PRINTER

The Sinclair ZX Printer is being phased out due to falling sales. The 3-year old device for the ZX81 and Spectrum has slowly been in decline and according to Sinclair, is no longer useful with the advent of Interface 1.

ROM PRICES REDUCED

Sinclair has reduced the price of its ROM titles for the new Interface 2.

Six titles, those being Space Raiders, Planetoids, Pssst, Cookie, Hungry Horace and Horace and the Spiders are now selling for £9.95.

The remaining titles, Jetpac, Trans-am, Chess and Backgammon are still selling for the original price of £14.95

THE QL DISASTER

Sinclair have admitted that any interest on payments received for its new delayed QL machine will go to the company and not the customer.

There are over 9000 customers still waiting to get the new computers that have sent payment to Sinclair, who now say the machines will be delivered at the end of April – well past the 28-day deadline originally quoted.

It is estimated that Sinclair will have around £1.8m of customer's money earing them in the region of £32,000 in interest.

After a customer back-lash though, they backed down and offered compensation for those who have already paid, finally admitting that development problems were to blame rather than, as previously stated, phenomenal demand.

NEW ROM GAMES

Parker Brothers will be the first independent software company to produce titles for the Spectrum's Interface 2 in ROM format.

The programs are set to be released in August and will include arcade favourites Q-Bert, Popeye, Gyruss, Star Wars and Return of the Jedi.

IMAGINE CRASH

Imagine, the Liverpool based software house, have spectacularly gone into liquidation after a long series of problematic events.

The company were to provide a series of games for publisher Marshall Cavendish, to accompany a new magazine called Input.

Imagine were to provide 6 games across 5 different computers, totalling 30 in all, but the initial batch has been rejected by the publisher.

Imagine, not happy with the state of things, claim the contract has now been terminated, leaving them with several finished and a few unfinished games to get rid of.

The company was served with a winding up order by VNU,a magazine publisher, over unpaid fees, and there were arguments over a separate company, Finchpseed, set up by three of the directors to raises funds.

Finchspeed then purchased Imagine's assets, rights to use its premises and copyright of the MegaGames for £40,000. This amount is not enough to pay off Imagine's debts that were thought to be around £400,000.

Two thirds of the staff had been laid off and the court gave them just 7 days to pay VNU £10,000.

Despite a huge sell off of games at just 30p to a German wholesaler, things were looking pretty bad and even bailiffs had been called several times to the Merseyside headquarters.

Nearly the complete back catalogue of Image games, along with the name, has been sold to Baeu Jolly.

A meeting of the creditors for the failed Liverpool software house have been told that the debts are bigger than first thought, surpassing £1m.

Not only do they owe Marshal Cavendish £250,000, but £100,000 to the bank and £250,000 in wages, vat and national insurance payments. Coupled with £650,000 owed to trade creditors, it's no wonder the struggling company collapsed.

HORROR GAMES

Palace, the video and film creators, are to move into the computer market to produce various games based on its films. Palace will be the first film company to do this, setting up Palace Software and rolling out its first game Evil Dead across various platforms.

Palace has the rights to other horror films too like Basket Case and Chain Saw Massacre, so we may well see these at a later date, although the government are currently looking into a ratings system for games like the ones used for films.

QUICKSILVA SOLD

Quicksilva, the software company that has been around since 1981, has been sold to Argus Press Software for an undisclosed sum, although it is rumoured to be several million.

Co-Founders Nick Lambert and John Hollis have left the company and Rod Cousens will remain as managing director.

The move also includes Software Studios, a subsidiary of Quicksilva, plus their American company Quicksilva Incorporated.

WAFADRIVE ARRIVES

A new fast access storage device has been announced, that will compete directly with Sinclair's Microdrive.

The WafaDrive will be distributed by Rotronics and will contain two drives as standard, each holding up to 128k on continuous tape loop cartridges.

The device will also contain a centronics printer port and pass-through edge connector.

TV GAMES

Two software houses have been given the licence to produce computers games based on current television shows.

Bug Byte will be writing Automan, a tron-like TV show where the hero can walk through walls and become invisible.

A new software company, at the time of this news item un-named (but we later know it was called *Elite Systems*), set up by Steve and Richard Wilcox (formally Richard Wilcox Software), will get The Fall Guy, a series around a Hollywood stunt man who solves crime.

The format of both games has not yet been agreed.

GAME MOVIE

Automata announced that its next game will be a totally new concept in computer entertainment.

Deus Ex Machina includes a real-time sound track featuring the voices of Jon Pertwee, Ian Dury and Frankie Howerd, accompanied by professionally recorded music.

The player guides a life form from birth to death with the sole aim of living a good life. The gameplay is split into different sections, each with its own challenges and different accompaniment.

END OF 16K MACHINE

Sinclair confirms that it has more or less dropped the 16k Spectrum from the UK. It has no plans to advertise the machine in the run up to Christmas, instead focusing on the 48k model and associated peripherals, along with special software packs to make up special bundles.

CEREAL PROBLEMS

Ubik's game Paranoid Pete has been pulled from the shelves after a complaint from Weetabix.

Initially the Tyneside company were working with Weetabix to produce a game featuring the breakfast cereal characters, as seen in the companies adverts, but Weetabix were unhappy with the end result.

Ubik made changes to the game to be able to publish it, but Weetabix are still not happy. The game has now been shelved and Ubik will concentrate on their newer titles.

COMPANIES GONE...

Recently liquidated *Carnell Software* have been bought by *Mastertronic*.

Rabbit Software slipped into liquidation after being in trouble for several months.

Fuller Electronics, the company providing a series of add-ons for the Spectrum have gone into receivership.

Fuller, along with *DK Tronics* and *Quicksilva*, were amongst the first companies to provide add-ons for the Spectrum, and after a board meeting they had no choice but to go into voluntary liquidation.

Digital Fantasia, the company producing adventure games has now slipped under, but their games have been taken over by another company, Channel 8.

SINCLAIR SURPRISE

Sinclair surprise customers by releasing a new micro, the Spectrum +

Featuring a fully moving keyboard, the micro is not so much a new machine, but the same Spectrum components in a new stylish case.

The case design is in-line with the new QL system, featuring nice black sculptured keys and a reset button.

ADVENTURE

Adventure gaming began in 1976 when William Crowther created the very first text-based game, written in a language called FORTRAN. The game was loosely based on a large cave that he had explored as a caver and was created on a PDP-10 mainframe.

Shortly after, Don Woods found the game, and with Crowther's blessing, expanded it into what now is known as Colossal Cave, the grandfather of all adventure games.

The game was purely text based and accepted 1 or 2 word commands to guide the player through various puzzles in a bid to collect all of the treasure within the cave and return it safely to the house.

From this single game spawned every other adventure game and it was no surprise that when home microcomputers came along in the early 80's, people would begin to write their own versions and create new variants.

Because the game was text-only it meant that almost any micro could be used as long as it had enough memory to hold the parser, objects, locations and mechanics of the game.

The Spectrum had several versions of the classic, notably *Adventure 1* from Abersoft (later bought and published by Melbourne House as Classic Adventure) and *Colossal Adventure* by Level 9.

Amongst the first wave of variant adventures, the ones that stood out were those from Artic Computing. There initial set proved very popular, frequently entering the top ten despite some very dodgy actions that could be performed on a female android in one game.

Magazines too jumped on the band waggon, offering hints for frustrated and lost adventurers.

The only problem often raised was that sometimes the games proved difficult, not because of the actual challenges, but because the player had to guess the correct wording to use... do you use collect, get, pick up, take an item?

```
You are standing at the end of a road before a small brick
Around you is a forest.  A small stream flows out of the bu
down a gully. In the distance there is a tall gleaming white
>enter

You are inside a building, a well house for a large spring.
There are some keys on the ground here.
There is a shiny brass lamp nearby.
There is food here.
There is a bottle of water here.
>get lamp

Okay
>get keys

Okay
>
```

The parser had to be improved to make gaming more accessible and easier, with multiple ways to do things that didn't leave the player frustrated.

Text-only games relied heavily on the imagination of the player, much the same way a book does, but with the advance of computing power, graphics began to creep in.

Initially they were poor line drawn squares, relegated to a small area at the top of the screen, but as time went on, they slowly improved, filling the top third or even half of the screen.
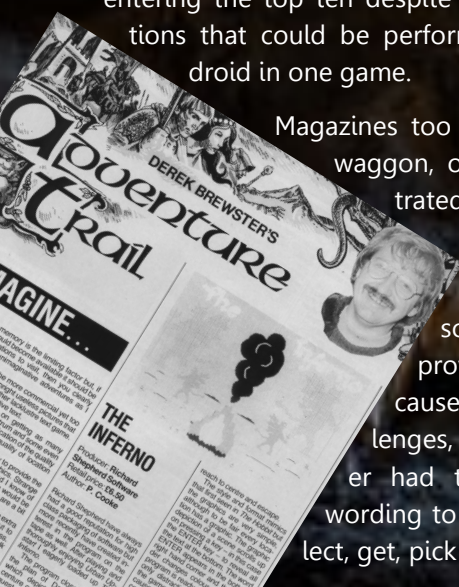
The major jump in advancement came in 1983 when Melbourne House published *The Hobbit*.
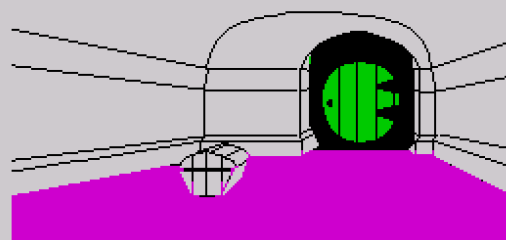
```
You are in a comfortable tunnel like hall

> LOOK
+
```

This game completely changed adventure gaming, providing a complex parser and rich graphics, coupled with a good story and large vocabulary.

ADVENTURE continues...

Like *Colossal Cave* before it, *The Hobbit* spawned a multitude of copies, some better than others.

The range of topics covered was vast, from pirates to hooligans, and sleuths to sci-fi, and the adventure loving gamers bought them as fast as they were being released.

Because adventures did not rely on specific hardware requirements, they could be ported across machines, and soon players could enjoy the same games regardless of micro. A good example of this was the Scott Adams games. Someone playing *Adventureland* on the Spectrum could ask their friend playing on a different computer for help.
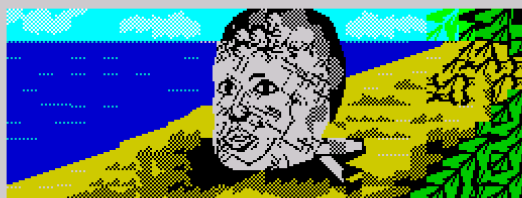

```
I'm in a Beach by ocean. Things I see:
Sand. Large stone head. Edge of
impenetrable jungle.

Exits: SOUTH EAST WEST DOWN
*****************************************

Welcome to Adventure 10:"SAVAGE ISLAND,
Part I"by Scott Adams, dedicated: Dennis
Brent.
---WHAT NOW ? ▮
```

Adventures began to grow and well known scenarios soon arrived, taking ideas from films, comic books and even television.

There has always been a niche market for adventure games, and a company called Gilsoft wanted to target this group when it launched *The Quill*, a utility that allowed people to create their own games.

This had a knock-on effect of flooding the market with home-made text-only games. Some were great and the users really pushed the tool to its limits, others were terrible.

Later an add-on allowed graphics to be added and again another flood of mixed quality games.

The next major step was animation. Not only did we get text and graphics, but now

moving images too, all to enrich our experience..

These usually took the form of small animated characters like those in *Valhalla* or scenes to move the plot forward like those used in the Scot Adams games.


```
You are in Valheim, which is in
an area of lakes in Asgard.
-
```

Slowly the textual element of adventures was been eroded until we reached a new genre, The arcade adventure.

Text input was either reduced significantly or eliminated altogether, as the player now relied on the graphics to portray the action, with just a few text prompts to help things along..

There were still some people willing to experiment though, one notable game was *Slaine*.

Here the player's thoughts drifted around the screen, to be selected and used when required; quite intuitive but difficult to control without a mouse and it never really caught on.

With all of these new features, the games themselves could seem restricted, especially in size, but some games just grew to enormous proportions despite the limitations of memory.

ADVENTURE continues...

Lords of Midnight boasted 32,000 views... and although leaning towards Role Playing, it was still a part of the Adventure family.


Snowball claimed to have 2000+ locations with Level 9 using clever text compression to fit it all in.

Games were now only limited by the hardware and storage.

To get around this several companies began to think about supplying an expansion unit for the Spectrum, to allow for bigger and better games.

Shadow of the Unicorn from Mikrogen, is the only one that actually made it to release though.

This game came with a 16k ROM expansion allowing for more data to be used.
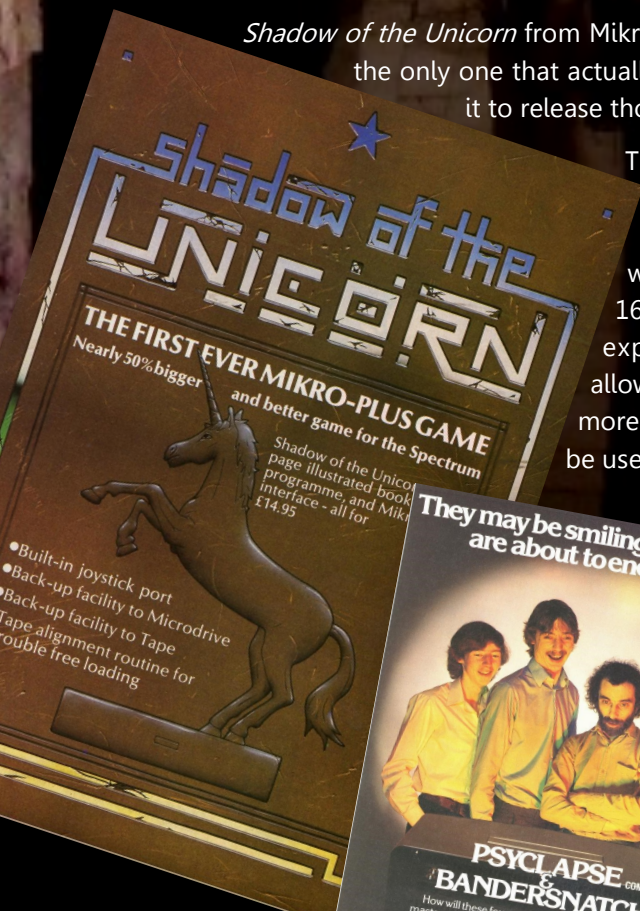
Imagine were famously working on a similar concept for their much publicised but never completed game *Bandersnatch*.

It seemed that the limitations of the Spectrum were holding adventures back, and the genre had gone as far as it could, at least on the 8 bit machines.

Some companies, like Magnetic Scrolls and Level 9, through Firebird, still put out quality games, relying on atmospheric text and complex game play, but the adventure game days were numbered, along with the Spectrum.
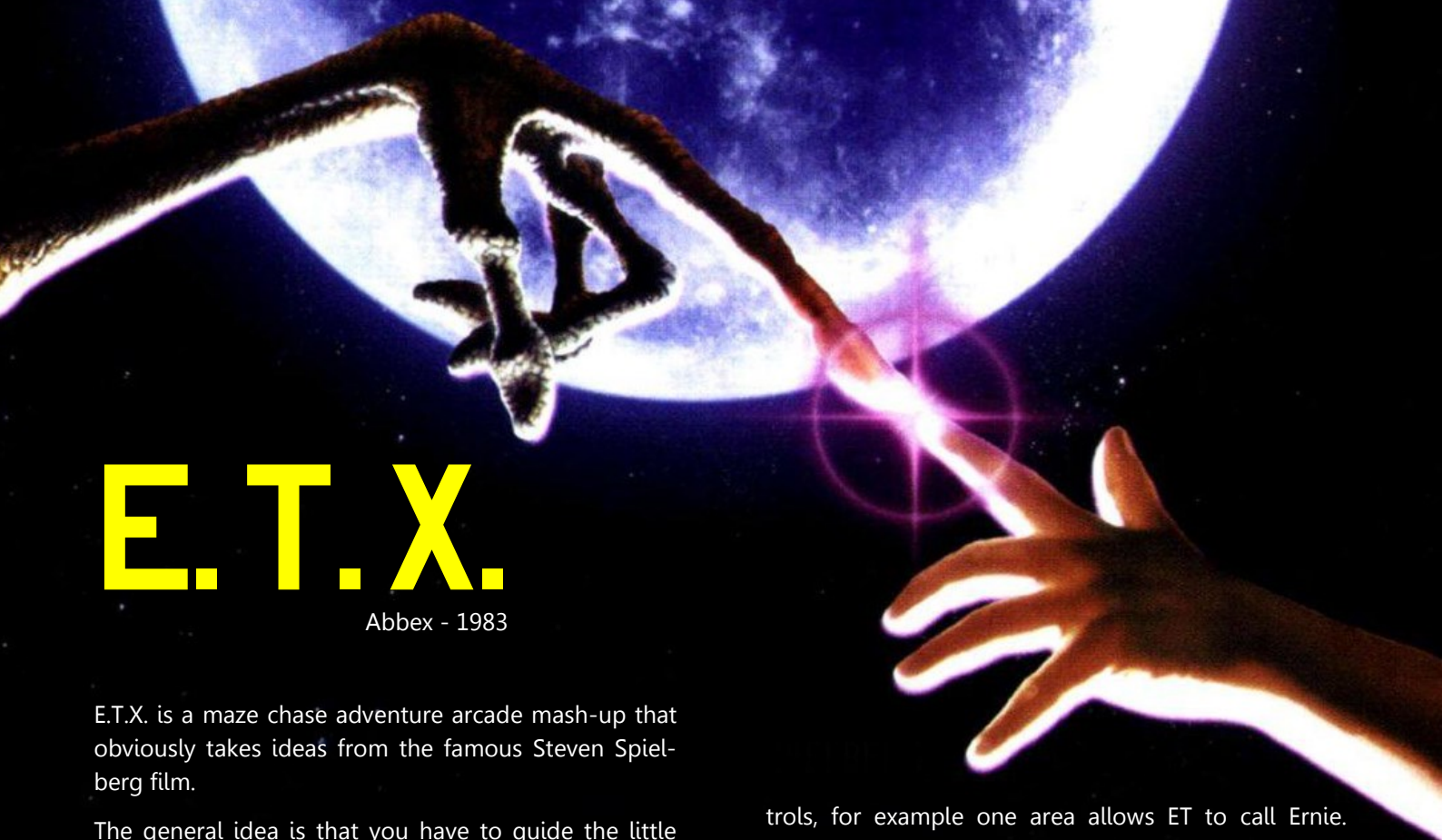

Luckily, for any avid adventure fans, the Spectrum and the genre is not completely dead.

Adventures are still being released, albeit slowly.

The game format came along way from its early text only days, but some say you still can't beat the imagination when it comes to adventures...
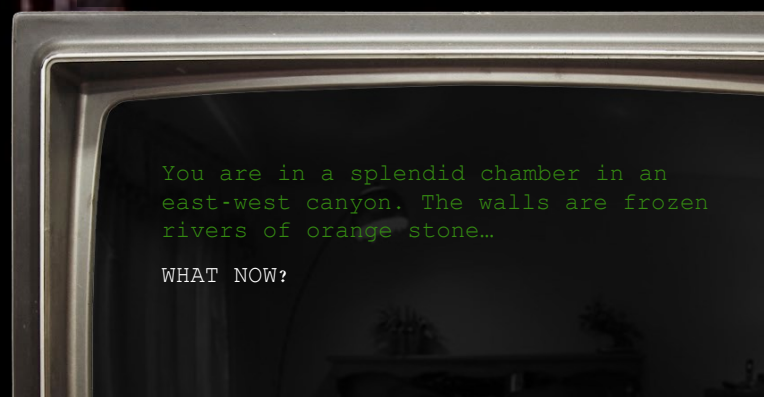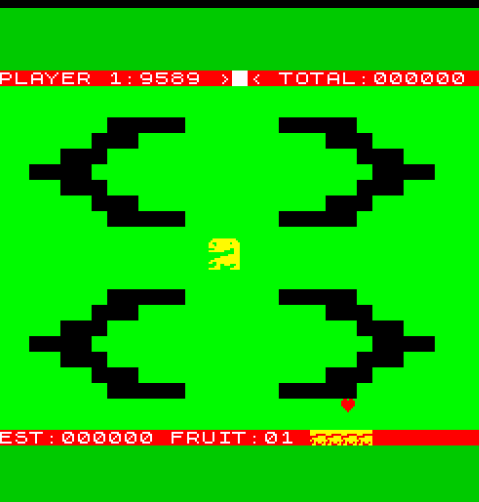
E.T.X.

Abbex - 1983

E.T.X. is a maze chase adventure arcade mash-up that obviously takes ideas from the famous Steven Spielberg film.

The general idea is that you have to guide the little alien around the 16 screens looking for parts of his transmitter so that he can phone home and get off the planet.

All of the time he is being chased by an MI5 agent and a mad professor.

There are options at the start of the game to select who you want chasing him, which in turn alters the difficulty.

Playing with just Ernie, who doesn't hinder ET at all, gives you a boring game of falling down holes, however, adding one or both of the others turns it into a hectic scramble and avoid game.

The gameplay consists of running around and falling into pits in the hope that at the bottom will be something of use.

ET can get help from his friend Ernie, who when plied with ten items of fruit will give him a piece of the transmitter. What kind of friend is that? If he was ET's friend surely he'd give him the transmitter straight away!

Certain areas of the playing area allow certain con-trols, for example one area allows ET to call Ernie. Others transport ET to another screen, this sometimes happen randomly too for no reason I could see.

The border effects are nice to start with, but are used too often and soon start to irritate you after ET has fallen down the one hundredth hole only to discover it has nothing in it.

The high point for this game is the speech, which is excellent. The digitised voice announces various things from the game title to specific actions within the game.

It is easy to see that the game relied on the film for sales, and no doubt let a lot of people down.

Having said that, a certain magazine gave it 100%, a rating higher than Jetpac!

I have no idea what the review was smoking, but honestly, is this better than Jetpac?

Famously the Atari 2600 version of this game bombed and was sent away in their millions to become landfill, it's a pity this one wasn't given the same treatment.

POWER DRIFT

Powerdrift was a very brave release from Activision, pitting the Spectrum's limited power and graphics capability against the might of a full blown 3D arcade machine.

The arcade machine was extremely popular providing not only a track race but the added feature of log hills, making the game more challenging.

It is obvious the Spectrum can't mimic the graphic power of the real thing and so the best Activision could do was to use monochrome.

The game is fast paced and plays really well. Controls are responsive and the buggies handle nicely, sliding round corners without going overboard.

Despite being monochrome the graphics are not too distractive and you soon become accustomed to them.

The road, for me, is a little too narrow making overtaking tricky, at least more tricky than the arcade game.

Despite this, the game is great fun to play and not overly difficult.

The feeling of speed is good and the perspective is just right, something other racing games have failed to do.

This game scores highly is most areas, graphics, sound, playability, it's all good, especially on the 128k version.

The only thing that I didn't like was that the music tended to play randomly, and could sometimes slowdown if the screen was busy.

Having just the sound effects would have been better, but I could find no way to set this. Some tracks gave you sound, others music.

If you like racing games, especially arcade racers rather than simulations, this will tick all the boxes.

A great game.

P47
THUNDERBOLT

Firebird Software - 1990

P-47 Thunderbolt was released quite late in the Spectrum's life, 1990 to be exact, and it is, if you didn't know, a version of the arcade machine P47 Phantom Fighter.

The arcade game was a multi-coloured wonder of horizontal shoot-em-up, with everything you came to expect like power-up and boss battles.

The Spectrum version, for me, seemed very flat in comparison with hardly any sound, even on a 128k machine, and the sound there was consisted of a simple beep. This was 1990, what were they thinking?

The game has various levels which are handled via a multi-load system, each with its own distinct graphics, but usually the same type of enemy.

The game play starts off OK but soon becomes monotonous. The power-ups don't help, giving you little in the way to survive.

I found myself just prodding the fire key continually and not actually getting into the game at all.

The end of level boss on level one took ages to kill. Once you find the sweet spot it's just a matter of sitting there, pressing the fire button and having a drink of tea until the thing finally gives up.

The Spectrum was never going to match the lush colours of the arcade, but I think they could have at least improved the sound and playability.

Something also doesn't seem right, it's as though it isn't complete, especially when you see the control panel graphics; these look corrupt or half finished.

As it is, I think the game is average at best, and I usually like shoot em ups.

There tends to be a specific level enemy that shows up half way through like horizontal missiles on level 1 and larger, diagonal missiles on level 2.

The landscape is monochrome and scrolls smoothly enough, but level two just made my eyes bleed. Yes its parallax, but come on. Are you saying the colours couldn't have been better. I know they were trying to mimic the arcade machine, but...
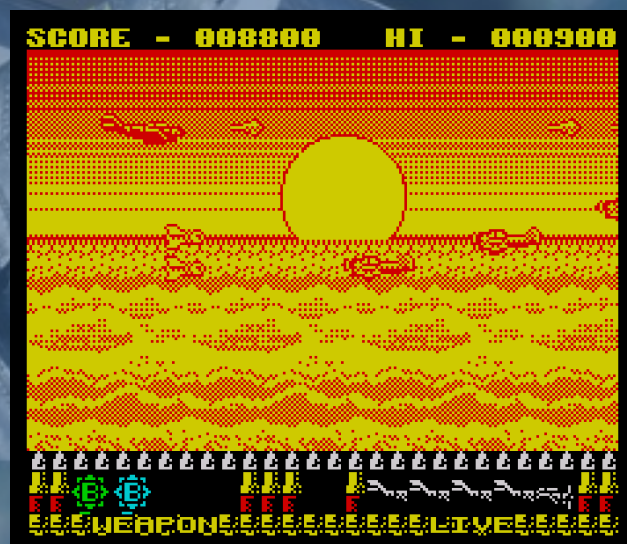
PARATROOPERS

Paratroopers was released by Rabbit Software in 1983 and was written by John Cain.

John later went on to bring us some classics like *Booty* and *Marble Madness*, but this is from a different league.

The cassette inlay looks cheap and the game itself is 16k, well actually just short of 7k, and strangely has two loading screens.

According to the inlay, life gets lonely, sitting in your bunker with only a greasy ack ack gun to converse with while waiting for the enemy to drop in. And your task is to stop them landing when they do arrive.

Once loaded and you have chosen your control options, the game begins. The player controls a nicely animated gun at the bottom of the screen that can fire at various angles to destroy the enemy choppers.

Paratroopers are released and the main aim is to stop them landing by either shooting their parachutes. so they fall to the ground and explode, or shoot them, in which case, they explode.

If five of them land, its game over, and a large tank arrives to blow you to bits.

One thing you have to remember is that each shot you take will reduce your overall score, so you have to be careful.

This is a very simplistic game, despite the varying things you have to remember, and my initial play through didn't enthuse me at all.
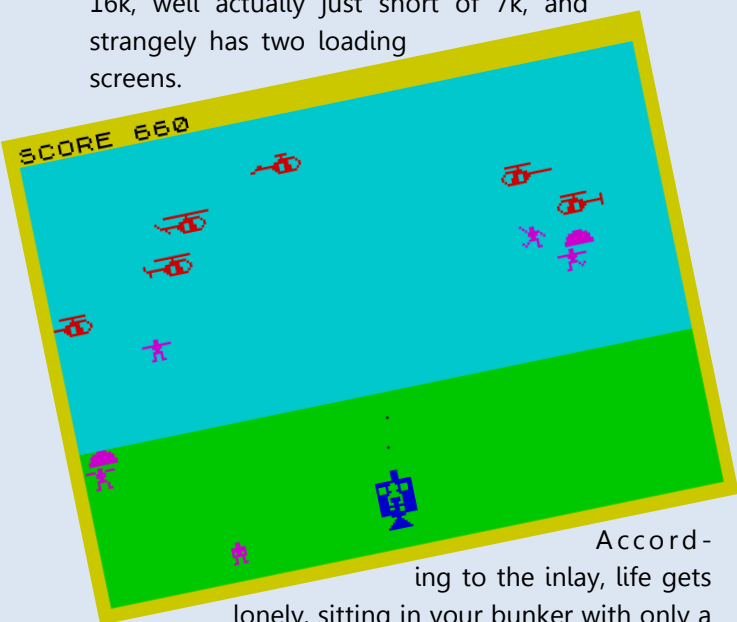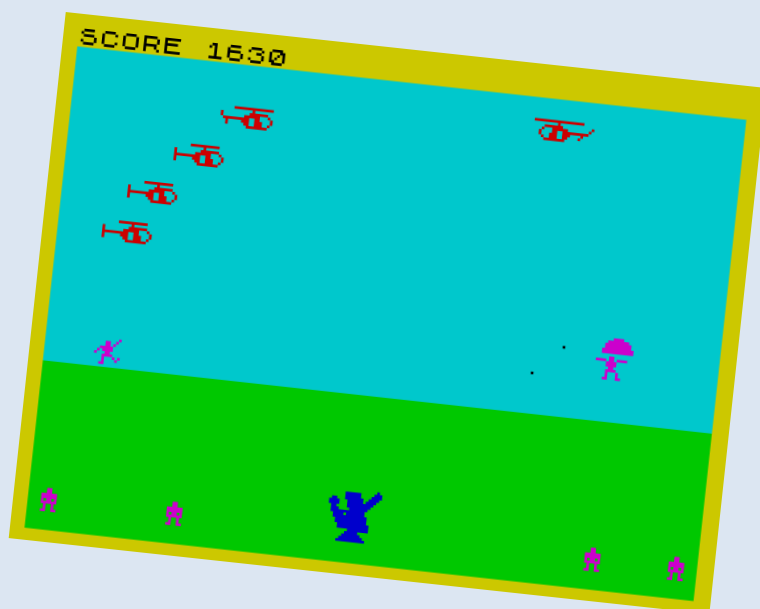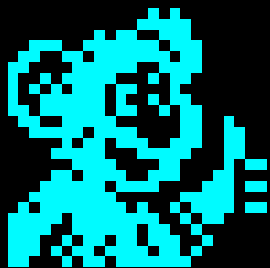
I was, however reviewing it, so I played it again, and again, and again. My score increasing each game from a rather poor 600 to over 6000 on my last play.

It's the kind of game that can draw you in and it's a pity you only get one life. Yes it has simple graphics, yes it has average sound and yes, it does slow down causing the controls to be sluggish when there is a lot on screen, but after a few plays it begins to grow on you, and without noticing, you start another game straight away... not that the software gives you any choice...

Oh well, I guess it was 1983 and it is a 16k game.

I enjoyed playing this game despite the dodgy controls when the screen was busy, and before I knew it, nearly 40 minutes had passed, and even after writing up this review, I went back for another go.

A good example of a simplistic game that plays really well, why not give it a try.

DINGO

Tardis Remakes - 2011
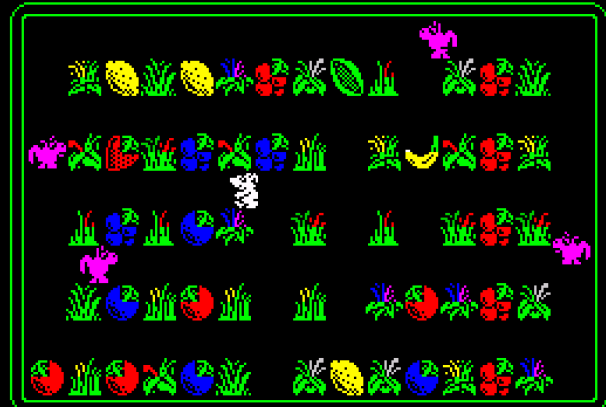
Dingo, released in 2011 by Tardis Remakes, was a project to convert the arcade game of the same name over to the Spectrum.

The reason behind the idea was that the creators of the arcade game were Ashby Computers and Graphics, better known to Spectrum fans as Ultimate Play The Game.

The arcade version, released in 1983, was a simple maze game where the main character had to run around collecting fruit and avoiding the chasing dingoes.

Strangely this arcade game never made it to the Spectrum although you can see similarities in the graphics to Ultimate's Sabre Wulf.

The arcade game used a different screen ratio to the Spectrum so obviously things had to be changed slightly. Despite this though, this is a cracking conversion, and great fun to play.

The main character has to chase around collecting the fruit before the dingoes grab it, either on a random basis, or aiming for a high score by aiming for the higher scoring fruit first, shown during the game start intro.

The dingoes can, and do, throw fruit at you, which means there is an additional hazard to watch out for.

Luckily you can throw fruit back, but obviously this loses the fruit and lowers your score.

The graphics and music were done by Mark Jones, a name that may be familiar with older gamers, as he worked for Ocean Software and is now a regular around the Spectrum scene.

There is nothing spectacular about the game, either the arcade or the Spectrum version, but it is a faithfully created version that plays really well , and there is not a lot more you could ask for really.

Nice tunes, great graphics and nice playability...

Control is a little tricky though as you have to get the alignment just right before you can move. This sometimes causes you to get stuck and panic sets in as the dingoes head towards you.

If you like maze games - grab a copy and give it a go.

TALK DIRTY TO ME

We had all seen movies and television shows that depicted computers that could take, some in realistic human voices, others in a metallic and robotic way, so when a small add-on arrived on the market in 1983 that promised to give your Spectrum the same functionality, I was eager to get one and hear what my micro sounded like.

The unit was quite small, just 7.5 x 8 cm and only 1.8cm thick and offered the added bonus of allowing your Spectrum's sound to be output through your television.

Connecting it up was easy, just plug it into the expansion port of your Spectrum, swap the ariel leads and plug in the 3.5mm jack into the Mic socket. The unit had no pass through port, so had to be the last device attached, which could prove troublesome if you had a few other things plugged in.

Once connected and the Spectrum powered up, the copyright message appeared indicating you were read to make your computer talk. By default it was turned on, and so pressing a key would prompt the unit to speak the input command. This could be turned off by using a reserved variable KEYS, for example LET KEYS=0.

The unit used the S$ variable to allow BASIC programming, so anything set within that would be picked up and sent to the speech interpreter. This made incorporating speech into your own games easy.

The result was not always
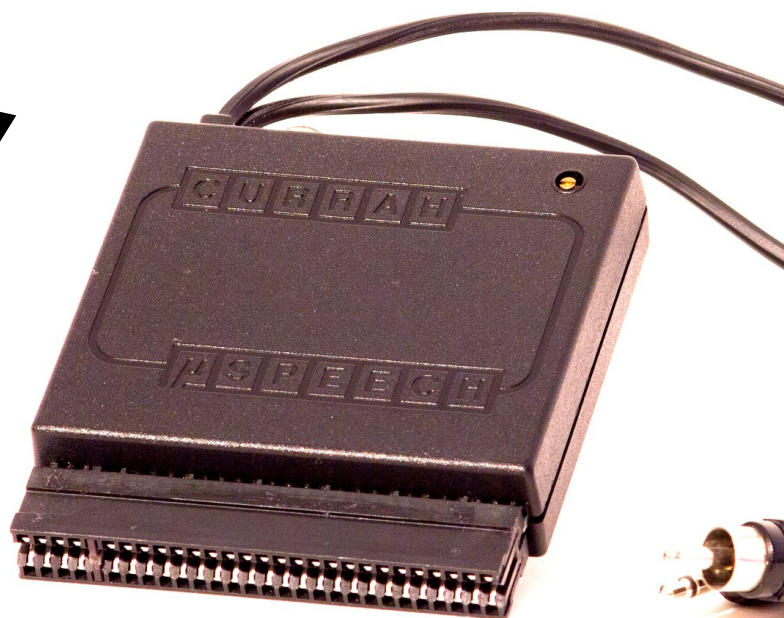
perfect and to get it to pronounce things correctly, you had to play around with the various syntax options. You could swap out letters, for example C and K, or you could wrap letters up in brackets to produce a new sound.

A single 'i' for example would sound like Ei. As in 'brick' but add two in brackets would produce 'eye'. The same went for 'o'. On its own it would be 'o' as in 'box', two would be 'ooo' as in 'shoe'.

A typical sentence could take a while to get just right, changing the letters and adding brackets to get the interpreter to produce the right sound.

EXAMPLE.

'Hello youtube, this is your spectrum talking' would have to be created by using 'hel(oo) y(oo)t(uu)b (dth)is iz Yor spectrum torking'.

Once you get to grips with the different sounds, it soon becomes easy to get what you wanted, but it wasn't long before the novelty wore off.

To be honest I spent a lot of time making it swear, no doubt along with hundreds of other kids, much to the annoyance of their parents.

The unit uses up some of the Spectrum's memory, taking up 256 bytes and moving the UDGs and RAMTOP down, the result of this caused problems with several games.

The ability to speak was taken up by many game companies, like Quicksilva, Firebird, PSS and Ultimate, all adding speech to some of their games. The affects were underwhelming and for me and didn't add anything to the game.

KEEP TALKING...

One game though had a trick up its sleeve, Booty from Firebird Software, detected if the device was connected and if it was, gave you a completely different game.

Currah were acquired by DK'Tronics in 1985 and slowly the unit went out of favour, with DK'Tronics pushing their own speech unit instead.

Maybe this was a strategic buy-out, which had the desired effect, and the speech unit slowly disappeared from the market and games.

At the end of the day though, it was just a bit of fun that never really took off, and even today, with the exception of satellite navigation and maybe Apple's Siri, computers that talk have not really made it into our homes, the only exception being the usage of devices for sight impaired people.

So, to sum up; it's a bit of fun to mess about with, but the novelty soon wares off, and it will be quickly removed and forgotten...

Games That Never Made It #1

Convoy Protector was written using AGD (Arcade Game Designer) and has been sat on my hard drive since January 2013, currently weighing in at 98% complete.

The game involves (if you hadn't guessed) protecting a convoy as it rumbles across the surface of a planet.

Various aliens drop down and you have to avoid and destroy them before they collide with the lunar trucks.

The level ends when 20 trucks make it across safely. Each level introduces different aliens and different attack waves.

Later levels add dangerous scenery that make things more tricky.

The reason for never releasing it? There was an issue that I just couldn't fix that broke the game in later levels, sometimes leaving the level with no enemies.

GOING APE !

THE DONKEY KONG SHOOT-OUT

Donkey Kong, released by Nintendo in 1981, is a very early ,and some might say one of the first (taking into account Space Panic), platform game for the arcade. It is also famous for introducing one of Nintendo's great gaming icons Mario to the world, although he wasn't actually called that in this game, he went by the name of Jump Man.

This multi-screened game has you playing Jump Man, trying to rescue his girlfriend from the clutches of a gorilla. The game-play is simple, move along the platforms, jump or smash the barrels and climb to the top. It isn't as easy as it sounds though, but it is certainly addictive, giving Nintendo an instant arcade hit.

The game also introduced other new elements to game-play including conveyor belts and elevators. There are so many mechanics to fit into a home conversion, so how did the Spectrum do?

For this test I played twelve clones released for the Spectrum, comparing the vital elements of the arcade game to see which game comes closest to the arcade for game-play, control, graphics, sounds and overall feel.

Working from the bottom up, the poorest games provided terrible game-play, badly drawn and animated graphics and simple sound.

Many were written in BASIC, and although released for sale, were just too awful to make any impression. Some of this batch was also not released officially, and when playing them, you can understand why.

Let the games begin....

GOING APE !

Amongst these low scoring games, **Donkey Ape** from Jaroslaw Puszko in 1988, **Oso Bobo** from Microhoby in 1985, **Killer Knight** (right) from Phipps in 1984 and **Gorilla** from Soft Spectrum in 1986 all provided terrible game-play with all of the bad aspects provided by a game written in BASIC.

Special mention must of course go to **Krazy Kong** from C*Tech released in 1982. This is widely recognised as the worst ever officially released game, and a few seconds with it confirms this. It is absolutely terrible in every aspect. The loading is interrupted by requests for CAPS lock change and key presses, and when the game finally runs things don't get better.

The graphics are a mess of flickering, non-animated pixels, the sound is almost non-existent, control is seemingly random and collision detection is sometimes ignored totally. The first level has proved too frustrating for most gamers, and the promised second and third levels have rarely been seen.

During this test I finally, after thirty years, completed the first level and got to see the second (right). It is far easier than the first, but still plays terribly, pausing to play sound effects. Then the real kicker; due to a bug, the game never gets to the third level, instead looping back the first level. I suspect the game does not have a third level, and it was all just hype, but we will probably never know.

The next set of games fall into the mediocre category, and although prove better than the low scoring games, still did not make it to the top of the pile.

Wally Kong (right) from Waltone Software in 1984 was an almost game. Almost good, almost playable, but not quite making the grade. **Monkey Bizness** from Artic in 1983 proved to be terrible in most aspects, with terrible control and response. Certain aspects of the game are missing such as conveyors and elevators, and sound is simplified to just beeps.

Kong from Anirog in 1983 also didn't make the grade, with poor character based movement and insufficient jump height made this a guessing game rather than a challenge. Another **Kong**, this time from Ocean (right) in 1983 also failed to make an impression. Although much better than many others in this test, the terrible collision detection made this a frustrating experience. With a few tweaks this could have made the top three, but as it stands, an average attempt.

Still in the mediocre category we have **Killer Kong** from Blaby (below/right) in 1983, with vertical jumps only and flickering barrels proved average at best.
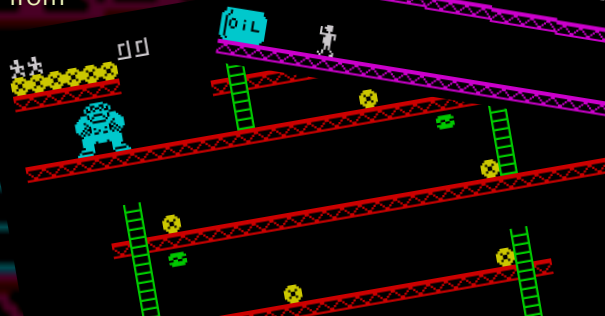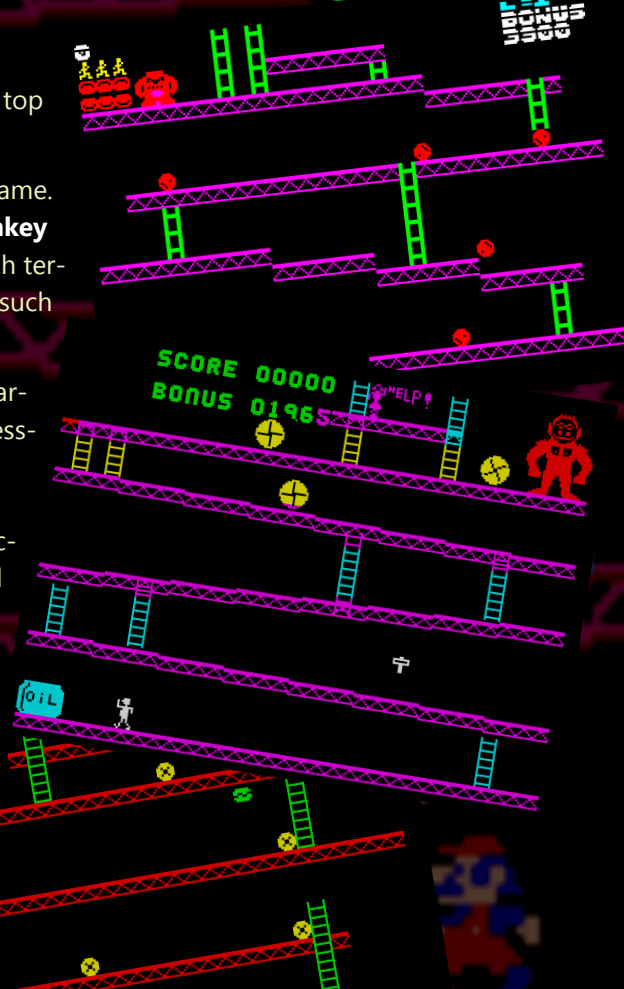
GOING APE !

Now onto the top contenders, and we have just two games in this list, as both have different things to recommend them, but neither provide a complete experience.

Donkey Kong - Ocean

Donkey Kong from Ocean Software in 1986 was the official release and contained most of the levels and game elements as you would expect. Sadly the game-play proved much more difficult than the arcade making it frustrating after a few plays.
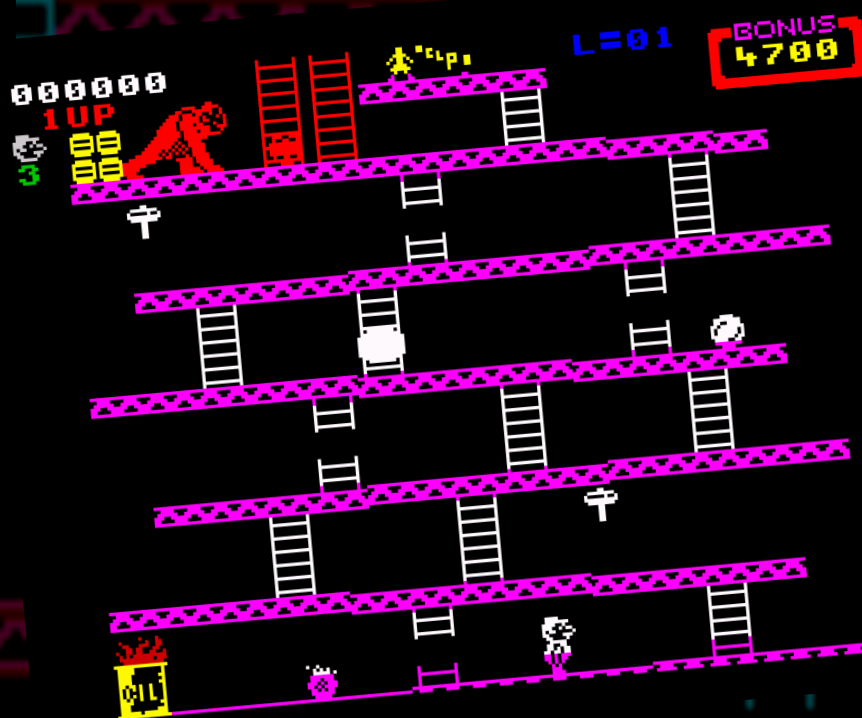
Krazy Kong - PSS

The other game is **Krazy Kong** from PSS. Although the graphics are not up to the official release, most of the arcade elements are present and the game-play is slightly slower than the arcade. Having said that the game-play is good, allowing nice progress and screaming out to be played again after each game.

Of the top two, which one you like will be based on the level of player you are and the type of game you like.

The Ocean game is very close to the arcade game but the difficulty is set far too high.

The PSS version, although not adhering fully to the arcade game, is much more playable.

The winner is up to you.

SILKWORM

As a shoot-em-up fan and Amiga owner, Silkworm was one of the greatest games in my collection.

Everything about the game I loved, from the graphics, music, sound and gameplay.

The option of simultaneous two player didn't really matter to me, but it was nice to sit down with a friend and blast away a few hours over some beers.

Originally released in the arcade in 1988, the Amiga version quickly followed and was one of my favourite games. The thoughts of this game on the Spectrum never crossed my mind; I mean, how could a Spectrum compare with the mighty Amiga version? The answer is, very well actually.

The Spectrum version maintains all of the playability, which is hugely important for a shoot-em-up.

The game lets you progress and the difficulty is set just about right.

The graphics have been toned down but they are well defined and smooth and mirror the Amiga's.

Sound again is toned down quite a lot, although the music is pretty good. The sound effects are limited to firing, explosions and bonus sounds and are the weakest element in the game.

The Spectrum version even manages to get two player mode in, quite an achievement . The only thing is both players appear on screen even if you are playing the single player game. Not that it matters, but I don't see the point of displaying something that is useless.

Nearly all of the game's features have been used including the shields, which can be used as shields or shot to create smart bombs, the goose copters, the mega copters, plus all of the various attack waves and enemies. The only thing missing are the vertical missiles.

I can't really praise this game highly enough, a fantastic conversion and just a great shoot-em-up, or should that be shoot-em-across, either way, this is heaven for shooter fans.

If you can play the music from the Amiga version while blasting, you get the ultimate experience.

As a side note, the graphics for the ground has the developers name in them on later levels. Tiles with the words RANDOM and ACCESS appear, I wonder if the publisher knew about that!

KINGS VALLEY

Retroworks 2009

the sound effects are spot on.

Gameplay wise it's a tuff one, and it took me a while to complete the first level, but it never seems to become frustrating.

Which order you do things in and what you use to achieve it is totally up to you, and you eventually learn the best way.

I hadn't seen this game before this review but I am glad I managed to find it.

An excellent game all round…
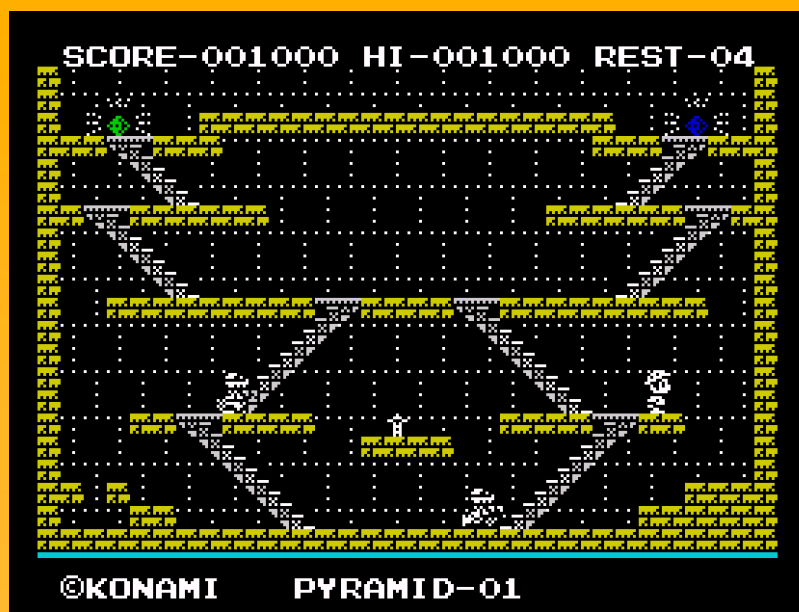
Originally released for the MSX computer by Konami in 1985, this Egyptian themed platformer brings many other elements into play to produce a wonderful and challenging game.

Playing Vick, the notorious adventurer, you have to explore the hidden chambers and collect all of the gems.

Obviously it isn't as easy as that, and there are some mummies that guard the chambers.

Once collected, the door to the next chamber is open and you can move on.

To help Vick there are pick axes, which can be used to dig out the gems and a sword that can be used to dispose of the chasing mummies.

The game is an absolute master class of how to produce a great looking, great sounding and great playing game.

The graphics are clear, smooth and often comical, the music suits the game well and

PINBALL POWER

Mastertronic 1989

I have always been a fan of pinball games since playing the real thing during a damp holiday in Scarborough.

As computers grew in power so the pinball game came closer to the real thing with Epic Pinball for the PC, Pinball Fantasies for the Amiga and of course Arcade Pinball for IOS and Android.

The Spectrum games were pretty poor in comparison, but imagine my surprise to find this game in the archives. A 3D pinball for the Spectrum that actually plays quite well.

There is only one table and the ball physics are sometimes a bit off, but this is a 48k Spectrum after all.

The single table is well designed with the usual Pinball things like bumpers, ramps and special drop targets.

A nice intro tune greets you before the game begins and then its down to some serious pinball.

The ball is sent into play by a single press rather than the usual type of varying plunger that most pinball games have. The flippers are controlled by two keys and that's all there is.

The table is presented at a good angle and everything is easy to follow, even when the ball is moving fast and rebounding at odd angles.

The flippers are responsive and the whole game is great to play with adequate sounds and bonuses..

Like any table you have to get to know how the game works, what to hit for the best scores and where to aim to achieve those extra bonuses.

The magazines didn't give it good reviews on its release, but I think it's a good game and certainly passes half an hour, and is probably the best pinball game in the Spectrum.
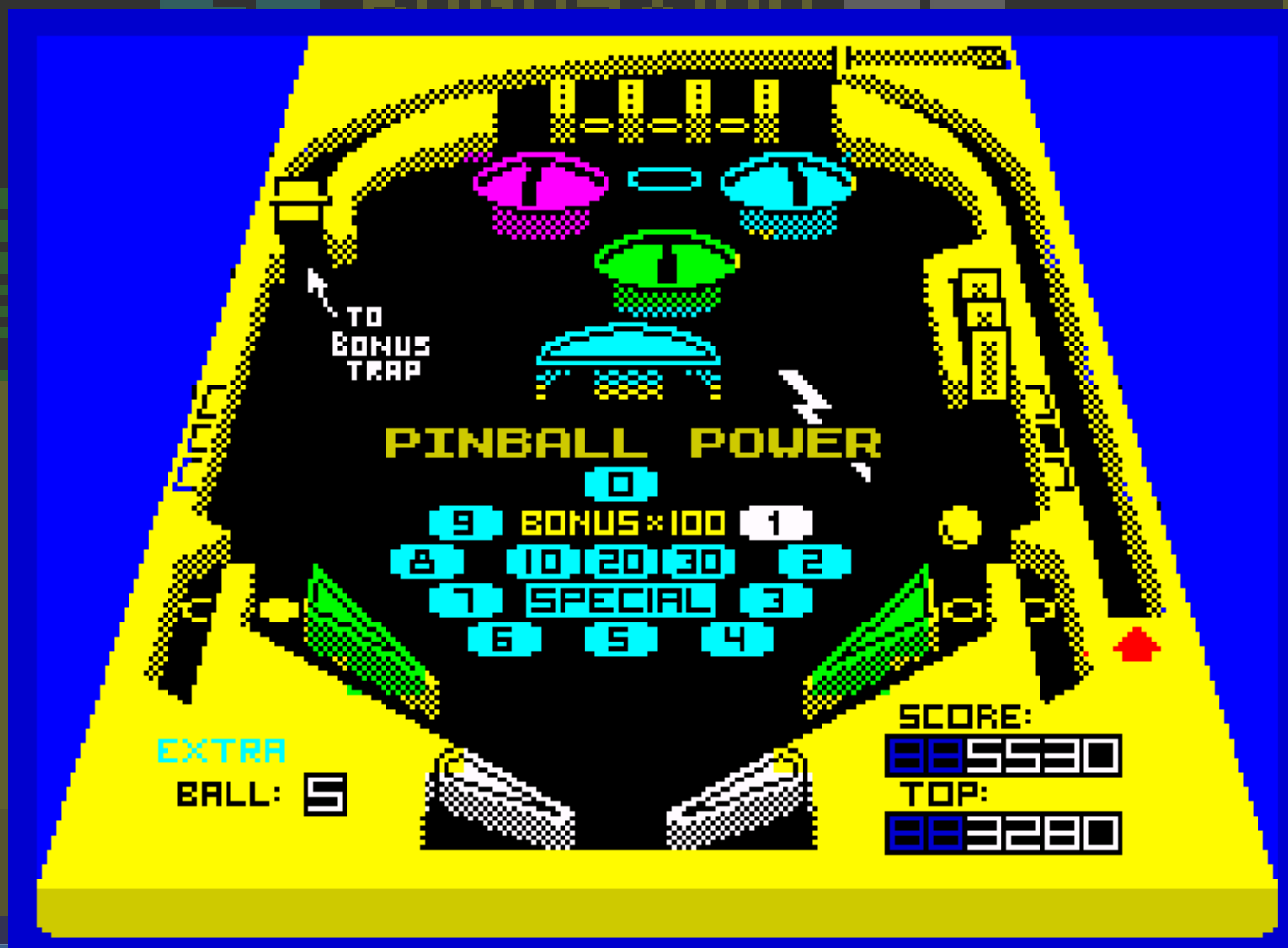
TOOFY'S WINTER NUTS

Paul Jenkinson 2013

Brrrrr it's getting cold and winter is racing towards us. Toofy needs to collect enough nuts to make it through but the nasty squirrels have raided his store and stolen them.

This colourful platform game, created using Johnathan Cauldwell's Arcade Game Designer, shows just what can be done with that excellent utility.
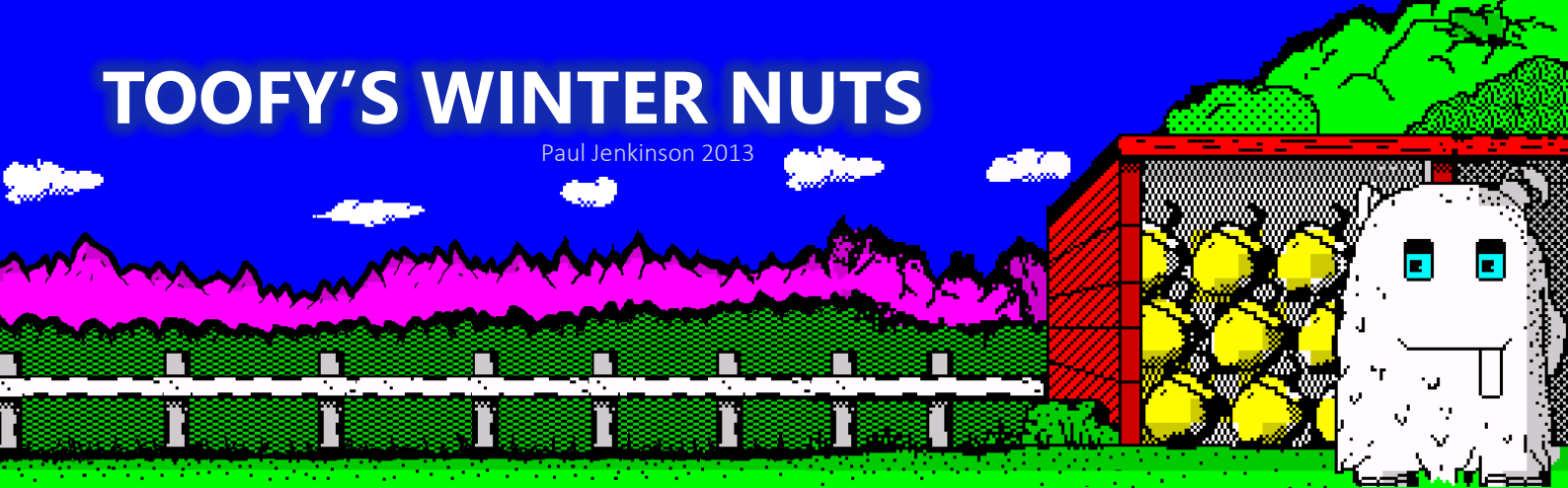
You control Toofy, an unknown animal, that has to collect nuts to be able to survive the harsh winter.

In his way are the evil squirrels, who walk randomly around, climbing ladders and generally getting in your way.

There are a set amount of nuts to collect before access to the next section is granted.

Each section is different graphically, each looking well drawn and well designed, giving Toofy many possible routes.

The game map is large and a flip-screen effect is used instead of scrolling.

Sound is used well, with some nice walking and collection sounds.

Control can be by either keyboard or Kempston joystick and is very snappy.

As the game progresses the levels get slightly more difficult, with timing being of the upmost importance.

The evil squirrels, because their movement is random, can be a real pain to avoid, but at least the game does not become a simple pattern learning exercise.

All in all, a nice game that can keep you playing for a decent amount of time.

If you like these types of game, give it a try - it's free!
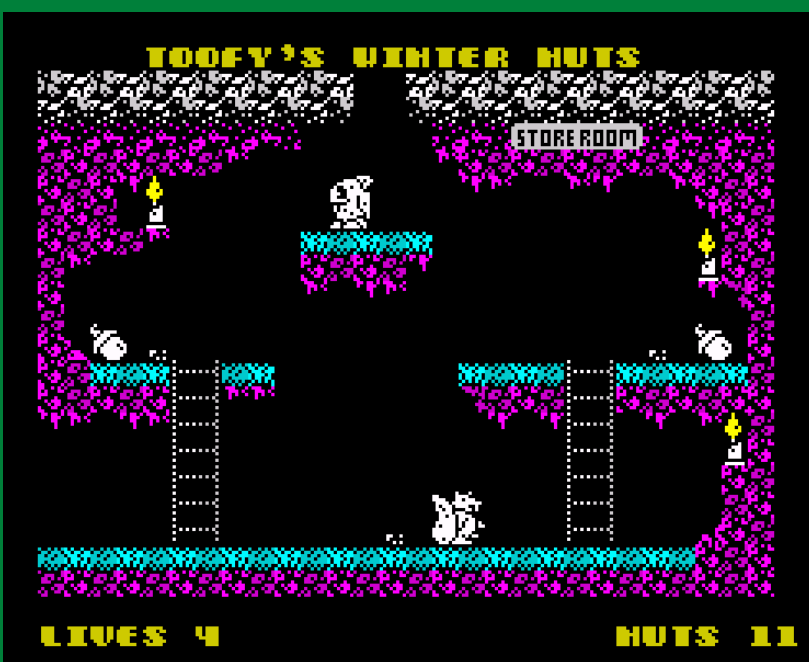
HEAD COACH

American football has quite a strong following in the UK, but unless you have SKY TV, the coverage is a bit pathetic.

If you are or were a fan, then you probably bought at least one Spectrum game connected with the sport. The one you chose would be governed by the type of game you like, either action or strategy.

This is a strategy type game, similar to Football manager from the same company.

After loading, you are taken through the initial process of choosing a team to manage, skill level and shown a list of your players. The game comes with a lengthy instructions sheet, and even being a fan of the game, I had to read it to understand the onscreen abbreviations.

This screen shows your players with their corresponding statistics. R is for running skills, P is for passing skills and L is for line defence.

Ft display the fitness of the player and Frm is their current form.

All of these figures add up to a total score that will affect the game and how each players functions.

These values change as each game progresses and some players may become injured.

From the main screen you have several options including looking at the transfer situation. Here you can see if players are available to trade useful if you have been given a poor set of players by the game to start with.

You do get a chance to trade before each game, and

get offered various players to enhance your squad.

Before each game you get to select which players you want to use for the game, this should be based on the figures as mentioned before, so you may have to rest some players if their fitness is low for example.

Not selecting any players usually causes your team to perform very badly, so I found out after three games!

Once you have made any changes, you can get on with your first game.

Before the game you are given statistics about the opposing team and scout information about the types of plays they like to use. These are split into various categories and gives you some idea of how best to play the game. If for example a team has very poor run defence – it would be to your advantage to use a lot of running plays.

Finally we get to the game itself.

The pitch is drawn out and the players put in position.

At the top of the screen is the time bar, showing how long there is left to play.

Usually there is a kick-off in the real game, but not here, the attacking team start from what appears to be random positions, sometimes it takes you back to the 5 yard line. This takes away the run backs, a bit disappointing really.

If you are the attacking team, you are now given a choice of plays to run, you do not get a list of specific plays, just the option to either run, pass, kick or line
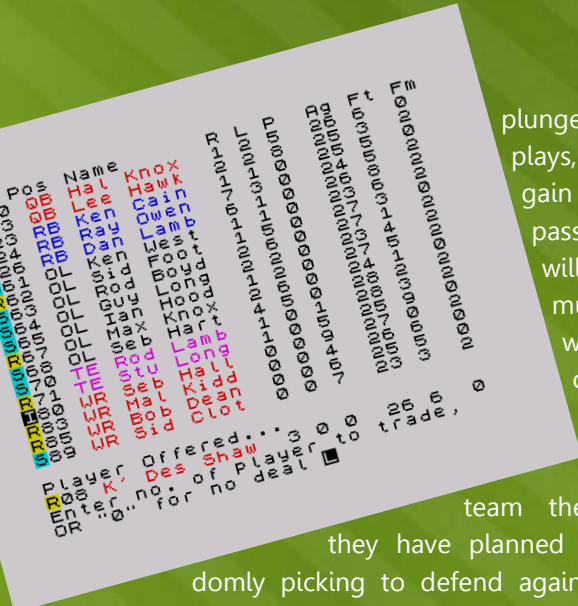
plunge. Each of the plays, if successful will gain various yards. A pass for example will gain a minimum of 10 yards, whereas a run can get you nothing.

The defending team then reveal how they have planned to defend randomly picking to defend against runs, passes, standard (which is a balanced approach) or short yardage.

The play then run with the players moving in character squares to depict what happens.

This I think, after playing a few games, is decided by random weighting. So if you choose a passing play and the defending team choose to defend against the pass, you chances of completing the play are reduced.

Even choosing novice mode at the start, I got whitewashed in every game. This felt a bit demoralising... It seemed that every one of my plays ended in either an interception or failed yardage. The other team then took over and scored with the first play, time after time after time.

There are other random elements to the game like interceptions or fumbles, and the outcome again is random. Either the other team take of possession or they score a touchdown.
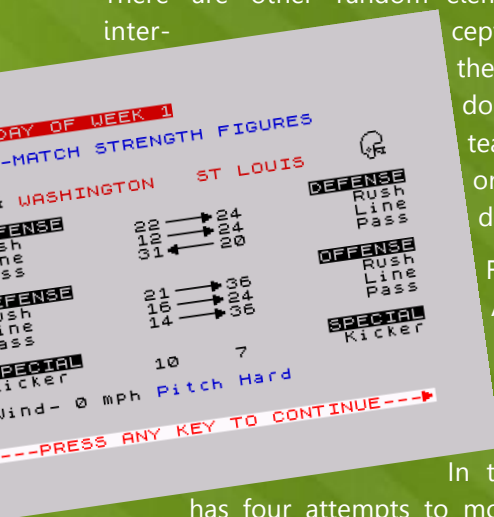
Field goals and Point Afters are all in their but one major problem is the number of downs.

In the real game a team has four attempts to move the ball ten yards, these are called downs. If on the fourth down you don't think you can manage it, you kick the ball back to the other team, otherwise they take over from the same field position.

This game only gives you two downs per play, it claims to improve the game, but proves very limiting and often causes you to hand over possession to the other team because your mind is thinking you have two more plays left.

Play outcome is displayed at the bottom of the screen, with colourful notices for touchdowns and other scoring plays. Get used to seeing these for the other team.

The game time is displayed across the top of the screen, and is very short, not letting you get into the game at all before it's all over.

After playing a full season, 12 games, I hadn't won a single game and only managed to score a few times.

The close season allowed me to pick some new players in the draft, and allowed all my players to rest and get back to a good level of fitness.

The second season started much the same as the first with my team losing every game. It doesn't really encourage you to continue... but I continued on in the hope that I might actually win a game.

I played this game for over 4 hours and through 2 full seasons.... Winning only 2 games...

It was an improvement on the previous season, but gave me no real incentive to carry on.

I know this is a Spectrum, but this game could have been so much better. A small choice of plays would have been nice, so instead of just offering a running play you could choose run left, run right, Quarterback sneak or fake for example. Passing could be split into short pass, mid pass or deep pass.

The defensive plays would also include more options, and I think this would have opened the game up more and made it much better to play.

Another neat option would be to allow the renaming of players, so you can play with your favourite current team. Two downs is bad too, and there should be an option to select the game length.

As a fan of American football, this game is not recommended. It feels too limited and because it is written in BASIC, it can often be slow and cumbersome.

It's so annoying to not complete a pass time after time and then see the other team get a touchdown with their first play.

One for fans only then, and only to see how badly it might compare to other games of its type.

STARSHIP ENTERPRISE

Silversoft 1983

LONG RANGE SCAN.

1ST DIGIT
NO OF ALIENS 009 012 002

2ND DIGIT
NO OF
STARBASES 006 018 006

3RD DIGIT
NO OF STARS 206 009 009

Starship Enterprise is a tactical space combat game, no zapping aliens here, well there is, but it's all played out with numbers and statistics, unless you get into a fight and then you can have a bit of phasor action, more on this later.

The game comes with a lengthy instruction sheet that outlines how to control the ship and is a must read if you want to succeed in this game.

The inlay gives the story; The federation is in ruins and as sole surviving starship, you have to hunt down and kill the aliens responsible.

```
MAIN COMMAND COMPUTER
CONDITION GREEN   QUADRANT 8,4
STARDATE  2835   SECTOR   3,2
ENERGY    4334   TIME       77
SHIELDS    305   ALIENS     28

    WHICH COMMAND SIR?

1.NAVIGATE    5.TORPEDOS
2.S.R.SCAN    6.DAMAGE REPORT
3.L.R.SCAN    7.SHIELDS
4.PHASORS     8.COMPUTER
```

Starting the game and you are asked for a skill level and a name and then the game does some kind of setup before you are ready to play.

The game sets random aliens, alien types and starbases, so some games can be very long and difficult, others short and easy.

At the start your ship is placed in a sector within a quadrant.

You can do short or long range scans and have other options available in the command window at the bottom of the screen.

To get more energy you have to get to a starbase.

If you navigate to a sector that contains a Romulon or a Klingon or another enemy type, then they start taking pot shots at you, damaging various systems of your ship.

You can switch to phasors and fire back, this is like a 3D space shooting section, but the enemy craft move around so erratically it is difficult to hit them.

For longer range attacks you can use torpedoes. Here you just set the target and fire, most of the time you will be successful.

If you do manage to get to a starbase, you can refuel and repair any damage before moving on to kill more aliens.

After playing for an hour, the game began to grow on me, it is a little slow paced and some of the sounds are annoying, and despite being written partly in BASIC, it's still entertaining in its own way.

For a break from platforms or out and out shooters, this game offers a fair challenge if you like this style of play.

ZX Spectrum +3

For me, the Spectrum +3 was the computer I always wanted but never had, for a number of reasons, mainly because it came too late in the Spectrum's life span.

It was released in 1987 at which time more powerful 16bit computers like the Amiga and the Atari ST were already available, wowing the public with their superior graphics, sound and storage options.

It was also not a real Sinclair computer, Sir Clive having sold off his prodigy to Alan Sugar's Amstrad in the previous year.

So this machine was the best bits of the Amstrad range of CPC's, the keyboard, connectivity and built-in storage plus the best bits of the Spectrum, Massive games catalogue, easy to use and a thriving copying culture.

The machine itself was larger than previous machines, nearly twice as big as the rubber keyed version and a third larger than the Spectrum Plus. The 3 inch drive was the same as the one in the CPC range, capable of holding around 170k per disk across two sides. The drive only had one read/write head, so the disk had to be turned over to read the contents of the other side.

Speed wise, it was a huge step up from tapes, loading a typical 48k game in around 3-5 seconds depending on how it was put on the disc and if any loading screens were included.

There are single keys for certain characters like quotes or delete, and the familiar keywords of the 48k days are no

longer to be found apart from the odd, well used command like LOAD. If you switch to 48k mode though, they are still present, but 128k basic offers a much better typing experience, you don't have to look for commands on the keys, just type them in fully.

Connectivity wise there are two joystick ports for Sinclair joystick on the left hand side, next to the reset button. At the back there is the normal ZX expansion port, featuring some annoying changes that means some peripherals no longer work.

There is also an expansion for an external disk drive. There is a video out socket that allows the use of scart cables, a big improvement over RF, which is also still available if required. Finally there is an RS232 serial port that can double up as a midi port and also an auxiliary port.

There is an audio socket to load and save to tape, so you can still load in all your old games.

On the down side, every Plus 3 had a built-in sound fault. Sound via the television was distorted due to an error on the PCB. There are various ways to fix this issue that can be found on the internet, but I am not brave enough to attempt them sadly.

Spectrum +3

The other common fault is the drive belt. This often decays leaving the drive inoperable. Luckily you can still get replacement belts and they are not too difficult to fix.

Loading and saving to disc was nowhere near as complex as using the ZX Microdrive, there was no strange commands to remember. Loading and saving used the same commands as tape, but because the A drive was the default storage system, the Plus three used that. Simple.

My plus 3 has been permanently setup right beside my PC since it arrived, and I have spent many a good hour converting my games across, saving them to disc and building boot menu's. It's everything I wanted my Spectrum to be in the 80's and although it isn't a Sinclair machine, it still has that special something.

JET PAC ADVANCED

Jetpac is my all-time favourite game across all platforms and spanning all eras, so when I first found out about this game I thought it was sacrilege to have changed it.

After a few glasses of wine though, it became clear that this was almost a Jetpac 2 rather than a hacked about original.

The idea came from two Spectrum fans called Bad Beard and Michael Evans, who wanted to extend the game and add some new features. The project was never fully completed, however the new levels and a few tweaks did make it.

Because this game cannot be distributed, the only way to get it is to apply a POKE file to the original. If you have a TAP file or SNAP file, first load it into an emulator that supports the POK file system. Once loaded, just drag the POK file into the emulator and you will be asked which Pokes you want to apply. Select the Jetpac Advanced option and bingo, you now have Jetpac Advanced.

Save out this new game (which is 48k incidentally) to which ever format you prefer, and you're done.

The new levels consist of different coloured platforms to the original, in different places and different sizes.

The aliens have not changed, this was one of the features that never made it, however with just the platform changes, this gives the levels a whole different strategy from the original.

The original to me, always will be my favourite game and a classic, but this is a good alternative if you get bored of the same level layout, and it's a damn good game to boot.

What more do you need...

http://goodwiigames2.blogspot.com.es/2011/07/jet-pac-advanced.html

LITTLE RED BUTTON

For Spectrum users who had just bought a Microdrive, or those lucky enough to be able to afford a disc system, the Multiface was the answer to their prayers.

For any mass storage device the problem was always going to be how to get your favourite games transferred from those slow cassette tapes onto your new, super-fast storage system, whether that be Microdrive or Wafadrive cartridge or floppy disc.

Most software companies were trying to deter pirates and part of their strategy was to use different loading systems.

Although these very rarely stopped the home copiers, they more often than not caused legitimate purchasers a headache when trying to load them.

Transferring games became impossible, even with the heavily advertised transfer utilities. They could usually manage the normal loaders, but give them a custom, hyper-loader and they fell over.

Romantic Robot came to the users rescue in 1986 when they launched Multiface One, a hardware device that could stop and save any game to a variety of device include Microdrive and Opus Discovery. It was about the size of a joystick interface and slotted into the back of the Spectrum and contained a single, soon to be iconic, red button.

Also built into the 8k of on-board RAM were other tools that allowed users to go looking through the contents of the Spectrum's memory; something used to locate POKE's for infinite lives. It also allowed the memory addresses to be changed, and this in turn triggered a flood of game-changing POKEs to the magazines.

Some game companies didn't like this new found power the user had and so tried to curtail it by causing the software to crash if the device was detected. Un-deterred, Romantic Robot released another version with a switch that allowed the device to be hidden during loading. It could then be switched on and activated, circumventing the detection process.
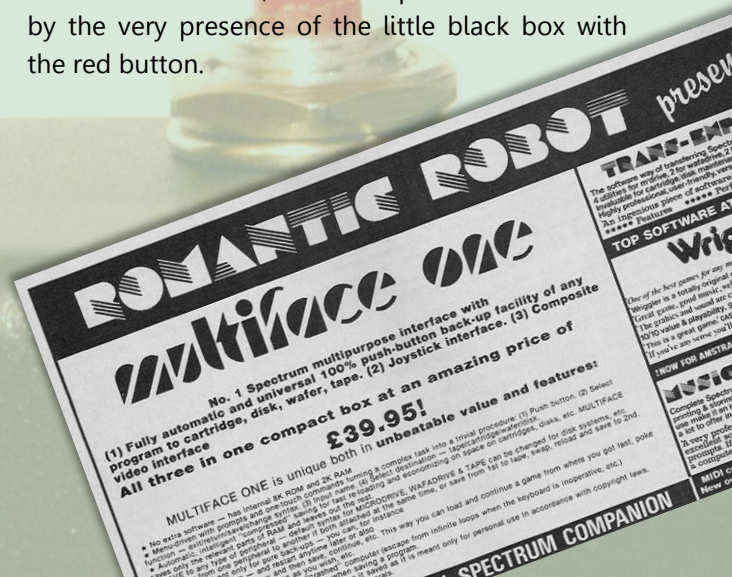
The Multiface One was compatible with the 48k machine or the 128k machine running in 48k mode. This meant that 128k games could not be saved.

When the +2 machine arrived, so did Romantic Robot's new device, Multiface 128. Allowing users to save 128k games to Microdrive or disc. This version also added support for the +D disc interface.

The Spectrum +2A and Plus 3 soon followed, which meant another device, the Multiface 3. This gave Plus 3 users the ability to save games to the internal disc drive.

To try and avoid any legal action, Romantic Robot modified the saved game data so that it could only be used if the device was plugged in, but it wasn't long before utilities were available that got round this caveat. The 8K RAM was also used for other utilities including Genie, a machine code dissembler.
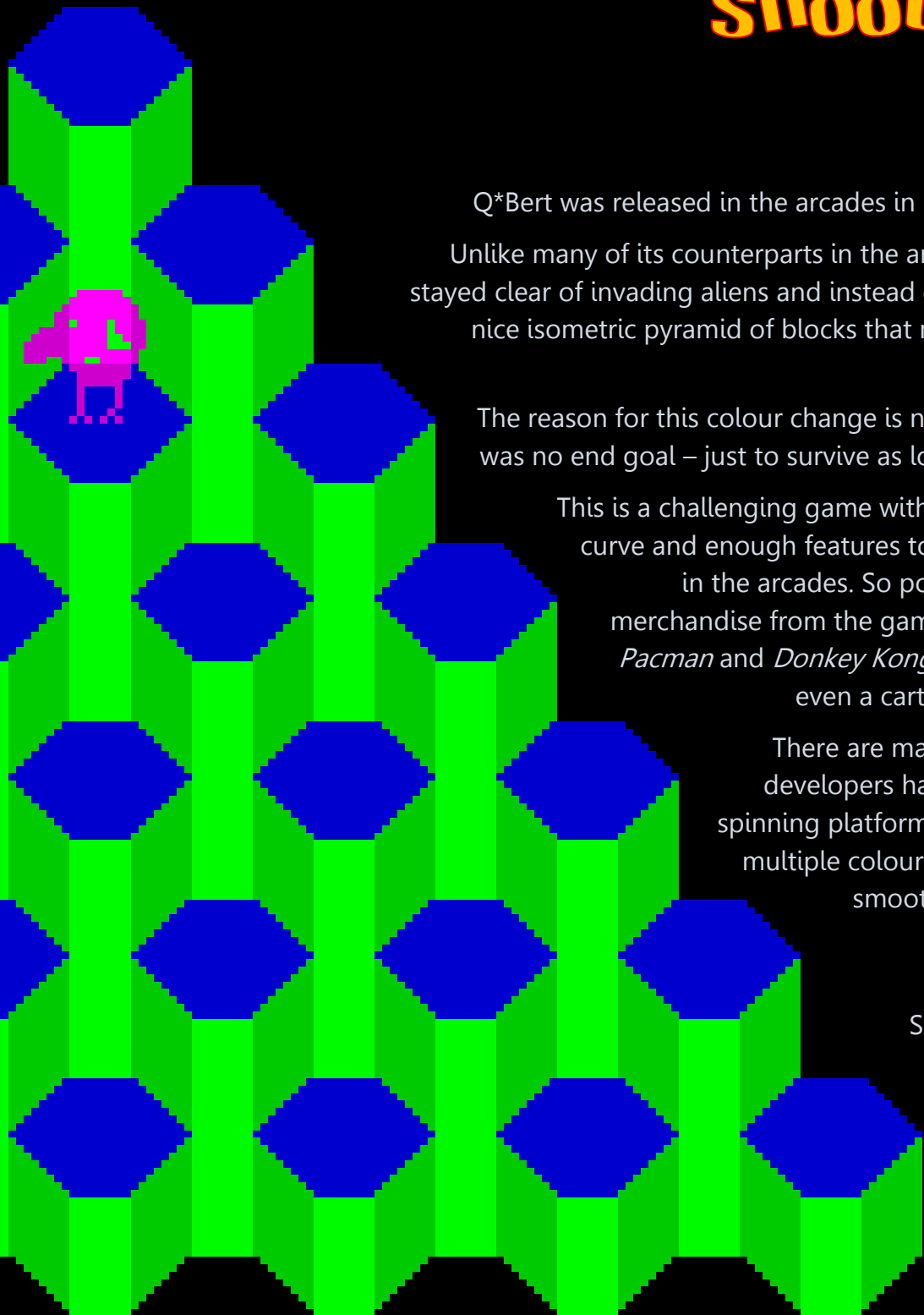
The Multiface was a must-have piece of kit for anyone with a mass storage device, and I am sure that sales of Microdrives, +D and Opus were increased by the very presence of the little black box with the red button.

Q*bert
Shoot Out

Q*Bert was released in the arcades in 1982 by Gottlieb.

Unlike many of its counterparts in the arcades, this game stayed clear of invading aliens and instead gave the player a nice isometric pyramid of blocks that needed changing colour.

The reason for this colour change is not known – there was no end goal – just to survive as long as you could.

This is a challenging game with a good learning curve and enough features to make it popular in the arcades. So popular in fact that merchandise from the game is third only to *Pacman* and *Donkey Kong* – and there was even a cartoon series made.

There are many elements that developers had to include, like spinning platforms, coiling snakes, multiple colour changes and the smooth jumping of the main character.

So.. how did the Spectrum versions compete?

Q*bert Shoot Out

Bouncing Berty – Power Software – 1984

The familiar layout of the pyramids looks right apart from the black and white shading, I could forgive this though if the game played well, but it doesn't.

The movement between blocks is instant, there is no actual jump involved and the response to key presses is sometimes very slow, meaning you can often die while waiting for the game to respond to your frantic key stabbing.

Games can be over very quickly too, due to the speed the whole thing plays, which can get very frustrating.

The floating discs that should scoop the player back to the top of the pyramid are there, but when you use them, you just suddenly appear at the top and usually die straight away because the fast moving balls re-generate right on top of you.

Overall, pretty poor and one to avoid.

Cubey – Chad Software – 1984

This game started with a nice colour pyramid and large blocks. The main sprite is also large but only ever faces one way, so that takes a few points off before I even get to the game play.

The pace is far too fast which causes frustration as you die time after time without making much progress. The sprite does jump from block to block and is lifted to the top when using the discs, so keeping close to the arcade.

Sadly, because of the pace, this game is almost unplayable... a shame really, as the graphics are quite nice.

Cuddly Cubert – Interceptor Software – 1983

Here we have another game that suffers badly due to the sheer pace of the gameplay. Had this game been slower, then it would have been a real contender.

The pyramid is colourful and the sprites are large and move smoothly around. The player jumps from block to block and the sound effects are good.

Sadly, typical games last about ten seconds as you don't have time to react to the movement of the balls, and end up losing all your lives in a short space of time.

Also, when you die, the pyramid sometimes resets the already cleared tiles, meaning you have to start all over again. After having at least 50 attempts I never managed to clear the first pyramid..

The discs do their job, when you can actually get to them before dying..

Such a shame the pace is too fast...
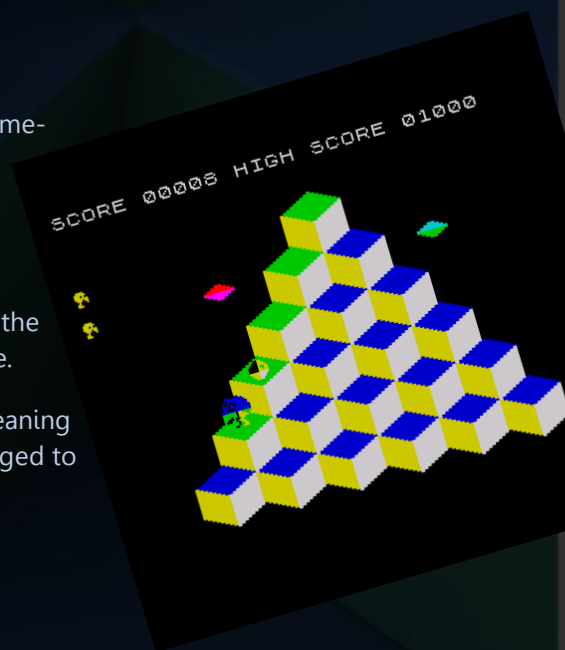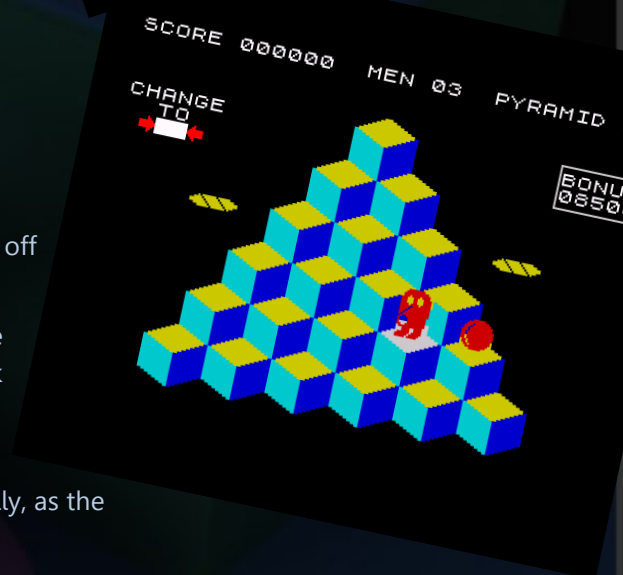
Q*bert Shoot Out

The Bad

Q*Bertus – Unknown

This game asks for keyboard controls at the start, which is fair enough, but then asks you again after each game. Once settled in and the game begins, we get an average implementation, clearly in basic.

The graphics are nice but not animated and not smooth moving. Sound is limited to beeps but the main let down is responsiveness. The game can take ages to respond to key presses, which in a fast moving arcade game, is criminal really.

Not a bad game, but certainly not one of the contenders.

Spellbound – Beyond Software – 1984

Points for taking the game and changing the style, giving it a new theme, and my initial impression is that it looks good. Maybe it was designed to look good for magazine adverts, because it look terrible in motion.

The graphics a jerky and not animated, and each move is accompanied by an irritating sound effect. The witch keeps throwing lightning which produces another nasty to chase you. If you die you lose your progress and have to start again, which is really a big problem.

Control can sometimes be unresponsive meaning you either remain still while a chasing nasties jump on you, or you throw yourself off of the platform and die...

All in all, a pretty terrible game....

### Q*Bert – Parker Brothers – Never released

This was one of the games Parker Brothers were working on for the ROM cartridges, but never completed or released.

As you would expect from an official game, it follows the arcade very closely, but as it was never finished, don't expect it not o crash.

The keys to play the game are odd, 1,2,3 and 4.. which takes some getting used to, although you can use a joystick in Sinclair mode in port 2 and this is far easier.

The gameplay is ok, but I think too tough in the initial levels, with lots of enemies to avoid. Response is also sometimes comprised if there are a lot of things on screen.

It is sad this was never completed as it would probably be the definitive Q*bert game for the Spectrum.
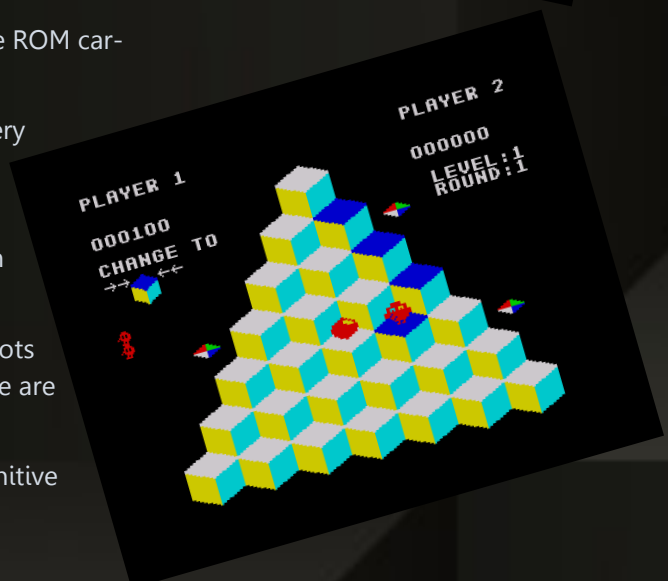
# Q*bert Shoot Out

Ghosty – Load n Run – 1986

This game has several differences to the arcade, for example there are no discs, and in this variant the main characters starts in the middle of the pyramid.

The pyramid is colourful, but for some unknown reason there is a colour split right down the middle of the screen. This doesn't add anything to the game, so I can't see the reason for it.

The main character hops around nicely while bats chase after him. The gameplay is the same as the arcade, with some nice sound effects and tunes.

Although not as smooth as some of the previous games, the pace and difficulty are set about right, meaning its quite fun to play, and you find yourself wanting to wanting another go. Something missing from some of the titles already tested.

The gameplay speeds up as you progress and the number of bats increase, providing a nice progression. Overall, a nice little game, especially when you consider it was released on a magazine covertape.
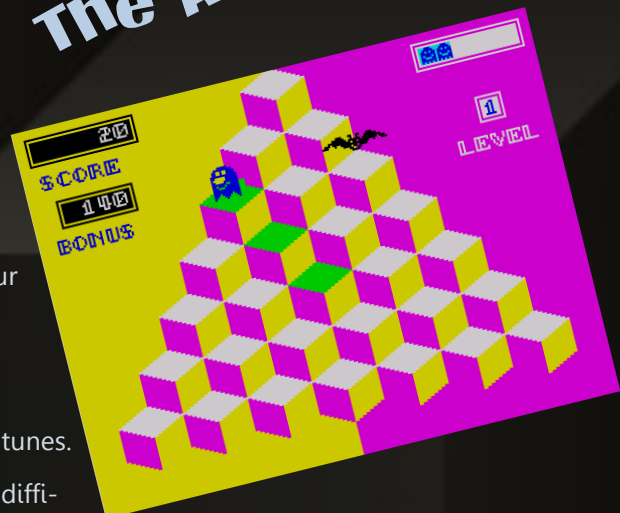
Hubert – Blably Computer Games – 1984

The pyramid in this version is transformed into a slab of tiles, although they are colourful, and the game plays much the same. Level one has no enemies and eases the player into the game.

Level two and things begin to go wrong. The balls move too fast, catching up with Hubert far too often producing frustrated gameplay. Hubert does not jump smoothly, but just appears on the relevant tiles, as do the chasing balls.

Sound is used well and this is the first game to use the blanked out swear word when Hubert loses a life. Control and response is ok, but can sometimes fail to register, even so because of the speed of the balls, it doesn't make much difference.
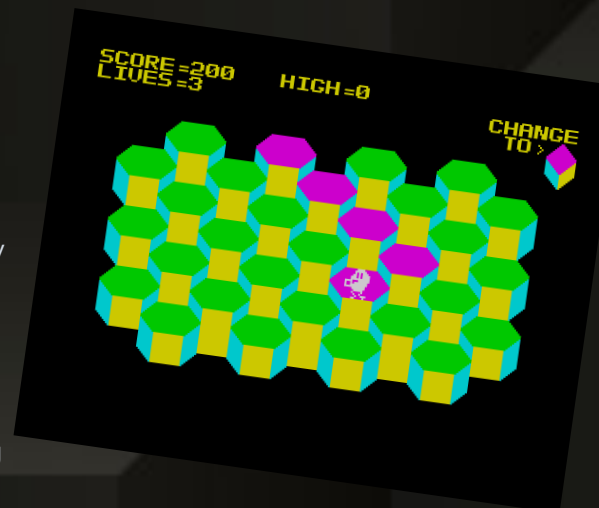
Pi-Balled – Automata – 1984

Game-play wise this is not a bad effort from Automata, the main let down is the actual movement of the sprites. Instead of bouncing from block to block, they just appear there, like so many other versions.

This aside, the game isn't too bad though, and good for a few plays at least. The graphics are nice although the angle of the pyramids is more acute than the arcade game.

Other differences are the speed of the lifts on either side. These seem to move at an alarmingly slow rate, and once at the top, you have to jump off yourself.

Sound is used very sparingly – only played when you appear or die and your progress is lost between lives, which is a real pain.
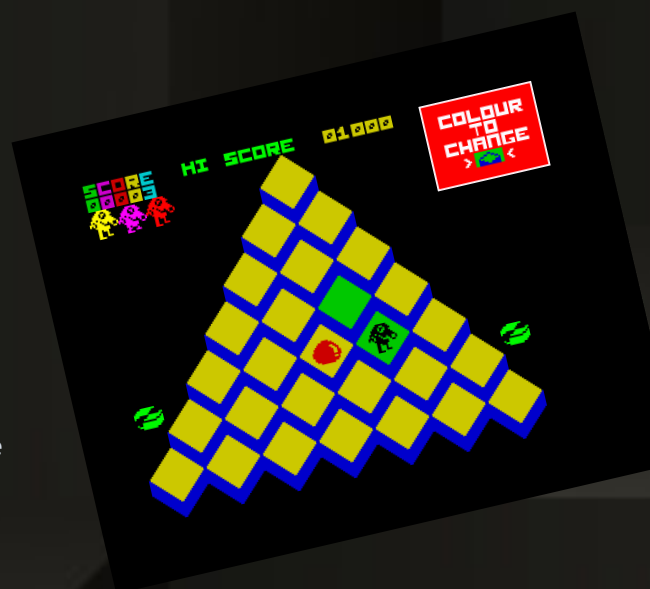
Q*bert Shoot Out

Shoot Out

Pogo – Ocean – 1984

This is Ocean's entry into the Q*Bert market, and it's a damn fine game all round, and the one I grew up with. That doesn't skew my judgement though.

The pyramid is nicely coloured, accompanied by a nice sound effect and the sprites are large, well defined and well animated.

Movement is smooth and the main character actually moves between blocks rather than just appearing there.

Gameplay is bang on, allowing you to get far enough into the game before it becomes challenging.

Control, which is by joystick or keyboard, is very responsive giving a nice arcade feel.

Sound is used very well throughout, with effects being used for every aspect of the game, and we even get the swear word with our hero dies.

The discs work as expected, taking the player back to the top in a timely fashion and with nice animation and sound.

I enjoyed playing this game so much that I forgot I was supposed be reviewing it!

It is such a playable and well-crafted game and deserves to take top spot in this test.

?+! ?#*=@!?
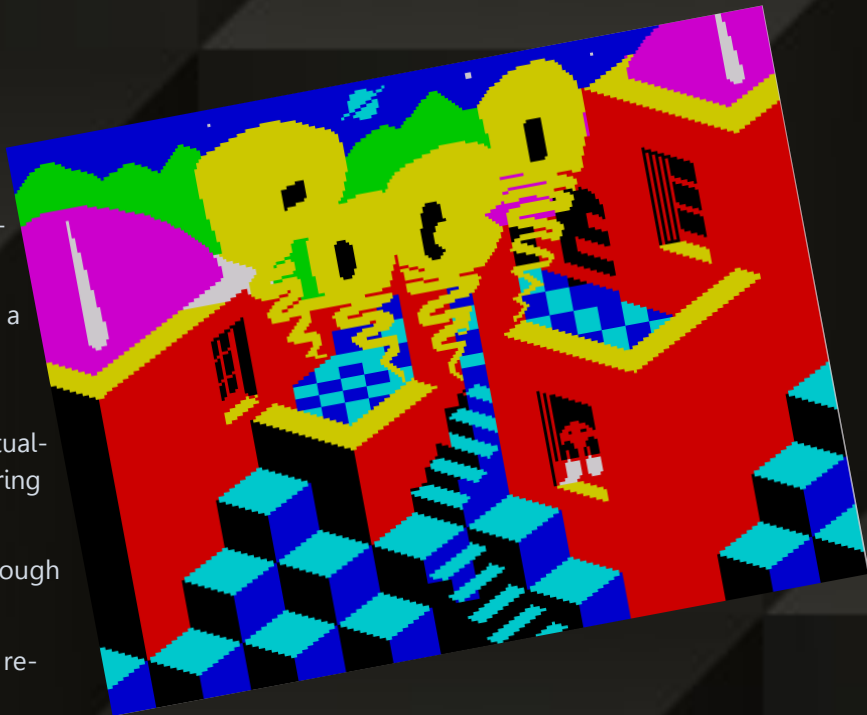
The Making Of....

THE SPECTRUM SHOW

The Spectrum Show, the monthly YouTube show that has now been going for over 2 years. Never missed a month, never late and always well received. How?

Many people have asked how the show is put together, how long it takes, what I use for various bits and where all the information comes from. I was planning on doing a video 'making of' and sticking it on one of the DVD's as an extra, but this way is faster.

I may yet, add it as an extra, if time allows!

Many have commented (thanks) that the show looks professional, which I can only put down to two things; a lot of planning and an urge to make things the best I can.

The Script

Each episode begins with the script. Yes, it is scripted and not made up on the fly. The basic script is usually about twelve pages long, including the special feature. It can of course be longer if the feature is an arcade shoot out!

The first segment of the show is the news. Although I have a large collection of magazines, it is much more convenient to search through scanned pages, and so I plough through various magazines that cover the month in question.

I prefer to look at weekly magazines such as Home Computing Weekly or Popular Computing Weekly, because of their regularity, tend to be quite accurate with dates.

I peruse each news section and add to the script around five to six news items I think are interesting. I very rarely copy them word for word, often embellishing them with further detail if required.

At the same time I check out the weekly charts, usually compiled by WH Smith, and grab a selection of games that are new in.

The Feature

Next we have the main feature, quite a lengthy but enjoyable task.

If it's a hardware review, I spend a good few days setting things up and generally playing about. Testing things out, making notes and often video.

If I have hardware setup, I don't want to do it all again to grab some footage later on, although this has been the case a few times.

At this point I have the very basics of the feature, just a list of bullet points to work from.

I fill this out later in the day, when its still fresh, and supplement it with additional data from various sources.
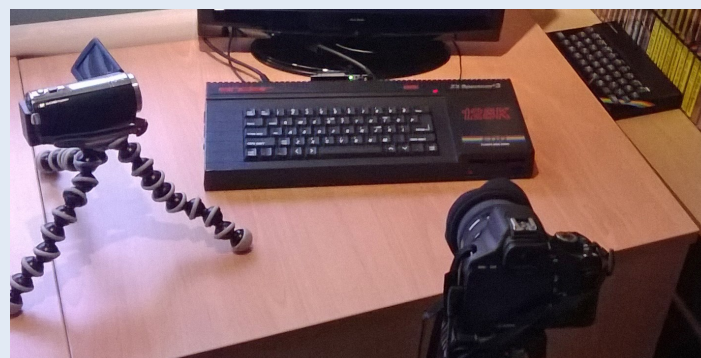
For the video I use one of two options, depending on the kind of shot I need. For normal, long to middle distance stuff I use a Panasonic HC-V510 camcorder. This is a small HD device that is fine for most things.

If I am doing close-ups or shots that require very short depth of field, I will call on my Canon 550D

The Making Of....
THE SPECTRUM SHOW

DSLR. This will let me manually set everything to give me great close up detail.

My Canon is also used for any photography I need, like box shots, or anything for the blog.

The feature can take anything from 1 day to a full week to complete (on and off) and at the end of it I will have a few pages of text, nearly an hour of video and loads of still pictures.

Game Reviews

Next comes the game reviews.

How do I chose which games to review? Easy, I take a mixture of old and new, of games I personally enjoy playing and games I have not played before. I also try to make a point of not using games that everyone puts on YouTube like Manic Miner or any of the Ultimate games.

Once the games are selected, I break out Spectaculator and load them up. Each game I play for over an hour before I even start to write about it. I have to get a feel for the game, how it plays and how it uses the Spectrum. This is very important.

After the first hour, I jot down a few notes before moving on to the next game. When all of the games have been played, I go over the text again and fill it out. At this point no video have been taken.

New Games

Once the older games have been reviewed, its on to the new title. This is difficult because despite the numerous new games being released, I want to pick a

good one so that anyone who missed the announcement can get a chance to see it.

The game goes through the same process as the older games and gets played for about an hour with notes being added to the script along the way.

Type-In Game

For series three I ended the show with a look at some type-in games that I found on an old C90 tape. Some of them were not available on the internet, so after getting them off the tape, I set about doing a quick review.

Video

Now, its time to grab some video of the games.

For this I use Spectaculator set to 300% zoom with the game loaded and ready. To capture the screen I use a free capture program called CamStudio.
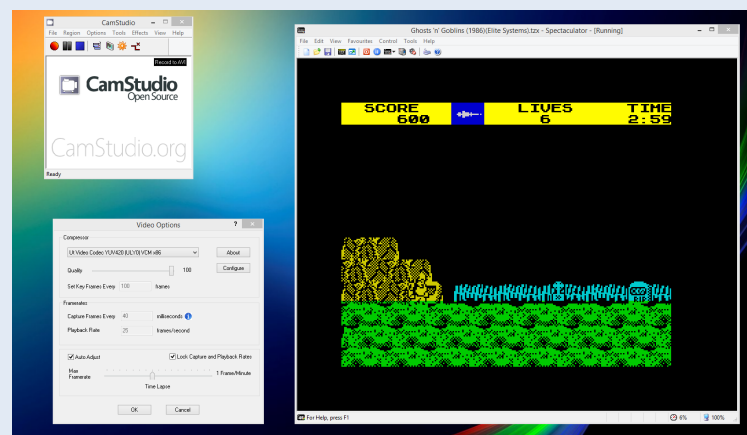
I added some lossless codecs and set it to record an area 800 x 600 pixels. This fits nicely within Spectaculator and produces excellent results.

For each of the games I had reviewed, I grab about 20 minutes of video in several different files. These hopefully cover different levels or features of the game to give a good overview.

During this capture I often add things to the script that were missed the first time round. This may be bugs, features, quirks or things I didn't pick up on.

Capturing the video can take quite while, but it does involve me playing lots of Spectrum games!

It also means I have to have quite a lot of storage to keep the files. For current shows the video files are held on my SSD drive for fast access while editing the show. Once finished the best ones are archived off to an external HDD in case I need them in a future show.

The Making Of....
THE SPECTRUM SHOW

Audio
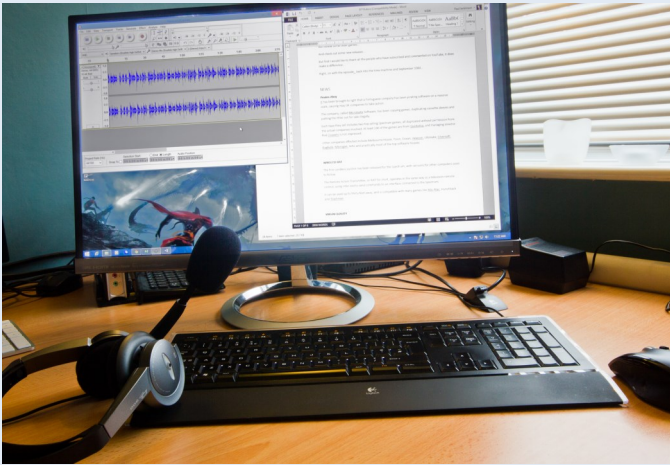
At this point the script should be complete and I am ready to record the audio.

I try to record it all in the same period to maintain the level and sound of my voice. This is not always possible though, and those with sharp hearing can tell when different segments of the show sound slightly odd. In one episode I had a cold for most of it, except for one game review!

To record the audio I use a free program called Audacity and a set of noise reducing headphones/microphone from Plantronics (DSP 500). These have given me great results for over six years.


I have added a larger blob of foam around the microphone to stop any popping.

The recording usually takes about one hour, after which I have several files for each section of the show.

Music and Titles

The intro titles and show titles are all pre-built and the music is all done by me. I have to change the news dates but apart from that, everything is now ready to start putting it all together.

Editing
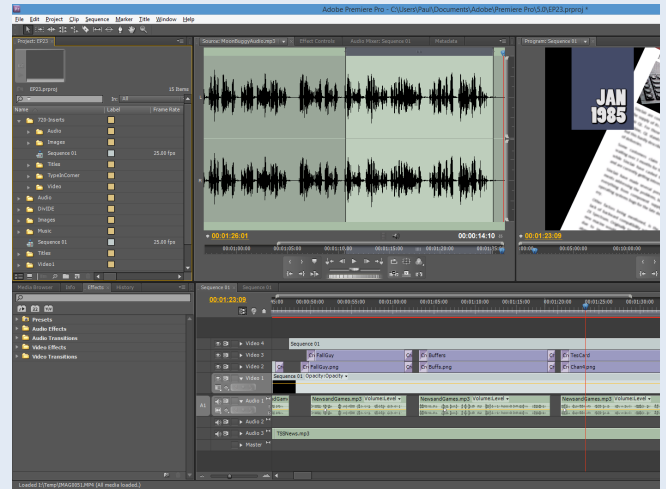
To edit everything together I use a very expensive program called Adobe Premier Pro CS5 (thankfully provided by my employer to do video work at home).

I pull all of the audio, video, image and title files into the project and begin the slow process of sticking it all together.

This process can take a few days until I am happy with the results. Once complete it gets rendered out to a single MP4 file which takes about 40 minutes.

Reviewing the finished show often shows up problems, bad timings or cuts, and of course this mean re-editing and re-rendering.

Once happy - it gets released, and the whole process starts again.
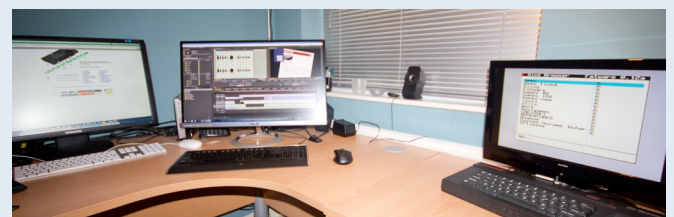
I would like to say a big thank you to all the people who have viewed, subscribed and commented on the show.

THE SPECTRUM SHOW

DISCOVER NEW GAMES

ANTIQUITY JONES
48k/128k Arcade Game.
Search for the golden chalice in the deepest jungles. Avoid snakes and traps. Can you survive?

£ free

SPACE DISPOSAL
48K/128k Arcade Game.
Help clean up the planets, get rid of the junk but beware of the aliens.

£ free

CHOPPER DROP
48k Arcade Game.
Collect the crates and get them delivered in time.

£ free

BOUNTY
48k Text Adventure.
Go in search of a space outlaw.

£ free

A BROKEN FRIEND
48k Text Adventure.
Help Fleg fix his beloved Spectrum.

£ free

Kyd Cadet
48k/128k platform game.
Help Kyd begin his first mission. Collect all the fuel pods and avoid the aliens.

£ free

Kyd Cadet II
48k/128k platform game.
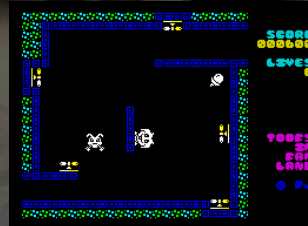Kyd sets off on another mission, to rescue a kidnapped dignitary from an alien planet.

£ free

Toofy In Fanland
48k/128k platform game.
Toofy goes in search of nuts in this crazy upside down, fan infested, flipping amazing game.

£ free

http://www.randomkak.blogspot.co.uk