

MASTERTRONIC

THE SPECTRUM COLLECTION

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SPACE WALK

Label
Mastertronic

Year
1984

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 16K

Developer
Andrew Gosling

BEAT MY SCORE
1900

IT was once every boy's dream to be an astronaut, floating in the infinite void of space (except for those who wanted to be train drivers, the spotty nerds), so Space Walk is an easy sell with its super cool cover art and the promise of orbital antics.

As the commander of a space shuttle (which one is not specified for reasons unknown) you've been tasked to collect a bunch of satellites that seem to have wandered off course. Naturally, there are 'cosmic aliens' that are intent on getting in your way and must be dispatched with your handy space laser. Some of these just bounce around, others are more aggressive and fire back, often taking several hits to destroy. The satellites have to be nudged by flying into them which causes them to change direction, and your aim is to get them into the cargo bay of the shuttle, after which you progress to the next screen.

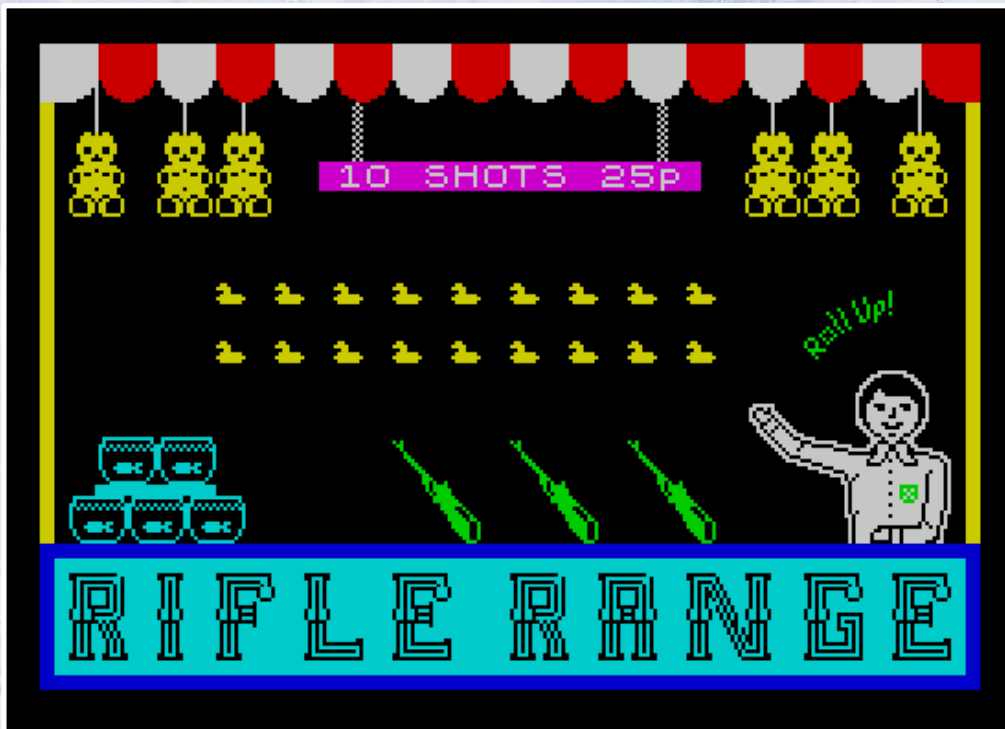
Controlling your character is a fight against gravity and pushing the satellite in the right direction (whilst avoiding enemies) is quite a challenge. Space Walk does suffer from some poor collision detection at times and

getting the satellite into the shuttle seems to require either luck or pixel perfect precision as it often just floats on past and straight into the ground. Crashing a satellite is instant Game Over, so many times I have found sacrificing myself on the radioactive landscape before this happens is the best strategy.

Despite these issues, there is quite an addictive and heart-pounding game underneath. It has great arcadey sound effects and the desire to get a little further and beat your last score is compelling once you get the hang of the controls. If this game had more polish, it might even feel like a worthy successor to Ultimate's Jetpac, but as it stands it is a cool, if flawed, action shooter.



RIFLE RANGE



Label

Mastertronic

Year

1984

Price

£1.99

Machine

ZX Spectrum 16K

Developers

Mr Chip Software

Andrew Foord

Peter Foord

BEAT MY SCORE

233 Medium difficulty

ROLL up, roll up! Are you ready to experience all the fun of the fair? Or at least, one stall run by an overly jolly carnie, who has no concerns about handing you a gun and letting you blast away...for this is Rifle Range, a cheap and cheerful high score game that manages to be a different enough variation on the Space Invaders theme to make it worth a little of your time.

Choosing from a selection of difficulty levels, you are allocated a few handfuls of bullets and must manoeuvre your rifle left and right, shooting at the three rows of moving targets (squirrels, octopodes and yellow duckies). On any setting other than easy, the squirrels also throw down acorns at you in an Invaders style, which eat away your bullet supply on contact with your rifle.

At the top of the screen is a barrier, beyond which sit a variety of juicy prizes. Missed shots poke holes in this barrier, and you have to be careful not to shoot down a prize while the owner is present. Luckily for you, the smiling buffoon needs to frequently nip away (either he's a heavy smoker or has a severe bladder problem) and during this period the barrier will start scrolling. Aim your shots well now as hitting a prize can award you with a points boost and extra bullets. You also have to be extra careful not to shoot the carnie upon his return, as murder is frowned upon and the fuzz will pull up and take you away, also negating your points for the high score spot.

Once you complete a screen, you get the chance of a little bonus game, shooting fast moving roller coaster cars (apparently this is an acceptable thing to do) for extra points before starting it all again.

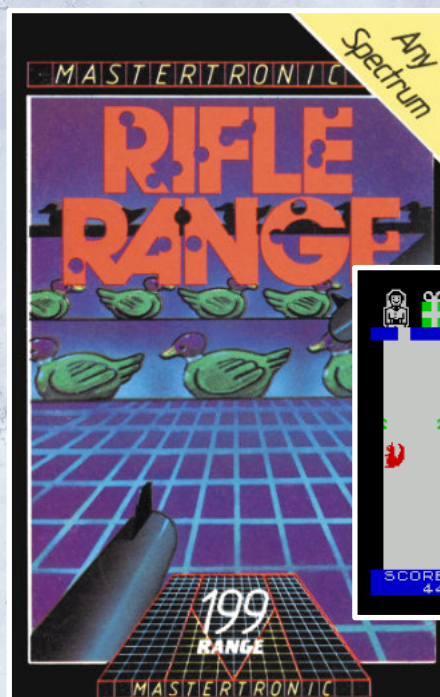
While the whole thing looks fairly primitive and could easily be a one-go-and-over affair, there is something that is compelling about the gameplay. The first half of each level might be a case of just sitting in one spot holding down fire, but the prize-roulette is a compelling temptation...do you save your bullets for the animals, or shoot a few holes in the hope for a bigger payout? For a game that was released in the first year of Mastertronic, it is playable and somewhat fun as it manages to provide a decent high score challenge with no frustrating elements. What more could you expect for a couple of quid?

CRASH

64%

"The overall finish of Rifle Range is very good, with much more polish than many a program at three times the price. The game itself is very simple, but oddly compelling for all that."

"I found that this game had a good difficulty level - one that will make you want to play it again and carry on. The game itself is fairly unusual and quite playable. Graphics are large and move smoothly, they are also colourful and have the added bonus of being detailed."



ALCATRAZ HARRY

Label
Mastertronic

Year
1984

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
Barry Jones



PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES 4/10

"It's a pretty simplistic game and there's really not a lot to tell you about, which isn't too surprising when you remember the price. You get what you pay for - not an awful lot."

SINCLAIR USER 3/10

"For the low price, the game is adequate. But in terms of quality, the game falls way short of what is possible."

ALCATRAZ Harry touts itself as a 'unique blend of arcade strategy and adventure.' As the titular Harry (whose guilt or innocence is mysteriously not mentioned), you must escape from Alcatraz by gathering up secret files and a whole bunch of escape equipment that the guards have carelessly left lying around the complex. You must then escape through the hole in the fence, while avoiding the minefield in your way. Sounds easy.

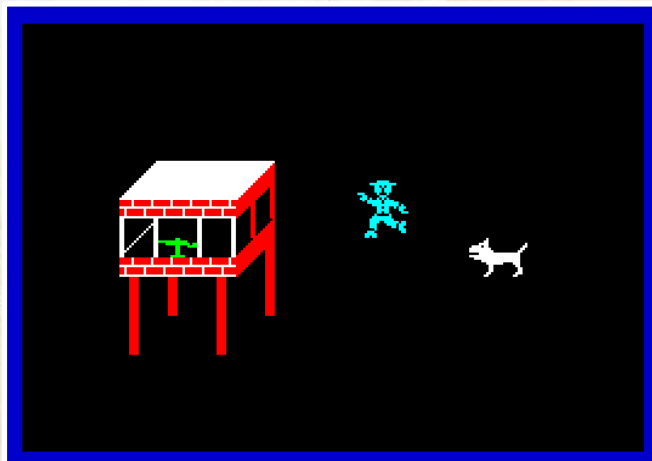
The game map is a grid of screens which allow free movement between them. A screen may contain nothing, part of your escape kit, a guard, a hole, a grate or a car. Escape kit parts are collected by walking into them, holes provide a quick route to other areas and the car takes you quickly back to your compound.

If you encounter a guard, don't panic - simply wander back off screen and no harm will come to you. However, if you re-enter a screen when a guard has already been encountered, you will be caught and have your head rather graphically shot off your shoulders. The grates can also be dangerous - at the beginning you are told in which sector the files are kept. If you enter a grate at the

wrong sector, you will also be caught and shot, so make sure you check your location regularly.

Once you get both the files and the allotted number of escape items, return to your compound where you will be briefly shown a minefield map of the complex. If you can reach the exit without blowing up you successfully escape, win the game and most likely the admiration of the late, great Sean Connery.

The game at first seems to be an exercise in memory; having to remember the locations of the guards is tricky, especially given the large play area. But you soon realise that this is a game made for those that love to draw maps. Mapping the complex is essential, but also makes completing it pretty damn easy. Once you complete it, there's not really much incentive to go back to (despite the extra difficulty levels). The game becomes a matter of just trudging from screen to screen and there is no actual 'action' to be had. No shooting, no running from chasing guards. You may get some pleasure in allowing Harry to escape one time, but I doubt you'll want to lend a hand after that.



VIPER III

THE evil Quardons have attacked the planet of Nimea! You must take your squadron of ships and save the planet! Dodge! Shoot! Excitement!

Such is the premise of Viper III, a horizontally scrolling dodge and shoot 'em up. The game is split into several sections, the primary being a test of your skill to avoid a multitude of enemy missiles while zapping their oncoming craft. This then leads to the destruction of a barrier and base defences (watch out for that debris) before a quick refuel and a bombardment of bouncing ships.

During the action, your energy constantly decreases as you shoot, although I never found this to be much of a

worry - as long as you don't tape down the fire key I think you'll be OK. You only have the ability to move (slowly) up or down which does give the gameplay an element of push-your-luck. Often your demise is purely a result of 'chancing it' because you think you can just get into position to shoot and find your timing is off, so it's completely your fault.

Having the extra sections (such as the base defences and refuelling) to break up the action is a welcome addition, although this doesn't add enough variety to give the game longevity. Graphically it's UDG-level basic, the sounds are simple blips when you fire and the whole thing, while not unfun for a few goes, is unlikely to hold your attention for more than one session.

Label

Mastertronic

Year

1984

Price

£1.99

Machine

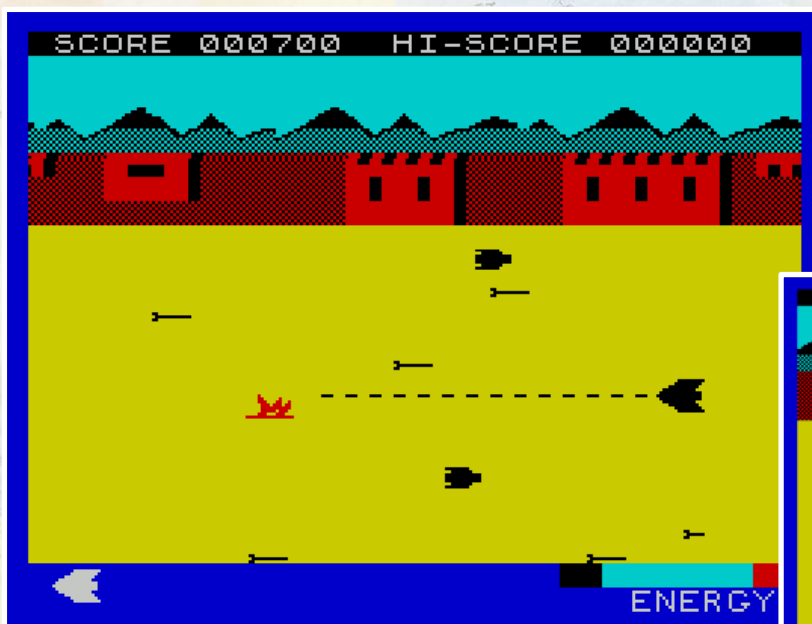
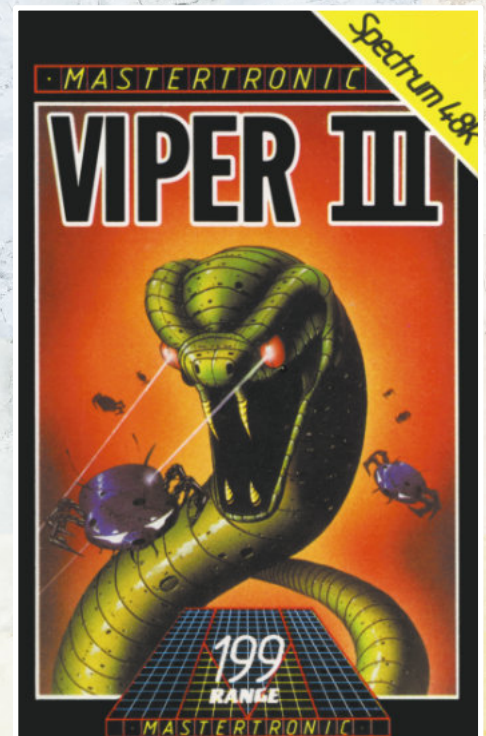
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer

Mark Pollard

BEAT MY SCORE

13140



SE-KAA OF ASSIAH

Label
Mastertronic

Year
1984

Price
£3.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developers
Clive Wilson
Les Hogarth

SINCLAIR USER 5/10

"After a short foray into the fortress you will soon realise that there is precious little description or supporting text beyond your own input. The inevitable result is a featureless and empty world which fails to grasp the imagination successfully. The graphics are interesting but do not add enough to the very slim story line to hold your attention for very long."

CRASH 5/10

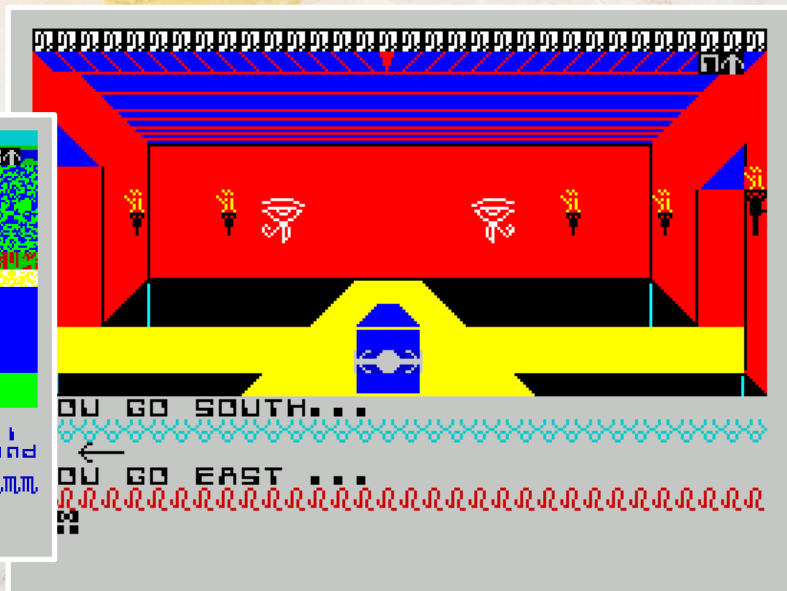
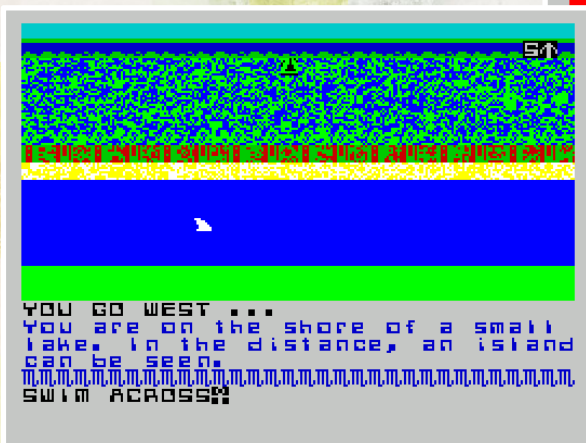
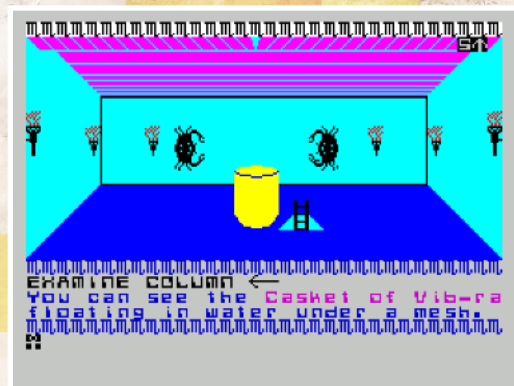
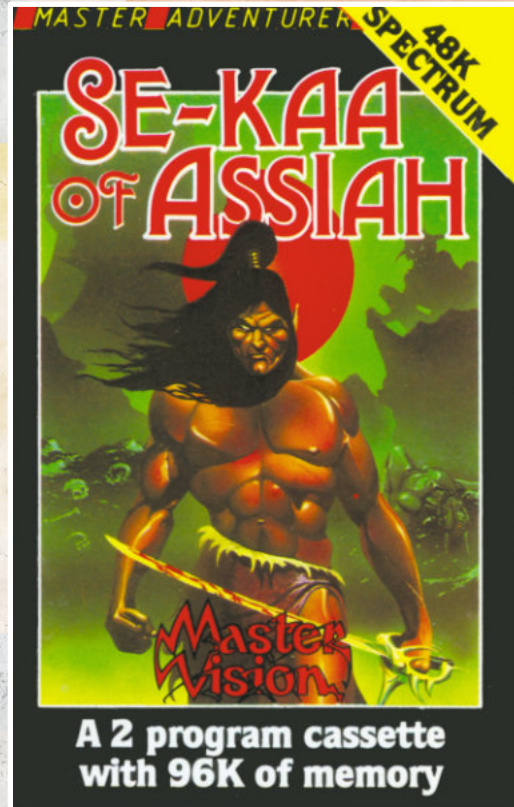
"Although two programs for £3.99 appears good value, I felt this package lacked any addictive quality. The first game largely consists of one long maze. It is not a game I will be returning to; 'nough said?"

A great cloud has descended upon the land. The Dark Hordes have seized the artefacts of the Wise Ones...The Rod of Light, The Hammer of Vib-ra and The Casket of Vib-ra. Your task is to find these artefacts and return them to their rightful resting place, thus allowing the Wise Ones to regain their power and defeat the Dark Hordes for good.

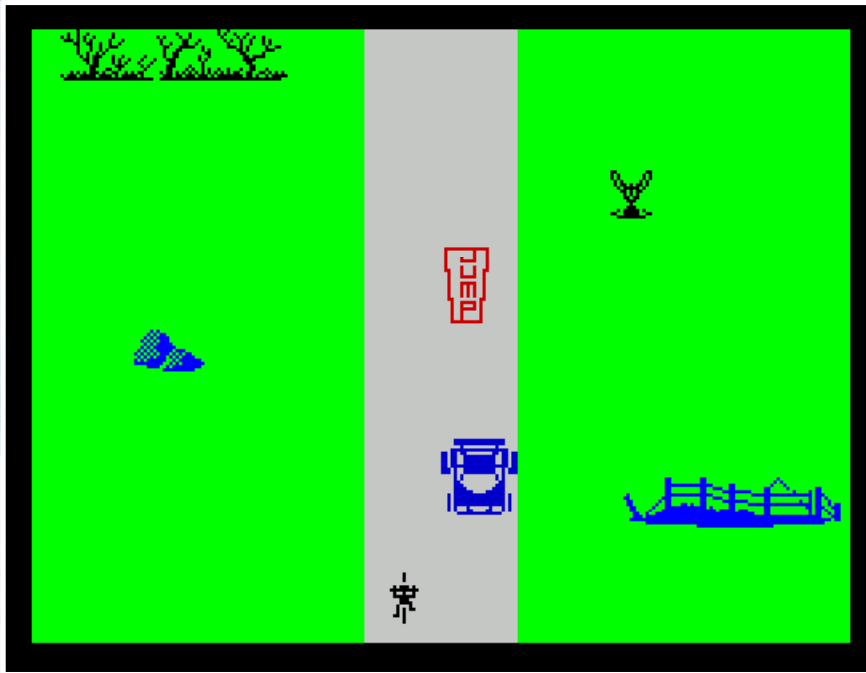
What this means for you is a lot of exploring and a fair bit of puzzle solving in this graphical adventure, split into two parts. I call it a graphical adventure because even though it has a text parser pretty typical of text adventures of the day, every location is illustrated and the images often are the clue to the game. In fact, most locations don't even have a text based description, nor a list of exits which must either be guessed (or noted from the image on screen when in the castle, for example). This makes the game seem like somewhat of a hybrid - in some of interior areas it's functional enough, but in others, the messy graphics fail to generate the sort of atmosphere that text would have done far more effectively.

The speed and responsiveness of the input is a little on the slow side, but is not unbearably slow and there are plenty of locations for avid map-makers to get their teeth into. It does feel at times that the vocabulary and responses are a bit limited, and some of the required inputs are a little annoying (when encountering a particular door for example, you have to use SLIDE DOOR instead of OPEN DOOR, and it accepts DIVE UNDER but not DIVE DOWN). I would certainly recommend having a guide handy, but only use it when absolutely stuck.

As with most adventures, your enjoyment may vary, but if you like drawing maps and getting stuck a lot, it may be worth loading up once or twice.



BMX RACERS



Label

Mastertronic

Year

1984

Price

£1.99

Machine

ZX Spectrum 48K

BEAT MY SCORE

7143

BEING the kind of kid that preferred to stay inside with his Spectrum and play games, I never had a bike growing up. Now, well into my forties, and I still don't know how to ride one. What? I saw that look. Don't you judge me!

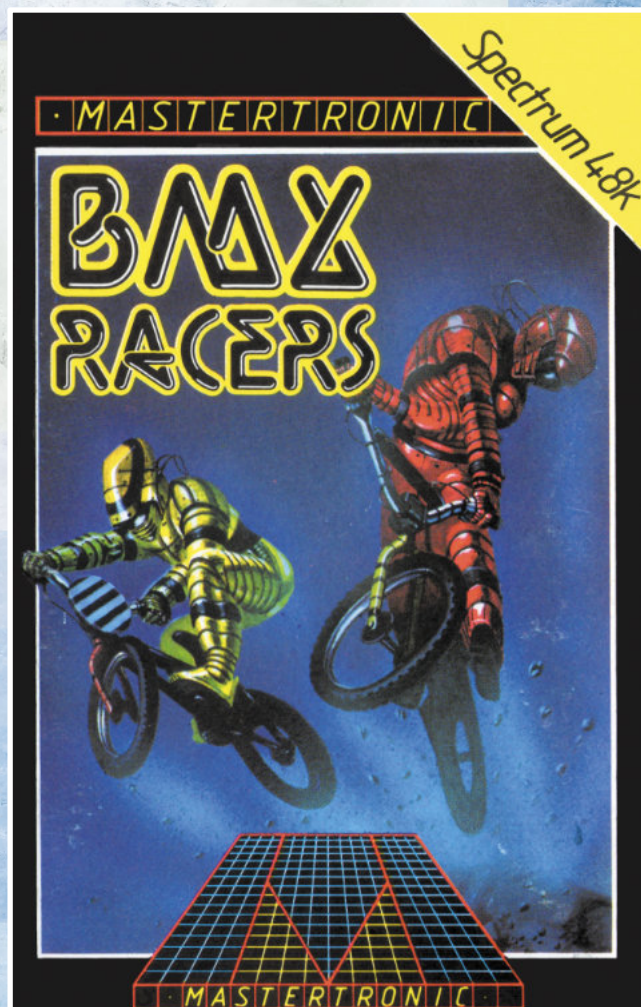
Well, the good thing is, it doesn't really matter, because with *BMX Racers*, I can pretend I am zipping down country roads in the summer holidays with the wind in my hair and not a care in the world.

The whole point of the game (and I use that term very loosely) is to just ride your bike for as long as possible for maximum points, but naturally there are a bunch of things to avoid, like oil slicks and cars coming in the opposite direction. There's also a mad old granny who throws her walking stick across the road in an effort to get it jammed in your spokes. There's also another biker who frequently rides up from the bottom of the screen - if he hits the granny, she's out for the count (and goes a worrying shade of blood red). If you're feeling a bit daring, you can also accelerate up some jumps scattered around for extra points.

At first, the controls feel all over the place, until you figure out that only accelerating or decelerating will set you on a straight line and this gives you a lot more control over your bike. Once you've got that sussed, the game begins to really show its flaws. The fact that you can ride off the road to avoid most of the hazards means that dodging the majority of obstacles is made supremely easy. Jumps can be a little risky, but it's far easier to ignore them and rack up points just cycling forwards.

It's like the game is half designed - the basics of gameplay are there, but it's not planned in a way that encourages you to stay on the road or go for jumps. You

end up just playing for so long on an endless, straight bit of land that the main reason you crash is out of boredom. It's a shame, as if there was a little more to it, it might have been a fun, if very basic game.



VOYAGE INTO THE UNKNOWN

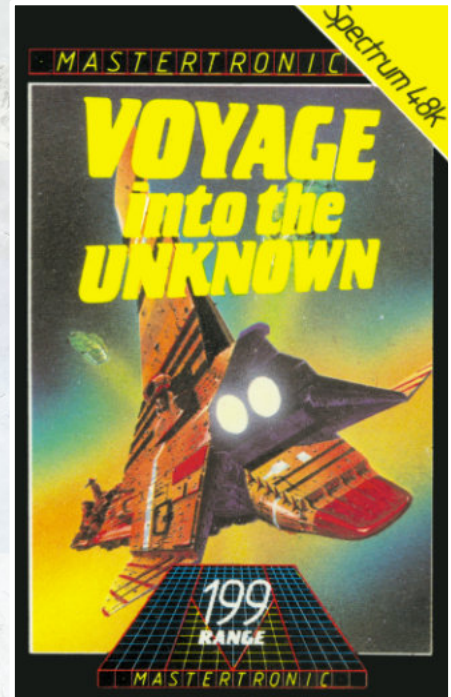
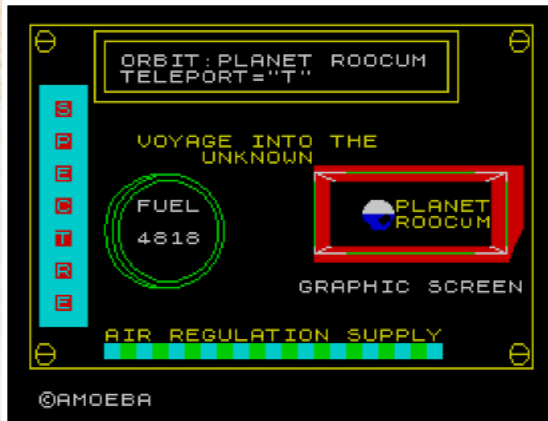
Label
Mastertronic

Year
1984

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
Amoeba Software



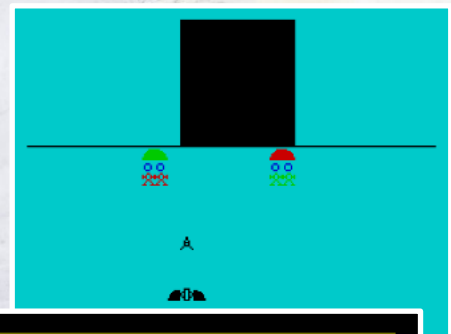
EARTH has been left devastated after the Great War and the evil forces on the Death Star (sounds familiar) are getting ready to wipe the Earthlings out for good. But you, a completely unskilled goon, has decided to take it upon yourself to save humanity. You are aware of a crystal that can destroy the Death Star, so you grab a spacecraft and prepare to blast off. If you can work out how to start the damn thing.

Voyage into the Unknown is a strange beast, and the title is very apt. Aside from some basic control keys in the manual, you are left having to figure everything out for yourself. As you move around space, your cockpit displays messages that can be vague and confusing and after a few minutes you're not surprised that this has one of the lowest scores ever in CRASH.

However, that's not the end of the story as this may just be a very misunderstood beast. After some perseverance, Voyage into the Unknown became a sort of 'Mystery Box', whose secrets just demand to be revealed. Can it be mapped? What's this I found on that planet? Where did that Time Warp take me? What the hell is a Buke? At a certain point, the sheer mystery of it all got its hooks into me and I found it quite compelling to try and make sense of what most people just shrug off as poor design.

After some extensive (and very complex) mapping that doesn't always make sense, many tries and retries I finally had the Crystal and destroyed the android guards on the Death Star, which leads into the Maze of Total Blackness. This name is no joke, as it is literally a black screen with zero feedback on any key you push. To this day I have no idea whether navigating the maze is possible, or the whole thing is one cruel joke.

All I know is that putting time and effort into methodically unlocking the mystery of this gaming train wreck was surprisingly quite...enjoyable? Maybe that's not the right word, but it did have me transfixed, although it was more due to the process of discovery than the game itself.



CRASH 9%
"It seemed to me that a major part of the program was damaged on take off. Because unless I've missed the point entirely, I found Voyage into the Unknown to be exactly that - completely unknown... In my opinion, this is a total waste of time and I wouldn't even both rating it."

"I must say that I have never seen such an utterly stupid program before."

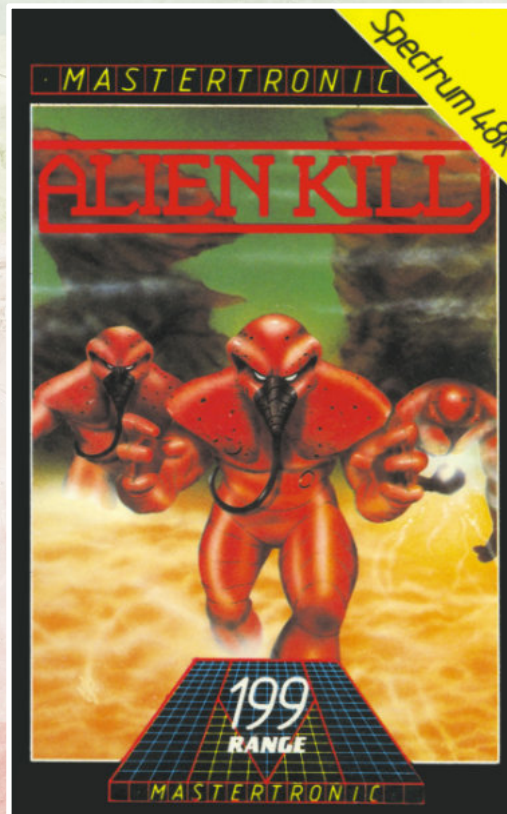
"Playability-wise, this game scores zero. You have no control really over the game. A total mess."

ALIEN KILL

FORGOING any subtlety in the title, Alien Kill is exactly as simple as it sounds. As a small human with a mighty Magnum Laser (also available with almonds), your sworn duty is to blast gaping holes in a huge wall, destroy the happy white aliens (that take two hits and turn a bit sad before they die) to get to the big (figuratively) alien at the top of the screen.

While this sounds like easy money, the alien has an ultra solid barrier of pure Tungstidium that randomly wiggles around in front of you and really cheeses you off as it will absorb any shots that hit it. You're also limited by an ever decreasing timer, as if things couldn't get worse.

With three difficulty levels, that's pretty much all Alien Kill has to offer. This is a game that could easily have been a type-in from a magazine like Sinclair Programs and it shows. There is little strategy; the alien moves randomly and the barrier follows it so you just have to keep blasting and hope you're lucky enough that you get an opening. There is no way to increase the timer, so every game is played in under a minute, so getting a good score amounts to zapping that little blighter as many times as you can. It's very basic (and very BASIC) and will only occupy for a handful of tries before you move on.



Label

Mastertronic

Year

1984

Price

£1.99

Machine

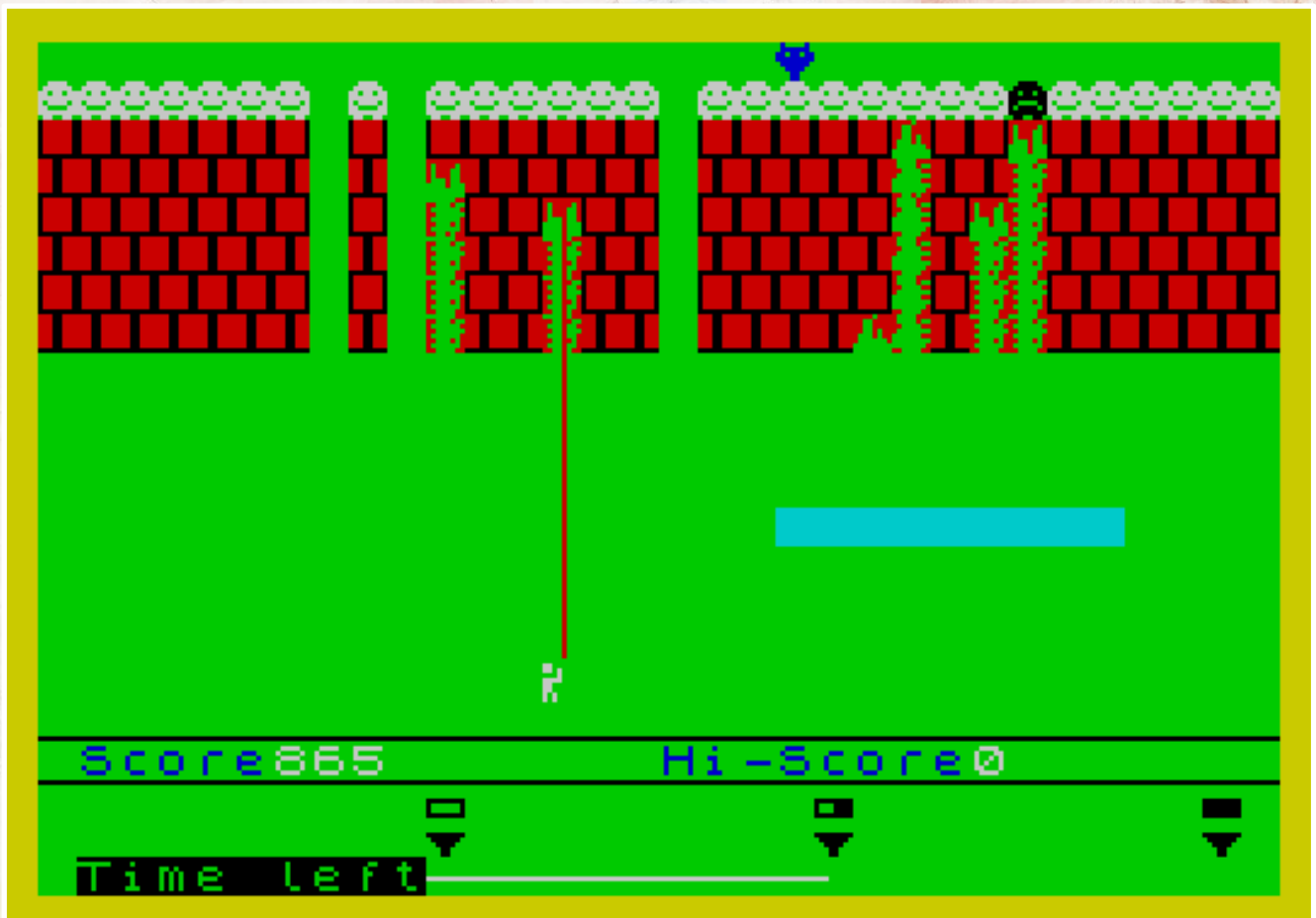
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer

CME

BEAT MY SCORE

4193 Skill Level 1



VEGAS JACKPOT

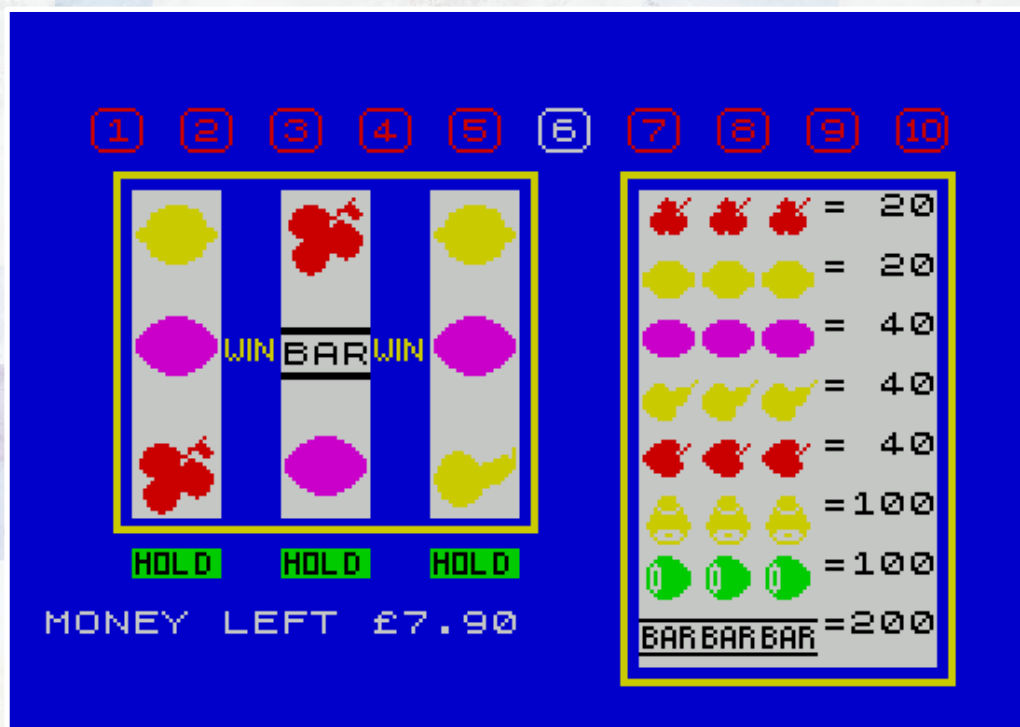
Label
Mastertronic

Year
1984

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
CME



VEGAS is a place of lights, thrills and spectacle...and of course, gambling. As it was far beyond the means of your average schoolboy to visit the City of Sin, they could just recreate at least some of the excitement with Vegas Jackpot. All the fun of a fruit machine without losing any money (aside from the £1.99 the game cost to begin with).

The layout has a no-nonsense approach, with the drums with their colourful fruit on the left and the handy scoring system displayed alongside. The game has all the features, such as holding, nudging and timing (or rather luck) based gambling for higher points.

I've never really understood the appeal of fruit machines in general, even less so for simulated versions. Sadly, this has nothing to offer with a very basic display, uninteresting beeps and a horribly slow pace that will have you reaching for the off switch before you end your first game. If there was a little more polish or glitz about it, then maybe it could've been fun for a brief moment, but as it stands I'd rather spend that couple of quid down the arcade on proper games.



WHODUNNIT

BOASTING 'high resolution graphics' and 'machine code' (despite the fact that it looks like a game written in BASIC), Whodunnit may not be a clone of the famous board game Cluedo, but it does try to channel its essence into a single player experience.

You control a (flickery) little detective who has to solve the mystery of who murdered the Butler. The only way to do this is to gradually whittle down the potential suspects, weapons, times of murder and locations until you know the true answer.

To do this, you have to wander around the mansion (or, more strategically stand still for a bit) until someone appears. Then, make a dash for them so you can interrogate them i.e. bribe them for information. The kind of clues you get are things like 'The knife is not the murder weapon' or 'I didn't kill the Butler' and by using these facts, you can gradually narrow things down. The

game also gives you a handy notes screen to mark off your knowledge as it grows.

At a certain point, you'll be running out of money to bribe people and you'll have to take a stab at the answer. The game lets you know which you have got right and which are wrong, giving you three chances in total to succeed.

The main issue with Whodunnit is that it's all just a bit pointless. If you sit in the centre of the house, you can pretty much grab anyone before they vanish. But even then, you'll most likely not have enough information to guess correctly, as the randomness of the interviews means a lot of facts are repeated. So it all ends up as a process of elimination, then just pure guesswork and luck as to whether you are correct or not. There's nothing here to keep you interested, or make you want to play again, so I'm left asking myself, 'Where is the fun?'

Label

Mastertronic

Year

1984

Price

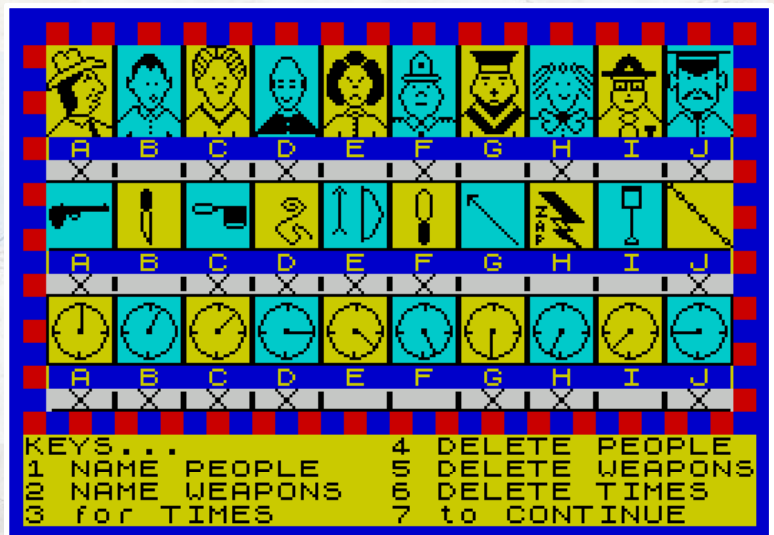
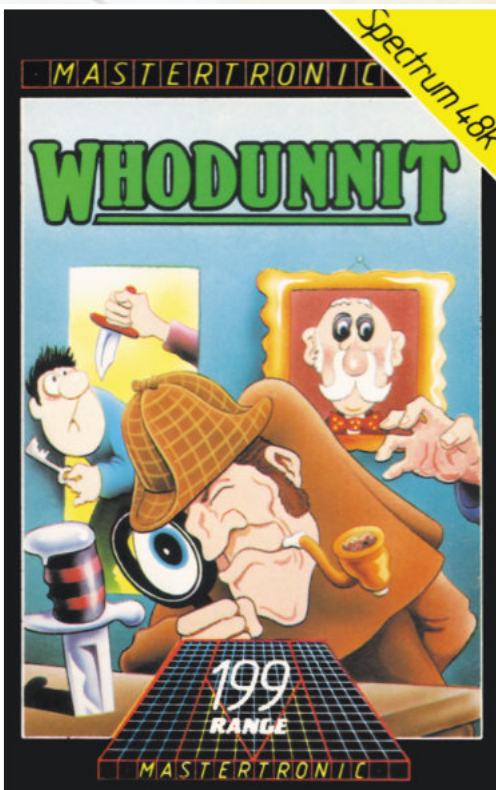
£1.99

Machine

ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer

Barry Jones



ELECTION

Label
Mastertronic

Year
1984

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K



CRASH 37%
"This game seems to have been put out unfinished and it's very uninteresting and very boring. I wonder whether the programmer ever played this game..."

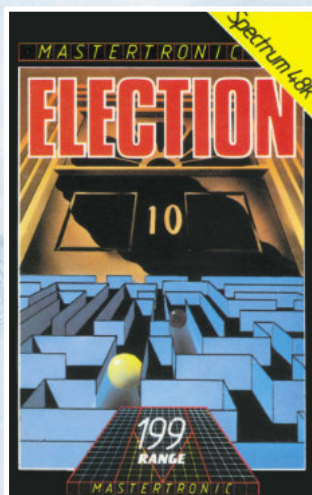
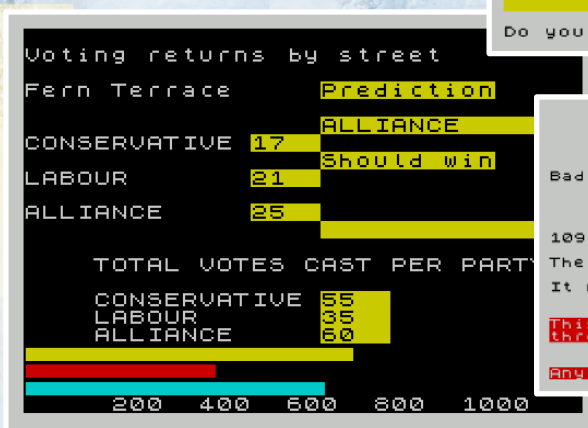
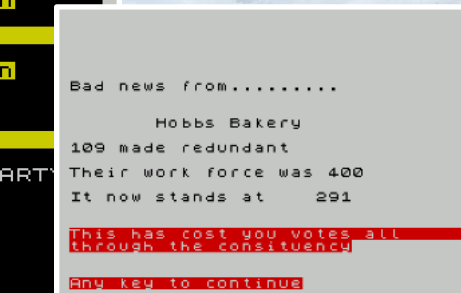
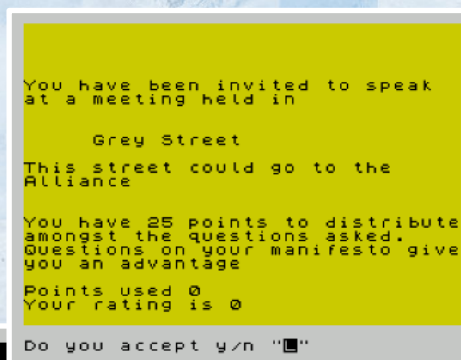
"For £1.99 this must be one of the best value for money games I have seen. The election simulation is rather absorbing and addictive."

IF you ever wanted to live out the dream of having an inconsequential political career, then Election may be the game for you. You have to defend the parliamentary seat of Pendell, using strategy and money to influence the voters and bring your party to victory.

The game begins with a selection of the three main political parties, then a choice on the points to focus on your manifesto. The game then plays out over 10 days, where you can allocate money from your £5000 budget to gain votes. Firstly, these may include bidding for road advertisements or paying for space in the local newspaper. Then you can choose to canvas a few streets in the area, throwing cash around as you do to make people like you more. You will regularly be invited to a meeting and must allocate points to various topics to increase your rating. Of course, there are always bumps in the road and external events may hinder your progress (such as a relative being thrown in jail). All this continues until the final day when the votes are counted up and the results are revealed.

Election is the kind of game that you convince your Dad to buy and play to prove that these new 'silly computer

games' are not all about shooting aliens and that the family investment in a home computer was at least slightly educational. The game itself is designed with absolutely no flair, aside from some coloured text and pretty little house graphics. It's all a case of using your budget to buy votes, then waiting an extraordinary amount of time at the end while the game shows you all the results being counted up - street by street, vote by vote. Then you get a simple text message and get to do it all over again. The whole thing is a pretty rudimentary simulation and is about as interesting as an actual election, so if you're into politics you might discover some joy in it. Otherwise you'll find it bland and a bit tedious.



MAGIC CARPET



Label

Mastertronic

Year

1985

Price

£1.99

Machine

ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer

Andrew Gosling

AS the legendary hero Aladdin, you are equipped with a flying magic carpet in your quest to obtain the stolen magic lamp. Such a daring hero, you must face fire breathing dragons, vampire bats and gravity defying spinning boulders! What more could you want from a game? Surely this is a guaranteed recipe for thrills and excitement!

Dodge 'em ups are not exactly uncommon, and this is one of those titles. You have full freedom of movement, but no attack. And absolutely anything you touch, even with the smallest pixel of your sprite, will kill you dead. Once you reach the huge keyhole at the end of each screen, you progress to the next.

Let's get this right out there at the beginning. Magic Carpet only has three screens. The first is easy, the second two will take some practice to learn the timing. All three look like garbage, are poorly designed and at times feel a little unfair. With some perseverance you will get through them, and save states make the whole process a lot less frustrating. At least it's not 'Jack and the Beanstalk' hard.

Once you finish the third screen, you're back to the beginning, just moving slower. I have a suspicion that this might make screen 2 impossible but to be fair, I wasn't willing to put in the time to find out. There is so little content here (even for a budget game) that it's barely worth more than a couple of minutes of your time. It's not even as though there is any replayability value to the whole affair. If the screens themselves were more developed - maybe smaller sprites and more maze-like it would feel like there is something of value here. As it stands, the best thing about Magic Carpet is the loading screen, which is hilariously badly drawn.



JASON'S GEM

Label
Mastertronic

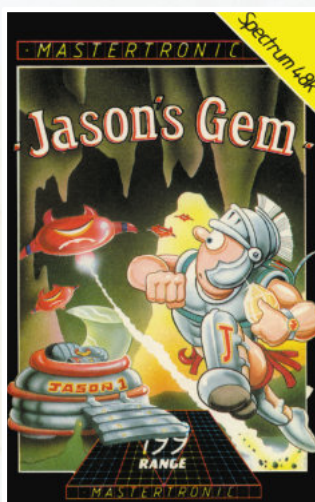
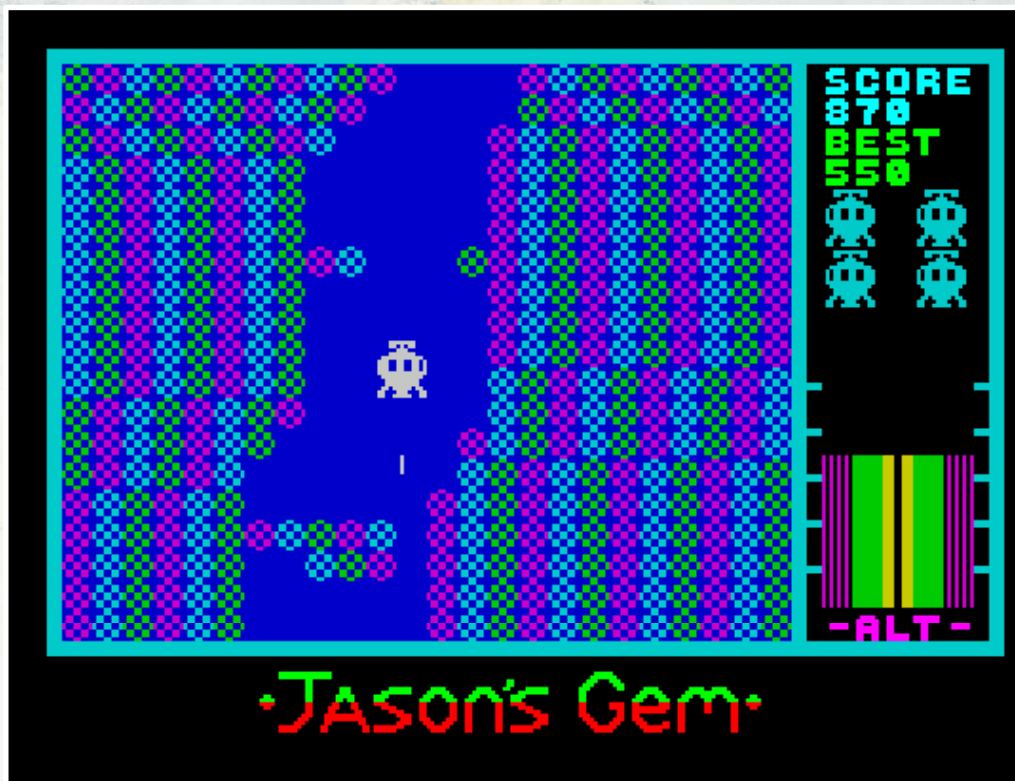
Year
1985

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
Simon White

BEAT MY SCORE
3550



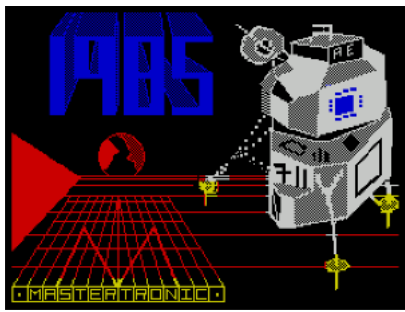
THE promise of treasure is a common theme in games, and this is true of Jason's Gem – a game of two halves. In an attempt to either recover your lost gem, or just stumble across some clues to finding one (the game and instructions are a little contradictory on this point), you must first take control of your spacecraft as it descends slowly down each screen. The first screen has you landing on a moving 'teleport' platform, and then goes on to have you rapidly descend through the caverns. These consist of a series of pre-set screens with rocky outcrops that can destroy your ship unless you blast them out of the way first.

Once you have navigated these and landed at the bottom, the game then switches to a flick screen platform dodge 'em up affair, with the usual abstract meanies (such as television sets), moving pillars and pits to avoid falling into. Reach the flashing exit on each of these screens and you move on to the next one. Once all 10 are complete, the gem is yours.



The problem with Jason's Gem is that the first half of the game is annoying, while the second half is just poor. The first screen, has a platform that moves left and right at random, but at the same speed as your ship. If you have a momentary lapse or aren't lightning fast with your reactions, it could mean a life lost right there. Furthermore, the caverns contain several places where if you exit the screen too far in one direction, you will basically suffer unavoidable infinite deaths on the next one. The instructions even go as far as to warn you to keep left on the first screen. I suppose fixing the game was not an option.

After some practice (as you learn to work with the iffy collision detection), you will make it to the bottom most of the time. This does feel kind of fruitless if you've lost a few lives on the way as you know you'll need them soon. The platforming levels are very simplistic – again the collision detection is doing you no favours here – and just not really all that fun. With a few tweaks, this could've been an acceptable budget title but as it stands, playing it frustrates more than it excites. In short, this game aint no gem (har har).



1985 - THE DAY AFTER

Once you reach the surface, you have the option of practicing a bit of casual flying while avoiding the alien craft that constantly dogs you from the left side of the screen. But eventually, you have to make a choice and fly into one of the planets to get to the main event.

Label
Mastertronic

Year
1985

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
Severn Software

WITH a plot that clearly doesn't realise what year the actual game was released in, 1985 is the story of the day after Big Brother has been destroyed. Planet Earth is running low on energy, so bizarrely, the most optimum solution for this problem is to send you out in a small, difficult to pilot spaceship to collect nuclear plasma from the four neighbouring planets. I can only assume the solar system has gained a few planets in the future (past?) or that one of the gas giants has hardened up a bit.

Each planet is a few screens wide, but is comprised of a more varied landscape (sometimes with caverns). You have to fly down to the plasma pods and use your tractor beam to grab them, but all this time there are enemy bullets to dodge. Dodging is not an easy task, as the inertia of your ship is of variable quality. Sometimes it seems to make sense, other times it just feels completely 'off'. Then there are the occasions where bullets just go right through you without a scratch, so let's just say collision detection isn't perfect either.

BEAT MY SCORE
1205

What this all amounts to is one of those gravity-control games (i.e. Gravitar, Thrust) where you must keep firing your thrusters in a desperate attempt to avoid crashing into the ground, cavern walls, flying saucers and if that wasn't enough - bullets from enemy installations. You begin each life on the rapidly retracting launch pad of your space station base and keen to throw you in at the deep end, you have to thrust through a narrow passage to make it out into the open. You will probably lose quite a few lives here, but the key is to floor it and just aim as best you can.

While 1985 isn't a terrible game, it certainly needs a lot of practice and patience to master. However, for me, games like this need fairly decent physics and the thrusting needs to make sense. So once I felt I'd achieved a fairly decent run, I'd pretty much lost interest in trying to improve further.



CRASH 21%
"While the game is meant to feature proper artificial inertia and gravity, it fails because it is just too jerky."

SINCLAIR USER 2/5
"The curse of this game is that it seems to have so little point. The only challenge comes from the unroadworthy nature of your spacecraft, but that is likely to prove more frustrating than fun."

THE EMPIRE FIGHTS BACK

Label
Mastertronic

Year
1985

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
Clive Brooker

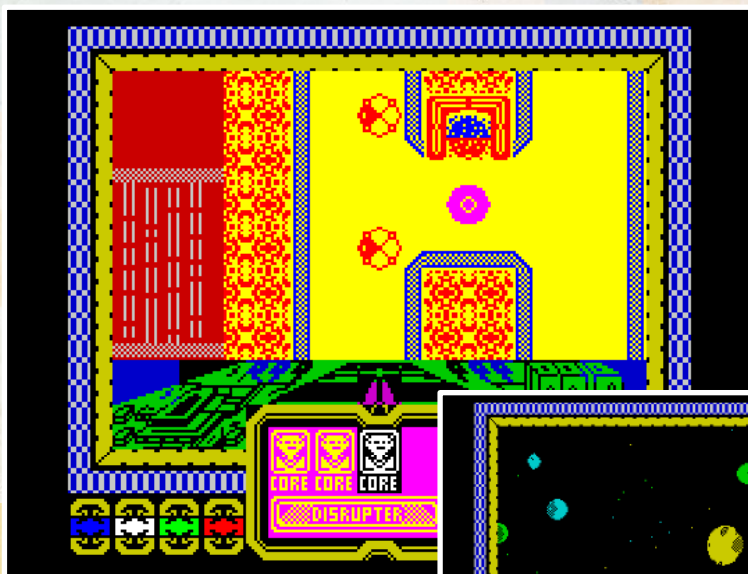
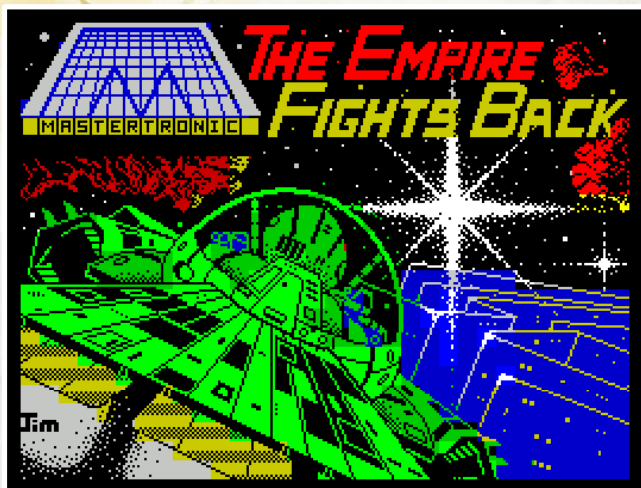
IT'S strange that I never got much of a Star Wars vibe from this game, particularly with the title, the asteroid field, the rebels, the robots and even the word 'Millennium' in the instructions. Perhaps it's the lack of blasters?

But I'm getting ahead of myself. The Empire Fights Back is a multi-style action game that has you trying to defeat the mutants in their 'space mines.' The game starts with a choice of areas, then launches you off into deep space. Here you must navigate around the (incorrectly named) meteorites as they hurtle towards your ship. At the bottom of the screen is a small display and you must take care not to veer off the edges; doing so will cost you vital energy, as will smashing into any of those pesky space rocks.

Once you have done this, the game switches to an overhead view with a small map display on the left and info panel at the bottom. In this area, you have to guide your little robot around the mine and locate the cores,

disabling them. You need to go carefully as the mines are filled with enemy drones that will disable you on contact. Thankfully, you have a handy disruptor that can freeze them in place by holding down the fire button. However, this uses up your energy so you need to keep a keen eye on the gauge as once you hit zero you get a critical failure and the game is over. Disabling the cores will then send you to another area with many locked doors - as you complete areas the doors will unlock and at the end of the game you need to make a dash to the finish and complete the game.

Despite its simplicity, I actually quite enjoyed this game. The multiple game styles break up the action and the mine areas can be quite exciting, as quick reflexes are often needed to either avoid or freeze the enemy drones. The visuals are decent enough with nice launching sequences and there are plenty of sound effects to add to the atmosphere. It is a pity that the scoring system only kicks in if you get good enough to complete the game, but that's a minor niggle.



CHILLER

Label

Mastertronic

Year

1985

Price

£1.99

Machine

ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer

Richard Wright



THERE'S only one thing worse than your girlfriend getting whisked away to a haunted mansion, and that's your car running out of fuel miles before you get there. And so starts Chiller with its B-Movie horror feel that is entirely unrelated to a certain popular song by a certain Mr Jackson.

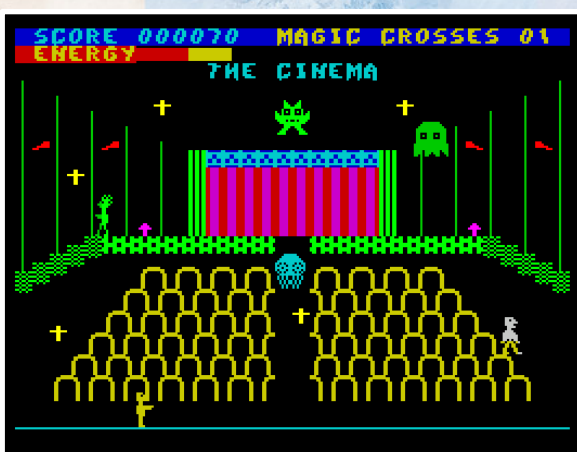
The game itself consists of several individual screens (in true Manic Miner style) that you need to navigate to collect magic crosses. You begin in the creepy forest with zombies and ghosts prowling around waiting to sap some of your energy bar on contact. Luckily, nature provides nourishment in the form of edible mushrooms, but also poisonous toadstools too. Once you collect all the crosses, it's on to the next area...and so on. The locations include a cinema, a the ghetto and a graveyard (with peculiar perspective that doesn't really mesh with the gameplay). Once you rescue your girlfriend you have to make your way back all over again.

Five screens isn't an awful lot, but the difficulty of Chiller is sufficient that the game will probably last you a while. It can be very challenging and the key is not



just to complete each screen, but to play through multiple routes until you find the most efficient way - this is important because your energy does not regenerate between screens. To make things worse, areas like the cinema have no mushrooms to eat and the screens are designed in a way that feels like it's impossible to complete them without knocking off some of your health.

This makes Chiller a very tricky game indeed, and will require an awful lot of patience to beat. If you're in the mood for some budget platforming and can really focus on learning the best way around enemy patterns, then you might find something to enjoy here.



CRASH 42%

"Chiller is quite playable for a while but soon becomes totally and utterly boring and I wanted to switch it off five minutes after loading it."

"The only reason why I could recommend this game is for its price - it has no real other qualities."

"The game content is poor, the controls are sticky and the overall objective is not sufficiently exciting enough to hold the attention for more than a few minutes."

SPECVENTURE

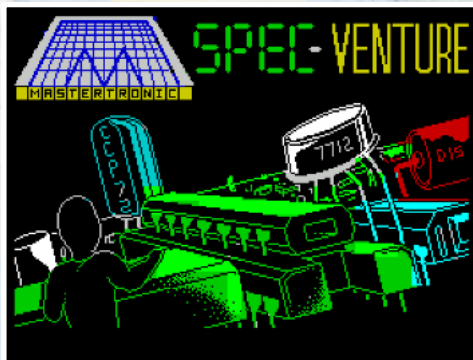
Label
Mastertronic

Year
1985

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
Fulvio Dominici



HAVE you ever wondered what life is like inside your ZX Spectrum? Of course, anyone who has watched Tron will have pondered this very question and Specventure is here to answer it.

The game itself is a fairly straightforward dodge 'em up, with a bit of shooting thrown in. For the most part, the best strategy is to take a moment and look at the movement patterns of the bugs as well as the positions of the sparks to plan your route so that you stick to the safe areas. It's also a good idea to be very aware of where you shoot something because you don't want to be wandering across that spot when then pop back into existence.

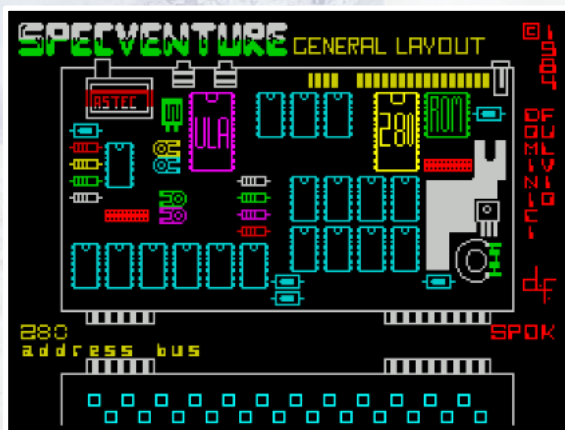
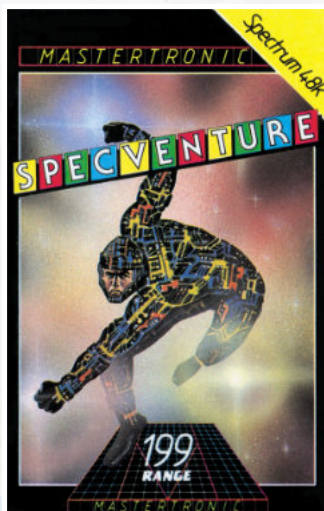
As you progress you will encounter some enemies that will home in on you and this is the only point where the collision detection really lets it down as sometimes you can be rapid firing right into a bug and it just fails to die. But this isn't a frequent issue and only became really frustrating on the final screen, and even less so as there is a password feature to continue from where you left off. While I started playing the game without using passwords, my constant silly mistakes forced me to embrace them and not have to repeatedly play the early screens, although these are the more interesting of the bunch.

I really enjoyed Specventure. It wasn't too taxing, yet had enough challenge that not every screen was done on the first try. Passwords mean constant steady progression and the 30 screens are just enough before you tire of the gameplay. There is also a wide selection of tunes that randomly play in the game, ranging from Beethoven to Mozart to Yankee Doodle and even the theme from Star Wars (and can even be selected at any time using the number keys) making this a really nicely presented package.

In Specventure, you play the part of a machine code instruction (that looks suspiciously like R2D2) who has to pootle around the various parts of the Speccy, collecting escaped bytes (represented by flashing squares). Once you have collected all the bytes on each screen, you have to push the button on the I/O RQ, then make it to the exit before it counts down to 0. If you don't, you need to push the button and try again.

This all sounds like a breeze, but of course coding is never easy, and each part of the computer has a bunch of system bugs that wander around, corrupting you on contact. You can shoot these bugs to destroy them, but they quickly pop up again at the point they vanished, so care is needed. If that wasn't bad enough, there are also sparks and glitches that appear and disappear, which are deadly to the touch. And if THAT wasn't bad enough, your battery is also slowly draining.

Sometimes, the theme can be important in the appeal of a game and there's something about the idea of trotting around inside a Spectrum that really appeals to me, and this game does that fairly well for what it is, with a nice circuit board diagram between each level and various transistors and things dotted around.



FINDERS KEEPERS

THE title that launched a whole series of popular 'Magic Knight' games, Finders Keepers gives you the task of finding a suitable birthday present for Princess Germintrude within the Castle of Spriteland or, if you wish, grabbing as much cash as you like and escaping. A moral dilemma for sure.

A mixture of styles, Finders Keepers is part platformer, part overhead maze game and part puzzle (with the player having to work out which items are worth collecting and which combine with others to produce something more...or less valuable.) You have a limited inventory which must be carefully managed and throughout the castle you come across ghostly traders that buy and sell goods.

I have strong memories of playing Finders Keepers. Sitting up in my bedroom, looking out at my brother playing with our dog in the sunny garden, I had to make a choice - go outside and play with them, or give the game another try. Of course, the Speccy won. Back then I had no clue what I was doing, just wandering around exploring the mazes was fun enough. It's a game I built up in my head as one of the more important budget titles of its time, so how does it fare today?

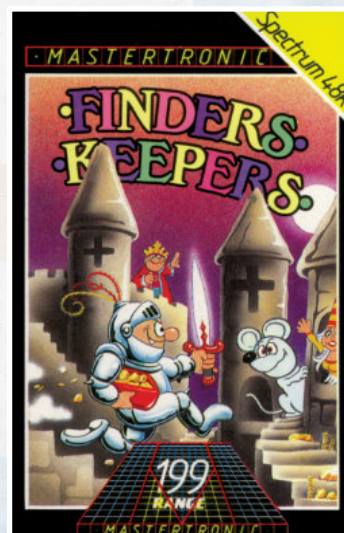
I still have fun with Finders Keepers, but only up to a point. The exploration and mapping of the game is enjoyable, but the gameplay in the platforming sections is clumsy and can be annoying. Magic Knight's strange jump arc - which is actually more of a right angled triangle than an arc, it not very intuitive and getting the right position to hit a platform or dodge an enemy is more effort than it really needs to be. Luckily, Magic Knight has a health bar and doesn't just croak every time he gets hit.

But when you're focused on solving the item puzzle aspect of the game, the shonky action feels like it's getting in the way - it's like your pet cat jumping on the table while you're playing a board game. Sure, you like both things, but simultaneously they get in the way of each other. Also, I personally think that either the action needed to be more refined, or the puzzles needed to be



more of a focus and the action easier. It's sitting in an uncomfortable middle-ground that doesn't satisfy either fully. To be fair, this is harsh criticism for a budget game, but the general quality of Finders Keepers makes it feel like something more.

If you have the time to spend getting good at the platforming and working out what the many items in the game do, then certainly give it a shot. It does have a depth that most other budget titles of the time don't reach, and just working out what to do with all the objects will keep you busy for quite some time.



Label
Mastertronic

Year
1985

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
David Jones

CRASH **85%**
"... a game with pleasing and slick graphics, and enjoyable story line, and with a fair amount of addictivity."

C+VG **STAR GAME**
"Mastertronic have a real hit on their hands with Finders Keepers. A number one? You bet!"

PERSONAL COMPUTER GAMES **9/10**
"Some of the platform screens seem a bit unplayable, and you're bound to lose energy by contacting nasties. But still an amazing title for the money."

NONTERRAQUEOUS

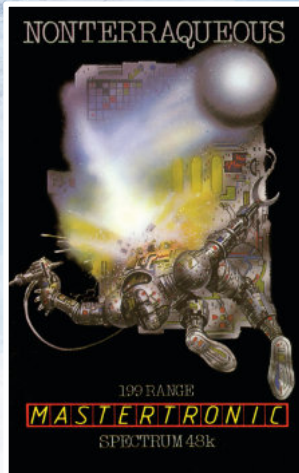
Label
Mastertronic

Year
1985

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developers
Stephen N. Curtis
Mark Jacobs

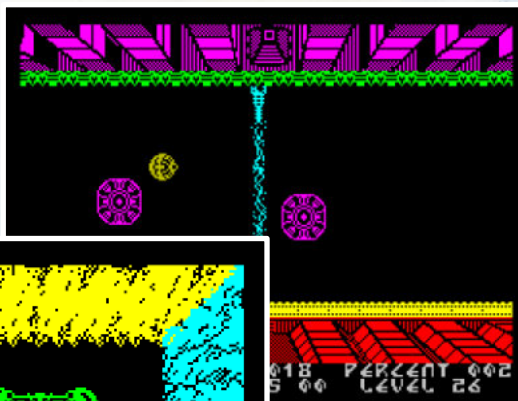


COMPUTERS, eh? They're all very nice until one of them decides that being an evil tyrant sounds like a good time and then goes on to take over a planet. But not to worry, because the people of this oppressed world have built themselves a 'seeker' who they send into the computer's base (appropriately inside a giant mountain) in an effort to destroy it.

You control the seeker and have to navigate through a vast maze of screens to reach the core, zapping the various minions and dodging the fatal photon thrusters. Your 'psyche' is your energy, and this is depleted when you touch a baddie, a wall...or just about anything. There are several generators that can recover psyche, but beware as some will outright kill you, which is nice of them.

Nonterraqueous certainly isn't the worst budget game I've played. The visuals are generally quite nice to look at (they have a little bit of an Ultimate feel to them) and the urge to get a little further each time is there. The main challenge of the game is really the map itself. There is a fair bit of exploration to be done and it's easy to get yourself lost mid way through the game. The actual enemies don't really provide much of a challenge and the gameplay in this respect is a tad repetitive and dull.

Thankfully it's not all just flying, shooting and dodging as you also have to locate bombs to destroy barriers, and find fuel to activate a rocket that gets you past a lethal room filled with gas. It's a game that will certainly keep you occupied for an hour or so before moving on to something else, or far longer if you're the kind of person that loves to map (because let's be honest, you're not completing it without one).



ZX COMPUTING 5/5

"With over 1000 screens of well designed problems to negotiate, fast action, smooth well animated sprites and a set of problems to solve, this game is a must for any arcade addict."

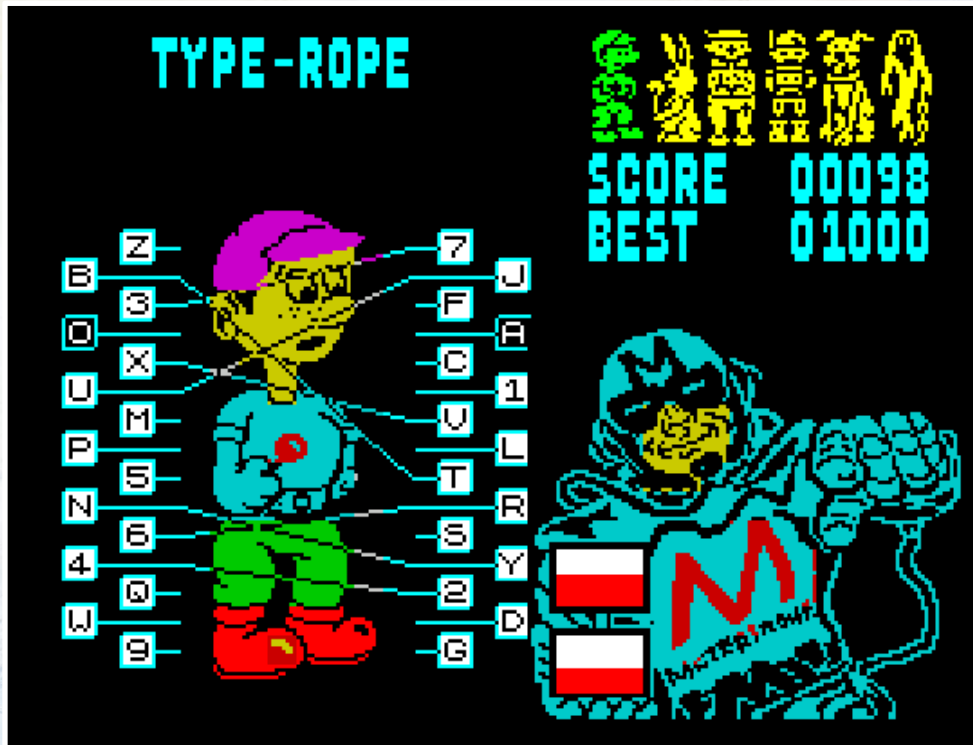
SINCLAIR PROGRAMS 30%

"Nonterraqueous has little to recommend it besides its size."

CRASH 77%

"A graphically pleasing game but one that could do with more action to keep you entranced within the game."

TYPE-ROPE



Label

Mastertronic

Year

1985

Price

£1.99

Machine

ZX Spectrum 48K

Developers

David Jones

Ray Owen

Albert Owen

EDUCATIONAL software is what computers are made for...said no-one ever (unless you were trying to convince your parents to buy you one). According to the instructions, Type-Rope is not only going to provide young children 'endless' hours of fun, it's also going to help with 'many aspects' of their education. I have my doubts.

Anyone who knows the 1983 title Break-Away will find themselves on very familiar ground as this game is practically identical. For those who don't, Type-Rope is essentially a keyboard teaching game where you have to rescue various cartoony characters who have been tied up by the dreaded 'Thread' (yes, really.) To do this, you have to type the letter or number at each end of the various bits of rope until all of them are clear. However, there is a constant ticking clock so you have to be quick to rescue them all.

As far as presentation goes, Type-Rope isn't that bad. The characters are all fairly well drawn and the whole thing looks decent for an educational title. The ropes are a little messy and indistinct over the artwork, which I suppose is part of the challenge - you have to pick the

right pairs carefully to make it easier to progress. As an actual mini-game in itself, it's fun for at least one or two tries, but there's just so little to it that you won't come back for more, and your kids probably won't either.

The only thing it really helps teach children is keyboard layout, and it's a shame that it couldn't be part of a slightly more varied package. Add a couple more little teaching games to reduce the monotony and it could've been decent value. But despite the nice presentation, you're better off just typing in listings from a magazine if you want to learn your way around a Speccy keyboard. That would be far more effective.



HOME COMPUTING WEEKLY

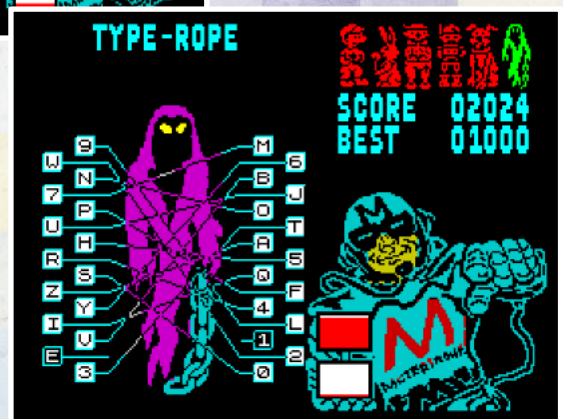
"Cheap, nicely presented, fairly easy to use, but of limited value."

ZX COMPUTING

"With the time element and the well judged difficulty level this game can be enjoyed by all ages. I liked it."

CRASH

"I'm afraid I fail to see the educational value of this game. It may have a use in teaching the layout of the QWERTY keyboard, but there are other games which do this better. Marketing programs like this under an educational banner is a bit dubious."



LOCO-MOTION

Label
Mastertronic

Year
1985

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developers
M.J. Child
P. Bates

CRASH 81%
"Locomotion will drive you loco, it's a real tough challenge but not a game for arcade zappers."

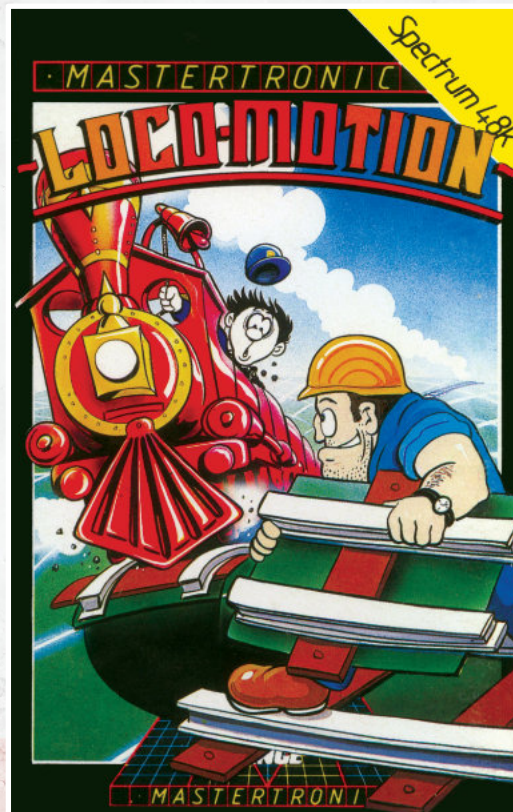
SINCLAIR PROGRAMS 59%
"A gripping game, excellent value for money."

GRR, those pesky Europeans. They're always out to cause trouble aren't they? Well today the annual London to Madrid race is on, running through ten countries via train. But there countries are a bit unsporting and have not only placed rocks and other debris on the track, they've also ripped most of it up. This means you have to do all the heavy lifting and place the track yourself...all while the train is in motion!

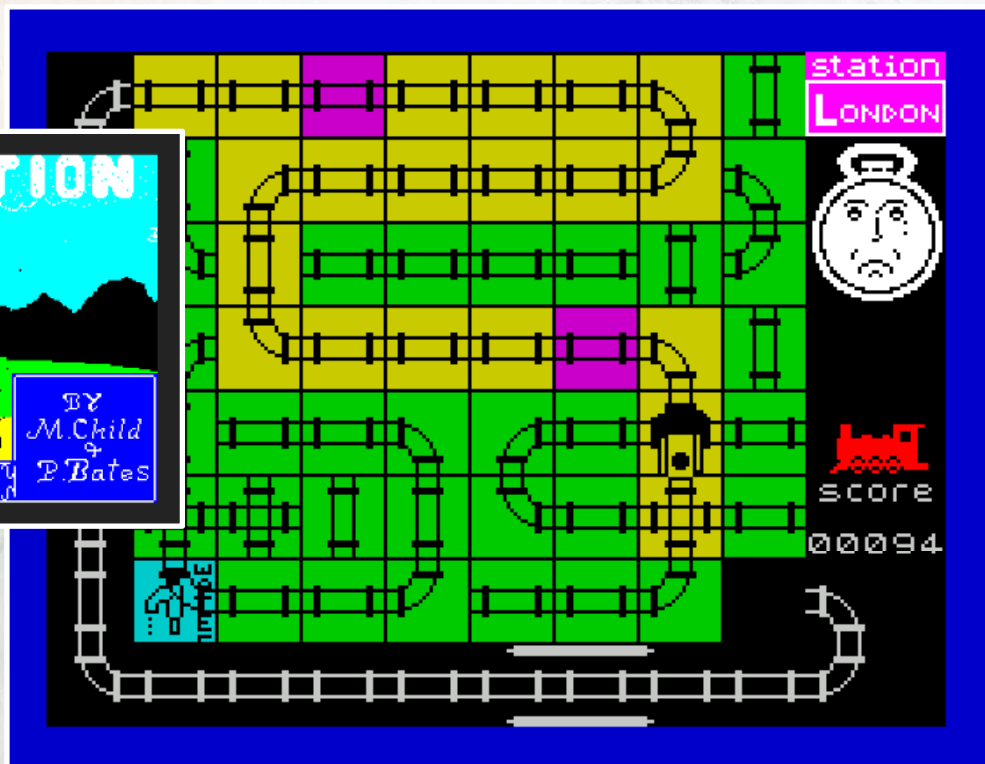
Initial reactions to Loco-Motion start well, with the loading screen actually sliding itself around like a block puzzle while the game 'loads' - a neat trick. This attention to presentation carries over to the game itself, which has some nice polish, especially for a budget title.

But what is the game like? Well, it's immediately familiar in concept; A train is continuously moving around the track and you have to slide the tiles around (much like the loading screen) to make sure it reaches its destination. There is the occasional obstacle, such as trees or people, to avoid, and also bonus spaces (such as water) to run over if you can. The train moves pretty fast, but you do have a panic button, which will stop it in its tracks (pun intended). However, you only have a total of 1 minute to freeze the locomotive. That's not 1 minute per level. That's 1 minute total.

It's not easy to give an opinion of this game. And by that, I mean it is easy for me: I hate it. It's not a bad game though. It's well programmed and has nice presentation, with 10 challenging levels to master. But like other games of its ilk, it causes so much brain panic and utter frustration in me that the screams can be heard streets away. If the train was slower or the freeze



timer reset each level, then I might just want to persevere. It's a shame, because there is fundamentally a good game here, but I just don't have the patience or mental planning to enjoy it. I'm sure some people will like it, so at least give it a try if you're curious, or if you want to raise your blood pressure.



CAVES OF DOOM

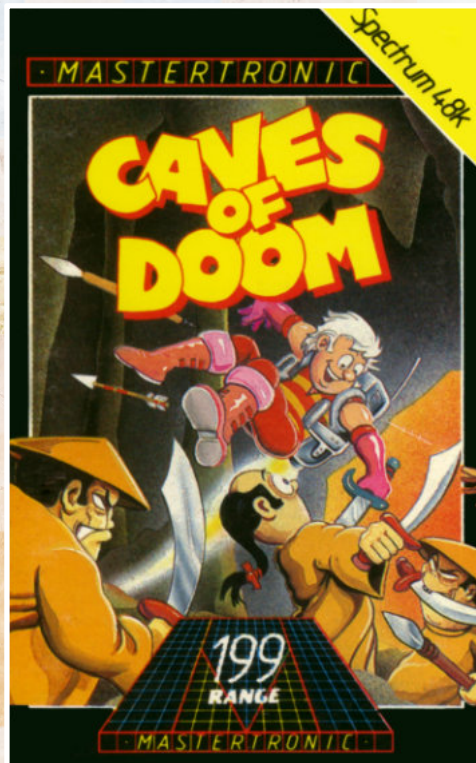
EVEN the most tenacious explorer might think twice about taking a closer look at a planet that is literally called Doom, but not you. Well, it turns out that you've been captured by the Lord of Darkness, so you've only got yourself to blame.

He's shut you up inside a maze of highly dangerous caves, filled with crawling things, spiky things, and a surprising amount of excess jet pack fuel. He has also been kind enough to have left a series of keys just lying around (which is nice) although he has also set a whole bunch of traps and sent minions galore to stop you escaping. It does make you wonder why he didn't just shoot you in the first place.

At first glance, *Caves of Doom* might just look like another *Jet Set Willy* copy. However, despite the graphical style and copious amounts of platforms, it's actually more like a whizzy version of *Kokotini Wilf*, with you flying around everywhere at speed rather than walking and jumping around. Most enemies follow a typical up/down or left/right pattern, although there are some that home directly in on you. These ones I found particularly annoying and also somewhat unfair at times. It's lucky that the collision detection isn't that great. There are also guns that shoot at regular intervals, and a lot of fatal scenery dotted around the landscape.

There are five keys to find and gather. They are colour coded and allow you to walk through the corresponding doorways, so you will find that some route planning and mapping will come in very handy when planning the optimum way to progress. This is all reasonably interesting to begin with as you explore and discover new routes and different rooms, but in the end some of the tight-and-deadly navigation that is required at very high speed begins to feel a little unreasonable and unnecessary in a game where exploration could have been the primary challenge.

Of course, if you feel frustrated, the game does come with its own map editor built in. So, just draw yourself a clear path up to the surface, jump in your spaceship and sit back with a smug look on your face.



Label

Mastertronic

Year

1985

Price

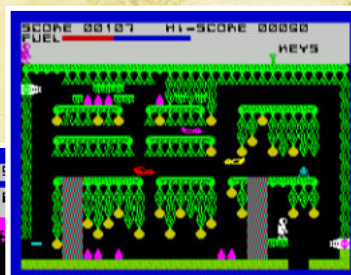
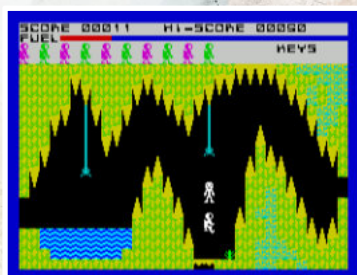
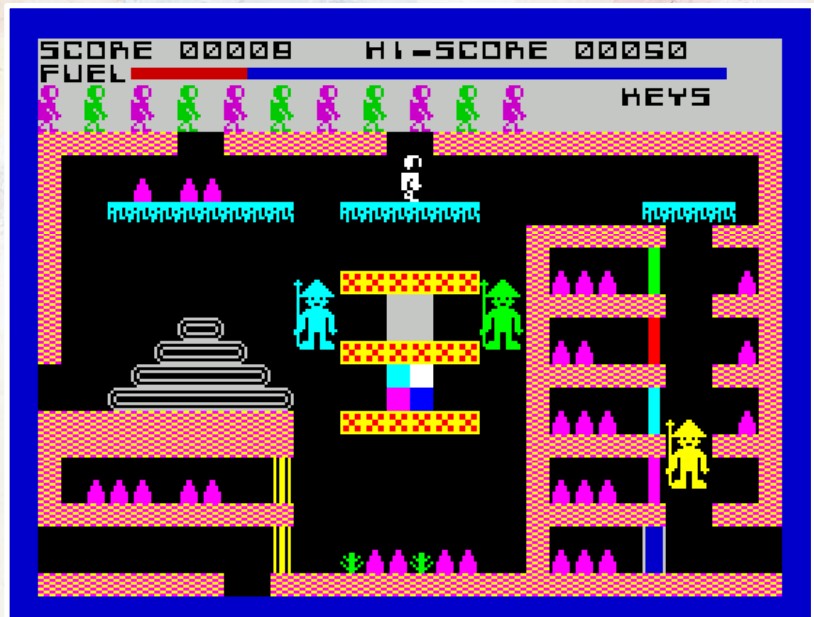
£1.99

Machine

ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer

Robert Sansom



YOUR SINCLAIR

8/10

"Cheaper than the price of a cinema ticket, it'll certainly keep you glued to the screen for a helluva lot longer!"

CRASH

58%

"... there is a strange sort of addiction about this game - you'll play it when you're bored with everything else and then get really addicted to it. The screen editor is very strange and takes time to get used to, but once you do, it's very useful."

ACTION BIKER

Label
Mastertronic

Year
1985

Price
£1.99

Machine
ZX Spectrum 48K

Developer
M.J. Child

WITH computer game licensing in it's earlier, experimental phase, you really did get some curious combinations in the 80s, but rarely in the budget market. Licensing a packet of prawn cocktail flavoured crisps might seem like a ridiculous idea, but the advertising campaign, featuring an animated biker doofus called Clumsy Colin, was certainly memorable and...well...the kids will lap that stuff up. Won't they?

And so Action Biker was born. A game with a story that seems simple on the surface, but makes absolutely no sense until you realise that this is all a dream (which the manual fails to mention). The premise is this; Colin must find his friend Marti and take him to the spaceport. To do this, Colin will need to drive around town on his bike, occasionally stopping to search through people's houses. Some of these houses contain useful items that he will need, while most are empty.

Because Col' is dreaming, he's only got until 8am before his alarm goes off and wakes him up, something that is also speeded up by the dream-trauma of bumping into other cars and bikes on the road. And if that's not bad enough, he has limited fuel...

In essence, Action Biker is a simple maze game with a



lot of issues. The idea of searching houses is neat, (although getting Colin to actually enter a house is a whole issue in itself) but soon gets tedious after the nth time that you find nothing. The roadway is narrow and you find that trying to avoid other vehicles is either impossible or just so annoying that you'd rather drive through them. Controls are sloppy, fuel goes down too fast and collecting packets of road-Skips is not nearly as compelling as it should be.

While that 'other' home computer got an open world, isometric driving experience, the Spectrum is stuck with a clumsy (yes, I know) and not particularly fun game that you'll soon get fed up with.

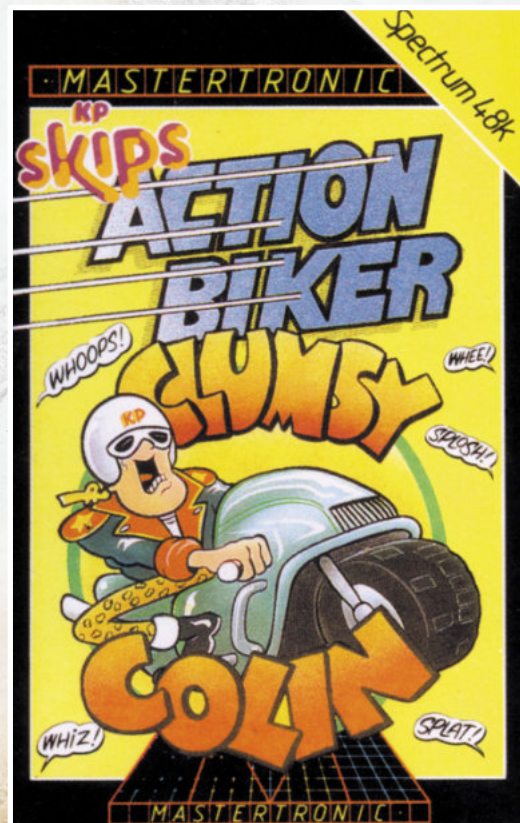


SINCLAIR USER 1/5

"Action Biker signifies a depressing trend to link grotty software with expensive advertising campaigns. Let's kill this off instantly by refusing to buy such garbage. Software like this gives junk food a bad name."

YOUR SPECTRUM 3/10

"OK, so it's cheap but that doesn't have to mean nasty all the time. It'll keep you occupied as long as it takes to eat a bag of crisps."







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