

UNOFFICIAL AND UNAUTHORISED

COUNTER RESET

464

THE A-Z OF

AMSTRAD CPC

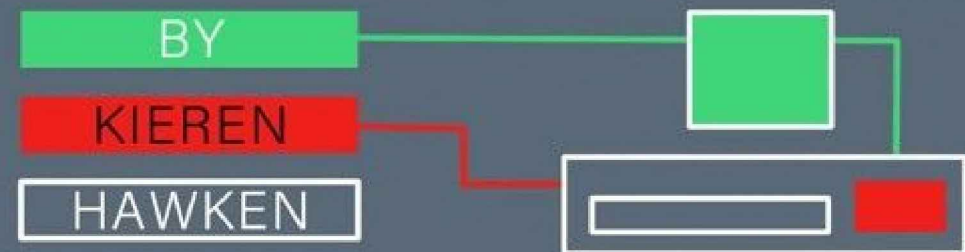
GAMES

VOLUME ONE

BY

KIEREN

HAWKEN



REC

PLAY

REW

F.F.

STOP
EJECT

PAUSE

The A-Z of Amstrad CPC Games

Volume 1



Kieren Hawken

Introduction

Over the years there have been very few British entrepreneurs who have made such an impact as Sir Alan Sugar (hence the knighthood!). Originally founded way back in 1968 as an importer of consumer electronics, it wasn't long before the company started creating its own products that regularly undercut its Japanese rivals while still maintaining a good level of quality and features. In 1984 Amstrad looked towards the booming home computer market and created the popular CPC range. Starting with the tape-based 464 and being followed by the disk-based 664 and 6128 (with the last 2/3 digits also referencing the amount of memory) these computers had two big selling points over their rivals. Firstly you had a built in cassette recorder or disk drive and secondly they also came bundled with either a green screen or colour monitor - giving customers an all in one package. Based on a Z80 CPU the same as its biggest rival the ZX Spectrum, the Amstrad CPC range soon started to take off, with all major European software houses supporting it. The computer proved particularly popular in France, as the vast games catalogue proves, and was also sold in Germany, Austria and Switzerland under the Schneider brand. An enhanced range of CPC+ machines were launched alongside a CPC based games console, called the GX4000, in 1990 but these failed to keep the brand alive and it was officially discontinued less than a year later. Despite this the CPC still retains a strong user base and an incredibly vibrant homebrew scene to this very day.



In this first book in the series I take you through the life of the Amstrad CPC range looking at a varied cross section of the 6000+ games available with a small review and screenshot of each one. This is not a list of the best games, a list of the worst or indeed a complete guide to what's available. The A-Z of Amstrad CPC Games: Volume 1 is just that, the first volume of my look at a selection of CPC games in alphabetical order from A to Z. There are three games featured for each letter and these range from the earliest ones released back in 1984, to modern homebrews and even unreleased prototypes. Hopefully this book gives you some inspiration to try games you've never played before, bulk up your personal collection or just replay some of those all-time classics. You might even find that it brings back happy memories of unwrapping Christmas and birthday presents or inviting your friends round after school for a bit of multi-player madness. Most of all though I hope you enjoy reading it and remember what makes the Amstrad CPC range of computers so great.

Kieren Hawken
Author



A

After Burner

Activision - 1988



Originally unleashed on arcade audiences in 1987, *After Burner* is one of Sega's most popular and beloved franchises. In the arcades this game relied heavily on its custom super-scaler hardware to wow audiences, which was also seen in games like *Galaxy Force* and *Space Harrier*. I am sure I don't need to tell you that the humble Amstrad CPC really struggles to replicate this advanced technology. All you actually do in *After Burner* is fly your F14 Tomcat over the different landscapes through night and day taking out enemy planes with your guns and lock-on missiles and occasionally take part in the now famous mid-air refuelling sequence. There really isn't that much to it and this is made even more obvious in this lower quality Amstrad version. Certain

compromises obviously had to be made here and these include much less scenery, much smaller play area and a lower frame rate. That said though this is actually a pretty remarkable conversion for the Amstrad that just about manages to pull it off. The visuals are absolutely fantastic with loads of colour and fast movement too. The iconic music has been created fairly well, but it's only present on the title screen sadly. Although the actual gameplay is pretty tedious after a while it is fun in short blasts and fans of the original arcade game will certainly appreciate it. One of the most impressive arcade ports out there for the Amstrad CPC.

7/10

Aftermath

Alternative Software - 1988



The Amstrad had a bit of a slower start to its biggest rivals, arriving on the market a couple of years later, so it missed out on conversions of some of the early eighties coin-op hits. This was corrected somewhat by the vibrant budget games market and labels such as Alternative. The game in question here is a very blatant clone of Atari's classic *Missile Command* arcade game. Thankfully though, *Aftermath* is a rather good effort at recreating the famous game. For those of you who might not be familiar with the concept, *Missile Command* has you trying to protect six cities from imminent nuclear annihilation by shooting down warheads from the sky above. While Atari's game featured three bases spread across the screen that you could shoot from, *Aftermath* on the Amstrad

simplifies things by having just one, much like Atari's own 2600 port actually. This is mainly because you only have one fire button, so it makes controlling the game easier. As the levels progress the missiles get faster and more frequent, satellites and enemy ships also join the attack and you have to be more careful with your very limited ammo too. Graphically the game is quite nice and stays pretty faithful to the original, the audio however is extremely lacking, which is a real shame. All things considered this is a great slice of old-school arcade action for the CPC that I would have happily paid a couple of quid for.

7/10

Advanced Pinball Simulator

Codemasters - 1988



Codemasters is a company I have almost limitless nostalgia for, I purchased more of their budget games than I care to count and this was not only one of the very first I bought it was the game that ignited both my love for video pinball and the label itself. These simulators are one of the things Codemasters became best known for (as well as *Dizzy* and cheap prices), in fact co-owner David Darling was once quoted as saying that their simulator games sold ten times as many copies as their regular titles. In my opinion, of the many sim games that Codemasters produced, *Advanced Pinball Simulator* is without doubt one of the best. Designed for the Amstrad CPC by legendary *Dizzy* creators the Oliver Twins, pinball has always been a concept that has translated well into video

game form, and this effort is no exception. You have all the things you would expect from this genre including bumpers, flippers, score multipliers, chutes and even a multi-player mode so you can compete with your friends for bragging rights. Graphically the game is nice and colourful and there is even some digitised speech in there too. Although it only features one table (The Volcano), it's so addictive and playable that it will keep you chasing your high score for a long time to come. There are very few Amstrad budget games that stick in my mind better than this *Advanced Pinball Simulator!*

9/10

B

Beach Buggy Simulator

Silverbird - 1987



It's always nice to find games for the CPC that aren't just lazy Spectrum conversions and actually use the machine to its strengths and *Beach Buggy Simulator* from Silverbird is one such effort. I can best describe this game as a cross between the BMX event from *California Games* and the Williams arcade classic *Moon Patrol*. The idea of the game is to race your high-powered beach buggy across a host of horizontally scrolling courses and get to the finish line before you run out of time. But the clock running low isn't your only concern here, as for some inexplicable reason there are also a load of helicopters trying to blow you up! If you crash into one of the many obstacles in your path or get blown up by an attack chopper you lose a chunk of fuel and also lose some of your valuable

time too. If you die too many times you'll never have enough time left make it to the finish. You can jump over the many obstacles but your buggy is also armed with a rather handy machine gun that can be used to take down the flying menaces in spectacular fashion. If you run out of fuel then you lose the ability to use your gun, although petrol can be picked up along the way to replenish this. The graphics in *Beach Buggy Simulator* are incredibly colourful and look fantastic. But that's not the best part as this game also has an outstanding soundtrack that will have you bopping your head in time as you play.

8/10

BMX Simulator

Codemasters - 1986



Programmed by former Mastertronic employee and Codemasters co-founder Richard Darling, *BMX Simulator* was one of the games that really put the budget software house on the map. Essentially the game is just a rip-off of Atari's hugely popular *Super Sprint* arcade game that replaces the F1 cars with peddle bikes and the asphalt for dirt tracks. The main point is though that this is an incredibly good clone, one that cost just a few quid no less! Unlike *Super Sprint* though, which featured four players, *BMX Simulator* just has two with the ability to play against another player or the computer. This Amstrad version also allows you to choose control methods and the number of courses you want to race around. As you go on through the game the tracks gets harder and feature

things like ramps, barricades and huge puddles. The graphics are decent without being spectacular featuring plenty of colour and nice detail. The sound is very good indeed though, not only do we have some superb music by David Whittaker but also some good in game effects too. *BMX Simulator* certainly doesn't break any new ground but it does do everything well, very well in fact. Is it better than the official port of *Super Sprint* by Electric Dreams? Probably not, but that doesn't really matter, this cost a damn sight less back in the day and is still very playable. Codemasters provide the goods once again!

8/10

Bomb Jack

Elite - 1985



The ever popular *Bomb Jack* is a great little strategy platform game that involves jumping around the screen as quick as possible defusing bombs before they go off. But there is far more too than that, as there are also baddies who get in the way to make life harder. They are not very stupid either, unlike many games of this type, and will often hover around a certain part of the screen stopping you getting to those last few bombs you need to complete the level, so you'll need to try and lure them out. From time to time power-ups also appear on the screen that give you the ability to freeze time, meaning you can dash around the screen getting all the bombs without worry of explosions, or just get rid of all the baddies completely like a smart bomb, they do re-spawn

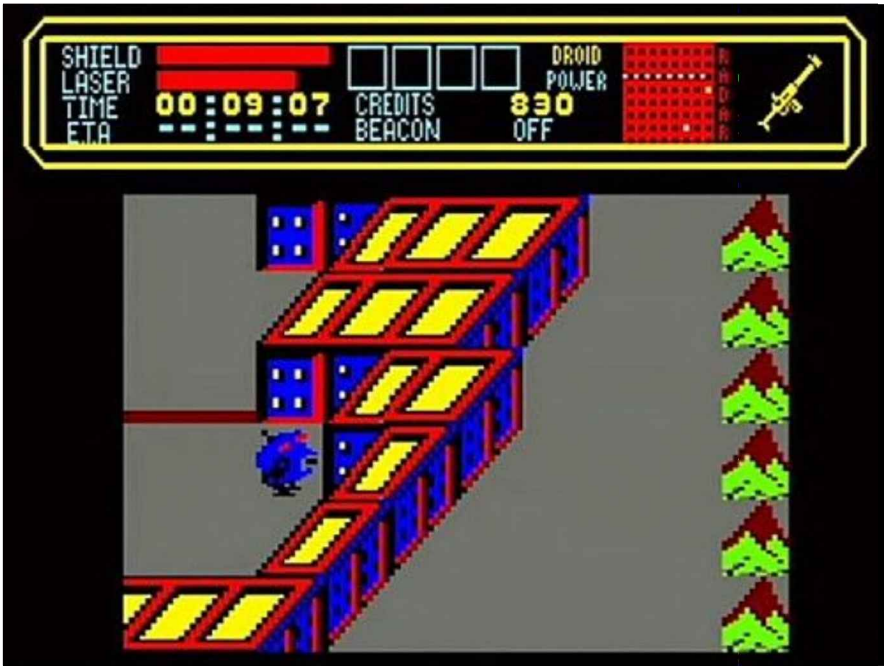
though unfortunately. *Bomb Jack* has some really mad gameplay that just gets more and more hectic as it goes on. This Amstrad version of the coin-op, originally released by Tecmo in 1984, stays pretty damn close to the original. The graphics are very colourful with detailed backdrops and recognisable destinations such as the Egyptian Sphinx and Greek Acropolis to gawk at. The sound effects are solid enough, shame there's no music though. There isn't really anything else out there quite like *Bomb Jack*, its unique gameplay and fun factor really do make this game that every Amstrad CPC owner should be picking up ASAP.

9/10

C

Colony

Bulldog Software - 1987



The plot of Icon Design's *Colony* is certainly something that sounds plausible and has been the subject of many Hollywood sci-fi movies. It tells us that owing to vast overpopulation humanity has found it necessary to grow food in colonies on other planets instead. Unfortunately, the mushroom-growing planet that is so important to Earth is also inhabited by hostile native aliens that resemble giant insects. Of course, this would be the planet that you've been put in charge of! So you must use a specially designed droid to maintain and harvest the mushrooms as well as look after and protect the colony itself from alien attack. You start the game with a limited amount of money that can be used to buy different resources to help protect your mushroom and make them

thrive. By picking and selling your mushrooms you can gain more money in order to buy more resources. You can either choose protection; building walls, fences and traps etc. to stop the aliens getting in. Or you can go for an attacking stance and try to kill all the aliens before they steal your goods. So in many ways this is kind of like an early version of *Farmville!* The isometric visuals here are very nice indeed but the sound effects are pretty limited. There is some nice music present however. There's a huge amount of gameplay here in *Colony* and because of that you'll find yourself playing it for hours on end!

7/10

Chase H.Q.

Ocean - 1989



Without doubt *Chase H.Q.* was one of my favourite arcade games of the late 80s, it was also one of the few video games that my dad loved playing. It was such a game of the times and brings back memories of the *Lethal Weapon* films, *Miami Vice* and other cheesy cop shows on TV. The idea of the game is get behind the wheel of a high powered police car, a Porsche 928 to be exact (all the cops round my way drove a Ford Fiesta!) and take part in a high speed chase. You are hot in pursuit of a wanted criminal and have to race towards him within a tight time limit. Once you reach him you have to use your car to ram him off the road, also within a time limit. Each level features multiple routes as well as other innocent road users, and a multitude of obstacles that will get in your

way and slow you down. Your car is also equipped with three turbos that can be used to give your Porsche a limited speed boost, so save these for when you really need them. If you don't manage to catch him within the allotted time you will grind to a halt as he speeds away. Using a continue will give you another opportunity to catch him without starting all over again. There are very few more accomplished coin-op conversions out there for the Amstrad than *Chase H.Q.* Ocean literally got everything right here from the fast moving graphics to the amazing digitised speech this is an essential CPC title.

10/10

Cowboy Kidz

Byte Back - 1989



When we talk about the best budget game publishers Byte Back isn't a name that comes up very often, if at all. But if *Cowboy Kidz* is anything to go by then maybe we should be giving their games a closer look. Although this might look like just another *Commando* and *Ikari Warriors* clone, *Cowboy Kidz* is actually a very different game. In the game you play as a cowboy riding his horse who must protect a train from incoming bandits. As these desperados appear you must take them out before they rob the train and make their escape. You are armed with a pistol in order to despatch them and have unlimited ammo too. Rather handily you can also direct your gun shots, a particularly useful feature here. But the enemies aren't the only thing you have to worry about as

there are also lots of obstacles in your way such as giant boulders, cactus' and rivers - where you must use a small bridge to cross. Hit any of these and they knock you off your trusty steed and you lose a life. To complete the level you must make it to the next station intact. Although the Mode 0 graphics are only in a fairly small window they look absolutely gorgeous and put the other versions of this game to shame. There is also a whimsical soundtrack that plays throughout the game too for extra effect. The only real downside to *Cowboy Kidz* is that it's pretty damn hard, but please don't let that put you off!

8/10

D

Dizzy

Codemasters - 1987



What more can be said about *Dizzy*? It's the game that set the Oliver Twins on the road to stardom and success and created a character that is still beloved to this day. But it's not so well known that ol' *Dizzy* didn't get off to the greatest start in life. Codemasters were against even publishing it at first and the initial poor sales of the game prompted David Darling to turn up to work wearing a T-Shirt saying "I told you so!" But after the game eventually entered the charts and stayed there for over six months, the Oliver Twins were ultimately proved right. I hope they made their boss eat his shirt! The game that started it all for the charismatic egg, *Dizzy* is a flick-screen puzzle orientated arcade adventure that pretty much started a whole new genre that Codemasters would become

synonymous with. The only way to complete the game was by finding the right objects and using them in the correct places. The puzzles ranged from simple to downright fiendish making *Dizzy* a game that was very approachable in the beginning but challenging in the longer term, a perfect mix. The original game still holds up well today with its attractive graphics, bouncy music and long term appeal. Ok, some of the sequels perfected the formula even further but if you've never experienced a *Dizzy* game before then you really should be starting here. How do you like your eggs in the morning? I like mine pixelated!

9/10

Double Dragon

Melbourne House - 1988



Quite easily one of the most popular arcade games of all time, Technos' *Double Dragon* set a whole new standard of scrolling beat 'em ups and gave the inspiration for many more such as *Final Fight*, *Ninja Gaiden* and the *Streets of Rage* games. In it you took the role of either Billy or Jimmy Lee on a mission to rescue their kidnapped girlfriend (yes they both share the same one, they must be very close!) from the machine gun totting Willy. Along the way you beat up many opponents from street brawlers to prostitutes and the massive Abobo who chucks you around like a toy. There are many moves at your disposal; head butts, flying kicks, elbow smashes and you can also pick up weapons to fight the bad guys too. These take the form of knives, baseball bats, rocks and even a kinky

whip! This god-awful CPC port gets so much wrong I don't even know where to start. Firstly it's incredibly slow with some painful scrolling. The sound is even worse though, gone is the magnificent arcade soundtrack and all we have is a few snap, crackle and pop type noises during the game. I suppose the visuals look nice in stills though. The two-player mode is still here but that's about it as far as the positives go. This is a shameful attempt at converting the classic arcade game. If you can find it then try out the later and much improved alternative version by CPC God Richard Aplin instead.

4/10

Dan Dare: Pilot of the Future

Virgin Games - 1986



I very much grew up reading comic books - I just couldn't get enough of them back then. So, when my attention started to be drawn away from comics and over to computers, it was only natural that a game based on such a thing would excite me. In fact I clearly remember the day I walked into my local newsagent and saw Mastertronic's budget re-release of *Dan Dare* displayed proudly on the small rack of cassettes. I rushed home to play it and certainly wasn't disappointed as *Dan Dare: Pilot of the Future* turned out to be one of my astute buys from said store. The game itself is a flip-screen arcade adventure where you are trying to find the parts of a device so you can set a self destruct sequence and blow up the Mekon's space station. Trying to stop you are his many minions, but

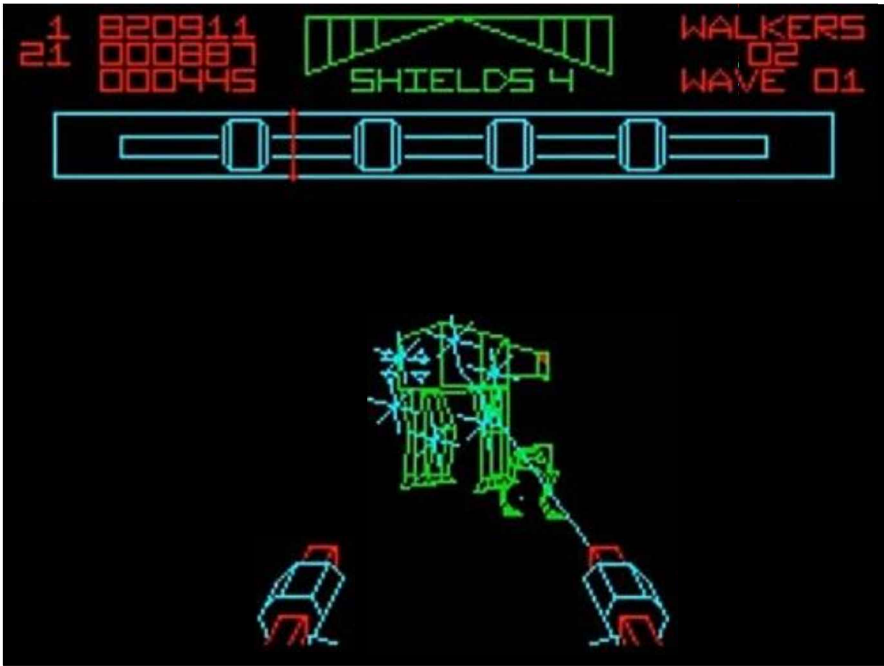
thankfully Dan himself is armed with his trusty pistol to stop them. This gun does have limited ammo however so you will also need to look out for handy ammo crates too. You must also complete the game within a strict time limit, although this is more than generous! The game has terrific graphics with tons of colour, nicely animated sprites and a real comic book feel. The sound effects are fairly sparse but they do the job well-enough. *Dan Dare* is a charming game that will hold your attention from the moment you start playing it and one that you will come back to again even after you finish it.

8/10

E

Empire Strikes Back (The)

Domark - 1988



Released in 1985, *The Empire Strikes Back* is not just the third film in the original *Star Wars* trilogy it is also the third game in the Atari arcade game trilogy. It was originally released as an upgrade kit for *Star Wars* and then as a standalone game, so as you can probably guess, it has far more in common with the original game than the second. This was probably a move for the best as the isometric System 1 game, *Return of the Jedi*, met with a quite mixed response. So like *Star Wars*, *ESB* is a 3D vector based game from a first person perspective that recreates key battles from the movie. In the first part of the game the player takes the role of Luke Skywalker as he jumps on a rebel snow speeder in the Battle of Hoth, battles the AT-AT Walkers and eradicates the Probots. In the second half of

the game you take the role of Han Solo piloting at the head of a convoy trying to escape the Imperial onslaught. The game features two upgrades over *Star Wars*, the first is the introduction of the “JEDI” bonus. If the player collects the letters of the word, all enemy shots will be instantly eliminated for a short time period. The second is the upgrades to the graphics that, while fairly minor, make it look less sparse. This CPC version is pretty close to the arcade original for the most part, but it is a little bit slow at times, especially when there’s a lot on screen. It’s still well worth owning however.

8/10

Enduro Racer

Activision - 1987



This arcade bike racer was originally released in the arcades by Sega in 1986 to great acclaim. It took the already hugely popular *Hang-On* games and added a host of new elements to the gameplay giving it a real nice point of difference from other racers of the time. Rather than just speeding to your destination, *Enduro Racer* focuses more on pulling off tricks and stunts than the actual racing with the original arcade game featuring a brilliant handlebar controller to help you perform all these tricks. Sadly the home computer versions can't replicate this so they lose do lose a little bit in translation but it has to be said that Activision did a damn good job with this port in the most part. Like *Hang-On*, the objective of the game is to race to the next location within a

strict time limit but all the time watching out for obstacles - jumping over them becomes the key feature of the game. There are five stages in total set in different places around the world. As this is a straight up Spectrum port the graphics are all in monochrome and move rather slowly sadly. The sound is pretty awful with annoying effects and not a lot else really. Despite these obvious downsides it is perfectly playable however with responsive controls. You can't help but feel though that this Amstrad CPC port of *Enduro Racer* could of and should have been so much better. One of many missed opportunities on the classic 8-bit micro.

6/10

E.S.W.A.T.

U.S. Gold - 1990



U.S. Gold's Sega arcade conversions really were very hit and miss. Unfortunately in the case of *ESWAT* it's a big miss, as this game is pretty terrible. First released into the arcades in 1989, it's a side scrolling action styled shooting game much in the vein of *Robocop*. There are your usual array of power-ups, enemies and end of level bosses who have to be defeated as you attempt to clean up the streets of Liberty City (no, not the one from *Grand Theft Auto!*). The key feature of *ESWAT* is the way you can increase the rank of your officer. Once the rank of Chief has been achieved the player is given a metallic cyber suit. The manual describes this as a "long-range supersonic powered suit" which contains two Turbo-Booster Thrusters and provides extra ammunition and protection from enemies.

This suit is then used for the rest of the game and the player is now focused on arresting criminal masterminds rather than killing them. Apart from that it's all very generic stuff indeed and much better examples of this kind of thing can be had elsewhere (like the aforementioned *Robocop*). The graphics, while colourful, are quite badly drawn and move at a snail's pace. The sound effects are absolute crap, well the few that are there anyway. This is far from the arcade action that we were promised and this conversion isn't helped by the fact the game was never that good in the first place!

4/10

F

F.A. Cup Football

Virgin Games - 1986



Although I am a massive fan of football management games these days I certainly wasn't as a kid and so it seems strange that I even bought a game like this let alone played it. But there is a story behind that! Firstly the game was part of a pack of tapes that my mum bought for me from a local charity shop, the other games were mostly great so I wasn't that bothered about this being included. But the reason I came to play it is quite amusing. My friend Nic had an Amstrad CPC, he was the only kid at school with one in fact and the poor guy only had a green screen monitor too! Now his parents were quite stern and insisted the computer was for learning and not for gaming, so all the titles he had for it at the time were educational! Now the budget re-release of

F.A. Cup was part of Mastertronic's Ricochet range, where the Spectrum version was on one side and the Amstrad CPC on the other. At the time this was the only game I owned like that so when I went round to Nic's house I used to take it with me so we could play it. What made *F.A. Cup* more interesting than the usual footy management sim was that it brought real life incidents into play in the form of challenge questions. These were quite wide ranging from stuff like do you miss a game to go to your daughter's wedding or do you give a player compassionate leave etc. This meant it was far more fun to play than either of us expected!

7/10

Flash Gordon

Mastertronic - 1987



For those that might not know, the *Flash Gordon* character first appeared in a comic book way back in 1934 and he was originally created as a rival to *Buck Rogers*. Since then the character has only grown in popularity as he joined the *Defenders of the Earth*, starred in a 1980 movie, had several animated series' and more toys than you can shake a stick at. So it's inevitable that he would have a video game too, but it perhaps rather surprising that such a big name license would be used for a budget game! Mastertronic's *Flash Gordon* takes the form of a multi-genre game that is split into three distinct sections. In the first part of the game you must make your way through the dense jungle avoiding hazards and taking out the vicious animals trying to stop you. Your ultimate goal

here is to find and enter the Cave of Barin, which is where the next section of the game takes place. In the cave you must then fight Prince Barin to the death! Once you win you progress straight to the next stage where you jump on your futuristic motorbike to make the final journey to Ming the Merciless' temple. This level takes a first person perspective as you race along a pseudo 3D landscape avoiding the obstacles and taking out the enemies trying to stop you. Overall *Flash Gordon* is an enjoyable budget game romp with good graphics and sound that offered great value for money back in the day.

7/10

Froggy

DJL Software - 1985



Konami's *Frogger* was the game that really put them on the map and they still remain one of the biggest players in the video game industry to this day. The idea of the game is to guide five frogs across a dangerous road and then a hazardous river to their homes on the other side. You can move in any direction using the joystick and have a time limit in which to complete your task. Crossing the road your biggest hazard is the cars and trucks, who won't think twice about running you over, these all move at different speeds making things trickier. When you get to the river you must jump onto the moving logs and lily pads to make it home safely. But watch out for the gators and lily pads that sink into the water and drown you (yes somehow these frogs can't

actually swim!). As the levels go on the game gets faster and the hazards harder to negotiate. The game can also be played against a second player and features a host of different gameplay options. This CPC clone of *Frogger* is pretty close to the arcade game for the most part. The graphics are cute and colourful with only the original screen ratio being changed. It sounds pretty great too with an excellent rendition of the original arcade music. It only takes one play of *Froggy* to remind you why this game remains one the true arcade classics of the early eighties and this more than competent Amstrad CPC version is a very decent effort too.

8/10

G

Ghostbusters

Activision - 1985



David Crane's game based on the first *Ghostbusters* movie became the best-selling video game of all time when it was released. This was despite it incorporating numerous elements from another game called *Car Wars* and being programmed in just a matter of months. It got a mixed reception from the press but was always praised for its Karaoke style musical intro. I was absolutely obsessed with the film back in the day so couldn't wait to get my hands on the home computer game. The idea of the game is to use your limited money to buy a car and various pieces of ghost busting gear and then make your way around the city trapping and catching the green slimers. The main part of this is the actual ghost grabbing, which involves you

positioning your trap and ghost busters on the screen in the correct place. Then you have to turn on your photon packs and use them to force the ghost over the trap (without crossing the beams!) then releasing the trap to suck it in. As the P.K. levels rise the hauntings increase until you finally reach the big showdown with the giant Stay Puft Marshmallow Man. The graphics here aren't particularly great, but a special mention has to go to the brilliant rendition of the classic theme tune and the digitised (but very crackly) speech. This game is an absolute must for fans of the movie and is also a pretty decent little game in its own right too.

8/10

Gemini Wing

Virgin Games - 1989



This little heard off eco-warrior shooter was originally released in the arcades in 1987 by Japanese coin-op giants Tecmo. Presented in the vertical fashion, *Gemini Wing* can also be played by two-players simultaneously! In this title you must shoot down the genetically modified butterflies, birds, fish and insects before they take you down and destroy all the resources. This multi-coloured blast fest also has a really unique pod-based power-up system that can lead to some heavy-duty firepower and rather cool bonuses. With each pod you collect it attaches to your ship leaving behind this daisy chain of coloured blobs. Each pod has a symbol or colour on it and based on how they are collected and arranged the abilities of your space craft change. In this version a handy

status bar down the side makes you aware of exactly which power-ups you're carrying. I do have to give coders Imagitec Design some special credit for not doing a lazy Spectrum port and actually choosing to do the game in glorious colour, meaning we avoid the hidden bullets syndrome that plagues so many Speccy to CPC shoot 'em up ports. I have always maintained that *Gemini Wing* is a very under rated game, not just on the CPC but the arcade original too. I still enjoy playing it to this very day and it's definitely one of the more accomplished shooters of its type on the Amstrad machine and well worth seeking out.

8/10

Grange Hill

Argus Press - 1987



Anyone who grew up in the UK in the eighties and nineties will remember the classic TV show *Grange Hill*. Not only was it meant to be a realistic drama based on the day we had endured at school before watching it but also taught us valuable life lessons such as don't do drugs! In 1987 Argus Press Software secured a deal to produce a computer game based on the show, which was exciting news at the time. Those expecting something like *Skool Daze* or *Back To Skool* (which basically were a *Grange Hill* game already) will be sorely disappointed as *Grange Hill* is a flick screen adventure game where you control some total random trying to retrieve his confiscated walkman so he doesn't get in trouble with his mum. The plot is nearly as stupid as the lack of any real

Grange Hill characters in the game. In order to save the day you must first solve a multitude of puzzles, mostly object driven, in order to progress. These range from fishing things out of sewers to not buying drugs from a shady man in the park (at least they kept something from the TV show I guess!). Most of the puzzles are fairly rudimentary but the problem is that if you mess one thing up it's game over and you have to do it all again. The best word I can use to describe *Grange Hill* is depressing. From the poorly drawn graphics to the repetitive music, this is a game that will leave you wanting to top yourself.

4/10

H

Haunted Hedges

Micromega - 1983



Haunted Hedges was one of the first computer games I ever bought. I found it with several other titles (which I can no longer remember) in a local charity shop for a couple of quid. The title sounded really cool and the promise of 3D graphics was exhilarating to my young mind. It also seemed to be a *Pac-Man* clone and as I had enjoyed that game in the arcades so much this was another bonus point. While *Haunted Hedges* didn't quite turn out to be the tour de force I hoped for it remained a favourite of mine right up until the day I traded my Spectrum in for an Atari ST. Apart from the attempt to make the game look 3D via some added perspective to the maze walls, this is for all intents and purposes *Pac-Man*. Instead of the yellow pill-popper himself we now have a little

stick man, the ghosts are still here and the power pellets have been substituted for pick axes (not sure why!). I love the visual look to this game, while the proclamations of 3D graphics are a little over the top the added perspective is a nice touch. The sound effects are also pretty good for an early game and it's certainly very playable. The Amstrad port is every bit as good as the Spectrum original and, in my mind anyway, *Haunted Hedges* is one of the best *Pac-Man* clones out there for an 8-bit home micro. It's also a game that holds a great deal of nostalgia for me, so the following rating might just be a little bit biased!

8/10

Hydra

Domark - 1991



A conversion of the Atari arcade game of the same name, *Hydra*, can best be described as *Road Blasters* in boat. You play the part of a courier in specially designed high powered speedboat that has to deliver top secret parcels all over the world using the globe's great rivers. Other people on the water want these packages too and will do anything to stop you and steal it. Your boat is equipped with guns, boosts and ever decreasing fuel. Just like *Road Blasters* shooting the enemies reveals extra fuel globes in addition to ones scattered along the water. The boosts are also limited and when used make your speedboat fly into the air! This allows you to both collect the bags of money hanging from balloons and take down flying enemies too. The bags of dosh are also

littered around the rivers too and add up to give you a bonus at the end of each level. Bonus stages take place periodically that see you trying to gain as many points as possible by collecting money and performing stunts. This Amstrad conversion of the game is surprisingly good actually. The graphics are colourful and move at a fairly decent frame rate. As far as audio goes there is some really nice in-game music to keep you humming along. I wasn't expecting much of this given how advanced *Hydra* was in the arcades but this Amstrad CPC port does a far better job of pulling it off than the other 8-bit computer versions.

7/10

Hunchback

Ocean - 1984



Hunchback was the first ever arcade conversion by legendary British software house Ocean. It was licensed from the little known UK company Century Electronics and the original arcade game first appeared in 1983. It was converted to the many 8-bit computers soon after and spawned several sequels. The player controls Quasimodo, based on the character from the Victor Hugo novel *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. It's a simple one-screen platformer where your mission is to cross each section of the castle wall and ring the bell. In your way are various obstacles including knights, fire pits and flying arrows. It plays a little bit like *Pitfall* in that you have to swing from ropes as well as jump and dodge these hazards. The final screen sees you rescuing your sweetheart

Esmerelda, if you get past this the game repeats but gets much faster. Graphically this game isn't too bad, it looks pretty similar to the arcade game anyway. The sound is pretty poor though with just some very basic sound effects during the game. In the gameplay department it's not so good, you have to be perfect with your timing and this can be frustrating. The biggest problem is though that the game is just so short, once you know what to do on each screen you can complete it in under five minutes! If you enjoyed the *Hunchback* coin-op then you will probably get a kick out of this, otherwise I wouldn't bother.

6/10

Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom

U.S. Gold - 1987



The original *Indiana Jones and The Temple of Doom* coin-op was released by Atari Games in 1985 and was based on the 1984 film of the same name, which was the second film in the ever-popular franchise. It's also the first Atari System 1 arcade game to include digitised speech, including voice clips of Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones and Amrish Puri as Mola Ram, as well as John Williams' classic music from the film. This 1987 Amstrad CPC conversion of the game is missing all those amazing features though sadly. The basic idea of the game is to make your way through all five levels collecting the treasures and rescuing the kidnapped children. The levels vary quite a lot from the 3D perspective adventure stages that scroll in all directions to the classic mine cart chase that

requires quick reactions to progress through. Indy is armed with his trusty whip to help him along the way and handy messages appear at the bottom of the screen to guide you. The graphics here are reasonable but because they are only in four colours it can be hard to see the enemies around you. The sound is reasonable enough but the music gets very annoying indeed. If you are a big *Indiana Jones* fan then you'll probably still dig this game, others might find it a bit too frustrating to bother spending time with. I'm still waiting for a truly great *Indiana Jones* game to arrive, there's so much potential there too.

6/10

Impossible Mission

U.S. Gold - 1985



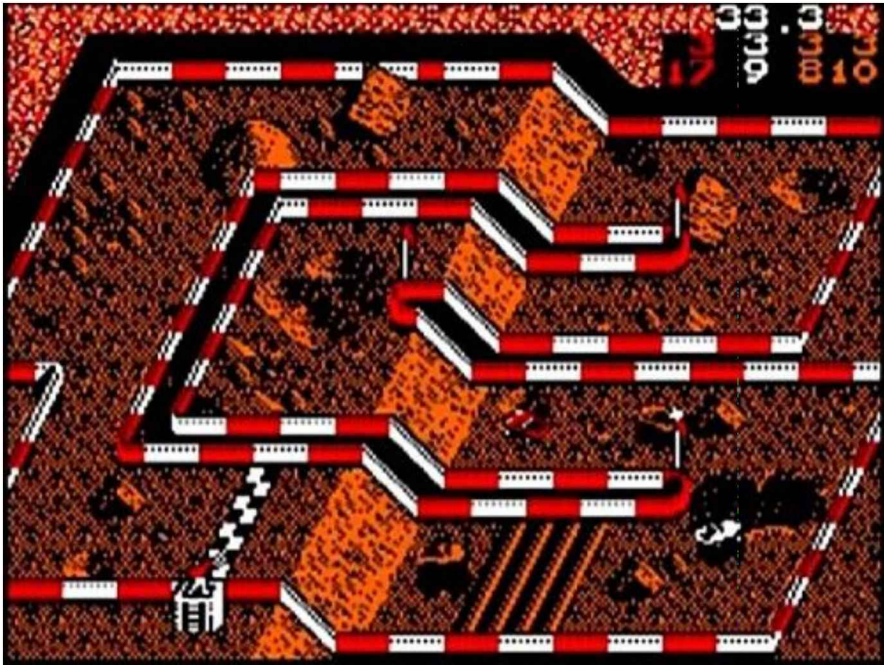
This game was a massive hit for Californian company Epyx on the rival Commodore 64 and ended up being converted to just about every 8-bit machine known to man, including the Amstrad. This version is as good as any really despite the fact it misses out on some of the more impressive features of the original such as the digitised speech and intro sequences. The idea of this game is run around a vast underground base looking for secret files hidden on a computer. There is a lift that takes you to different floors with a handy map being revealed as you explore. All the rooms are guarded by lethal security droids that makes getting around them much more difficult. It takes several seconds to search the computers in each room so perfect timing is required if you don't want to

killed doing it! Sometimes it will require numerous attempts to search a room successfully. Your character can also jump, not only to get to other platforms, but also to leap over the relentless robots. The graphics in this Amstrad CPC port are very nice indeed with good use of colour and some particularly impressive animation on our hero. The sound isn't too bad but it's definitely inferior to the original C64 version here. If you like arcade adventures and you like them tough then *Impossible Mission* will be right up your street. It's also worth checking out the incredibly similar, but much larger, sequel too.

8/10

Ivan “Ironman” Stewart’s Super Off-Road

Virgin Games - 1990



Originally a Leland Corporation arcade game, *Super Off-Road* was also endorsed by some bloke called Ivan “Ironman” Stewart, who’s image adorned all the home computer versions of the game. In many ways *Super Off Road* is the spiritual successor to Atari’s *Super Sprint*, like that title this is a four-player racing game with a kind of forced isometric perspective so you see all the track (as if from above) but the trucks are viewed side-on. It features many of the same gameplay principles as Atari’s iconic game including power-ups, money, up to multi-player gameplay and race ceremonies too. The one addition though, thanks to the

viewpoint, is the track has features like ramps, hills, water holes and barriers that make the races a bit more interesting. This Amstrad version is incredibly close to the original arcade game in the gameplay department, developers Graftgold absolutely nailed the physics and the controls. The biggest downfall of *Super Off-Road* is that once you have got your vehicle up to spec it's incredibly easy to win each race meaning you might get a bit bored of it as the challenge wanes. The most fun with games of this type, as always, is when you get a friend to play to add a bit more competition, although it's a shame you can't have a third player on the keyboard like *Super Sprint*. All said and done though, *Super Off-Road* is a very competent arcade conversion.

8/10

J

Joe Blade

Players - 1987



Joe Blade was easily the most well known game released by Players, which was the budget label of the historic Interceptor Software. It was released on just about every platform out there from the Acorn Electron to the Atari ST and also spawned a couple of pretty similar sequels, but the Spectrum version is the original. In the game you take the role of brave soldier Joe Blade who has been sent into the base of the evil dictator Crax Bloodfinger to rescue the six world leaders being held captive there. But that is not all, he must deactivate six bombs and escape within 20 minutes or they will blow up and kill everyone! The game is a flip screen affair that is viewed horizontally with doors that lead in and out of the screen. Joe has limited ammo so must use it wisely

but you can collect more as well as picking up the keys to open the locked doors. Another neat feature is the enemy uniform you can pick up to disguise yourself and not get shot! *Joe Blade* is a very enjoyable game but is ruined slightly by the bloody bombs, these have to be diffused using a code that is very hard to crack within the time limit and more luck than judgement. Graphically the game is all in monochrome, as it's a Spectrum port, but the sound is a lot better thankfully with nice title music and good effects. Without all the annoying bombs *Joe Blade* would score much higher but as it stands it's still a pretty fun game.

7/10

Jet Bike Simulator

Codemasters - 1988



One of the first really big hits for Codemasters was the excellent *BMX Simulator*, itself a clone of the classic Atari game *Super Sprint*. So with that in mind it probably wouldn't surprise you to learn that they returned to the same format several times later, such as with this game - *Jet Bike Simulator*. The name is perhaps a bit confusing, as jet bikes sound really cool, but what you are really driving here are jet skis. I am really not sure why they didn't just call it *Jet Ski Simulator* instead! So just like those titles this is a four-player top-down racing game. I say four-player, but at least two of those must be controlled by the computer, still adding an extra human is always a bonus and much more fun. The only real differences are that this game is set on water instead of land and rather

than just having a finish line to cross you have a series of checkpoints that must be passed in turn, each marked with a number. Your races are also timed, with a clock constantly running down in the bottom left and the required time displayed on the bottom right. Graphically this game is quite nice actually, the bright blue water looks really inviting with the lush green islands in-between. The sound is even better too with some particularly nice music by David Whittaker and some snippets of digitised speech. Overall this is another quality budget game from Codemasters that is well worth looking out for.

8/10

Jet Set Willy

Software Projects - 1984



If there is one game that is synonymous with the CPC's great rival the ZX Spectrum more than any other it's *Jet Set Willy*. Matthew Smith's hugely popular sequel to *Manic Miner* sold in the millions and became the stuff of legend when it was featured in the superb BBC docu-drama *The Micro Men*. It was the game that all future Spectrum platformers were judged by and spawned hundreds of clones and conversions to other machines, CPC included. For those who have been living under a rock and somehow don't know what this *Jet Set Willy* is all about I will explain a little more. You take control of Willy, who is now a millionaire after his exploits in *Manic Miner*. He threw a huge party in his mansion and just wants to go to bed, but the housekeeper won't let him until he clears

up all the mess left behind! But mess isn't the only thing still lurking in the many rooms, so of the more crazy drunken guests are there too and must be avoided all costs. So to put it in layman's terms - make your way around the mansion collecting all the objects. Once you've collected all the items you can finally get your head down. Graphically *Jet Set Willy* is colourful and characterful as a good platformer should be. The audio is quite poor here though with just some sparse in game effects. This CPC port of *Jet Set Willy* is every bit as good as the ZX Spectrum original and remains an all-time a classic.

9/10

K

Karnov

Activision - 1988



A conversion of the fairly popular 1987 arcade game by Data East, Karnov himself became somewhat of a mascot for the Japanese company having also made cameo appearances in several other of their games including *Bad Dudes Vs. Dragon Ninja* and *Fighter's History*. Jinborov Karnovski, to give the character his full name, is a fire-breathing circus strongman from the Soviet Union who's on a quest to recover ultimate riches so he doesn't have to perform anymore. To do this he must make his way through a side-scrolling world of fantastical monsters, demons and undead warriors. Although mostly an arcade adventure in its style, the main element of Karnov is fighting off the bad guys. He can spit fire, run, jump, climb ladders and also collect additional power-ups

that greatly improve his strength and other abilities. As well as the regular enemies there are also end of level bosses who must be defeated too. I should also mention that every level must be completed within a strict time limit, so there is no time to hang around and admire the scenery. This conversion uses the Amstrad's unique four colour mode and manages to stay remarkably close to the arcade original. The sound is pretty weak sadly, but I guess we can't have everything. All in all, *Karnov* is a very impressive and highly under rated arcade port for the Amstrad CPC that is well worth taking a closer look at.

8/10

Kung-Fu Master

U.S. Gold - 1986



Irem's classic 1984 arcade game *Kung-Fu Master* was the very first scrolling beat 'em up ever and started a whole new genre that led to classic games such as *Double Dragon*, *Final Fight* and *Streets of Rage*. For this reason it deserves a special place in video game history, thankfully it was also a rather good game. In it you must make your way through the various floors of a building in order to defeat Mr. X and rescue your girlfriend. Along the way you have to despatch all sorts of enemies including ninjas, knife throwers and even dragons! As well as kicking and punching you can also duck to avoid attacks and punch people in the nuts! The screen actually scrolls both ways here and the enemies approach from either side too, meaning you must keep your wits about you. Don't

get bogged down in fighting every one though as they just keep coming and you need to preserve your energy for the bosses. All in all this is a fairly decent port of the arcade game, it certainly has all the elements you'd expect and plays pretty well. Graphically it's most good, but the sprites are a bit jerky for some reason. The effects are a bit bland and it's a shame the original music is missing here. I've always liked *Kung Fu Master* and this Amstrad CPC conversion is pretty good (and much better than the awful ZX Spectrum port!) so if you enjoyed it back in the day too then give it a closer look.

8/10

Kick Off

Anco - 1989



When *Kick Off* was first released by Anco in 1989 for the Atari ST and Amiga it revolutionised the world of football games and received rave reviews across the board. Designed by the legendary Dino Dini it offered up a new level of realism when it came to simulating the world's most popular sport and shot to the top of the charts. Due to the huge success of the 16-bit versions, a host of 8-bit iterations and console translations soon followed to cash in on this. In terms of options this version really couldn't be more comprehensive. There are your standard friendly and tournament modes as well as the ability to practice your dribbling skills and penalty taking. You also have the option of changing the match length, weather conditions, pitch type, referee, offside rule, skill level

and even the type of defensive tactics you employ! Sounds pretty good so far right? Well, it would be if it wasn't for the fact the controls are far too loose, making controlling the players an absolute nightmare. Combine this with the slow speed of the game and the absolutely awful graphics and sound you have a true recipe for disaster! To be perfectly honest I never liked *Kick Off* when I first played it on the Atari ST way back when and this version is even worse. It might be the most realistic footy game on the CPC, when it comes to features anyway, but it's far from the most fun and should be given a straight red card!

4/10

L

LED Storm

GO! - 1988



For those that don't know the "LED" part of the title is short for *Laser Enhanced Destruction*, already sounds brilliant doesn't it? But what is very strange is that in this game you aren't actually armed! So that title doesn't really make a lot of sense. It actually plays, and looks like for that matter, like an update of the classic Bally/Midway game *Spy Hunter*. It's a top viewed racing game where you must try to get your futuristic red car to the end of each course without running out of fuel or smashing the thing up. As well as other road users trying to smash you off the track there are hazards such as giant potholes, boulders and chicanes to deal with. Your car is blessed with the ability to jump though, which does come in very useful. Scattered around the levels are fuel tanks and

also power-ups that will improve your car's armour or give you limited invincibility. If you manage to pick up a hitch-hiker then you will earn bonus points for as long as he can hang on to the back of your speeding vehicle. *LED Storm* looks pretty decent, even if there are big black borders down each side of the screen. The sound is incredibly disappointing as not only are the in-game effects poor but the majestic Tim Follin music from the other home conversions is entirely absent! *LED Storm* is a reasonable conversion of a highly under rated Capcom arcade game that feels like it was very much rushed out the door.

7/10

Legend of Kage (The)

Imagine - 1986



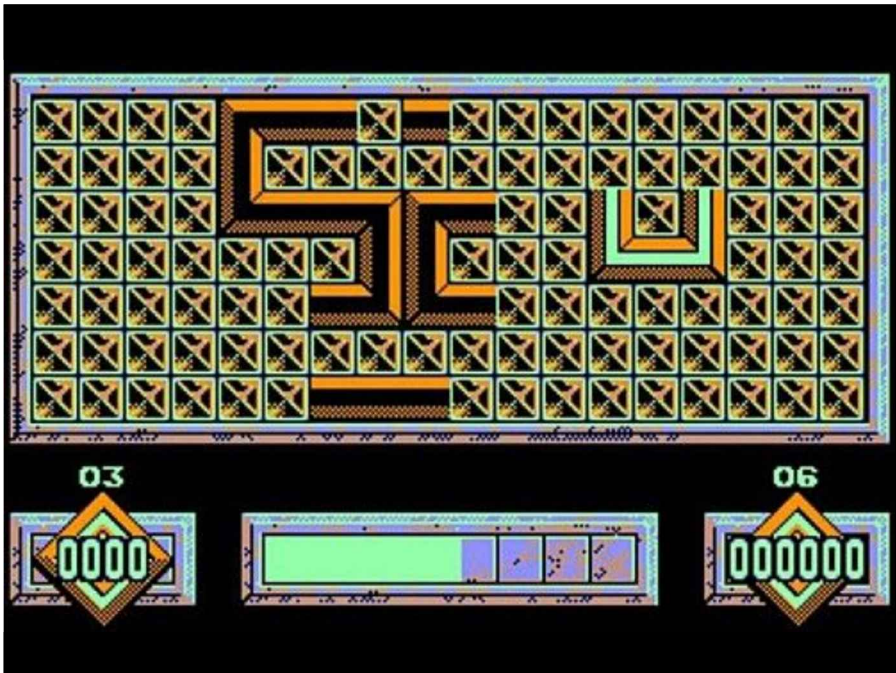
I remember the first time I ever played this game, on the Taito Coin-op Hits compilation for the ZX Spectrum. It was actually the first game I played from the eight game pack for a couple of reasons. Firstly because I had never played it before but even more so because I'd never even heard of it! It definitely seems to be one of Taito's more obscure arcade games of the era but still found its way onto numerous home systems, Amstrad CPC included, nonetheless. As soon as you play it you soon realise why it's not so well known, because it's well, quite frankly, a bit crap. In essence it's a kind of run and gun game where you control this red ninja (who very much looks like a girl) who's on mission to save a princess (aren't they always?). You can run, throw shurikens and jump

extremely high - and I mean high as you can leap over half a screen in distance! Your shurikens can be enhanced by collecting power-ups and you can also pick up extra lives and limited invincibility. While it plays well enough it's just really tedious, as the gameplay barely varies from level to level - there aren't even any boss fights to liven things up. *Legend of Kage* isn't particularly great in the graphics department either with its tiny stick figure sprites and boring backgrounds. I will say that the oriental-styled music is rather nice however. I suppose it stays pretty authentic to the mediocre coin-op then really!

6/10

Loopz

Audiogenic - 1990



Are you bored of *Tetris* yet? Well look no further than this great game, as it's time to get loopy! *Loopz* is a puzzle game with a simple yet incredibly addictive concept. After a comprehensive options screen including difficulty mode, game type and even a choice of music its straight into the action. You are given a series of Tetris style shapes that must be placed on the playing field to create solid loops. They can be as big or small as you like and any shape as long as it loops round so both ends connect. You have a time limit to make the set number of *Loopz* on each level, take too long to place your piece and it disappears costing you time. Sometimes you have no choice but to cost yourself this valuable time though as you can't place the piece it gives you. Every now and again

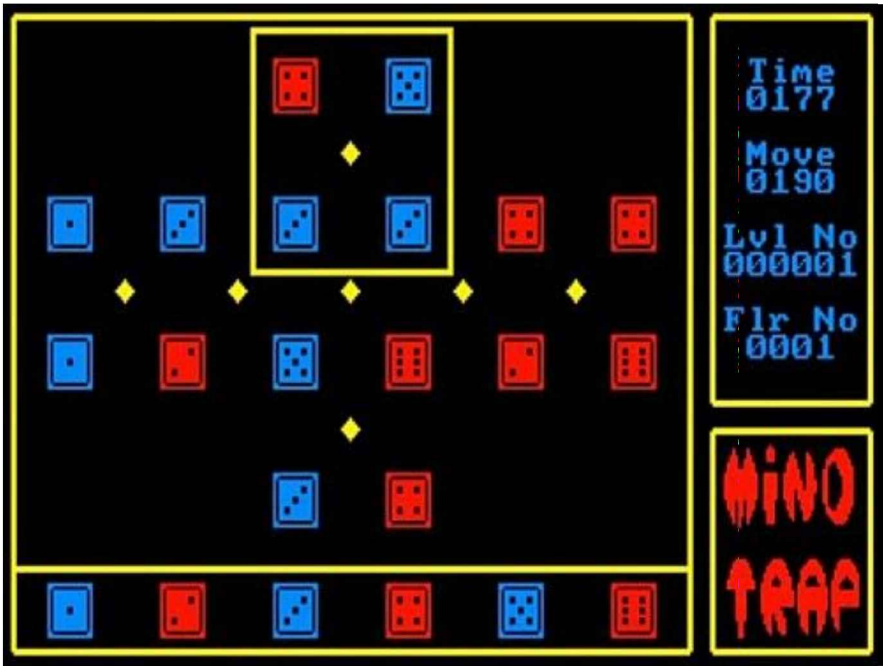
you will get a little *Pac-Man* character, who is able to munch up an incomplete loop from the screen for you to give you more space. Graphics are simple but very well defined indeed and the music is really great, you will be humming it for hours after playing. This is a really solid and incredibly enjoyable puzzle game for the CPC that has a great learning curve and is a must for fans of the genre. It's easy to see why the legendary Shigeru Miyamoto once said that this was his favourite video game!

9/10

M

Mindtrap

Mastertronic - 1989



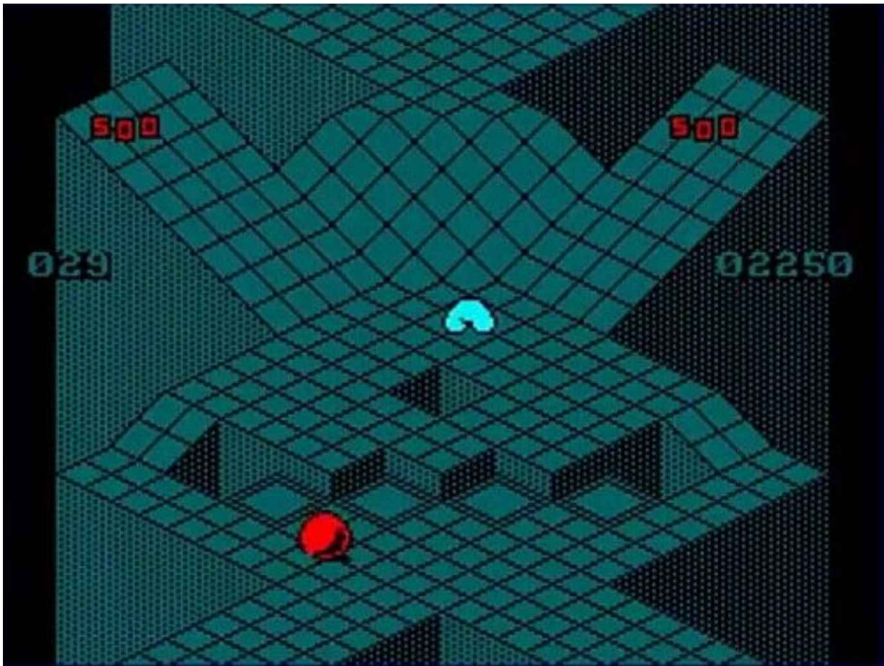
I have always been a sucker for puzzle games, so I'm always excited to find a new one and before I came to researching this book I was totally unaware of *Mindtrap*. It follows a fairly original concept that can best be described as a cross between a *Rubik's Cube* and those plastic sliding puzzles we all had as kids. In the game you are presented with up to 24 coloured and spotted dice-like blocks on the screen arranged in columns of up to four. The task is to arrange these dice so that they are lined up in vertical columns matching their number and colour. Your cursor can move a section of four blocks at a time to start with from anywhere on the screen. But on later levels it blocks some sections off, making the swapping of these dice much harder. Some of these later

stages are also huge in size, requiring you to switch between multiple screens too! This pretty abstract puzzler boasts that it has an incredible 999,999 different level variations, this means that you never play the same game twice, which of course adds a lot of long term playability. My only minor complaint with this is that some of the levels are really tough so you occasionally face some pretty brutal difficulty spikes. A rather handy password feature means you can return where you left off. If you like puzzle games and are bored of the usual *Tetris*-style block droppers then *Mindtrap* might be just the title that you're looking for!

7/10

Marble Madness

Melbourne House - 1986



This is a conversion of the highly popular 1984 Atari arcade game that famously used a trackball for a controller. The gameplay in *Marble Madness* combines a number of genres without actually fitting into any and is all built around its clever 3D isometric viewpoint that was inspired by the work of M. C. Escher. The idea is to guide your marble down six different courses and into the exit before the time expires. The marble must be guided up and down ramps, through tunnels and over thin bridges without falling over the sides or edges of the terrain. This requires very precise movement and careful control that will take some time to master fully. This is not all though as the courses also include slinky like enemies who move around at their own will trying to stop

you, one touch from these and you lose a life. There is also a two-player mode too allowing you to compete against each other for the best time. This Speccy version controls about as well as it could without the custom trackball of its arcade parent. The graphics make good use of the Amstrad's four colour mode with nice smooth movement and a convincing 3D effect too. The sound effects are a bit weak though sadly. The best feature of all though is the construction kit that lets you design your own levels and then save them to tape or disk to share with your friends! Overall this is a very good conversion of a truly classic arcade game.

8/10

Milk Race

Mastertronic - 1987



Milk Race is without doubt one of my most loved titles from Mastertronic's vast budget range. I am not really sure why but I spent many hours playing this Spectrum version as a nipper and it's still a game I return to from time to time now. The game is based on the 1987 Milk Race, which was basically an English version of the Tour De France to promote the white stuff. You ride a bike horizontally across the screen racing through the thirteen different towns that make up the tour. You are one of sixty racers on the roads and your position is displayed in the status bar at the top along with your speed, time, energy, gear and the gradient of the track. Your energy bar runs down as you race and the only way to top it up is by collecting the milk bottles littered around the

course, I bet you were wondering how they sneaked milk into the game! Also spread around these roads are oil slicks that make you crash and ultimately slow you down if you happen to ride into them. If you run out of energy before you make it to the end of the stage then it's game over. The graphics in *Milk Race* game are really nice with well animated cyclists and good use of colour too. It's also a winner in the sound department as well with some really great music by David Whittaker playing throughout the game. *Milk Race* is a pretty challenging game but one that wins a lot of points for its originality and value for money.

8/10

N

Ninja Massacre

Codemasters - 1989



One of the first arcade games to truly wow me was Atari's seminal dungeon crawler *Gauntlet*. Everything about it was amazing; from the beautifully drawn graphics to the booming speech and experience enhancing multi-player mode. So when I heard from my friend Neil at school that the Codies had released their own version I promptly headed down to my local newsagent to see if they had a copy, and you know what? They did and I couldn't wait to rush home and load it up. I wasn't disappointed as not only was this a *Gauntlet* clone with ninjas (something my 12 year old brain thought was utterly incredible) it was a bloody superb game to boot. My enjoyment of the game was also raised a few notches higher by the addition of some incredible music by David Whittaker,

which is possibly his finest work on the Amstrad CPC. The object of the game was exactly the same as Atari's arcade game; fight your way through a maze of monsters, collect the special items and then make your way to the exit. There was no option to play with up to four players of course, but being able to add one friend was a more than reasonable compromise. *Ninja Massacre* is pretty decent in the graphics department too with tons of sprites on screen at once. Without doubt *Ninja Massacre* is a true Amstrad CPC essential and one of the best budget games released for the machine full stop.

9/10

New Zealand Story (The)

Ocean - 1989



While Taito's *Bubble Bobble* franchise has always remained their most popular and famous platform game series another big favourite has always been this ultra cute game that sadly lacked the sequels of its more illustrious brethren. *The New Zealand Story* came out around the same time as highly acclaimed *Rainbow Islands* and was met with the same level of enthusiasm, which makes it even more surprising that the story wasn't continued. In it you play the role of a cute little kiwi trying to rescue your friends down under. They have all been kidnapped from the zoo by an evil walrus and locked in cages around the landscape under armed guard. You start off with a bow and arrow to battle your equally cute opponents but can soon upgrade to other weapons that increase your

firepower greatly. Because poor old kiwis cannot fly he must use the balloons and flying platforms to reach some of the higher areas, but watch out for the lethal spikes that will bring back to earth with a bang! To complete each level you must rescue your buddies and make your way to the exit. Along the way you can also collect fruit, much like *Bubble Bobble*, to gain bonus points. This Amstrad CPC version of *New Zealand Story* is incredibly impressive indeed. The great graphics accompanied by the now classic music create a near perfect platform game experience that shouldn't be missed out on.

9/10

Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less

Domark - 1987



For those that haven't already worked it out from the title, this game is based on a Jeffrey Archer novel of the same name. I really wish I was kidding but I'm not. Staying somewhat faithful to the original printed source material, it's a text adventure that uses still graphics to portray key moments within the game. Just to make things a bit more interesting, the player is also required to solve puzzles from time to time in order to progress. The plot revolves around three Englishmen and one American who have been conned out of their savings by a crook. Taking the role of one of these men, named Stephen Bradley, you must join up with the others to try and swindle the money back from the original fraudster. Although all puzzles have to be solved in a order to

progress from a location, it is still possible to miss important objects along the way and then get totally stuck later on because of it. The game gives you no clues or hints about how to achieve your goal and you are automatically expected to have read the book first, which was included with the game. Graphically they did a nice job with the still images but there isn't a lot else to it, remember this is a text adventure after all. Combine an uninteresting game design with several gameplay flaws and the fact that no further games based on the former MP's books followed, and you should have all you need to know!

3/10

0

OutRun

U.S. Gold - 1987



Perhaps *OutRun* is Sega's greatest ever arcade game, it was amazingly successful and the franchise is still popular to this day. The original game was loved not just for its brilliant gameplay but also for having a simply amazing soundtrack that is still regarded among the best ever. U.S. Gold took responsibility for the home conversions and were much criticised for their efforts. The main complaint of gamers was the slow speed of the home ports, and the Spectrum conversion of this classic road racer is no exception. The funny thing is that before you see it moving it does really look the part! You can definitely tell that it's *OutRun* and the graphics are very well drawn. They just move so slowly and so jerky that there is just no sense of speed at all! The iconic

music is actually pretty good throughout though, well if you have a CPC 6128 anyway, so at least they got somebody good in to do that (Jas C. Brooke). The audio really is the game's only saving grace as gameplay wise *OutRun* is so sluggish that it's completely devoid of thrills. I think it would actually be quicker to get out the car and walk! This is a really pale imitation of the brilliant arcade game that is frankly insulting. In fact I can't think of a single arcade conversion on the Amstrad that's worse than this, if there ever was an Amstrad game that's crying out to be remade then this is it. So come on homebrew community, jump to it!

2/10

One Man and His Droid

Mastertronic - 1986



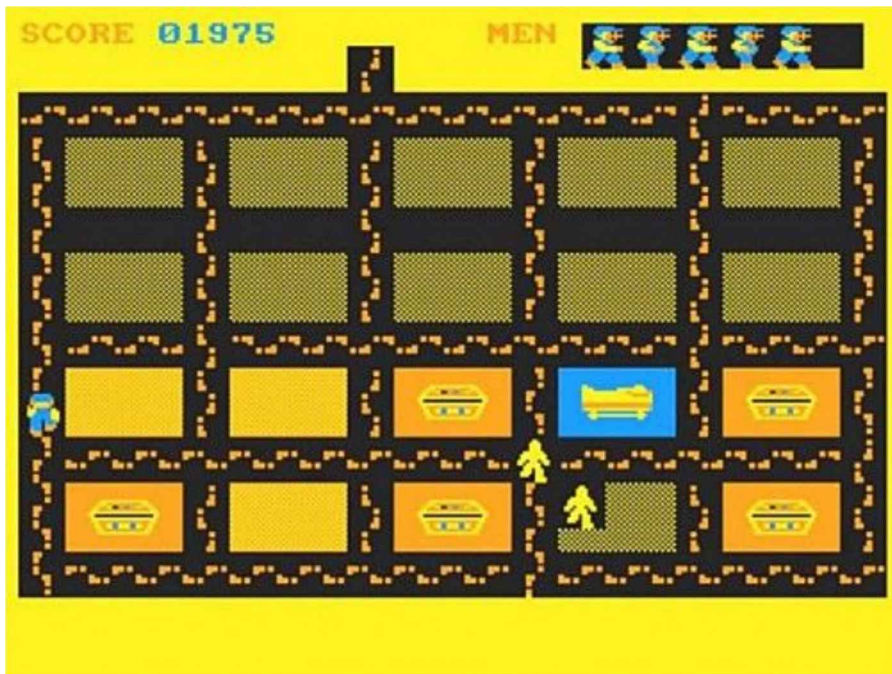
I clearly remember buying this game when I was a kid from my local newsagent (purely based on it being by Mastertronic) and never really getting it. All these years later I played it again and I'm not really any the wiser! Some might have guessed by the name, but it's an obvious play on the classic BBC TV show *One Man and His Dog*, a show that saw a farmer and his trusty hound rounding up sheep. Well in *One Man and His Droid* you are some kind of intergalactic farmer who is rounding some Ramboids, some kind of alien breed of the animal. In order to complete the game you must round them all up and push them into the teleporters. Rather than a dog you use a droid, as you may have guessed, that you control on the screen. Other alien creatures get in the way

and push you around making the job harder, they also kill the dim-witted Ramboids if you take too long. One useful feature of the game is a password option that allows you to return to where you left off. The C64 version was known for its great music and this version is pretty great in that department too you'll be pleased to hear. Graphically the game is fairly decent too, it's certainly nice and colourful anyway. But at the end of the day I just found *One Man and His Droid* every bit as confusing and tedious as I did all those years ago and find it hard to recommend this game to anyone but ardent CPC collectors.

4/10

Oh Mummy!

Gem Software - 1984



Although it was originally released by Gem Software for the ZX Spectrum in 1984, it was converted to the CPC not long after and became one of the first titles in the new Amsoft range. *Oh Mummy* is pretty much just a clone of the classic Konami coin-op *Amidar*, which was itself a variation on the popular maze theme of the time, but Gem's game does have a few differences. In *Amidar* you had to run around the screen to cover the entire grid and avoid the enemies. Once you had moved round the exterior of each box in the grid it would light up. Once they were all lit you move onto the next stage. The difference between *Amidar* and *Oh Mummy* is that in this game you don't have to reveal every square, you just have to find the scrolls hidden inside several of them and then also

find key to escape. The boxes are now tombs and moving around them reveals the contents. The game starts off quite tame with just one stupid enemy chasing you but as more monsters are added the game gets harder. Graphically the game is much better than the simple looking ZX Spectrum original with nice colour and bags of personality. It's also much improved when it comes to the audio too with a great piece of music playing throughout and effects too. It might not be the most advanced game out there for the Amstrad but when it comes to the fun factor *Oh Mummy* is a really hard game to beat!

7/10

P

Pac-Mania

Grandslam - 1988



After the release of *Pac-Land* in 1984 Namco decided to take Pac-Man back to his roots for the 1987 follow-up and stick him back in his more familiar maze. Only this time the yellow dot chomper would be in glorious 3D! As well as adding the isometric perspective to the gameplay, the programmers also added another unique feature, the ability to jump! This is incredibly useful as if you time it right you can avoid traps and grab a power pill to get your own back! However be warned because as the levels go on the ghosts get more intelligent and also learn how to jump too! Each stage also has its own theme from the Lego-like Block Town to the floating Jungly Steps. These levels also scroll, unlike the single screen mazes of the original. Otherwise the core

gameplay in *Pac-Mania* is exactly the same as the original with you trying to gobble up all the pellets, munch the bonus fruits and turn the tables on those pesky ghosts with the help of a power pill. All you readers will probably be very disappointed to hear that CPC *Pac-Mania* is nothing more than a port of the ZX Spectrum version only much slower and with even less colour. Pac-Man isn't even yellow in this iteration of the game for goodness sake! The scrolling is even worse too and the controls feel incredibly sluggish to boot. It's a shame because *Pac-Mania* is one of my all-time favourite games but this version is just so lacking.

6/10

Pro. Tennis Simulator

Codemasters - 1989



After *Dizzy*, Codemasters “Simulator” games are no doubt their most famous on the 8-bit micros. Covering every imaginable sport and past time possible, we saw games based on skiing, all terrain vehicles, pinball, fruit machines and even street soccer. This time the Codies stuck to a more traditional sport that has become more popular than ever in recent years thanks to the rise of one Andy Murray. *Pro. Tennis Simulator* is a pretty simple rendition of the sport that decides to take a more arcade-like look at things over the suggested realism. The selection of shots on offer is more limited than many other tennis games and there aren’t that many options to choose from either in terms of game type. The casual nature of the game is definitely shown in the

visuals too as not only do the graphics have an almost cartoon like look to them, you also appear to be playing in somebody's back garden! That is not to say this is a bad game of course, it's just different to the likes of the *Pro. Tennis Tour* series and *Passing Shot*, for example. This is something more akin to the Nintendo produced Tennis games on the NES and Game Boy for those familiar with them. The graphics are rather good here and the title music and in game effects are also pretty decent too. If you like your sports games a bit less serious then *Pro. Tennis Simulator* is definitely a game for you.

7/10

Pang

Ocean - 1990



Originally developed by a small company called Mitchell Corporation and released into the arcades in 1989, Capcom licensed this game for worldwide release after it became a huge hit. Over the years the game and its sequels have been converted to a huge number of different formats but Ocean software's Amstrad CPC+ and GX4000 port is regarded as one of the very best out there. *Pang* is a highly original game for one or two players where you use a harpoon to shoot bubbles that bounce around the screen. When you hit a bubble it bursts into smaller bubbles that are much harder to hit, a la *Asteroids*. As the bubbles bounce around you must be careful to avoid them as one hit from them and you lose a precious life. Many of the levels feature platforms that either get in the

way or can be used to your advantage by climbing ladders to reach different parts of the screen. Some of these platforms can be destroyed with your weapon making things a bit less awkward. There are also power-ups that can be collected to give you things like multiple shots, freeze, dynamite and rope hooks that keep your stream in place until something hits it. Also watch out for the special items too which will drop from time to time at random and give you a massive reward! *Pang* is incredibly fun and furiously addictive, especially with a second player, and is a game that should everyone should own.

9/10

Q

Quick Draw McGraw

HiTec Software - 1990



When it comes to Hi-Tec's Hanna Barbara licenses *Quick Draw McGraw* has to be one of my personal favourites. Not just because I always liked the character but also because it's a pretty decent game too. One of the first things you will notice about it is that quite similar to many arcade games, without directly copying any single game in particular, this is down to the way the game is designed. In the main part of the game you run along a moving train shooting the bad guys until you finally get to the engine. Here you will meet a boss who must be despatched before you can move onto the next section. These standard levels are broken up with bonus stages where you go inside the train. Taking the form of an *Operation Wolf* style shooting gallery you watch as people pop up from

behind the seats. Here you must despatch the foes whilst trying not to shoot the innocent passengers! Quick Draw himself has an energy bar that depletes when you are hit, if it does run out then its game over. Graphically *Quick Draw McGraw* is very nice for a budget game, the characters are colourful and well-defined and there is even some very impressive parallax scrolling. It's not so good in the audio department though sadly with just a few basic sound effects and that's it *Quick Draw McGraw* is never going to set the world alight or win any awards for its originality but it's definitely good clean fun.

7/10

Question of Sport

Elite Systems - 1989



For those that don't know *A Question of Sport* is one of the longest running programs on UK television, first hitting our screens in 1970. Over the years it's been through numerous hosts and a wide range of different captains representing different sports from former Scottish striker Ally McCoist to heavyweight boxing champion Henry Cooper. It's no surprise to see that the popular TV quiz show also appeared in pixelated form too, thanks to Elite Systems. This particular era of the show had popular sports commentator David Coleman as host with former England cricketer Ian Botham as home captain and former England rugby international Bill Beaumont as away captain. The game then allows you to pick two guests to join each team, depending on if you are playing

against the computer or another player. These are just random images, rather than real people, but each one has their own specialist sport, just as the guests do in real life. Then it's just a case of playing through the various rounds and answering the questions, just as they do in the TV show. Each question must also be answered within a time limit and is multiple choice, so you just have to select the correct answer out of the three shown on screen. Graphically it's pretty decent, you can actually tell who the images are! The sound is pretty decent too. If you enjoyed the show or you like sport then you'll probably like this!

7/10

Quartet

Activision - 1987



The original *Quartet* arcade game was released by Sega in 1986. Despite not being particularly original in style or very impressive to look at, the game quickly drew in audiences thanks to its simultaneous four player gameplay, which is what the title of the game alludes to. Unbelievably the Amstrad CPC conversion retains this feature intact! Two players can use joysticks and the other two take each side of the keyboard, obviously this is rather difficult and cramped however! *Quartet* is a platform based shooter where you can also utilise a jetpack to fly around for a limited time. The objective is to simply make your way to the end of each level (there are six in total) and get into the exit. Once you reach the end of the game you have to defeat a giant super

computer. Along the way there are items that can be collected to increase your firepower and activate bonuses. This version was ported from the Spectrum and completely ruined along the way. It has worse visuals with less colour and terrible scrolling. It's also slow, unresponsive and has almost non-existent audio. Another big problem with this port is that levels are quite sparsely populated, probably because it retains the "Quartet" feature of the original. This makes the game quite boring to play compared to the all-action arcade original. All in all CPC *Quartet* is an awful port of a port that should be avoided at all costs!

3/10

R

Robocop

Ocean - 1988



There are very few films from my childhood that I love as much as *Robocop*. After watching a good quality pirate version on a VHS tape that my friend's mum acquired from a "bloke down the pub" my friends and I were utterly obsessed by it. So much so that when the legendary Ocean Software released the game based on the film I finally stopped spending all my pocket money on budget games to make it my very first full-price purchase. The design of *Robocop* followed on from another famous movie tie-in by Ocean, *Platoon*, by taking key scenes from the film and then loosely connecting them together to make a game. It has to be said that *Robocop* is arguably the best example of this strategy. There are run and gun style levels, crosshair based shoot outs, one on one fights

and even puzzle games such as the famous photo fit stage. Not only are each of these mini-games executed superbly in an individual level but the whole product has been weaved together wonderfully. The colourful visuals capture the look of the film almost perfectly, the gameplay is challenging yet rewarding and the sound is among the best you will hear in any Amstrad game with both great effects and an incredible soundtrack by Jonathan Dunn. Trying to pick out the best game on a format with a library like the Amstrad is certainly difficult, but *Robocop* is definitely it!

10/10

Road Blasters

U.S. Gold - 1988



Road Blasters is perhaps one of Atari Games' most famous and popular arcade games and inspired numerous clones such as *Overlander*, *Fire & Forget* and *Battle Outrun*. Set in a futuristic world you control a super fast car armed with machine guns racing through fifty different "Rally stages". While they are called this they play nothing like a real rally race! The road is full of other cars, some of which can be destroyed with ease and armoured ones that require special weapons to take out. At the side of the road gun turrets add to the challenge, oh and did I forget to mention you also have limited fuel that you must replenish by collecting globes! One of the best features of *Road Blasters* is the power-ups that are dropped by ships that fly overhead. These include nitro boosts, nukes and

super cannon. It sounds difficult and at first it is but *Road Blasters* is a game you will quickly get the hang of and have a serious amount of fun playing. Graphically the Amstrad CPC version is pretty impressive with loads of colour and smooth scrolling road, but it does move pretty slowly. There is also some great sound with both effects and music present and only the speech sadly missing. Sadly the rather unresponsive kill a lot of the enjoyment you would otherwise get from CPC *Road Blasters*. There's a really good game in here desperately trying to get out but sadly U.S. Gold suppressed it (again!).

6/10

Rick Dangerous

Firebird - 1989



For those that don't know, *Rick Dangerous* was the game that really put Core Design on the map. A company who became better known for producing fantastic games such as *Thunder Hawk*, *Chuck Rock* and of course *Tomb Raider*. *Rick Dangerous* is an incredibly challenging platform game that takes its inspiration from the Indiana Jones films. You guide our hat wearing hero Rick through the various levels trying to recover all the treasures that are hidden within. You must try to avoid the traps, hazards and enemies trying to stop you. Thankfully you are armed with a pistol and a limited amount of dynamite to help you on your quest. Rick must run, jump, climb and fall in order to make his way through each stage with precision timing required for every move he makes. As I

already alluded to this game is really tough, so people used to easier console games will be in for a real shock. You will really need to learn this game in order to progress through it. It's almost just a memory game as you try to recall where enemies appear, how many times they shoot and the exact place you need to stand to make a jump. Both the graphics and sound in *Rick Dangerous* are of very high quality, something that certainly became one of Core Design's trademarks. *Rick Dangerous* is undoubtedly challenging but there is still plenty of enjoyment to be had from it if you are willing to persevere.

8/10

S

Super Robin Hood

Codemasters - 1986



Super Robin Hood was the very first game that the now legendary creators of *Dizzy*, *The Oliver Twins*, produced for Codemasters after defecting from budget rivals *Players*. They sold it to the Darling Brothers' company for the grand sum of £10,000 and 10p royalties on each copy, which in hindsight they really regretted as it ended up selling far better than either them or the Codies ever expected and the Twins' legacy really began. It's a flick screen arcade adventure where you control Sherwood Forest's favourite son on a mission to save Maid Marion from the grips of the evil Sheriff of Nottingham. She is being kept in the castle tower, so you must negotiate your way through the many rooms taking out the Sheriff's soldiers with your trusty bow and avoiding the

many traps he's put in place to stop you. Along the way you will also need to collect keys to open doors and find food to replenish your health. If you like getting out the graph paper and drawing your own maps for games then this will be the stuff your dreams are made of. It's no slouch when it comes to the graphics or sound either as *Super Robin Hood* is rich in colour, has a great soundtrack and even some digitised speech. It's easy to see why this title remains such a favourite among Codemasters collectors as it features all the charm and character that would become their trademark for all future releases.

8/10

Switchblade

Gremlin - 1990



Gremlin didn't give a great deal of support to Amstrad's failed GX4000 console but they did choose to publish one of their biggest hits of the time on the machine, to the delight of all GX4000 and CPC+ owners everywhere. Designed by Simon Phipps at Core Design, this manga inspired platform style adventure sees you take the role of Hiro, a Japanese warrior on a mission to recover the sixteen pieces of the Fireblade - a sacred symbol of the ancient Switchblade clan. Unlike many other games of its type *Switchblade* doesn't scroll, you simply progress from one screen to the next, this seems a bit unnatural at first but you soon get used to it. You also have to upgrade your fighting power as the game goes on - you start with nothing more than your fists, finding weapons hidden in

the various rooms among other useful items. The main upgrade here from the original CPC release is in the colour, making the game much closer to the 16-bit original. We also have some simply incredible music from the legend that is Mr. Ben DGLISH, it might even be my favourite tune in any Amstrad game! *Switchblade* is much deeper than many of the other games you will find on the machine and with its attractive graphics, great soundtrack and long-term playability it's rightly considered one of the best games of its type on the Amstrad and one of the few reasons to own an enhanced machine.

9/10

Shadow Warriors

Ocean - 1990



Also known as *Ninja Gaiden* on the home consoles (the original Japanese name) this was one of Tecmo's biggest ever hits in the arcade when it was released back in 1989. A really classic scrolling beat 'em up for the Amstrad this one features some particularly impressive visuals with its full-colour chunky sprites and backgrounds. While your ninja doesn't have many moves here he does have the ability to swing from lampposts and bars, which was one of the main novelties of this game when it was released. You can also knock the enemies through parts of the scenery to attain power-ups like health, extra lives and the ever useful sword. Some might find the choppy movement and flick screen scrolling a bit annoying here, especially if you're used to the arcade version, but you

will soon get used to it after extended play. As I already mentioned the graphics really are excellent here but they are played in quite a small window, one of the many sacrifices that had to be made which also includes a distinct lack of sound. That said though there's no doubting that *Shadow Warriors* is one of the best games of its type on the CPC and one that isn't too badly hindered by the one button joystick either. The only real downside is the lack of a two-player mode, which many of the home versions suffered from sadly. If you like scrolling beat 'em ups then *Shadow Warriors* is must-have title.

8/10

T

Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles

Image Works - 1990



I always thought this was a really strange release for the Amstrad CPC. Because this game originally appeared on the Nintendo Entertainment System and was released after the well known arcade game, which is what everybody really wanted. But no, instead of giving us a port of Konami's red hot coin-op that was the talk of every playground in the country we got this a typical NES platform style action game with weird little sub-sections, something they seemed to do in almost every NES game at that time. I wouldn't have minded that too much if the game was any good, but it isn't, it's just an incredibly generic and annoying affair that is very loosely based on the popular cartoon. You basically choose a turtle and then make your way round the city jumping into

the sewers, negotiating tricky platforms, bashing generic baddies and trying to rescue April from the evil Shredder. I do have to give particular credit to the graphics in this version of the game though. That is because it was coded by the legendary Dave Perry and Nick Bruty using their amazing multi-colour engine that can also be seen in games such as *Savage*, *Dan Dare III* and *Tin Tin on the Moon*. While the graphics are great, the sound is pretty pants and matches the generic gameplay perfectly. For a Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles fix on the Amstrad pick up the superior sequel instead, which is a port of the arcade game!

5/10

Thunder Blade

U.S. Gold - 1988



This 1987 arcade game had a real point of difference from Sega's other super scaler games in that the stages switch between a third person 3D behind the helicopter view, much like *After Burner*, and more traditional vertically scrolling top-down stages but with a fancy 3D perspective to add depth. In these stages the buildings actually seemed to actually be pointing up at you, rather than them just being flat, with the angles of them change direction as you do giving a really 3D convincing effect. Sadly none of the home conversions managed to pull off any of the 3D effects of *Thunder Blade* properly and what you have left is a rather frustrating and broken version of the Sega hit. The 3D effects are almost completely missing from vertically scrolling stages here, but

these still play pretty well. The third person parts however are horrific with an almost non-existent frame rate, unresponsive controls and it's almost impossible to judge the trajectory of enemy fire. None of this is helped by the messy graphics that cause your blue chopper to blend into the blue sky of the background. Basically this is just a game that shouldn't have been even attempted on the Amstrad, the hardware just isn't up to it. When you consider that the 16-bit Sega Mega Drive version is also terrible too, that probably tells you all you need to know about *Thunder Blade*. This is definitely a game to miss out on!

4/10

Thrust

Firebird - 1989



It's funny how sometimes the clones are remembered better than the games they are actually based upon. This is definitely true in the case of *Thrust*, originally released for the BBC Micro in 1986, it is pretty much just a rip-off of Atari's 1982 vector arcade game *Gravitar*. The aim of the game is to pilot a spacecraft over a planet surface picking up the pods using your tractor beam and then fly them into space. The ship and pod are subject to both gravity and inertia and, as a stiff pole connects them, they can end up spinning around each other and out of control. Hitting the walls of a cave or the ground will also result in your death. But this is not all you have to contend with, as there are also enemy bunkers on the planet trying to stop you stealing the pods. They will

shoot at you and try to take you down but fortunately you can shoot back. You must be careful though not to fire at the reactors as this will start a countdown that self destructs the planet in ten seconds. You also need to collect fuel along the way and when you don't have a pod in tow you can use your shield to deflect enemy fire. I was never a fan of this game at all, I always found the gameplay to be infuriatingly difficult. Controlling your ship is an absolute chore and just takes away from everything else that is good. *Thrust* has really nice vector style graphics and but that cannot save it from being one of the most annoying games I have ever played and one that I just can't understand the love for.

4/10

U

Uchi Mata

Martech - 1987



Uchi Mata is one of several games released by Martech to be endorsed by one Brian Jacks. You probably haven't heard of him but he won Britain's first ever medal in Judo at a world championship, taking a bronze in Salt Lake City in 1967. He then gained a second bronze at the Munich Olympics in 1972, launching him into stardom for a short period of time. Brian Jacks later achieved national fame for his outstanding performances on the BBC TV programme *Superstars*, in which he was one of the most successful competitors. Jacks dominated the British and European version of the contest from 1979 to 1980 winning no less than four titles. Why Martech decided to resurrect him so many years later when he was long gone from the public eye is anyone's guess, I can

only assume he was cheap! This game is a one-on-one Judo simulator, so less *Street Fighter 2* and more *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*. You will require quite a lot of patience to play this as it takes some time to learn how to execute all the moves and use them correctly. To perform an attack you first have to grab your opponent and then perform a short sequence of directional movements. Both the graphics and sound here are pretty good actually but I just found *Uchi Mata* too slow and cumbersome to be truly fun and you'll quickly abandon it for something a bit more accessible like *Way of the Exploding Fist*.

5/10

U.N. Squadron

U.S. Gold - 1990



Probably Capcom's most famous and popular side scrolling shoot 'em up, *U.N. Squadron* was originally known as *Area 88* in Japan and was unleashed upon arcade audiences in 1989. Based on a Manga series of the same name, it was renamed in the west to something with a more international flavour. The key feature of *U.N. Squadron* is that you are able to choose between three different pilots, each with their own different plane and characteristics, which is something you don't often see in a shoot 'em up of this type. Also rather than the standard lives system, in *U.N. Squadron* you have an energy bar instead, which depletes as you are hit. After this you get no further lives - just a limited amount of continues. Another neat feature of this title is that you can earn money, by

destroying the enemy, which can then be spent in shops to upgrade your weaponry. *U.N. Squadron* also earns extra brownie points for being a two-player game, allowing you to team up with a friend to take on the terrorist forces. The ZX version of this game is pretty decent all in all. The graphics are incredibly good here with loads of colour and smooth scrolling too. It's pretty decent when it comes to the sound with both music and effects at the same time! Overall *U.N. Squadron* easily ranks among the more accomplished horizontally scrolling shoot 'em ups on the Amstrad CPC and is a must have title.

9/10

Uwol: Quest for Money

The Mojon Twins - 2009



The Mojon Twins are often called the kings of Z80 homebrew for all their wonderful works on the MSX, ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC and Uwol has become somewhat of a mascot for them. This title, subtitled *Quest for Money*, is a real hark back to the old days of 8-bit gaming with its unforgiving gameplay and is certainly not designed for the beginner! In fact it's a brutally hard (at times anyway) platform game where you must guide Uwol himself around the screen collecting the money. He must do this by jumping on platforms and avoiding the bad guys, which is much harder than it actually sounds. There is also a time limit and if the clock runs down a new enemy appears on the screen and chases you down until he kills you, a lot like Baron Von Blubba in *Bubble Bobble*. You

only have three lives to work with and if you lose them then it's game over. At the end of each level you must choose what route to take to progress. This means there are a number of different routes through the game, adding plenty of lastability. The graphics are very nice indeed with bright attractive colours and detailed sprites. They are accompanied by some nice sound and music too making this an impressive package. *Uwol: Quest for Money* is very challenging, maybe overly so, but completing the levels is very rewarding too. Gamers who grew up with titles like *Manic Miner* will be right at home here!

7/10

Video Card Arcade

Blue Ribbon - 1989



Card games have always been a staple of every single computer out there, especially the Windows based PC, which has had them included in every version since the early years. Most of them just specialise in one discipline, such as poker or pontoon, but this nice little budget release by Blue Ribbon has no less than three different variations included. First up there is Poker Royal - this is your standard five card variant of the game where you are trying to get the best set of cards possible from pair up to a royal flush. Next up is Twenty One, you've probably guessed already that this is just the ever popular blackjack under a different name. In this game you are trying to score as close to 21 in two cards as possible without going bust (over 21) and beat the dealer, just like you

would at a real casino. The last game is a bit more obscure and is called High Low, now this is basically like the TV game show *Play Your Cards Right* where you are trying to guess if the next card drawn is higher or lower than the first one. The goal here is to get the value of all five cards correct to win. In every game you have both a score and credits, which start at ten. With each turn you take a credit is removed, but if you win a credit is added on. The amount of score you earn varies with each game. *Video Card Arcade* is never going to win any awards for graphics or sound but it is pretty enjoyable to play.

7/10

Vindicators

Domark - 1989



Vindicators was a 1988 arcade game by Atari that was actually made available as a conversion kit for *Gauntlet*. You can see why in some ways as certain elements of it are very similar, only with tanks instead of wizards and warriors! The idea of *Vindicators* is to guide you tank through each vertically scrolling level, find the key and then make your way to the exit (much like *Gauntlet* in fact!). Your vehicle is equipped with a gun, a limited amount of bombs, shields and fuel. Scattered around each level you will find icons that upgrade your guns, restore your shields and top up your fuel. All these things must be kept an eye on as if you run out of fuel you lose a life and if you have no shields you are vulnerable to enemy attacks. These foes consist of other tanks and gun

turrets that can be taken out with a few precise hits. There are also various barriers and walls that get in the way, so you must find the best way round each level to conserve your valuable fuel. One of the nicest features of *Vindicators* is that two of you can team up to take on the enemy together. Graphics wise the game is very nice and stays remarkably close to the original arcade game. The sound is also very good with a great tune and in-game effects. *Vindicators* might not be Atari's most famous arcade game but in my opinion it's a bit of a hidden gem and a certainly worth taking a much closer look at.

8/10

Vigilante

U.S. Gold - 1988



Irem were responsible for the very first scrolling beat 'em up ever, the classic *Kung Fu Master*, and this 1988 arcade game is somewhat of an unofficial sequel to it. While looking more like a modern scrolling beat 'em up it actually plays remarkably similar to the original Irem scrapper. In *Kung Fu Master* you had to walk both left and right to defeat streams of generic bad guys that constantly appeared before meeting an end of level boss. *Vigilante* plays exactly the same as this, only with a street setting. It even has pretty much the same plot too, with some lame story about your girlfriend being kidnapped. This of course means that *Vigilante* seems a bit tired and repetitive compared to more modern beat 'em ups, even if it does add a few new features like weapons and

grapples. If you are expecting something like *Final Fight* or *Streets of Rage* here then you are out of luck. Graphically the game is really good with big chunky sprites and detailed backdrops. Sonically the game is pretty rubbish though with just some very basic sound effects while you play! When it comes to the all important playability you'll find that *Vigilante* is incredibly dull and lacking in any real excitement, much like the original arcade game really! All in all *Vigilante* is a good conversion of a poor arcade game, which is pretty ironic really when you consider how many times U.S. Gold messed up good games!

5/10

W

The Wild Bunch

Firebird Silver - 1984



Firebird's *The Wild Bunch* represents my earliest memory of playing a Wild West themed video game. Not only that, it was also one of the first games I bought for my Speccy just after I received it for Christmas, having already played the game on my friend Kris' computer (who had since moved away) and wanting it for myself. This title really made me feel like I had been transported into a Hollywood western, something I didn't feel again until playing *Red Dead Redemption* on the Xbox 360 some 40 years later! *The Wild Bunch* is a highly original combination between a text adventure, strategy game and arcade game that sees you framed for a murder you didn't commit. With the local Sherriff on your tail you must search the local towns for clues and try to track down the real

killer before it's too late! There are many locations that feature different ways to interact with the game; the bar serves drinks for health, the shop sells ammo for your gun and the local telegraph office gives you clues to your assailant's identity. The real fun comes in the form of the first person gun fights however, where the quickest man to the draw lives to see another day! Graphics are fairly average really and there are some nice little pieces of music that help set up each scene nicely. *The Wild Bunch* is possibly the closest you'll ever come to being Clint Eastwood without leaving the safety of your keyboard!

8/10

Wonder Boy

Activision - 1987



For those that don't know, *Wonder Boy* is a platform game with a fantasy theme and more than a few unique features for the time. It originally appeared in the arcades in 1986 thanks to a link-up between Westone and Sega and would later be adapted into the *Adventure Island* series by Hudson Soft. Unlike many other platformers, rather than jumping on the bad guys in *Wonder Boy*, you throw hammers at them instead. You also have a life bar, which drains as you move along, and you must collect the fruit littered around the levels to keep it topped up. If this energy bar runs down, or you hit an enemy, you die. Along the way you can collect some pretty smart power-ups too. The most fun is the skateboard that lets you zip along the landscape much quicker than running but the

most useful is the fairy that gives you limited invincibility. I am always telling people that I am not a very big fan of platformers in general, but the *Wonder Boy* series has always been one of the few I that have liked. This Amstrad CPC version isn't as bright and colourful as its coin-op counterpart, in fact it's quite dark and foreboding in places! However you can still tell it is *Wonder Boy*. There is a nice rendition of the original arcade music in here and some nice sound effects too. Overall this is a solid conversion of a very good coin-op that should definitely go into a high level of consideration for platform game fans.

8/10

Way of the Exploding Fist

Melbourne House - 1985



When *Way of the Exploding Fist* was first released back in 1985 it was part of a mini-craze for fighting games that was started by Data East's landmark coin-op *Karate Champ* and also included titles such as *International Karate*, *Way of the Tiger* and *Yie Ar Kung Fu*. In fact *Way of the Exploding Fist* owes much to Data East's famous game, but unlike *IK* it seemed to change just enough to avoid a lawsuit! The idea of the game is to score enough points in each fight to be awarded the winner. Harder hits score one point while softer hits earn a half-point and you need two full points to take the win. As the game goes on your opponents get harder and your skills will need to be improved to progress. In total there are sixteen different moves available and these are mostly pulled off

using a combination of a button and a joystick direction, some being more difficult than others. The graphics in *Way of the Exploding Fist* are gorgeous with lovely backdrops and well-defined sprites. In the audio department there are some really bone crunching sound effects and even a few small pieces of music to introduce each match. It's easy to see why *Way of the Exploding Fist* still remains such a favourite among 8-bit computer owners. The gameplay still holds up and it's arguably the best game released as part of that short-lived mid-eighties craze. It's a shame the sequel *Fist 2* was so disappointing though.

9/10

Xenon

Melbourne House - 1989



Xenon was one of the very first games to be produced by the now legendary Bitmap Brothers and it was originally released for the Atari ST in 1988. It's a shoot 'em up that features some very unique looks and gameplay that would go on to become the Bitmap's trademark. The key element of *Xenon* is the ability to transform from a space ship into a tank and back again at will. The game is designed in such a way that you will need to transform in between the two to complete each level. Although when you get to boss fights your craft becomes fixed on one or the other. The enemies in the game are also ground or air based and their attacks can often only effect one type of craft, likewise you can only destroy some of them using one configuration. Each of your craft has its own

characteristics that either help or hinder you in different ways. The tank is very slow so requires much more skill to move around, which can be a big challenge in the boss battles, while the spaceship is fast and nimble but much easier to destroy. You can also collect various power-ups to help you through the game and improve each craft. This is an incredibly impressive port from 16-bits to just 8. The graphics look great with some nice use of colour but it's the outstanding music from David Whitaker that really steals the show here. Without doubt *Xenon* is one of the best vertical shooters out there for the Amstrad CPC.

9/10

Xenophobe

MicroStyle - 1989



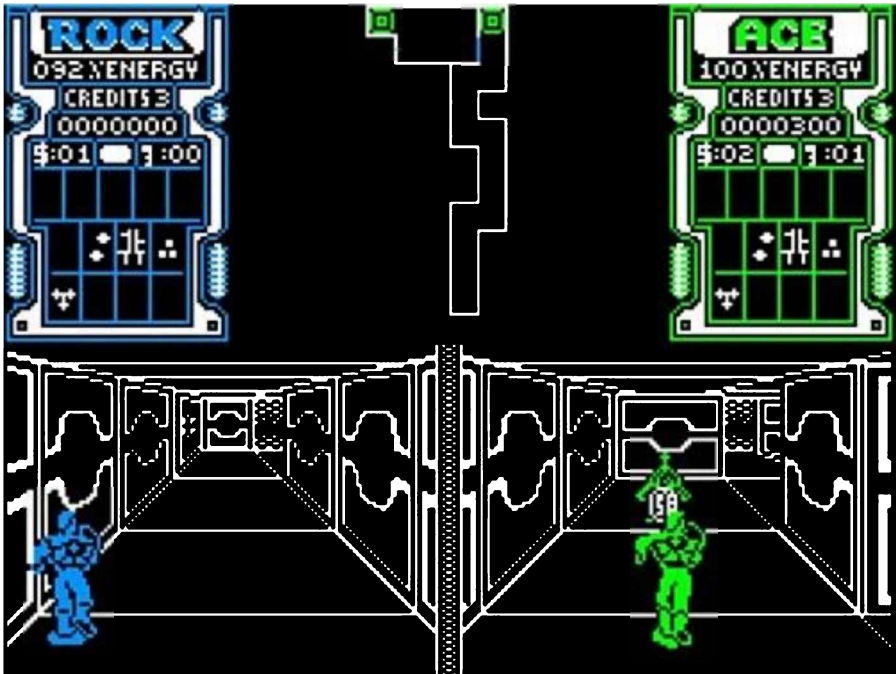
The original 1987 arcade game, published by Bally/Midway, was no doubt heavily influenced by the classic film Aliens. Starbases, moons, ships and space stations are all infested with aliens and the players have to kill all the aliens before each one is completely overrun. You must select a character then set out through space clearing each station of xenos and recovering all the useful objects that have been left behind. Some of these items can be used straight away (such as weapons) while others are just collected for bonus points. This game was rather unusual in that it split the single monitor into three separate horizontal sections, one for each player. This allowed the players to co-operate, but also allowed the players to wander around freely, a feature not

found on most other co-operative multi-player games that restricted you all to the same screen. This Amstrad CPC version pares that down to two but you won't hear me complaining as it works absolutely great! Imagitec Design did a great job with this port. The graphics are big, bold, colourful and well-drawn. The music by the legendary Barry Leitch is an absolute joy to behold, in fact it was so good that MicroStyle bundled an audio cassette with every game with the original Amiga composition on it! I have always been a huge fan of *Xenophobe* and this Amstrad CPC version certainly doesn't disappoint.

9/10

Xybots

Domark - 1989



The original arcade version of *Xybots* started off as *Gauntlet 3D*, but as the programmers made it more and more futuristic Atari took the decision to re-name it as they thought it was too far removed from the original franchise. But it actually isn't really that different in many ways and that gives you an idea of how the game plays. It's much like a very early version of *Doom* with its mapped out levels, maze like tunnels, multiple weapons and the need to find keys and open doors to get to each level exit. Where it does differ is that you actually see your character on the screen and also the game doesn't quite move like *Doom* either. Instead of the level moving with you as you change direction you actually have to hold a button and direction to flip the viewpoint, this may sound

annoying but it works fine and you can use the map to see all the directions you can move in. Each space station is full of enemies from hovering drones to the mighty Xybots themselves and the shooting can get pretty frantic. Thankfully at the end of each level is a shop where you can upgrade your weapons, health, armour and scanners using money collected around the previous level. This Amstrad port is certainly not the prettiest game in the world but it's definitely Xybots. It manages to retain all the elements that made the original arcade game so enjoyable right down to the split screen two-player option!

8/10

Y

Yogi Bear and Friends in the Greed Monster

Hi-Tec Software - 1990



The first of Hi-Tec's Yogi Bear games for the CPC, *Yogi's Great Escape*, was a rather tedious attempt to cash in on the license and so I wasn't really expecting much from this sequel. However I was pleasantly surprised to find that this is a very different game with much more going for it. Apparently Yogi Bear and his team of treasure hunters have received a call from Top Cat telling them that all the toys in the world have been stolen. When they set out to find out what happened to the toys all but Yogi Bear himself are captured by the thieving Greed Monster. So you take the roll of the big cuddly bear and set out on a mission to save your friends and recover

the toys. The game takes the form of a top down flick screen arcade adventure set in a huge world full of nasty minions. Thankfully you have a limited amount of sweets that can be chucked at them to kill them. You have to use these when you really need them because you don't know when you will be able to grab more. Also look out for the picnic baskets, which when collected, restore your health. Graphically the game is rather nice with lots of bright colours for the backgrounds and a well-defined Yogi Bear himself. The sound is pretty decent too with a particularly title tune. All in all though, *Greed Monster* is a rather enjoyable romp for the Amstrad that will satisfy all the arcade adventure fans out there, at least for a while anyway.

7/10

Yie Ar Kung Fu

Imagine - 1985



When Konami first released *Yie Ar Kung Fu* into the arcades back in 1985 it was a huge hit and it's now considered the granddaddy of all modern fighting games. It introduced the selection of different characters and projectile style weapons/special moves that we are now used to in games like *Street Fighter II* and *King of Fighters*. In the game you control a warrior called Oolong who must battle a series of foes to become the martial arts Grand Master. These opponents include a Bruce Lee inspired nunchuka specialist, a dangerous samurai and dastardly thug with a big club. Each rival has their own unique strengths and abilities meaning that you have to adapt you own attacks to suit each one. Moves are performed using a combination of a direction, including

diagonals, and the fire button, so there are plenty you need to master. *Yie Ar Kung Fu* was extremely successful for Imagine so it was followed with a computer only sequel a year later, but it's now where near as good. The arcade sequel, *Shao Lin's Road*, is considerably better. Graphically the game is pretty authentic to the original with great backgrounds and nice looking sprites. It also excels in the sound department too with all the original effects and music recreated very authentically. My only small complaint with this game is that once mastered it you can finish it in less than ten minutes! Still fun while it lasts though.

8/10

Yrox

AM-Mag - 1988



This obscure platform game was given away free with French Amstrad magazine AM-Mag and is written entirely in BASIC. When you consider that against the quality of the game it's actually pretty impressive for what it is too. I think I can best describe this as a clone of the classic Broderbund platformer *Lode Runner*. In *Yrox* you have to make your way around the screen collecting all the treasure and trying not to get eaten by the monster chasing you. There are both platforms and ladders to help you do this and your character also has the ability to jump small gaps. Not just this though, he can also dig holes, which will be needed to enter the caverns where the gold is hidden, escape from the baddie and also fall through platforms when needed. You have to be extremely

careful where you dig these holes though because it's incredibly easy to trap yourself. As you start each level you really have to plan your route around the screen. One thing that did really annoy me about this is that if you mess a level up there doesn't seem to be a way of resetting it other than to just lose all your lives on purpose, which is incredibly frustrating. The graphics and sound are both pretty simple here, as you would no doubt expect, but the controls are fast and responsive. I guess if you like platformers you might get some fun out of *Yrox* but the rest of you will no doubt give up in frustration before long.

5/10

Z

Zorro

U.S. Gold - 1986



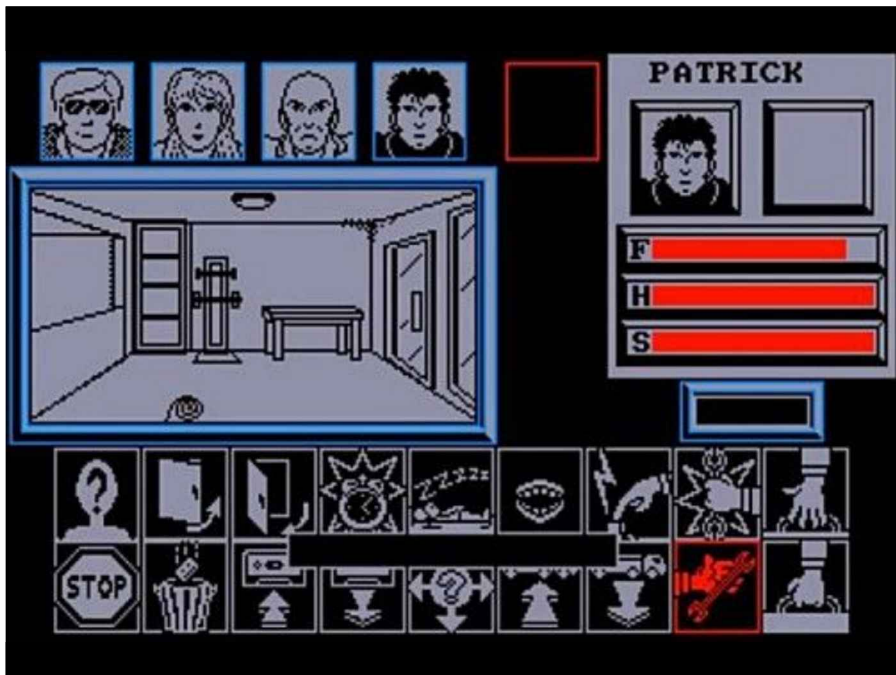
A conversion of the popular Atari 8-bit game by Datasoft that was in turn based on the classic TV show, *Zorro* follows a winning formula that was first created for the excellent *Bruce Lee*. This formula consists of walking around the many screens duffing up the bad guys whilst collecting the objects needed to complete your quest. And what is this quest I hear you ask? Well unsurprisingly it involves the capture of an innocent female by some big scary guy and as always it's your job to rescue them. Different objects allow you to unlock more locations and get past the henchmen trying to stop you, however only one item can be picked up at a time so careful planning is required here. Most of the enemies you encounter can be despatched with a quick slash of your sword and Zorro

can also climb ladders, trees and use other objects as platforms to try and reach higher places. Some of these movements can be quite fiddly though so it's not always as easy as it looks. This port is certainly a big step down from the Atari 8-bit version in both audio and visuals. The colour scheme chosen here is very strange in fact with almost everything being coloured in either yellow, black or red. This makes it seem a little drab and lifeless. Although there aren't many in-game effects, there is some fairly nice title music, which is something I suppose. *Zorro* is certainly good, but could have been much better.

7/10

Zombi

Ubisoft - 1986



The very first game by the modern day publishing giants that are Ubisoft, this game was more recently resurrected and remade as the launch game for the Nintendo Wii U console in the form of *Zombi U*. It was later converted to the PC, PS4 and Xbox One using the original name too. When it first arrived for the Amstrad CPC in 1986 it was considered pretty ground breaking, an icon driven adventure game heavily influenced by the classic George A. Romero film *Dawn of the Dead*. In the game the player controlling four different protagonists as they explore a zombie-infested shopping centre. It draws from many parts of the aforementioned film including the gun shops, the escalators and the articulated trucks that are used to block the entrances. If a character's health is depleted

he turns into a zombie, which then roams the room they died in! The actual zombies in the game can be killed by either shooting them repeatedly in the body or by a single well-aimed shot to the head. You move around by clicking the arrows in the corner of the screen and there are action icons in a panel at the bottom. Character statistics are shown on the right and a cursor can also be moved onto the screen to interact with the environment. Although it's in monochrome *Zombi* looks fantastic with loads of great detail. The sense of horror really works here and all in all this is a highly accomplished game.

9/10

Zynaps

Hewson - 1987



Zynaps was released in the golden age of 8-bit computing and, for a while at least, leading software house Hewson Consultants could do no wrong in the world. With stuff like *Nebulus*, *Uridium* and *Exolon* receiving rave reviews and hitting the top of the chart everyone was clambering for the latest Hewson release and this title was no exception. *Zynaps* is a horizontal shooter that I remember extremely well from my younger days of home computing. It was rightly raved about when it was released on Sir Clive's dream machine, not just because it played great but also because it looked fantastic with a multitude of colour when so many Spectrum games were turning monochrome. It follows the *Scramble* school of shooters with the levels taking place in tight caverns with a

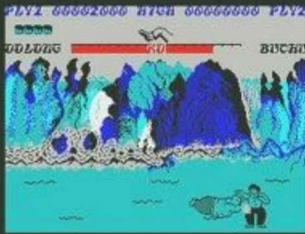
wide range of both enemies and obstacles to avoid. You also have to collect fuel like *Scramble* too but you will be pleased to hear that *Zynaps* does have the power-ups of more traditional shooters like *R-Type* too. The control system also takes a bit of getting used to as you have to hold the fire button to collect things and tap it to fire, not very intuitive. The slick colourful visuals are accompanied by a nice title tune and a host of decent sound effects during play. When it comes to horizontal shooters on the CPC there are very few out there better than *Zynaps* so make sure it's in your collection!

9/10

Also available

UNOFFICIAL & UNAUTHORISED

THE A-Z OF SINCLAIR ZX SPECTRUM GAMES

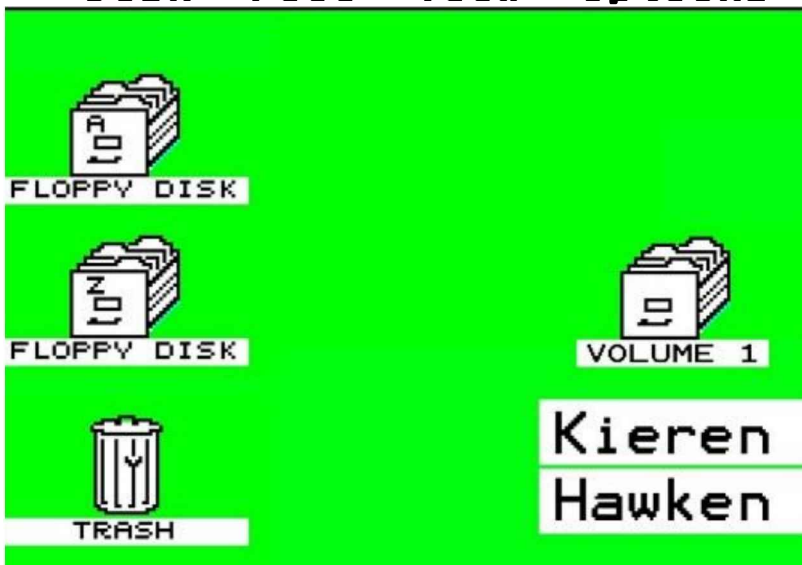


K I E R E N H A W K E N

UNOFFICIAL AND UNAUTHORISED

The
A-Z
of
Atari ST
Games

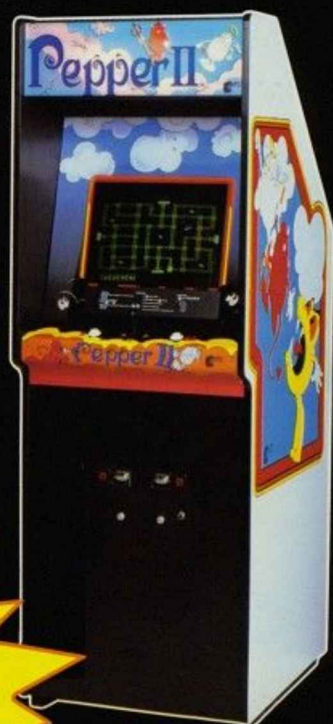
Desk File View Options



UNOFFICIAL & UNAUTHORISED

A - Z OF COLECOVISION GAMES

KIEREN HAWKEN



**VOLUME
ONE**