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# THE A-Z OF

# AMSTRAD CPC
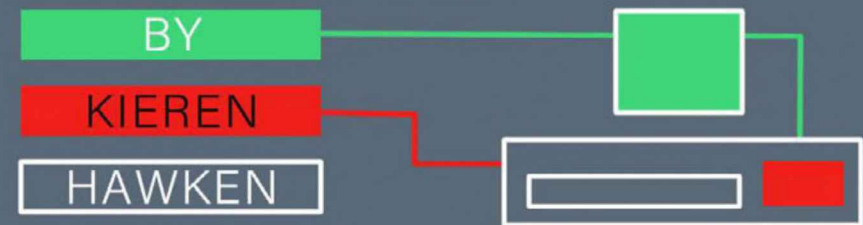
# GAMES

## VOLUME TWO

BY
KIEREN
HAWKEN

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# AMSTRAD CPC

## GAMES

## VOLUME 2



## 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 second book in the series I once again 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 second 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**

# Arkanoid
**Imagine – 1987**
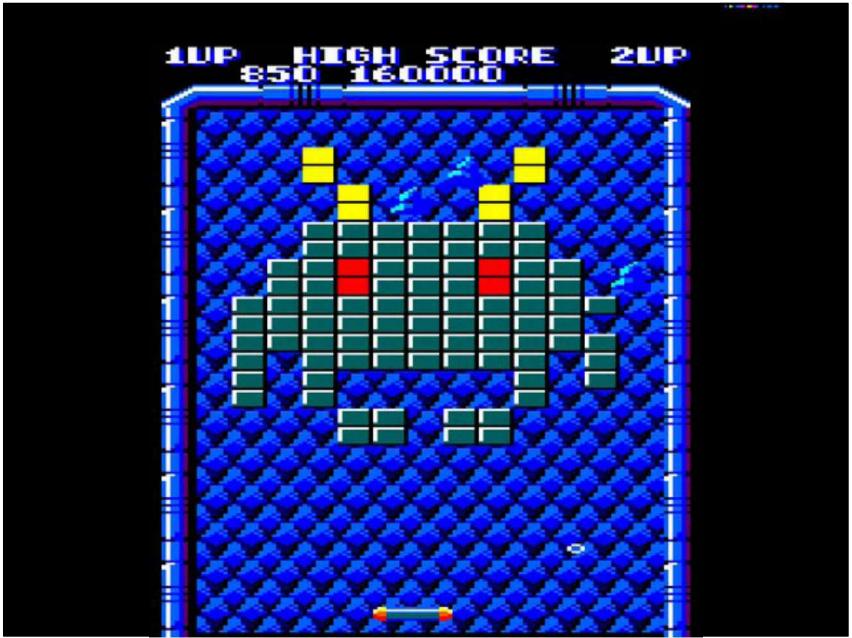


While Atari's *Breakout*, programmed by Apple founders Jobs and Wozniak no less, was the very first bat and ball brick breaker it was Taito's *Arkanoid* was the game that revolutionised the genre. It took the basic gameplay of *Breakout* and added a host of new features like enemies, different formations, multi-hit bricks and of course power-ups! Collecting these coloured icons allows you to do stuff like shoot the bricks with a laser, aim the ball where you want, expand your bat and even skip a level. The new level formations are interesting too with some even based on other popular Taito arcade games such as *Space Invaders* and *Bubble Bobble*! There are also different types of bricks including ones that require numerous hits to destroy and others that can't be removed at all. All these features added so much more to the game and made it much more than just another *Breakout* clone. In fact *Arkanoid* has since been cloned hundreds of times itself and can still be seen in some shape

or form in many games of today. *Arkanoid* is not about graphics or sound, although both are very good here actually, it's just pure playability, and there is loads of it here. I have always been a real sucker for these types of games and this is no exception, *Arkanoid* remains one of my most played video games over the years. It's also worth checking out the equally excellent sequel *Arkanoid 2: Revenge of Doh* too.

**9/10**

# Agent X II
**Mastertronic – 1987**



We all know that Mastertronic released many fantastic budget games for the Amstrad CPC but *Agent X II* is universally ranked as one of the very best, and it's easy to see why. The game itself is split up into three very distinct parts, giving some nice variation in gameplay. The first section of *Agent X II* is a pretty standard horizontally scrolling shoot 'em up where you shoot down the enemies and try not to get hit. The second part is a platform-style arcade adventure where you are jumping around avoiding enemies and trying to hack some computers. The third and final episode plays out much like the Atari arcade classic *Breakout*. Each section requires different skills and makes the game more challenging for it. On the negative side though, I would say that the three parts decrease in quality as they go on, with the shooting level being by far the most enjoyable. Graphically *Agent X II* is very colourful and looks excellent, especially the first level. The audio is even better

with some of the best music you will hear in any Amstrad CPC game, not a just a budget one. It's safe to say that back in the day *Agent X II* offered tremendous value for money and it's still well worth a play even today, even if it isn't quite as great as the sum of its parts. I am still very surprised that Mastertronic didn't follow up this one up with more games featuring the mystery agent though, he very much could have become their mascot.

**8/10**

# Alien Syndrome
## Ace – 1988



Hot on the heels of Atari's hugely popular maze-based dungeon crawler *Gauntlet* came another similar arcade game in Sega's *Alien Syndrome,* which many people at the time described as *Gauntlet* in space. It's not an unfair comparison in all honesty, but there is a little more to this game that. The levels are smaller and more linear than *Gauntlet*, being much less maze like in nature. Before you can go into the exit you must also rescue all the hostages too. There are also end of level bosses to be defeated in this game as well as weapon upgrades, making the combat a bit more advanced than Atari's game. Like *Gauntlet* though, this can be played by more than one player. In this case two of you can team up to battle the xenomorphic hoards and save the day. Visually the Amstrad CPC port is awful with bland Mode 1 graphics, a tiny play area and slow jerky scrolling. The sound is also pretty pathetic though with droning music and poor effects. *Alien Syndrome* was a pretty

good arcade game but this CPC conversion is horrendous. It's only saving grace is the two-player mode, which slows the game down even more. It's also worth noting that this game has, somewhat surprisingly I might add, been resurrected fairly recently by Sega themselves for modern machines in glorious 3D. I would suggest checking out those versions or the original arcade game on MAME rather than this mess.

**4/10**

**B**

# Badlands
**Domark – 1990**
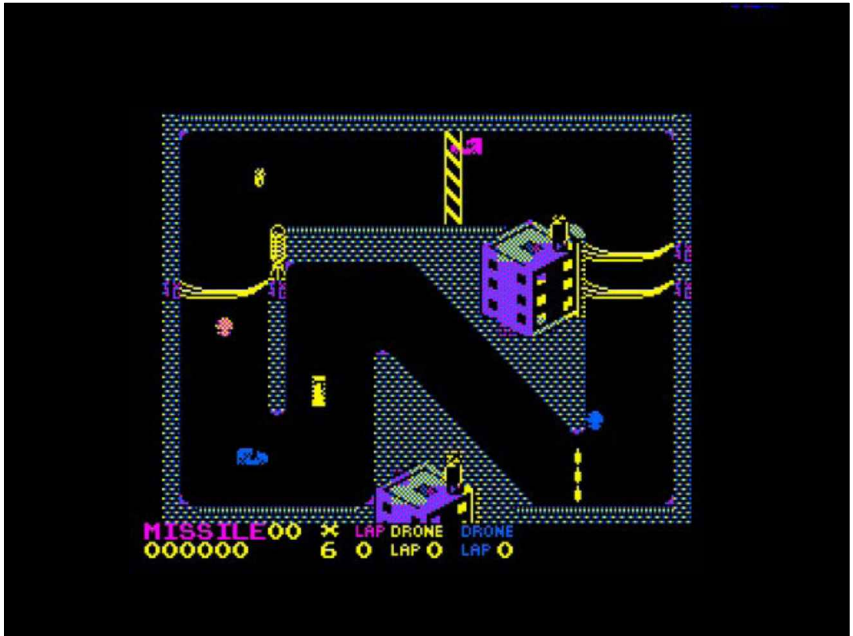


Originally released in its huge multi-player cabinet form (complete with three steering wheels) just a year before, this conversion of the very last game in Atari's classic *Sprint* series was released as part of Domark's popular Tengen label and is a highly enjoyable affair indeed. Unlike its more famous predecessor *Super Sprint* this game only allows two players to compete at once but does add several new gameplay features, which more than make up for it as I will explain. The most notable addition is the weapons that can be used to take out your opponents in the most violent fashion! Other racer's projectiles aren't the only thing to worry about though, there are also obstacles on the track which are just as lethal including boulders, road blocks and huge oil slicks. In a feature more like the previous games you can collect spanners from the track and by winning races. These can be traded in for upgrades after each race is completed. Among the improvements at your

disposal are shields, turbo boosts, special tires and upgraded missiles! Graphically this CPC port is absolutely terrible with awfully re-coloured images from the ZX Spectrum. The title music is very good however. *Badlands* is kind of the forgotten game in the classic *Sprint* series and if you can look past the horrible visuals and slightly slow gameplay then there is some fun to be had here, could have been much better though.

**6/10**

# Bubble Bobble
## Firebird – 1987
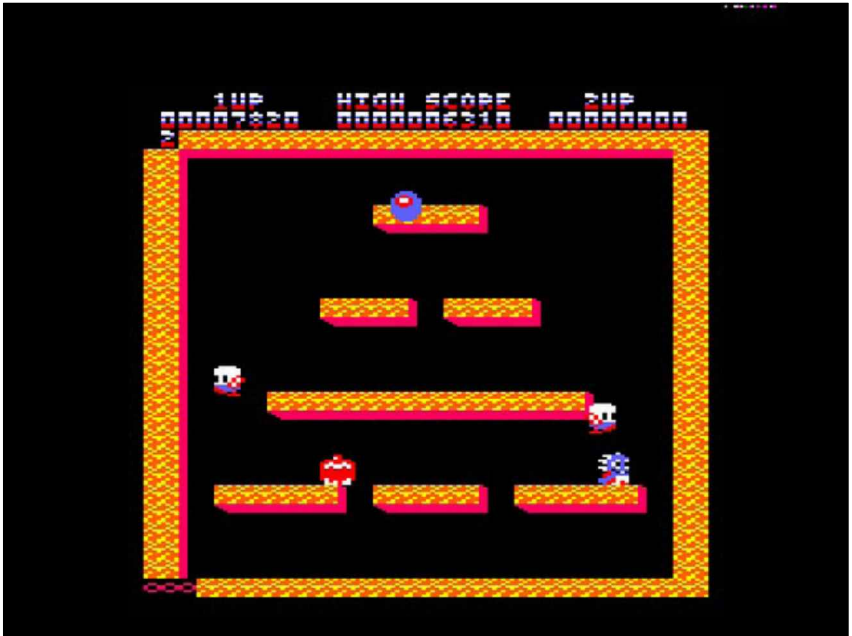


What is there left to say about this iconic game? *Bubble Bobble* is widely regarded as one of the best platform games ever made, and rightly so too. The game was so successful that it saw conversions to a number of different machines and spawned several sequels. I am sure everyone reading this has played *Bubble Bobble* on one platform or another but for those who somehow haven't it's an addictive two-player single screen bubble blowing platformer. Playing the parts of Bub and Bob, two humans who have been magically turned into dinosaurs, you might fight your way through each level in order to return to your original form. The idea is to blow bubbles to trap the bad guys, burst the bubbles to kill them and then collect the fruit and bonus items that they leave behind. You must also look out for the bonus bubbles that contain letters spelling the word "EXTRA". If you get all the letters you activate a warp taking you several levels ahead. Visually the game excellent

with plenty of colour and piles of cuteness, but what happened to the audio? This CPC port is missing the classic music and is almost completely silent! The coup de grace of this game though remains the simultaneous two-player mode - there are very few more enjoyable multiplayer experiences out there. *Bubble Bobble* remains a really fine arcade port for the Amstrad, but the lack of decent audio definitely marks it down a notch.

**9/10**

# Batman: The Movie
## Ocean – 1989



This was actually the third *Batman* game to be produced by Ocean but the very first to be based on a movie, in this case the iconic Michael Keaton/Tim Burton reboot that famously starred Jack Nicholson as The Joker. It also followed on from two highly successful Ocean movie licenses in *Platoon* and *Robocop*, which had previously defined a template for all futures titles to follow. So with *Batman: The Movie* this tried and tested template is followed once again. For those of you that are unaware of just what the Ocean Movie Template is, it basically means that each level in the game plays out like an individual mini-game based on a key scene from the film. So you will find multiple genres and game styles covered within one title. *Batman: The Movie* mixes things up with side scrolling arcade-like levels where you duff up the bad guys and use your Bat Rope to swing from platforms. A driving game, where you steer the Batmobile around Gotham City and swing it

around corners and also a shoot 'em up style level in the Batwing. All in all Ocean made a really good job of using the source material and capturing the look and feel of the original film. Graphically it's really nice and absolutely bursting with colour! The audio here is magnificent with one of the best soundtracks of any Amstrad CPC game out there. Without doubt this is the definitive *Batman* game available for the system.

**9/10**

C

# Chip's Challenge
## U.S. Gold – 1990



Epyx's seminal classic *Chip's Challenge* was one of the original release games for the 16-bit Atari Lynx handheld and went on to become one of the system's most beloved and well-remembered games. Licensed by U.S. Gold for release on the home computers of the time, this title garnered an even more hardcore following with PC owners thanks to deal that saw it bundled with Windows. In the game you play Chip, a bespectacled nerd and must solve nearly 150 different puzzles in order to impress your girlfriend and take her to the school dance, called the eProm (get it?). These puzzles require you to make your way around each top viewed level collecting the chips and making your way to the exit before the time runs out. This involves a lot of logical thinking as you need to work out the best way to do this. You also need to collect things like keys and cleats (to walk on ice) in order to help you with your task. It is very easy to get stuck and while the early levels are pretty easy you will

soon find yourself repeating levels over and over again in order to learn them. Thankfully each level also has a password, so you can return where you left off. The graphics and sound stay remarkably close to the Lynx original with bags of colour and some really nice tunes. If you have plenty of patience, are a logical thinker and love puzzles then *Chip's Challenge* will be right up your street.

**8/10**

# Chuckie Egg
**A 'n' F Software – 1985**



When it comes to 8-bit platformers for the home computers there are few title more famous than the seminal *Chuckie Egg*, probably only *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy* are higher regarded. My own memories of this game mostly come from playing it on the BBC Micros at school when I should have been doing work in computer studies! For those of you who have never played this game before it is a simple single-screen platformer where you are trying to collect all the eggs from a hen house within a strict time limit. You do this by going up and down ladders, jumping across platforms and avoiding the angry chickens. This violent poultry will also chase you around the screen, but will soon get distracted by piles of feed dotted around each level. You can also pick up this feed yourself for bonus points if you want to rile them up even more. Eating these piles of seed will also pause the timer for short while, giving you longer to complete the level. There are eight standard levels,

but they are repeated with a higher difficulty a total of five times. Graphically *Chuckie Egg* is pretty bland and simplistic, albeit colourful, much like the other versions really. The sound is also distinctly average with just a few mediocre effects present! None of this really matters though because *Chuckie Egg* has a certain charm to it that so many similar games just don't have and that alone makes it worth owning.

**7/10**

# Commando
**Elite – 1989**



In *Commando* the player takes control of a soldier named Super Joe, who was taken hostage in a jungle and has to fight his way out single handily. You must fend off a massive assault of enemy soldiers using a sub-machine gun (which has unlimited ammunition) on your way to an end of level enemy base. You also get a limited supply of hand grenades, which must be used very wisely. While Joe can fire his gun in any of the eight directions that he faces, his grenades can only be thrown vertically. Unlike his bullets, grenades can be thrown to clear obstacles, and explosions from well-placed grenades can kill several enemies at once! At the end of each level the screen stops scrolling and you must defeat a stream of enemies before destroying the enemy fortress. Along the way you can free prisoners of war as the enemy transports them across the screen but be careful not to shoot the actual person held captive! This Amstrad CPC port of *Commando* really doesn't

get talked about enough and in my opinion it's much better than the often raved about C64 version. For starters, this version has all eight levels, lovely colourful visuals and a nice rendition of the music (although not quite as great the C64). The only real issues with this version are the jerky scrolling, which you can live with, and the high difficulty level. Fans of the original coin-op should definitely seek this one out.

**8/10**

D

# Dragon Ninja
**Imagine – 1988**



I don't think there is much doubt that *Bad Dudes Vs. Dragon Ninja* (to use the full name) has one of the greatest titles of any video game in history! In case you didn't already know it's a scrolling beat 'em up that first appeared in arcades back in 1988 to great success. It is presented on a single plain but with two distinct parts of the screen that you can jump between, a bit like Sega's classic *Shinobi* or Namco's *Rolling Thunder*. In the game you simply make your way along each stage defeating the hordes of bad guys until you get to an end of level boss – then rinse and repeat until you reach the end where you must save President Ronnie. You have a limited range of kicks and punches and can also jump to move between the two parts of the playfield and dodge enemy attacks. As well as your fairly limited range of attacks there is also the odd weapon that can be picked up too such as nunchukas and knives. You have an energy bar that depletes as you are hit but you can collect cans

of Coca Cola to top this up. This version of the game also features a time limit, so you can't stick around too long beating down bad guys. One interesting fact about *Dragon Ninja* is that one of the many bosses is in fact Karnov, from the hit Data East coin-op of the same name. This CPC port has lovely graphics, decent sound and more than enough gameplay to keep you playing in the long term.

**8/10**

# Deathchase
## The Executioner – 2008



In 1983 Mervyn Estcourt programmed the legendary *Deathchase* for the humble 16k base model of the Sinclair Spectrum and a legend was born. Having just seen *Return of the Jedi* in the cinema, he was inspired by the forest speeder chase sequence and decided to create a game based on it. Part of Micromega's slightly misleading "3D Action" range, it quickly garnered praise from the press and consumers alike for its advanced arcade-style gameplay. It really stood the test of time too as in 1992 it was awarded the prestigious title of the best Spectrum game ever by the highly regarded Your Sinclair magazine. The premise of the game is simple, to speed through the forest on your bike taking out the rival bikers before moving on to the next stage. These stages alternate between day and night and there are eight in total. As the game goes on, the density of the trees increases, making it much harder to avoid them. As well as the enemy bikes, tanks and helicopters will also appear on

the horizon which can be shot for bonus points. Although your gun shoots straight forward, by moving the bike left or right your bullets will also move in that direction, adding a new tactic to the game. This homebrew CPC version of *Deathchase* stays pretty close to the Speccy original. It has lovely colourful visuals, decent sound and really compulsive gameplay that will keep you coming back for more.

**8/10**

# Defender of the Crown
## Ubisoft – 1989
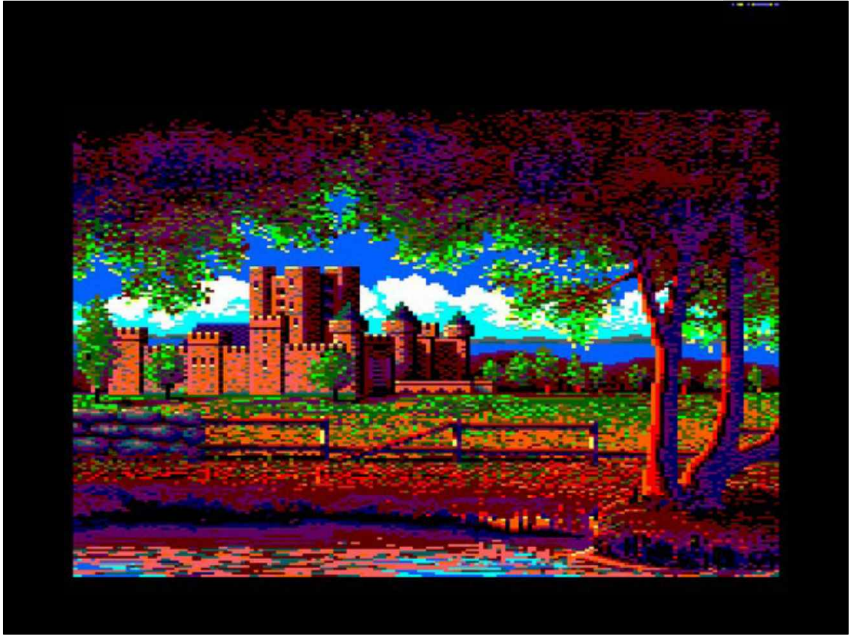


Those people who know their history of the 16-bit computer war often quote *Defender of the Crown* as being the first real game changer in the great rivalry and the one that set Commodore's Amiga apart from the competition thanks to some stunning, almost photo realistic, graphics and incredible sound. So with that in mind it's pretty incredible to learn that it was later ported to the Amstrad CPC. For those who have never played this title, it's a strategy war game with arcade elements woven around a fairly historically accurate story. You take the role of a Saxon knight leading an army against the invading Norman forces from across the sea. Your sole objective is to capture all the counties of both England and Wales then unite them all as king. You have to build armies, gather weapons and collect gold by sacking castles. The arcade elements revolve around many of these actions in a series of mini-games. For example, when you sack an opponent's castle

you must lead three soldiers into it and battle the opposing troops to steal the gold. While this Amstrad port obviously has to make a few concessions when it comes to the graphics and sound, although both are excellent, it manages to retain pretty much all of the gameplay. My only issue is that it loses quite a bit of the wow factor when put into 8-bits. It's still a pretty enjoyable game, just quite slow paced and a little limited too.

**7/10**

E

# Exolon
## Hewson – 1987



Originally designed by the hugely talented Raffaele Cecco for the ZX Spectrum, this Amstrad CPC version was ported by the man himself and remains every bit as good as the original. In fact it might even be better, it certainly looks a lot prettier anyway! For those that perhaps don't know, *Exolon* is a flick screen run 'n gun style game where you make your way through each level despatching the alien forces using your laser gun and rocket propelled grenades. You'll need to switch between these two types of weapon constantly in order to despatch the foes efficiently. The enemies themselves take on a wide variety of forms from pretty standard gun totting aliens and flying bird type creatures to huge gun turrets and lethal land mines! You have to constantly adapt to the circumstances around you here, which really keeps you on your toes. Around half way through each level there is a pod that the player can use to upgrade their exoskeleton until the end of the

current level. This equips you with not only better armour but also improved firepower too. However, if you choose to complete the level without getting this power-up then you are rewarded with a massive score bonus. There's no doubting that *Exolon* is one of the best games of its type on the Amstrad CPC. The excellent graphics certainly set the tone but it's the compulsive gameplay that will keep you coming back for more.

**9/10**

# Elektra Glide
## English Software – 1986



Regarded by many as one of the most technically impressive games from the earlier years of the CPC, *Elektra Glide* is a futuristic motorcycle driving game where the player chooses to drive in one of three countries, England, Australia or America. This isn't your conventional racer though, as there aren't actually any other drivers on the road! Instead there are many strange obstacles such as bouncing globes, spinning prisms and even airplanes that drop tall screens in your path. You are racing against the clock, so you must swerve around these obstacles and not crash. Hitting them will force you to stop dead and will lose you some valuable time. Another unusual feature of the game, especially for the time, is the way you can adjust how it handles. The most impressive feature of *Elektra Glide* though will always be its graphics. They really are a sight to behold and give an amazing impression of 3D with a huge array of different colours. There is also a really kick-ass soundtrack

too, which only makes the game even more impressive. In reality, it's sad to say that the gameplay in *Elektra Glide* actually becomes quite tedious after a while, but you will probably want to own it for the graphics and sound alone. A shame they never found a way to push the engine further and make something a bit more interesting with it, because there sure is a great deal of potential in here.

**7/10**

# Elevator Action
## Quicksilva – 1987



In case you are not familiar, *Elevator Action* is a conversion the classic 1983 arcade game by Taito. The game sees you playing the part of a James Bond-esque secret agent using a series of elevators and staircases to move around the different floors of a large building avoiding the enemy spies and collecting the secret documents. Although there are hundreds of doors, the game helps you out by colouring the ones you need to investigate in red. Each floor of the apartment block has also been numbered, but this actually serves very little purpose. The enemy agents can also be taken out thanks to your handy handgun, but watch out for the flying bullets that come back! Once you have searched all the floors and recovered everything you need, you must go right back down to the basement in order to jump in your high powered sports car and escape. Then you move onto the next location, which is pretty much the same, only bigger and harder. Graphically this Amstrad CPC port is

pretty close to the looks of the original with its bright and bold colours. The sound is also really good with a superb tune by David Whittaker playing throughout. If you were a fan of the original arcade game then this port of *Elevator Action* will certainly fulfil your fix. Quicksilva did do a great job here and it's very surprising that you don't here this Amstrad coin-op conversion talked about more often.

**8/10**

F

# Fast Food
## Codemasters – 1989



Given how successful the *Dizzy* games were for Codemasters and creators The Oliver Twins it was only a matter of time before the character would start to appear in other games. This happened for the very first time with release of *Fast Food* for the Amstrad CPC, the very first official *Dizzy* spin-off. I suppose you could compare game with *Pac-Man*, it certainly shares a few similarities anyway. First of all it's set in a single-screen maze and secondly the object of the game is to eat everything on the screen whilst avoiding the monsters. What makes *Fast Food* different to Namco's famous arcade game is that it's a lot more sedate, you don't need to rush around the screen, and in fact you can't really do that anyway as our egg-shaped friend seems to be stuck in first gear. Also there are just a few items of food that need to be eaten per level and some of these move around the maze too, making it harder to catch. The monsters here aren't particularly intelligent and just

tend to get in the way more than anything else. Rather than having power pills that allow you to eat the enemies, in this game you have invincibility power-ups instead that last for a short amount of time and let you just walk through them. Graphically *Fast Food* is very lovely indeed and it has a great soundtrack too. There's no doubting that this is an enjoyable game, it's just one that's rather slow paced and a bit too easy.

**7/10**

# Fighting Soccer
**Activision – 1989**



Here we have yet another coin-op converted to the Amstrad CPC, but this time we have an arcade sports game, which certainly something you don't see a lot of. *Fighting Soccer* also takes a bit of a departure from SNK's other pre-Neo Geo coin-ops by not being a shoot 'em up! What we actually have here is a fighting game mixed with a sports game, which was released around the start of when these types of game became all the rage with lots of similar creations such as *Speedball 2, Brutal Sports Football, Arch Rivals* and *Pigskin 621 A.D.* proving to be very popular. Unfortunately like many of the less well-known sports and fighting hybrids (that vastly outweighed the above games) it's also not very good either. In actual fact it's a bit of a mess as the fighting element plays an incredibly minor part of the game. The screen seems crowded, the action seems to jump around all over the place and you spend more time trying to just win the ball than actually scoring

goals. What's worse that is that once you get past the lovely intro sequence you are presented with a poorly optimised ZX Spectrum port! Aside from that aforementioned intro, the only good thing about *Fighting Soccer* is the excellent in-game music. The Mode 1 graphics look incredibly ugly, the scrolling is jerky beyond belief and the controls are extremely unresponsive at times. A truly awful port of an already very average coin-op.

**3/10**

# Final Fight
## U.S. Gold – 1991



*Final Fight* is without doubt one of Capcom's biggest hits from their heyday in the arcades. Originally designed as a sequel to the *Street Fighter* games, it soon became a game in its own right and went on to spawn several sequels of its own too. Final Fight took the scrolling beat 'em up genre, made popular by *Double Dragon* just before it, to a new level with its huge sprites, detailed backgrounds and end of level bosses. Being such a technically impressive game made it hard to port to the home systems and many of them faired very badly, but this Amstrad CPC conversion is probably a lot better than you'd expect. All the levels are here, it has all the moves and the same huge sprites we know and love. But on the downside the scrolling is painful, you never get more than a few enemies on screen at once and it gets extremely slow as soon as the action starts. It does a fairly good job of replicating the controls with just one button, as good as you could expect anyway. Apart from the

scrolling the graphics are actually very impressive and it's great to see the arcade intro in all its glory too. The game has some excellent title music but in game the sound effects are pretty sparse sadly and well, a bit crap. *Final Fight* is certainly an impressive conversion to the CPC that definitely looks like the arcade game but one that's just a bit too ambitious as the chugging gameplay demonstrates.

**7/10**

**G**

# Gauntlet
## U.S. Gold – 1985



This is a conversion of Atari's outstanding 1985 arcade game of the same name. Programmed by the legendary Ed Logg, *Gauntlet* is still regarded as one of the best multi-player arcade games ever made. This Amstrad CPC version has to make a few compromises, the multi-player option has been pared down to two people and the iconic speech is sadly missing but otherwise it does pretty good job. For those that don't know, in *Gauntlet* you choose one of four characters: Thyra the Valkyrie, Thor the Warrior, Merlin the Wizard or Questor the Elf. They all have different abilities in areas such as speed, armour and attack. You must then battle through the maze like dungeons killing the ghosts, demons, lobbers, grunts and sorcerers among other enemies. Then make your way to the exit and onto the next stage. Along the way you must collect keys to open doors, health and magic potions. The latter of which is the only thing that can defeat Death, the grim reaper himself.

Graphically the CPC version is mostly very good, it has to make obvious sacrifices to detail but you can certainly tell it's the same game. *Gauntlet* does rather well in the sound department with a nice rendition of the music and some good effects. *Gauntlet* is fun on your own but comes into a world of its own with another player and is definitely one of the best two-player games released for the good old Amstrad.

**9/10**

# G-LOC R360
## U.S. Gold – 1992



*G-LOC* was the sequel to *After Burner* that was made very famous by its amazing rotating cabinet that totally immersed you in the action and spun you round 360 degrees in every direction. To highlight this publishers U.S. Gold chose to use R360 as part of the title on the box, which was not only very pointless outside of the arcade, but also very misleading! They should have stuck with the arcade game's "*Air Battle*" moniker. It's no secret that these types of game usually suffer outside of the arcades and this game is no exception, in fact I would say it suffers more than most. *G-LOC's* bland gameplay really stands out even more than ever as all you do is fly along and take out a generic stream of air targets followed by a bunch of ground targets, rinse and repeat. It's not at all challenging, in fact the hardest part of the game is landing the plane. In all honesty they shouldn't have even attempted a game this on the Amstrad at all, especially after seeing how *After Burner*

turned out. The graphics are very boring with very little detail and feel really empty. The feeling of 3D is almost non-existent too due to the slow speed. There's some really nice music on the title screen but the in game sound effects are pretty poor. If there was an award for most pointless coin-op conversion on the Amstrad then *G-LOC* would be right up there with the likes of *Pit-Fighter*.

**4/10**

# Grand Prix Simulator
**Codemasters – 1987**



Many people call Codemasters' *BMX Simulator* a budget version of *Super Sprint*, but perhaps many of those people don't realise they actually did a full on clone in *Grand Prix Simulator*. The only real difference between the Atari arcade game and this game is that this only has two cars on the track as opposed to four, but otherwise you would struggle to pick out the differences! You can play against the computer here or take on another player, with the latter being a bit more fun of course. The classic quote-laden Codemasters packaging proudly boasts that this game is officially endorsed by none other than Johnny Dumfries (yeah me neither!) and that it has "Digitised Voice Synthesis", now this I was impressed with! And if this excellent announcing wasn't enough the game also features some utterly sublime music by the chip tune genius that is David Whittaker. But *Grand Prix Sim.* doesn't just impress in the sound department, the graphics are also top notch

for a budget game too. The cars in the status panel look great and the rest of the visuals are super colourful and very well designed. Well, apart from those strange looking square cars anyway! The Amstrad CPC might already have plenty of good top down racing games including titles such as *Super Sprint, Super Off-Road* and *Super Cars* but *Grand Prix Simulator* is another decent little game to add to that selection.

**7/10**

**H**

# Hard Drivin'
## Domark – 1989



Atari Games classic 1989 coin guzzler *Hard Drivin'* is one of those arcade games from back in the day that nobody thought was possible on a home system. It wowed arcade audiences with its solid 3D polygon graphics, realistic controls and use of action replays – all things that later became common in driving games. This was all housed in a big sit-down cabinet that looked just like a car with wheels and everything. This CPC version is surprisingly accurate, managing to replicate almost everything except for the steering wheel and car shaped cabinet. You have the speed track and the harder but more impressive stunt track with its loop the loop and bridge jump, you have the polygon graphics, albeit in monochrome, and even a fairly decent sense of speed! The controls make take some getting used to for many but once you master them you will get a lot of fun out of the game and finally get to that final race against the legendary Photon Phantom! Domark did a

brave job of trying to convert this game to all the home computers and this Amstrad CPC port very nearly pulls it off too, if only the frame rate was a little better it would stay remarkably close. If you are a fan of the original arcade game then you will probably want to give *Hard Drivin'* a closer look but others might find it a bit too clunky and awkward compared to more accessible racing games like *Crazy Cars* and *Lotus Esprit*.

**6/10**

# H.E.R.O.
## Flynn – 2005



*H.E.R.O.* is an acronym for Helicopter Emergency Rescue Operation, it is also one of the most original games that prolific Atari third party stalwarts Activision ever released. Released for the Atari 2600 VCS in 1984 during the North American video game crash, this game was criminally over looked at the time because of it. You play the game as R Hero (groan!) who is on a mission to save some trapped miners. Equipped with his helicopter pack (basically a jetpack), a gun and limited dynamite he heads on down through the maze like caverns. You must watch out for bats, spiders and other enemies as you go and will need to blow away walls to progress, but make sure you choose the right route or you will get trapped and have to go back! To make things even harder the lights have blown in some caverns and you will need all your senses about you to progress through these. The graphics in this game are rather nice, they are not only high res but wonderfully

coloured too. The audio isn't special but it does the job here well enough I suppose. The gameplay is the real winner though. It is just so easy to pick-up and play but requires some real skill if you actually want to get far into the game. I absolutely loved the original *H.E.R.O.* on the Atari 2600 and this CPC conversion is just as enjoyable, even benefiting from some improved features, so don't let this one slip under the radar!

**9/10**

# Hardball!
**Accolade – 1986**



When it was originally released for the C64 in 1985 Accolade's *Hardball!* was considered the most realistic baseball game on the market and received a string of awards as it shot to the top of the charts. In fact the game was so successful that it's actually ranked as the best selling Commodore 64 game of all-time selling over 250,000 copies. Unsurprisingly the game went on to receive numerous ports as well as four sequels, but none of these came out for the CPC sadly. *Hardball!* was also one of the very first baseball video games to put the player's perspective focused on the pitcher's mound, just like you would have seen on TV at the time. There are also some managerial options available too, making it one of the first sports titles to provide a full simulation with strategy elements and proper gameplay. Each player in the game has their own statistics that affect their performance and you must pick your own rosters. Despite all its many achievements and gameplay

firsts, *Hardball!* falls into a rather unfortunate gap these days. If you want a true simulation or in-depth management then other games are far more advanced. On the flip side, if you want a true arcade experience then again there are also better options out there. There's no doubting that *Hardball!* gets lots of things right but not quite enough to make this Amstrad CPC version the classic that owners of rival 8-bits thought it was.

**6/10**

I

# Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade
## U.S. Gold – 1989



This game is actually subtitled "*The Action Game*", and this is because U.S. Gold and Lucasfilm also released a graphic adventure as an alternative for computer owners. Your task is here is to take control of Harrison Ford's on screen action hero in order to find the legendary Holy Grail. Before this can be done you must find the Cross of Coronado, a shield and a diary that contains clues to find the grail. This makes for a four level arcade style adventure that combines climbing, exploration and puzzles in equal measure with each stage loosely following a section of the blockbuster movie. Indy is armed with his trusty whip to fight off foes but can also get involved in hand-to-hand combat too. The first level takes place in caves underneath Colorado, this is followed by; a moving circus train strewn with traps, a Zeppelin which is full of guards and ladders and then on to the final stage set in Castle Grunwald in Austria. This game was very successful on every system it was

released for and it even came out for stuff like the MSX. I can only assume this is because of the license attached to it because the actual game isn't very good. The monochrome graphics are dull, the sound is almost non-existent. The gameplay is just dull and also very annoying at times. Overall it's nothing more than a frustrating look and find platform adventure with very little variation and some very unfair deaths.

**4/10**

# Impossible Mission II
## U.S. Gold – 1988



The first *Impossible Mission* was a huge success for Epyx and their publishing partners in Europe U.S. Gold, so it's hardly a surprise to see that they followed it up with a sequel that offers more of the same. One again you're on a covert operation in an enemy fortress searching the rooms for items, hacking computers, disabling the security systems and leaping across dangerous ledges. As before these rooms are all linked by a central corridor and a lift that takes you between the various floors. Different parts of the fortress are locked and cannot be entered until you've discovered the relevant passwords. There are two main differences between *Impossible Mission I* and *II*, the first comes in the form of the new enemy types. The security droids have been massively upgraded and now have all sorts of new weapons and tactics with which to stop you. But thankfully for us, there are also new deterrents too such as bombs to blow safes as well as mines to destroy floors and

platforms. They didn't make the game any easier to play though and so it will still take some real skill if you are to complete this game within the time limit and make it out alive! Graphically it's almost identical to the first game with colourful backgrounds and a really well animated character sprite. The audio is pretty bang average though. *Impossible Mission II* is a must have title for arcade adventure aficionados!

**8/10**

# Impact!
## Audiogenic – 1988



Let's face it, there are absolutely tons of *Breakout* and *Arkanoid* clones out there for the CPC, but what I loved most about *Impact* is that it doesn't try to hide it at all! In fact the plot is some silly story about getting trapped in a classic arcade game and how you have to try and escape by completing it! Aside from the fairly clever back story there is nothing much else that stands out about this game, that's not to say that *Impact* is a bad title, far from it, it's just an extremely generic and unoriginal one! If you have ever played *Arkanoid* on the CPC (or any other system for that matter) you'll know exactly what to expect here as this is almost an exact carbon copy. You have a different formation of colourful bricks on each level to destroy, you have a selection of nine different power-ups to collect and some annoying enemies that float around the screen generally getting in the way and changing the flight of your ball. The aforementioned power-ups include all the usual

upgrades you would expect such as catch ball, lasers, large bat and multi-ball. As the levels go on the formations of bricks get more complex and you are also introduced to new bricks that are either totally indestructible or take numerous hits to destroy. Visually it's functional if unspectacular and the same can be said of the audio too. Thankfully, the gameplay in *Impact* more than holds up making it well worth checking out.

**7/10**

**J**

# Joe Blade II
## Players – 1988



The first *Joe Blade* was an enormous success for Players, the budget label of Incentive Software, so it was inevitable a sequel would follow, which would turn out to be equally successful. Unlike the first game where you had a gun you must now flying kick the baddies instead, which makes killing them a lot more difficult. It also seems that Joe himself is now some kind of vigilante, rather than a soldier, who must clean up the streets of London by taking out the gangs of thugs that lurk there. His prime objective seems to be searching for drug stashes that are hidden in bins, although you are actually supposed to recover keys and rescue trapped citizens. If the bombs that you had to defuse in the first game were not annoying enough, they are back in this game too. Except now you are given just ONE minute to get the code, again more luck than judgement and bloody annoying too! Oh, and did I mention the whole game must be completed within a time limit too? Thankfully

extra time can be picked up when you find it. The graphics are fairly good here, although they are just taken from the Spectrum but with re-coloured sprites. The sound effects are decent enough but it's shame that there isn't any music of any kind. Overall *Joe Blade II* is a pretty good sequel that features very familiar gameplay, well for those who played the original anyway, and will put up a very good challenge.

**7/10**

# Jack The Nipper
## Gremlin – 1986



In Gremlin Graphics hugely popular baby-themed arcade adventure *Jack The Nipper* you, as you might have guessed, take the role of the titular Jack. The nipper in question is a very naughty young child who wants to break the world record for naughtiness. This is recorded the "naughty-o-meter" at the bottom of the screen along with your lives, inventory and nappy rash, which works like a health bar. He needs to carry out various wicked pranks on the unsuspecting inhabitants of his town, but if he comes into contact by angry adults he will be spanked. With each spanking his "nappy rash" meter increases until Jack ends up losing one of his five lives. Contact with the various monsters and ghosts that inhabit the town will also add to your nappy rash too. The various items that you come across on your travels can be picked up and then used to create mischief, a big part of the fun of this game is discovering what pranks can be caused and how you perform them. Graphically

*Jack The Nipper* is pretty good and makes good use of the colour-limited Mode 1, the sprites in particular really pop out from the backdrops. There are some reasonable sound effects as well as some lovely music from the legendary Ben Daglish. I have never found *Jack The Nipper* to be the classic many people out there regard it as, but I still had plenty of fun playing it nonetheless and I'm sure that you will too.

**7/10**

# Jetpac
## 40 Crisis – 2014
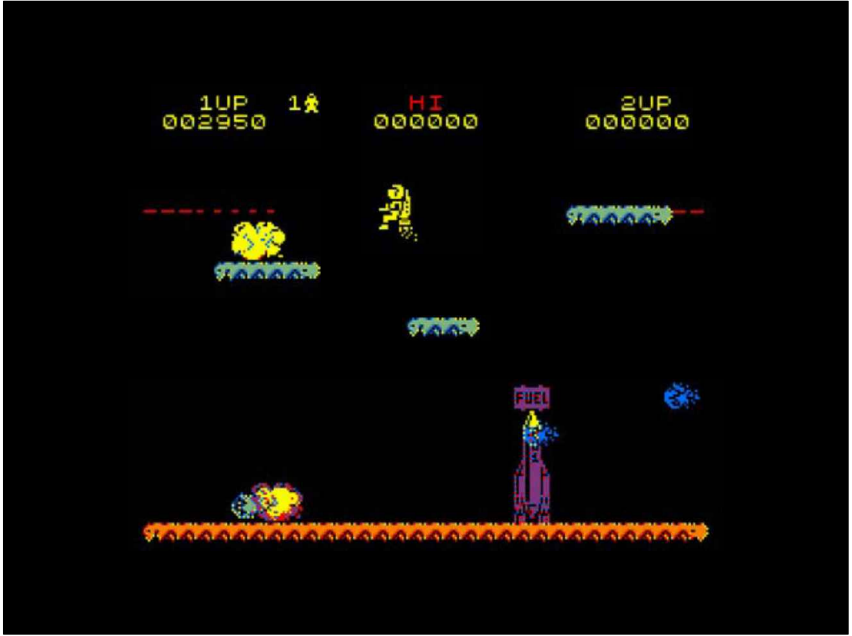


Everyone out there who has owned a Sinclair Spectrum, or even knew somebody who had one, will no doubt be aware of Ultimate Play The Game's brilliant *Jetpac*. It was one of the first original arcade style games to be released for the machine, was later ported to many other machines and spawned several sequels too, but somehow never came out for the Amstrad CPC. Thankfully this mistake was corrected in 2014 with the release of this version, which is actually just the Spectrum original being emulated by the Amstrad CPC! For those who have somehow never played *Jetpac*, you control a little space man who can fly around the screen and shoot enemies with his laser gun. The object of the game is to escape each level by firstly grabbing the parts of your ship, as they fall from the top of the screen, and then collecting the fuel needed to help you take off. Various platforms around the screen can be used to take a little rest if you need it! This is a very simple

concept but the fast action-orientated gameplay and colourful graphics made the game a huge hit. In fact it would probably come as a surprise to anyone no so familiar with the game that didn't originate from the arcade. I like the clever way that *Jetpac* has been adapted to run on the CPC, thus avoiding the wrath of Microsoft and Rare's lawyers, and given you are actually playing the original version it's also just as brilliant!

**9/10**

**K**

# Knight Tyme
**Mastertronic – 1986**



*Knight Tyme* is the third game in David Jones seminal *Magic Knight* series that started with *Finders Keepers*, continued with *Spellbound* and ended with *Stormbringer*. It also happens to be my favourite game in the franchise and the one that I spent by far the most time with back in the day. What really sets *Knight Tyme* apart from the other three games is that it's set in space in some kind of *Star Trek* parody! Another interesting feature of this entry is that you are not alone anymore, you have a little helper who will appear from time to time during the game to help you. Known as Klink, this little droid will certainly be familiar to all the *Star Wars* fans out there! Like the previous game, *Knight Tyme* also uses the innovative pop-up menu system for managing your inventory, interacting with objects and speaking with other characters in the game. I love this system and found it far more intuitive than the processes used in similar arcade adventures. It's pretty amazing to

think that this game only cost £2.99 back in the day, because it's far better than many of the full price releases we saw at the time which cost over three times as much! The graphics are pretty simple but ooze personality while the soundtrack by David Whittaker is absolutely sublime. If you like your arcade adventures then you should already own the *Magic Knight* games, if you don't then it's time to fix that!

**9/10**

# Karateka
## Microids – 1990



Long before Jordan Mechner became famous for *Prince of Persia* he perfected his incredible animation techniques with seminal fighting game *Karateka*. Even to this day the character animation here still looks amazing and it's easy to see why it was so highly regarded at the time. In the game you play as the titular Karateka and you have been sent on a mission to rescue a princess who has been captured by the evil Akuma and is being held captive in his castle on a remote island. Using only your fists and feet you must make your way to the fortress, defeat all his guards and then make your way to the central chamber for a fight against Akuma himself. His highly trained guards aren't the only thing you have to worry about though as he also sends his eagle out to attack you too, although this can be taken down with one well times punch or kick. And timing is very much the key to this game, the fights can be very long and drawn out as you play a game of cat and mouse

with your opponent trying not to get too close so you get hit but also trying to belt them yourself. And this is one of the main issues with *Karateka*, you will have to have lots and lots of patience and absolutely perfect your timing to get anywhere in this game. Personally I just don't have the commitment for that! Still, it's easy to see why the game impressed so much back in the day and is definitely very accomplished.

**6/10**

# Killapede
**Players – 1986**



Whilst *Killapede* is nothing more than a pretty bog-standard clone of the classic Atari arcade game *Centipede*, it is notable for one particular thing – it was the very first Amstrad CPC game by the legendary creators of *Dizzy* The Oliver Twins. When the game first starts up it also surprises you with some rather loud and somewhat crackly speech, a bit of a novelty at the time. The actual gameplay offers no such surprises though sadly. If you have somehow never played a version of *Centipede* I better explain how it works. It's a single screen shooter where you have a can of bug spray at the bottom that has full horizontal movement and limited vertical adjustments. The screen is full of mushrooms that can be shot and the centipede himself starts at the top and then moves his way down, but if he hits a mushroom it sends him straight down a level. If he hits several mushrooms in a row his descent can be very rapid and this also causes his movement to speed up

too. The centipede is made up of sections, so you have to shoot all of them to kill him and they can move independently once split up. If he reaches the bottom before you destroy him then he starts to regenerate. There are also other garden creatures like spiders, flies and even scorpions that are trying to kill you. It's not the best *Centipede* clone you'll play and not the worst, but it offers a bit of short term enjoyment.

**7/10**

**L**

# Last Duel
## U.S. Gold – 1989



Subtitled *Inter Planet War 2012* and originally released in arcades in 1988, *Last Duel* is easily one of the more obscure games that U.S. Gold licensed from Capcom for release on the home computers. Not many people actually realise that Last Duel is also the sequel to the criminally under rated *L.E.D. Storm* (which U.S. Gold also ported). There are quite a few differences between the games though, despite them looking incredibly similar from static screenshots. The most major change is that your car can now shoot, so you are able to blast the other cars off the track. The second big change is that rather than just watch the blue car race alongside you, like it does in *L.E.D. Storm*, a second player can now join the game and play with you! Instead of end of level checkpoints there are now end of level bosses you must destroy to progress and you no longer have to worry about topping up your fuel. The power-ups in *Last Duel* now improve your weapons as well as your car to fit in with

the other changes to the game. While there is essentially nothing wrong with *Last Duel*, it just lacks the energy of its predecessor. It never seems as fast or exciting and the dull, if well-drawn, four-colour graphics, and slightly repetitive sound effects to nothing to liven it up. If you were a fan of the original arcade game then you'll probably love it but otherwise it's just pretty standard fare all round.

**7/10**

# Los Angeles SWAT
## Mastertronic – 1986
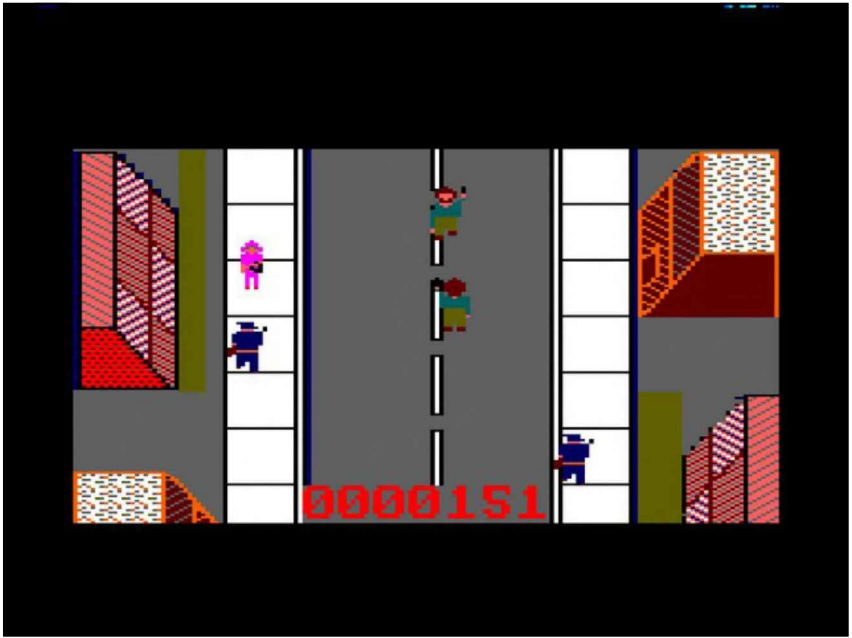


This is yet another bit of budget fare from Mastertronic that I remember purchasing from my local newsagent as a kid. The game basically plays like Capcom's classic coin-op *Commando* but on the streets of Los Angeles! You have three little guys who are part of the local Special Weapons and Tactics team (SWAT). They walk up the street in unison with you controlling the middle one to start with. You are armed with a machine gun and have to shoot all the grenade throwing thugs that are coming towards you. As well as avoiding their projectiles you also have to be careful they don't get up close or they will beat you to death with their stick! Occasionally you get obstacles in the way that you need to move around like over turned cars. There are also snipers hiding on the rooftops of nearby buildings too so you need to keep moving all the time. If your cop gets killed then he is replaced by one of the other two who walk along side you until they are all dead. At the end of each

level you get another familiar situation taken from *Commando*. A hostage is taken across the screen and you have to try and shoot the capturer without harming the innocent civilian. *L.A. SWAT* is a nice idea that is very badly executed. The two biggest issues are the painfully slow speed and the awful collision detection, which make this game nigh-on unplayable at times. Avoid this game like the plague!

**3/10**

# Las Vegas Casino
## Zeppelin Games – 1988



Casino games always come across as being a bit pointless, you can't win any actual money or take the risk of losing any (I suppose this is a good thing!). There are a few good ones out there (*Lynx Casino* springs to mind) but they are few and far between. The key is that they need to be fun and addictive enough to keep you playing despite the lack of real winnings. Sadly Zeppelin's *Las Vegas Casino* doesn't hit the mark. I think this is down to the choice of mini-games included more than anything because out of the four you can play only blackjack holds any real long term appeal. The other games included are craps, baccarat and roulette – pure games of chance that become tedious very quickly. There are certain aspects of *Las Vegas Casino* that are good though, the game is certainly nicely presented, especially the card games, and it stays authentic to the real thing in the way it plays. It just isn't something you can ever get excited about. It also annoyed me to learn that like their

rival budget label Mastertronic, Zeppelin also chose to release the fruit machine element of the casino as a separate game, when it certainly should have been included here. I was also a bit miffed at the lack of music in the game too, there are just some very paltry sound effects, as it no doubt would have livened things up. All in all this is definitely not a game deserving of your cash.

**4/10**

M

# Manic Miner
## Software Projects – 1984



Matthew Smith's seminal *Manic Miner* is often quoted as the game that truly kick started the British games industry and became a huge overnight success. It's sequel, *Jet Set Willy*, became even more popular and even more famous but *Manic Miner* still remains almost as iconic as the computer it first appeared on – the Sinclair ZX Spectrum. A single screen platformer where you must try to collect all the objects whilst avoiding the enemies, not many people realise the game was based on Big 5's Atari 8-bit classic *Miner 2049'er*. After playing the game, Matthew Smith was very keen to come up with a version of his own and that became *Manic Miner*. There are a number of differences, such as not needing to colour all the platforms and having limited air (which acts like time), but the influences are clear to see. With a grand total of twenty caverns it was also much bigger than Bill Hogue's game and undoubtedly one of the biggest and most challenging platformers of its time. At

the time *Manic Miner* was also very notable for featuring in game music, a rendition of the well known orchestral piece *In the Hall of the Mountain King* no less, and this sounds much better on the CPC than it did on the ZX! The graphics aren't quite as colourful as the original, as it uses Mode 1, but it still looks rather good. Overall *Manic Miner* is a classic platformer even if it is a bit hard for its own good, well for me anyway!

**8/10**

# Moon Buggy
## Anirog Software – 1985



If the name didn't already give it away, Anirog's *Moon Buggy* is nothing more than a shameless rip-off of the classic Williams arcade game *Moon Patrol*. At first looks this seems like a pretty good clone too as it features colourful graphics that includes the ground-breaking (for the time) parallax scrolling. But then once you start playing you find that the game is painfully slow, I am guessing this was the trade off from achieving that smooth parallax. It's still perfectly playable but the lack of speed kills off the frantic urgency that the original coin-op had. This is due to the fact that *Moon Patrol* is a game that combines both a driving game and a shoot 'em up. As well as having to steer your buggy along the planet surface jumping over the hazards you also have to shoot down the enemies above and avoid their incoming fire. This is definitely not a game for those who can't multitask! The lack of speed makes avoiding the various hazards so much easier, as you

have more time to see them coming, and it also gives you more space and time to shoot down the enemies too. It's a shame really, because all the elements of *Moon Patrol* are here, but that lack of speed just kills the game dead. Well I say everything is here, but I did notice one important feature that was missing and that's the music. All we get in *Moon Buggy* are some pretty rubbish effects. Not completely horrible, just rather disappointing.

**5/10**

# Mr. Heli
## Firebird – 1987



Irem are perhaps best known for releasing the legendary *R-Type*, but they also produced this rather lovely horizontal shooter too, which was first released in arcades back in 1987. This cartoon-styled affair is fairly unique in that it features levels that scroll in all four directions. It also requires you to direct your weapon fire in order to cover all these different angles too. Many of the stages take place in tight caverns where you must also drop bombs to clear the way forward. In a way the game is almost like an updated version of the classic *Scramble* but with cute visuals and power-ups. In these caverns you'll also find crystals that can be traded in for weaponry via the handy shops. Because of its style *Mr. Heli* is much less about frantic blasting and more about negotiating your route through each level. It's certainly a big departure from the aforementioned *R-Type* and quite different to the multitude of other horizontal shoot 'em ups on the computer too, which

is always good. The original CPC port of *R-Type* was also pretty disappointing, but the same can't be said of Mr. Heli because this port is fantastic. In fact I'd argue that it's up there amongst the very best arcade ports ever produced for the 8-bit micro. The colourful graphics stay remarkably close to the coin-op, the sound effects and music are both excellent and it plays great. I think it's safe to say that *Mr. Heli* is a true CPC essential.

**9/10**

N

# NARC
**Ocean – 1990**



One of the last games to be released under the legendary Williams name after their merger with Bally/Midway, *NARC* first hit the arcades in 1988. Designed by video game pioneer Eugene Jarvis of *Joust, Robotron 2084* and *Defender* fame, it caused a lot of controversy due to its excessive violence and adult subject matter! It also pioneered the use of digitised graphics in games well before the same company went on to develop *Mortal Kombat*. *NARC* is the nickname for a member of the US Narcotics Police, and this will already give you an idea of what the game is about. In it you basically just run around each level blowing the crap out of drug addicts, busting their dealers and collecting all the cash they leave behind. Eventually you will come face to face with the crime lord himself Mr. Big, who really fits his name here! *NARC* is just a pure blast fest that is almost like another of Eugene's games, *Robotron*, but from a horizontal perspective. The Amstrad version

is surprisingly faithful to the original arcade game when it comes to the visuals, they both colourful and well drawn. However, when it comes to the audio and gameplay it's a different story. While the title music is nice there is no in-game sound at all! Yep, it's completely silent and there is no excuse for that. The game also plays far too slowly to be truly enjoyable. It's a shame because CPC *NARC* could have been pretty special.

**6/10**

# Nemesis
## Konami – 1987



*Nemesis* is better known to international audiences under the title *Gradius*. It was originally released in arcades in 1985 to tremendous acclaim, setting new standards for horizontally shoot 'em ups and introducing several new innovations. Most notably *Gradius* introduced the "weapon bar" power-up system, which would be copied by many games thereafter. When you collect one of these power-ups it will shift the section cursor along the weapon bar at the bottom of the screen. The player can then select the weapon highlighted if they want to use it. The more power ups you collect the more become available and this innovation allowed for deeper tactics on the part of the player with greater freedom of weapon choice rather than relying on the one you are given, like most similar games. *Gradius* was actually an evolution of a previous Konami game – *Scramble*. This is particularly obvious in that the levels take place in fixed height caverns with no vertical

scrolling of any kind. You also have a wide selection of both air and ground based enemies to deal with, but no longer have to worry about collecting fuel. This Amstrad CPC port of *Nemesis* is a pale imitation of the coin-op that plays far too fast (I've never ever said that about a CPC game!), has poor collision detection and really repetitive music. With a little more tweaking this could have actually been a pretty decent port of the coin-op.

**5/10**

# Nightshade
## Ultimate Play The Game – 1984



I think it's pretty safe to say that Ultimate Play The Game (who still exist today as Rare) are best known for their ZX Spectrum work, specifically their many isometric adventures. However, they did decide to convert some of these to other machines such as the BBC Micro and Amstrad CPC. What set *Nightshade* apart from previous efforts such as *Alien 8, Knight Lore* and *Gun Fright* was that for the very first time the screen scrolled. All the previous games had used single screens to display the action and many thought that this technique just wasn't possible. The plot tells us that between the Seas of the Seven Islands and the purple Mountains lies a valley. In a previous time this area was safe and hospitable. However, then the darkness then came - killing many of the inhabitants and warping the minds of the others. Many have gone there, none have returned, so can you be the first to complete this quest? As you can probably imagine, the gameplay in *Nightshade* is very similar to the

previous offerings with a mix of exploration, puzzle solving and arcade action. The ultimate goal is to find all the objects needed to destroy the four evil overlords and return the land to peace. The graphics have been converted directly from the ZX Spectrum version (using mode 1) so are a bit lacking in colour but still look good. *Nightshade* offers plenty of enjoyment for adventure game fans.

**8/10**

o

# OutRun Europa
**U.S. Gold – 1991**



Publishers U.S. Gold were so desperate to cash in on the success of the first *OutRun* game that rather than wait for Sega to make a sequel hey just created one of their own. Something that became a habit of theirs as you can also see with *Gauntlet 3* and *Human Killing Machine*, which was promoted as a sequel to *Street Fighter*. You do also wonder if the Birmingham based publishers, along with the developers Probe, wanted to atone themselves in some way, as many of their home conversions of *OutRun* were pretty horrific. This semi-official sequel, is quite a big departure from the original owing more to Taito's *Chase H.Q.* than anything else, which in itself is interesting as the early prototypes of this game were basically the same as the original only with different scenery. Rather than the red Ferrari's of the other games in this game you get to race jetskis, bikes and a Porsche 911 instead, which adds a lot more variation. The whole time you are trying to escape from the

police so you need to keep up the high speeds so not to get caught. As the name suggests the levels take place across different parts of Europe and the scenery is very recognisable. Graphically the game is mostly very good, but the frame rate is quite poor and the movement is strangely jerky. *OutRun Europa* certainly improves upon the original *OutRun* conversion but still doesn't get things quite right sadly.

**7/10**

# Operation Wolf
## Ocean – 1988



While *Operation Wolf* was not the first light gun shooter in the arcades it was certainly the game that all future ones were judged by. Released by Taito in 1987, it spawned several sequels as well as endless clones from other coin-op manufacturers. In *Operation Wolf* you are a soldier who has parachuted into an enemy warzone and must rescue all the hostages then make it to the airport in order to escape! You see the game from a first person perspective and move the target round the screen to shoot all the enemies. When hostages appear they are marched across the screen by enemy troops, so you have to be extra careful not to shoot them! Enemy soldiers are not the only things you have to worry about in this game though, as you are also attacked by tanks, armoured vehicles and even helicopters! This is where your grenades will come in particularly handy. You will need to look out for animals like flying ducks and trotting pigs to replenish your health along the way

too, no time to cook them here! *Operation Wolf* is undoubtedly a classic shooter that is rightly well remembered. The CPC port has some nice graphics that look remarkably close to the original arcade game and plenty of great sound effects too. It's certainly one of the best games of its type on the Amstrad and the only thing it's missing is big metal Uzi bolted to the top of your computer!

**8/10**

# Oil
**Amstrad Magazine – 1987**
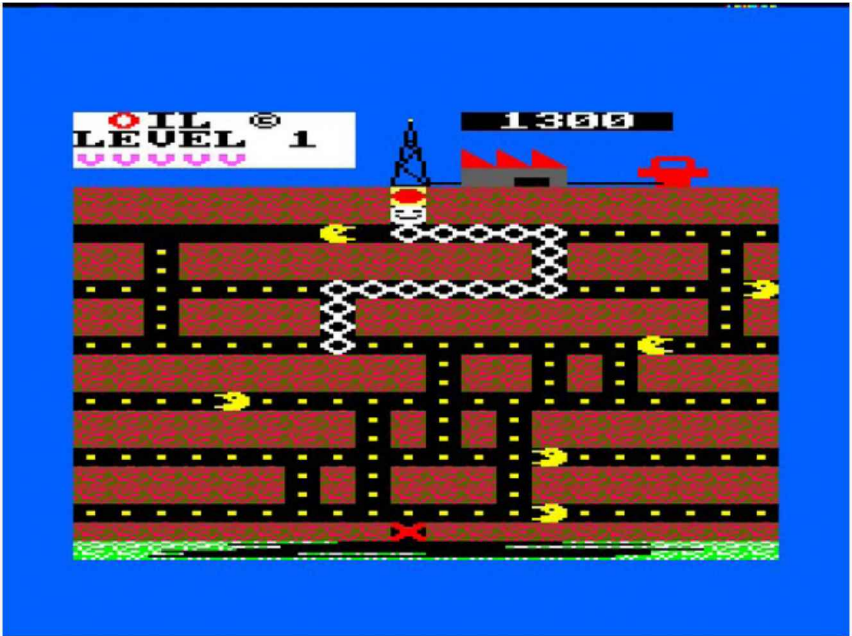


One of the first truly successful PC released games by Sierra On-Line was *Oil's Well*, a clone of the Tago Electronics arcade game *Anteater*. It was never ported to the Amstrad officially but *Oil* is certainly close enough. The actual game is a really strange mix of *Pac-Man* and *Dig Dug* with a plot revolving around drilling for oil. You control a kind of pipeline that you need to guide through the caverns below the rig collecting all the, erm, dots – I have no idea what these have to do with oil! There are various subterranean creatures down there too who are trying to stop you and generally get in your way. If you guide your pipe towards them the jaws on the end eat them. But if they bash into your pipe as you are laying it then you lose a life. There are also indestructible mines to look out for and as the game goes on the game gets much harder. One trick to this game is the use of the fire button, it allows you to retract your pipe quickly to get out of sticky situations. It's only as I write

this that I realise just what a hard game to explain *Oil's Well* is! The graphics are simple, if colourful, and the sound effects are certainly nothing special either. *Oil* is a really strange and quirky affair that while not looking like much is actually both fun and challenging. It probably lacks the addictiveness of the games I mentioned earlier but still well worth a good look, especially if you are a fan of maze-type games.

**7/10**

P

# Pac-Land
## Grandslam – 1989



Namco's excellent 1984 arcade game *Pac-Land* was the very first *Pac-Man* title to take our yellow pill chomping hero out of the maze and into a more traditional platform game landscape. It's also credited as being one of the very first scrolling platformer, having arrived around a year or so before the often wrongly cited *Super Mario Bros*. The creators also gave him arms and legs for the first time, for a more human-like form, and introduced us to a whole new cartoon-styled world that would feature in many more games to come. Rather than being a sequel to the maze type games that we all know and love, *Pac-Land* was actually based on the popular *Pac-Man* cartoon series that we all loved watching on Saturday mornings as kids. You guide Pac-Man through the various parts of Pac-Land such as the town, forest, desert and mountains in a traditional style platformer that would later be revisited again for the *Pac-Man World* games. The ghosts, as always, are out to stop

our yellow hero but now they even drive vehicles, jump on pogo sticks and fly planes! There are a limited amount of power pills strewn across this landscape to help you, which see the ghosts run away, and bonus fruit. Graphically this port is lovely and colourful but the flick screen scrolling is very annoying indeed. The music is absolutely fantastic however. This isn't a perfect port of *Pac-Land* but it's certainly good enough.

**8/10**

# Pipe Mania
## Empire – 1989
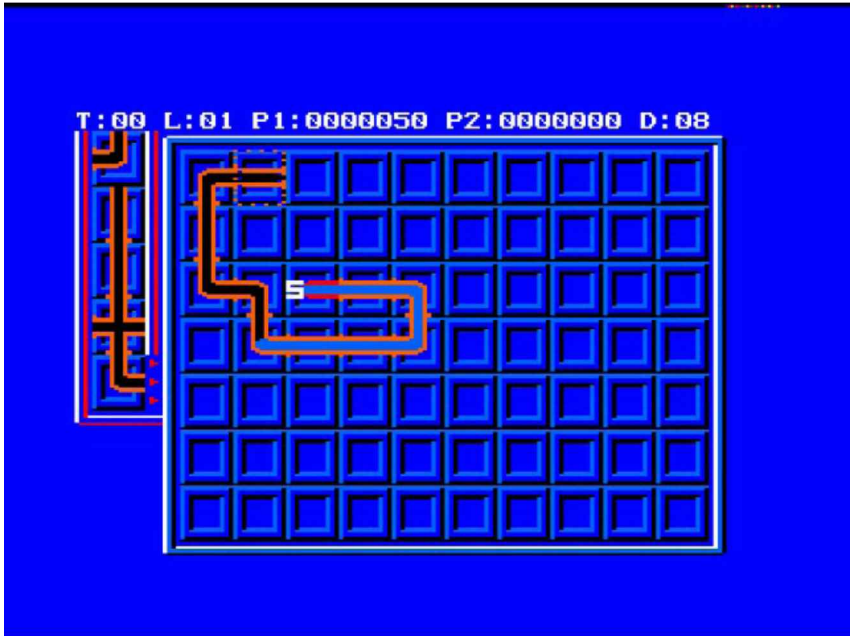


I really do love puzzle games, they are one of my favourite genres, and for me *Pipe Mania* is one of the best ones out there. I really cannot understand why this game is not better remembered these days. The idea is to build a continuous pipeline around the screen as long as possible from leaking tap. This tap doesn't start leaking straight away so you are given a slight head start on the flowing water. From here you are given random pieces of pipe to fit together including straight ones, bends and cross pipes that allow you travel through them in both directions. These cross pipes also allow you to cross back though your own pipeline, very handy when you are running out of space on the board. There's a handy side panel showing you what pipes you have coming so you can plan ahead, the style of pipe is delivered at random however. If you have a pipe you don't want you can destroy it and go onto the next one but this costs you valuable time as you have to wait for it to be

demolished. As the levels go on special pipes are added around the screen, such as the bulges that help slow the flow down. But the time also gets shorter and longer pipelines are required to clear the level. You will also find that certain parts of the screen may also become blocked off, making your job even harder! *Pipe Mania* is incredibly addictive and a must have title for any fans of the puzzle game genre.

**9/10**

# Postman Pat
## Alternative Software – 1988



There are always certain games from your childhood that trigger more nostalgia than any others. Sometimes they are not even particularly good games, they were either the only ones you had or titles that you associate with other special moments from your childhood. Alternative Software's *Postman Pat* definitely falls into the latter category. When I was still a nipper I shared a room with my younger brother and our Spectrum took pride of place at the front of our bedroom accompanied by a 14" black and white TV that you had to retune every time you wanted to change the channel (not to mention wiggling the built in aerial to get a half decent picture). Every Sunday night we would both have a bath and then relax in our dressing gowns with a few games so we could try and forget the dread of school the next day. This would mean that we would always pick something pretty sedate to play too, putting aside the more popular arcade-style games that we usually

played. This Amstrad CPC version is incredibly similar to that Speccy version and every bit as good. It's a pretty simple top-down driving game where the idea is to deliver all the mail within a one hour time limit. The simple concept was obviously designed for kids but it's actually pretty enjoyable and the authentic graphics and cheery sound certainly help matters. Give this one a play, you might just enjoy it!

**7/10**

**Q**

# Quack
**Logipresse – 1986**



I should first start this review by talking about the name, which will no doubt confuse many English speakers out there. Now you can probably see already that this is a Frogger clone and the name probably suggests to you that the frog has been swapped out for a duck, but it hasn't. You see, in France, where this game was produced, "quack" is the noise that a frog makes. While in English we say "ribbit" and "quack" is the noise a duck makes. So now we've got that confusion out the way it's time to analyse if *Quack* is actually any good. And in an answer we say a firm no, as *Frogger* clones go this is pretty poor. It appears to be written entirely in BASIC and has terrible collision detection (although mostly to your advantage!), poor graphics, simple sound effects and is far too easy. It also has some pretty big glitches that cause big chunks of the graphics to just go missing at random! The only real difference in the gameplay here is that the island between the road

and the river has a giant spider that moves back and forth, but this is very easy to avoid. I was also interested to discover that *Quack* is actually nothing more than a hack of an existing Amstrad game called *Death Race*, which was given away with Spanish magazine Your Computer the year before. So in summary, not only is *Quack* a pretty terrible game, it's also a complete rip-off of somebody else's game too!

**3/10**

# Questprobe Featuring The Human Torch and The Thing
## Adventure International – 1985
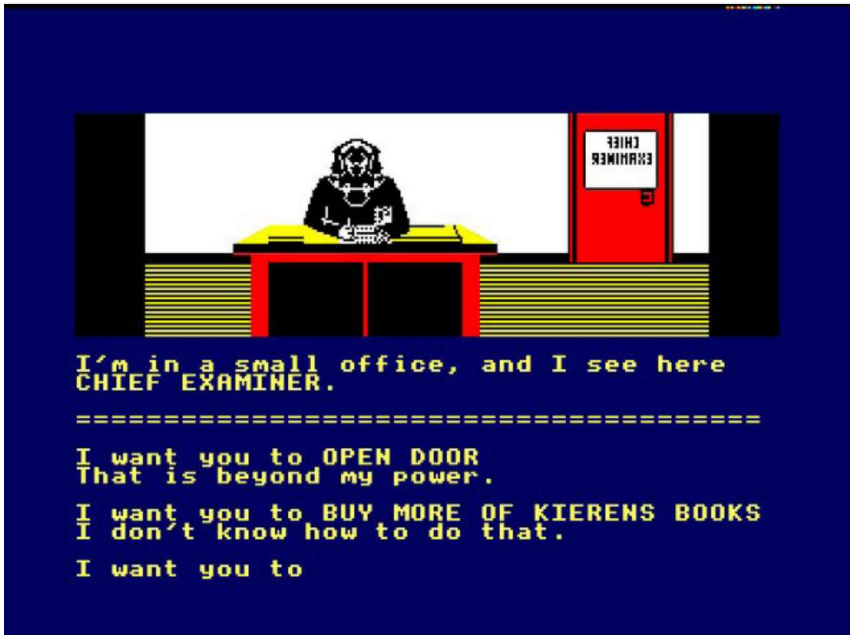


Originally developed by the legendary Scott Adams for his own company Adventure International, this title is actually the third entry in the now obscure *Questprobe* Series, but bizarrely it was the first and only one released for the Amstrad CPC. The game takes the form of a text adventure with graphical interludes depicting key parts of the story. All commands are entered through the keyboard and require you to use a series of predefined words and phrases that, depending on what you put, alter the path of the story in different ways. Each "scene" in the game is accompanied by an image. These include movements, for example "Move west", as well actions such as "Pick up" or "Kill". Previous games featured just one character, firstly The Incredible Hulk and then Spider-Man, but this one features two members of the Fantastic

Four and a key element of the game is switching between them. Another game featuring the X-Men was programmed but never released due to the sad demise of Adventure International in 1985. All of the games are still highly regarded by text adventure fans. Modern gamers may find the *Questprobe* series a bit clunky and unappealing compared today's big budget Marvel productions. But there is actually a great game in here that stays very authentic to the subject matter and will certainly please all the true fans of the original Marvel comic book universe.

**7/10**

# Q-Bert 2
## Players Dream – 1987



Here we have another Amstrad CPC game that was give away free with a magazine, but this time the publication in question is Players Dream from Germany. Not just another free magazine game though, this is also another clone of a popular arcade game, but this time the name makes this a lot more obvious! *Q-Bert 2* pretends to be some kind of legitimate sequel to the Gottlieb classic *Q\*bert* but in all honestly that is very misleading and a bit of an insult. Remember how in the original game you jumped around an isometric pyramid avoiding the enemies and colouring the squares? Well in this one you still have to colour the squares, but there is just one enemy who moves down the screen in a random pattern and then repeats this over and over. But he moves so fast that he's pretty much impossible to avoid! The unresponsive controls don't really help this matter either and there really is no kind of intelligent A.I. of any kind. It's obviously written in BASIC

and this doesn't help matters much either. The graphics are truly awful with garish colour choices and no animation of any kind. The sound effects are almost non-existent here too. I know this was a free game but it's also an unbelievably awful one with almost no redeeming features at all. If you want to play a decent *Q*bert* clone on the Amstrad then I suggest checking out Alternative Software's *Er*Bert* instead.

**2/10**

R

# Rampage
**Activision – 1987**



One of the most popular multi-player arcade games ever released, *Rampage* was first introduced to the world back in 1986 courtesy of the now sadly defunct Bally/Midway. The game allowed you and up to two of your friends to take control of one of 3 movie styled monsters; George (King Kong), Lizzy (Godzilla) and Ralph (Werewolf). Then the idea was to make your way across 128 North American cities and reduce them to rubble. You did this by climbing buildings and smashing them with your fists until they are destroyed and fall down. However the army are out to stop you and use their soldiers, tanks and helicopters to attack you. The buildings also contain innocent civilians who can be eaten to boost your health as well as a multitude of other objects, both good and bad. The first really good thing about this Amstrad CPC version is that it retains the full three-player mode of the arcade game. Two players can use the joysticks and the other can use the keyboard,

which works really well indeed. The graphics look excellent with lots of colour and lots of detail too. It also impresses when it comes to the audio too as the both music and sound effects are excellent. CPC *Rampage* also plays at a good speed and has responsive controls. So all in all this is a very good conversion of the coin-op that while fun in single player, comes into a world of its own when you hook up with some friends.

**8/10**

# Renegade
**Imagine – 1987**



Not many people know that *Renegade* was actually licensed from Technos and was in fact originally part of their animie-styled *Kunio Kun* series and also the prequel to *Double Dragon*. *Renegade* is essentially a scrolling beat 'em up of sorts, but the levels only scroll a limited amount from side to side keeping the action quite frantic and enclosed. It sees the player taking on a series of street gangs across a violent crime ridden city. Your foes were able to utilise weapons, ride motorcycles and perform team attacks making your fight that much harder than any similar games that came before it. Another difference from the usual gameplay of this genre is in the control method. You basically have both forward and reverse attacks, so are required to direct your attacks depending on which way you are facing, this method was later re-used in *Double Dragon 2*. This is pretty annoying at first but you do start to get the hang of it after a while. There's no doubting that

this Amstrad CPC port is by far the best one for an 8-bit computer. The graphics are absolutely stunning and stay remarkably close to the arcade original. The sprites are well-animated and the detailed backgrounds really help set the scene. *Renegade* is also no slouch when it comes to the sound either as there is excellent music playing throughout and decent enough effects too. This is up there with the best arcade ports on the CPC.

**9/10**

# Rescue on Fractalus
**Actvision – 1986**
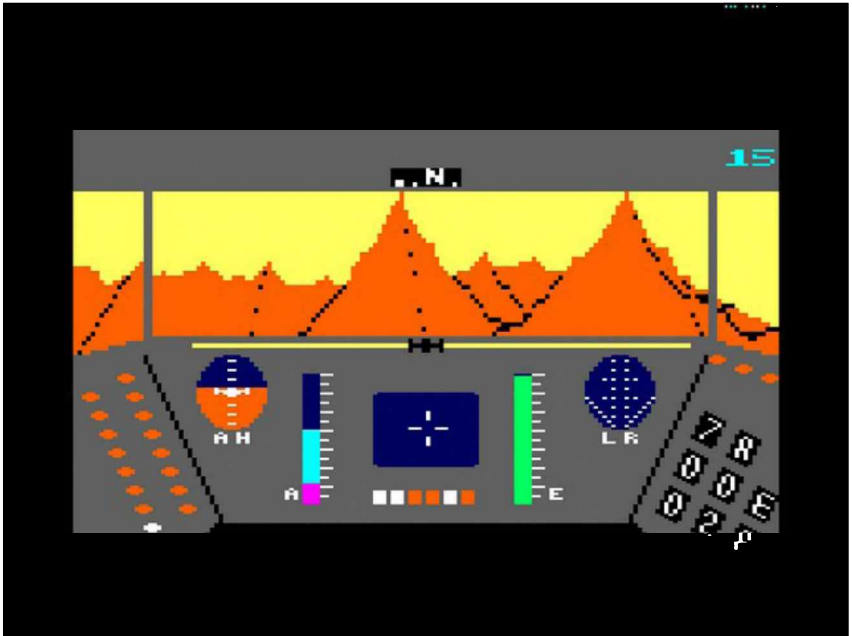


This classic game was one of the first to be released by George Lucas' legendary software company LucasArts and originally appeared on the Atari 8-bit computers. You start by watching an impressive take-off sequence where you launch from a mothership in orbit around each planet your craft appears over the surface of the world below with the player viewing everything from the ship's cockpit. Your craft is armed with a laser weapon, scanner, thrusters to land/take off and fly, shields and a warp drive, which must be used to return to the mothership. The scanner is used to locate the lost pilots that have crashed on the planet surface. As you fly over the undulating hills and valleys you will hear a beeping sound that lets you know you are close to a crashed vessel. Once you find a crashed craft you must try to land as close to it as possible and then turn off your shields. Once this is done the pilot will come running towards your ship and bang on the door, you must then activate the

airlock to let him in. As well as the laser cannons that are located on mountain tops you will also have to deal with enemy UFOs that fly after you and try to shoot you down leading to some intense aerial battles. CPC *Rescue on Fractalus* isn't quite as impressive as the original with a shorter intro, simpler graphics and a much smaller playing window. It still plays well, but the Amstrad version is one of the weakest.

**8/10**

s

# Skool Daze
## Amsware Systems – 2015



Whenever you look at a list of the greatest ever ZX Spectrum games you will always find *Skool Daze* somewhere near the top. So when I heard that it had now been converted to the CPC I couldn't have been happier! For those of you that have never played the game before, you control a naughty school kid called Eric who is trying to steal his report card from the headmaster's office so he doesn't get expelled. To do this you must solve several puzzles in order to get the code to the safe and also search the various classrooms for objects that might help you. You are not the only kid in the school of course, there are other pupils too who would like to nothing better than getting you into even more trouble and see you punished by those evil teachers. Great news though, you can also turn the tables and get the other kids into trouble too. You can even rename the other students and teachers at the start of the game to mimic your own childhood school! *Skool Daze* is one of the very

first open world games where you can basically stroll around as you please playing the game as you wish. Visually this port isn't the greatest, as the purple on yellow looks very garish indeed. The sound effects aren't the greatest either, as again they have been copied across from the Speccy. The only way this game will be beat on the Amstrad is if we also see a conversion the amazing sequel *Back To Skool*!

**10/10**

# Space Harrier
## Elite – 1986



A conversion of the highly advanced 1985 Sega arcade game, *Space Harrier* is a game that was deemed far too advanced to be converted to lowly 8-bit computers but Elite decided to have a go anyway. Like *Outrun* and *After Burner* this was another game that used Sega's revolutionary, super scaler hardware to great effect. You fly into the action from a third person 3D-style perspective taking out the aliens, avoiding the scenery and eventually going up against a giant boss at the end of each level. Being such a graphically intensive game it's fair to say that most of these home conversions of *Space Harrier* weren't that great. So it will come as no surprise to learn that the CPC struggles quite a bit with this game, although it does just about get away with it. Elite did a great job of maintaining a fairly fast frame rate, but the strange wireframe sprites are horrible. You will quickly notice these see-through objects are very hard to make out properly and very poorly defined. The fantastic

soundtrack of the arcade original is recreated brilliantly though, but the trademark speech is sadly missing. Thankfully it does control pretty well and fans of the arcade game will certainly be in familiar territory, if perhaps a little underwhelmed. However my everlasting feeling of this game is that the poor old Amstrad CPC just couldn't quite handle it, but well done to Elite Systems for trying anyway.

**6/10**

# Star Wars
## Domark – 1988



Perhaps the most famous and popular of all the many *Star Wars* games released are the three Atari arcade games based on the original trilogy. Atari's first *Star Wars* game arrived in video game arcades in 1983 as both a stand-up and sit-down cockpit cabinet, the latter of which is regarded by many as one of the best arcade experiences of all-time. Surprisingly it took an incredible five years for anyone to pick up the license and convert it to home computers but Domark proved that it was definitely worth the wait in 1988! With its visually stunning vector graphics, digitised speech and thrilling gameplay, that recreated all the key battles from the original film, it's rightly held in such high regard. The trench sequence and ultimate destruction of the Death Star remains one of the most memorable and copied segments of any video game ever. A 3D into the screen shoot 'em up, other missions see you taking out enemy Tie Fighters and also enemy bunkers on the

Death Star itself. This CPC conversion is pretty impressive in many areas – most notably the excellent rendition of the famous theme tune and the iconic 3D wireframe visuals. Ok a few allowances had to be made for the more humble hardware, most notably the frame rate is quite low with the speed taking an obvious hit, but it's undoubtedly still *Star Wars*. A must have game for fans of the long-running movie franchise.

**8/10**

T

# Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles: The Coin-Op
## Image Works – 1991



After first trying to fob us all of with a port of the lacklustre Nintendo NES game, Image Works gave us what we really wanted just a year later with this arcade conversion. Once again handled by Probe Software this second *TMHT* game for the Amstrad brings back the stunning colour graphics of the first effort but add so much more besides! For those of you that somehow missed out on the magic of the original arcade game, which was by far the hottest cabinet out there upon release, this is a scrolling beat 'em up for one or two players featuring all your favourite characters from the original cartoon. As well as being able to play all four of the turtles themselves you get to fight against people like Rocksteady, Bebop, Baxter Stockman, Shredder and, eventually, the evil Krang himself. The moves at your disposal are fairly limited but then you'd expect them to be if you've ever watched the cartoon. There are also special power-ups that can be collected as well as yummy

pizzas to grant you extra health. The super-colourful graphics here are detailed and move quickly while the sound effects are pretty average, although the title music is very nice I have to say. All in all *Turtles: The Coin-op* is right up there with *Target Renegade* as one of the very best scrolling beat 'em ups available for the Amstrad CPC computer and is a must have title for all fans of the heroes in a half shell!

**9/10**

# Tapper
## U.S. Gold – 1986



*Tapper* is a conversion of the popular arcade game that became one of the first ever games to feature sponsorship in it! Although in the original game it was Budweiser and this family friendly port swaps that over for Pepsi. In this very original title you play a barman who is trying to serve his thirsty customers as quickly as possible. You are at one side of the screen with a row of beer taps behind you and in front of you are rows of tables. The customers make their way along these tables and you must fill a glass from the tap and launch it down the table to make them disappear. If a customer gets to the end of the table without being served then its game over! As the game goes on you get a change of bar and it gets much busier as you have to serve more and more punters. One thing you have to be careful of is throwing more glasses of beer than needed because if you do they will fly straight back at you and will need to be caught before they smash on the floor! *Tapper* looks great

on the CPC with lots of colour and well defined sprites too. The audio is also great too with an excellent rendition of the original music and some decent sound effects too. Overall though, *Tapper* is a great coin-op conversion for the Amstrad machine that once again shows us what the machine can really pull off when a game is programmed to its strengths. You should definitely track this one down!

**9/10**

# Techno Cop
## Gremlin – 1988



I don't think there's much doubt that Gremlin's *Techno Cop* was a thinly veiled attempt to cash in on the success of *Robocop* but unlike many other similar games of the time this is a pretty damn good one! It's a game of two very distinct halves, which are equally unoriginal in nature too, as I will go on to explain. Each level is split into two sections – the first of these is a *Chase H.Q.* styled driving game where you race to intercept the criminals in your red Lamborghini. The second half of the level sees you park your motor and then enter a building where you despatch even more guys before killing a boss-type character. These parts are very reminiscent of the classic Namco arcade game *Rolling Thunder*. While all of this goes on a status panel makes up the bottom third of the screen, which contains any useful information you need to know such as your speed and distance from destination on the driving sections and a map as well as an image of the adversary

you're out to apprehend on the run and gun stages. Graphically it's very much a game of two halves too – while the driving stages look superb the run and gun levels are pretty drab and lacking in colour. The sound effects are pretty disappointing too, although Ben Daglish's title music is very nice indeed. When you consider the whole package *Techno Cop* is a pretty enjoyable romp that wins extra points for gameplay diversity.

**7/10**

U

# Uridium
**Hewson – 1987**



Legendary shoot 'em up *Uridium* was originally released for the Commodore 64 and was met with widespread acclaim by the press and players alike. Many even thought that Amstrad and Spectrum versions were impossible due to the technical proficiency of the game – fast scrolling and lots of sprites are not either machine's strong point. However, Hewson gave crack coders Dominic Robinson and Stephen J. Crow a call and they pulled it off with aplomb. *Uridium* is somewhat of a mix of the two most popular types of shoot 'em up, because although the screen scrolls horizontally the action is actually viewed from above (like a vertical shooter). In the game you are flying above a giant space craft trying to take out the gun placements and scout ships that are being sent out to stop you. One you destroy the ship you simply move on to another one, only march harder. The game seem to have been inspired by both the Death Star from *Star Wars* as well

as classic arcade game *Defender*, with you being able to switch the direction of the scrolling at will. Amstrad *Uridium*, as you would no doubt expect, is a direct port of the Speccy version in Mode 1. However the extra colours do help greatly with the clarity of the graphics. There's some great title music and good in game effects too. This is a better conversion than many would expect but does suffer from a few annoying gameplay bugs sadly.

**8/10**

# Ultimate Tetris (The)
## Dreadnought – 1994



Don't let the name throw you, this certainly isn't an official version of the classic puzzle game *Tetris* and there is nothing ultimate about it. What we actually have here is an incredibly bog standard iteration of the Russian mind melter that is actually vastly inferior to Mirrorsoft's own official port. It starts off pretty badly with a very simple title screen and then nothing else. No options to define the type of game, no gameplay choices such as sound/controls etc and no two-player mode either sadly. There isn't even any music to accompany the boring text either and this theme (or lack thereof!) continues into the game itself, which stays completely silent! The graphics aren't anything special either, I suppose they did add some detail to the different bricks but this is very much at the expense of colour. The border graphics are pretty unspectacular too and there is a pretty basic info panel that shows the next block, your current score, number of lines and, rather strangely, how long you've been

playing. Onto the controls, and while you do have full rotational movement and the ability to do a "fast drop" the keys are way too sensitive, which leads to some really annoying misplacements. So all in all this is a pretty awful version of *Tetris* with nothing to make it worth recommending over the squillions of other clones out there. I'd suggest grabbing hold of the aforementioned port by Mirrorsoft instead.

**3/10**

# Up Periscope
## Argus Press – 1986



Originally included on the disk given away with CPC 464 Computing Issue 02, *Up Periscope* is a simple arcade-style shooter for one player. Centred at the bottom of the screen is your torpedo launcher with the ocean above you. You cannot move left or right, just shoot, and only one torpedo can be fired at a time. On the waves above are three rows of enemies that can be taken out with the largest enemies at the top (ships), medium in the middle (submarines) and smallest at the bottom (fish). Points are awarded based on the size of the enemy, with the top row harder to hit given that it's somewhat blocked by the other two. The idea is to accumulate enough points within a minute to carry on playing, which makes what enemies you hit extra important. If you reach this target, which is shown to you before the level starts, you get to carry on playing. With each level the difficulty is increased, as you'd no doubt expect, until it pretty much becomes impossible.

The individual scores for the enemies are never shown to you, so it's up to you to make note of these as your score is added to the total at the top. Graphically *Up Periscope* is very simple, as you'd probably expect, but nice and colourful. The sound is equally as simple too. Despite being nothing more than a simple BASIC game, *Up Periscope* is actually quite fun and there are worse ways to waste five minutes.

**6/10**

V

# Victory Road
**Imagine – 1988**



Released just a year after the original arcade game, SNK's *Victory Road* is the sequel to the highly successful *Ikari Warriors* and offers pretty much more of the same. This time the conversion duties were taken up by Ocean Software's arcade label Imagine and as usual they did a pretty good job here. Although the gameplay is pretty much the same as the first game the theme takes a bit of a departure. In this follow-up the enemies and levels take up a much more fantastical feel with all sorts of mythical monsters, demon like bosses and crazy weapons assaulting you from every angle. Thank fully, when designing the game, SNK also chose to add some new power-ups to help you out, which are always welcome. So now you can upgrade your gun to things like a flame thrower and rocket launcher that can clear the screen in a matter of seconds. You still have the use of those classic hand grenades like the original *Ikari Warriors* too. Other pick-ups include bonus lives, extra points

and smart bombs. One of the best features of both games was the simultaneous two-player option and I am very pleased to tell you that this has remained intact for this CPC port, making the game that bit more enjoyable. Graphically it's pretty nice with loads of great colour but the audio is pretty average. *Victory Road* is pretty good port all in all even if it's not as good as the original *Ikari Warriors*.

**7/10**

# View to a Kill
**Domark – 1985**



To give the game its full title, *A View to a Kill: The Computer Game* was the first title *James Bond* license released by Domark. I remember getting it on one of those great value for money compilations by Prism Software (remember them?) back in the day and thinking it was a bit crap. To be fair the game starts off quite well with a really nice rendition of the original theme music by Duran Duran, this is arguabley better than the game itself! The game is split into three very distinct parts, although I only remember playing the first part back in the day so I obviously wasn't very good at it! I should now point out that for some reason the level sequence is completely messed up in this Amstrad version so it doesn't actually match the film! So you start in the abandoned mines, where Bond must locate and a bomb before confronting the evil Zorin himself. The second part has takes place in New York City Hall as you try to put out the fire, save the innocent people

trapped there and escape! The finale is now the driving game where the top half of the screen is a clever first-person 3D view and the bottom part is a map showing the streets of Paris. The game is pretty loosely based on the film and both the graphics and sound here leave quite a lot to be desired. I suppose that in hindsight this isn't a totally horrible game but it's certainly not the action packed *James Bond* experience you'd expect.

**5/10**

# Viz: The Computer Game
## Virgin Games – 1991



Anybody who grew up in the UK will be more than aware of controversial adult comic *Viz*. Still going to this day, the publication introduced us to the snigger-worthy antics of such characters as Roger Mellie, The Fat Slags, Buster Gonad and Billy The Fish. I myself remember sneaking a look at the comic in the local WHSmith before being told off by a spotty sales assistant as I guffawed away. In the video game adaption of the comic developers Probe Software chose to take some of the most popular characters and put them into a series of mini-games, which fit together to form the complete package. Our heroes (of sorts) are Johnny Fartpants, Biffa Bacon and Buster Gonad and they are tasked with competing in a series of five races around the fictional town of Fulchester for some kind of unnamed prize (no doubt something rude!). The races are run in the park, Fulchester High Street, a building site, the beach and a nightclub. The race commentator is

of course Roger Mellie, who provides irreverent chat throughout the game. Many of *Viz's* other popular characters pop up to help or hinder the contestants along the way. Each character has unique characteristics to match the stories from the comics such as fart power or fighting. *Viz* isn't going to thrill you with its gameplay but it's a nice nod to the comics that will raise more than the odd chuckle as you play through it.

**7/10**

W

# Wonder Boy in Monster Land
## Activision – 1989



The first *Wonder Boy* game was a massive hit for Sega and equally popular on the home systems of the time with the CPC version being very highly regarded. The sequel *Wonder Boy in Monster Land* takes the platform game stylings of the original and adds some really cool adventure game style aspects into the mix too (that were actually enhanced further in following sequels). There are an amazing twelve different locations to explore here including Monster Land itself and each one has a big boss that must be defeated in order to continue. Every enemy you defeat along the way leaves you coins, which can be collected and traded-in at the many shops for a variety of objects to help you on your quest such as extra lives, new weapons and magic potions. You must also collect keys to open doors and keep an eye on the time in order to succeed in your mission. The bad news is that this is a really poor and very un-optimised port from the Spectrum. It looks absolutely

horrible, plays incredibly slowly and has poor in-game sound too. But despite all of that *Wonder Boy in Monster Land* is still an undeniably good game that mixes the world of platformers with RPGs extremely well. So despite all the issues around the technical side of this port, once you can learn to tolerate them you'll actually find an enjoyable title that very much set up the template for all future *Wonder Boy* games.

**7/10**

# WEC Le Mans
**Imagine – 1988**



A conversion of the 1986 Konami coin-op, *WEC Le Mans* was particularly notable for the number of different cabinet configurations it came in. The most impressive and play-worthy all being an almost full size replica of a real car complete with hydraulics that threw you around as you raced! While there's obviously no way that the humble Amstrad could reproduce this experience it does do a damn fine job of nailing the actual gameplay. So what sets *WEC Le Mans* apart from all the other arcade racers out there? Erm, well, nothing actually – it's your standard complete the race within the time limit jobby and very much an evolution of Namco's classic *Pole Position*. In fact the only real difference between the two is that this game features hills and dips, giving the circuits a little more variation. Apart from that I am not sure there is much else to mention. You have both high and low gears, lots of nice scenery and plenty of other racers to compete against.

Despite the huge lack of any originality here, *WEC Le Mans* is actually a very good racer. A large amount of this is down to the excellent engine Ocean created for it. The sense of speed is terrific and despite its monochromatic nature there is loads of detail too. In fact the engine was so good that Ocean later adapted it for the simply amazing *Chase H.Q.* There's no doubting that this is one of the best racers on the CPC.

**9/10**

# Warhawk
**Firebird – 1986**



Among all the music the legendary Rob Hubbard created the stunning *Warhawk* composition is often quoted as being the best. This incredible tune may be best known for its Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit renditions but the Amstrad CPC music actually holds its own remarkably well and is one of the best tunes I've heard on the home micro. Released as part of Firebird's £1.99 budget range in 1986, the game itself is actually a pretty bog standard vertically scrolling space shooter. In it you control the *Warhawk* flying over enemy space stations taking out the ground targets and enemy ships. At the end of each stage the screen stops scrolling and you are bombarded with an onslaught of these same enemies, rather than a big boss. The sheer number of foes taking you on is almost reminiscent of today's bullet hell shooters. So it's a good job that this game gives you an energy bar, as opposed to lives, that gradually depletes as you are hit. The graphics have quite a unique

look, they are big colourful and somewhat chunky but actually work pretty well here. The wonderful music continues from the title screen into the game and there are some decent effects too. So overall, *Warhawk* is actually a pretty rudimentary shooter that gets its mark raised a notch or two for having one of the best pieces of music on any 8-bit computer period and is worth getting for that reason alone.

**8/10**

X

# X-Out
## Rainbow Arts – 1989



German software house Rainbow Arts are probably best known for producing the legendary run 'n game *Turrican*, but they also produced the excellent horizontally scrolling shoot 'em up *X-Out* and its sequel *Z-Out* too. The unique feature of this arcade-like game was that you could select your ship, weapons and power-ups from the start with each having their own advantages. It was actually a very good job that it did offer up these selections before you got into the action because once you did things got pretty tough very quick! The enemies in *X-Out* come at you relentlessly with no space for a breather. The levels mostly take place in a cavern of some sort so not only are there flying baddies but also floor and ceiling instillations to contend with. Although *X-Out* is a horizontally scrolling shooter, the screen also moved vertically in both directions, meaning you can't see the whole play area at once. This of course means that shots can seemingly come from

nowhere, so keeping on the move constantly is a must. Graphically the game is excellent with loads of colour, well defined sprites and nice level designs. I must also give special praise to the amazing looking bosses in particular. It loses points for the disappointing audio sadly that is nothing more than some average effects. If you are looking for a shooter that will give you a real challenge then look no further than *X-Out*.

**8/10**

# Xeno
## A 'n' F Software – 1986
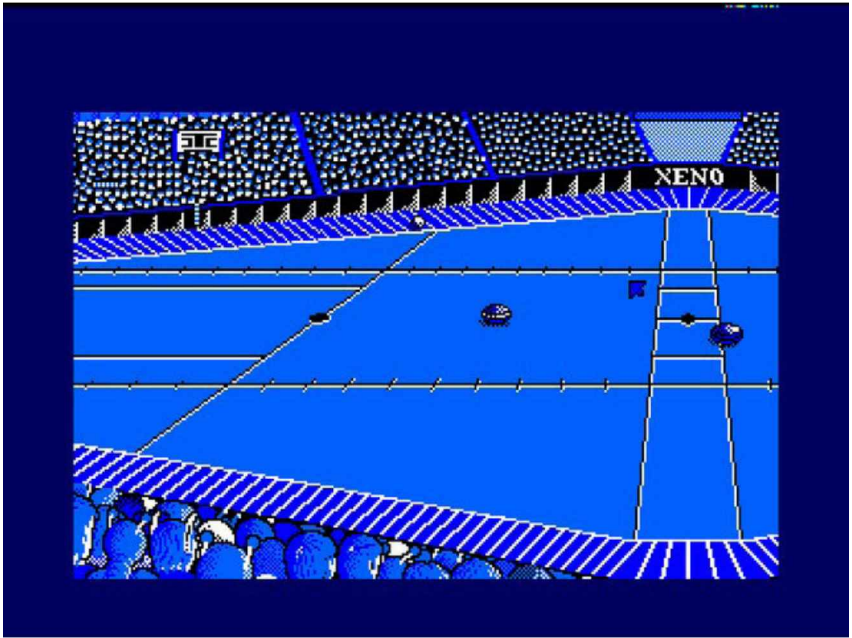


A game from the publishers that brought us the classic *Chuckie Egg*, *Xeno* has become a bit of a cult classic among Amstrad owners over the years. It can probably be best described as a futuristic version of air hockey, but there is a little bit more to it than that. You start off choosing between the type of game you want to play, one or two player, and the amount of time you want the game to last. You also have plenty of different control options too, which is always nice. There are two pucks on the playing field as well as a small ball. To hit the ball you drag a line away from your puck, using the length of it to determine the power while you set the direction to shoot in. At each end of the stretched hexagonal playfield is a goal and, yes you've guessed it, you must knock the ball into this to score. The player with the most points when the time has run out is the winner! Unlike air hockey there is no barrier in the middle and you have full movement across the whole playfield, so some pretty

hectic goal line scrambles can occur here! If the ball hits the edge of the play area it simply bounces off it as you'd expect. Graphically the game is mostly in blue monochrome, but even so it still looks pretty decent. The sound effects are solid if unspectacular. Overall *Xeno* is a pretty simple little game but also a highly playable one that increases in fun greatly once you add in another human player.

**7/10**

# Xcel
## Activision – 1985
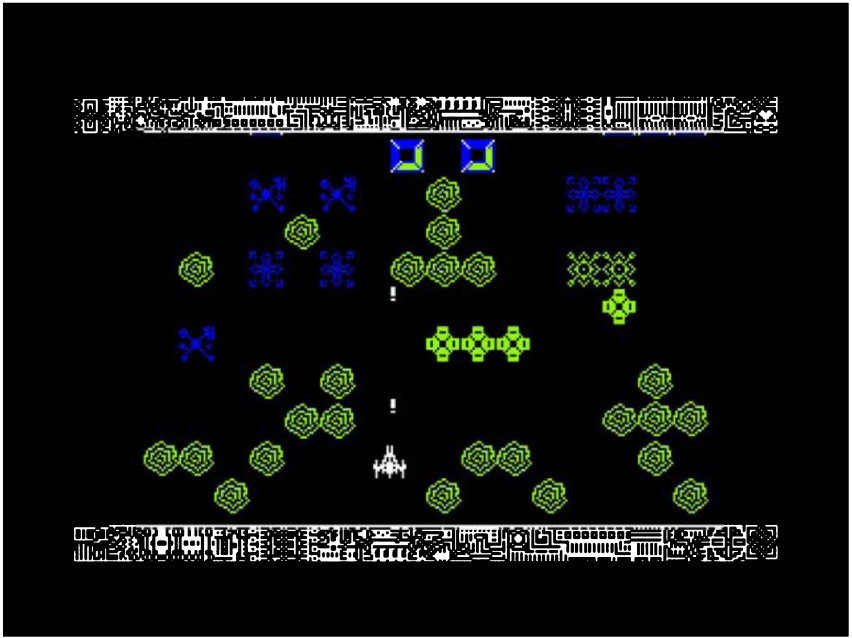


Upon loading this game you are very much fooled into thinking that this will be some kind of *Star Raiders*-esque space exploration game. In fact *Xcel* is, for the most part anyway, a fairly standard vertically scrolling shoot 'em up. The plot of the game is actually pretty intricate but to sum it up concisely it explains that computers have taken over the world and with it humanity's vast network of colonies across the universe. Each of these outposts is ruled by a Sentinel and, after stealing a ship from a museum, you set out on a one-man mission to destroy these advanced beings and put the universe back into human control. So first you must discover the location of these planets and then send out a remotely controlled shuttle to find the Sentinel and then destroy it. In these parts of the game you just fly up the screen avoiding obstacles, destroying enemies and buildings before finally blowing up the Sentinel itself. These don't vary that much as the game goes on but the maze

sections, where you are basically just trying to avoid hitting trees are both tiresome and annoying. Graphically the game is pretty dull and very samey whilst the sound consists some ok title music and average in-game effects. *Xcel* is a bit different to your average horizontally scrolling shoot 'em up and one that's perhaps a little too clever for its own good, meaning it isn't as accessible as it should be.

**5/10**

Y

# Yogi's Great Escape
## Hi-Tec Software – 1990



Budget label Hi-Tec Software are most famous for their acquisition of the Hanna Barbera license, which they continued to milk for all it was worth using pretty much every character they had ever put in a cartoon. One of the more famous characters at their disposal was Yogi Bear, so it comes as no surprise to learn that they released several titles featuring Jellystone Park's most famous resident. *Yogi's Great Escape* is a platformer using strict time limits where the basic idea is to try and escape park before you are caught. The game is split into stages and if you take too long to finish them Ranger Smith will come and capture you and then send you packing to the local zoo. Along the way you can collect bonuses such as picnic baskets and extra time to help you in your mission. I am generally not a fan of platformers anyway but I found this game incredibly boring, all you basically do is jump across platforms. No real enemies, no weapons and no excitement either. Graphically it's

fairly well drawn but it's all very samey. There is very little audio in the game but what's there is pretty damn awful and repetitive. At the end of the day, *Yogi's Great Escape* is an incredibly mediocre platformer that would have disappointed anyone who bought it, even at the low price of £2.99. Thankfully Hi-Tec's other efforts usually did a better job of fulfilling their prestigious licenses.

**4/10**

# Yie Ar Kung Fu II
**Imagine Software – 1986**



The first *Yie Ar Kung Fu* was a massive success for Konami in the arcades and Imagine's many home versions sold like hot cakes too, so it was inventible that a sequel would soon follow. Just a year later Konami delivered, but instead of debuting in arcades, the follow-up would first be released for the popular Japanese MSX computer. What made this even more confusing was in the west the game *Shao Lin's Road* (known as *Kicker* in other parts of the world) had also been billed as a sequel to *Yie Ar Kung Fu*. And they probably should have left it at that because, unlike *Shao Lin's Road*, *Yie Ar Kung Fu II* is a bit of a stinker. Unlike the first game this one scrolls and no longer focuses on one-on-one battles to the death. Instead you stroll along avoiding things that fly at you or kicking them away! After getting past the scrolling bit you do get to fight an opponent, but these battles are nowhere near the standard of the first game. The foes barely fight back, your moves

are really limited and it just ends up looking like you're having a dance with each other! The graphics are distinctly average here, it's not that they are particularly bad, they're just really weird looking. The audio is even worse with just a smattering of bloopy effects. It looks like Konami were trying to combine a scrolling beat 'em up with a fighting game here and failed miserably on both counts as *Yie Ar Kung Fu II* is a real turd.

**4/10**

# Yabba Dabba Doo!
## Quicksilva – 1986



There were several games based on *The Flintstones* for the Amstrad CPC but this was actually the first one ever released, so it's appropriate that it starts off at the very beginning before Fred and Wilma even got married! In the game Fred is still a young man with his heart set on a local girl who he hopes to make the future Mrs. Flintstone. The problem is that Wilma is already very materialistic and no intention of dating Fred until he has his own house, a steady job and a car. So you must set out to complete several tasks in order to make this happen. Firstly you have to pick up stones to build a house and then take them back to the plot one by one. Then you have to find a car, which will help you go further afield to get all the materials you need to complete the house. To put the roof and chimney on the house Fred will need a big set of steps, which take the form of a huge dinosaur, but these cost money and Fred doesn't have any. So you must go and get a job at the local

quarry and work there until you have enough money to finish the house and woo Wilma into sharing it with you! Graphically *Yabba Dabba Doo* is pretty simple with its overly yellow visuals and simple backdrops. There is isn't a great deal of sound either, so lower your expectations here too. The gameplay is ok but does get boring quite fast and there are plenty of better cartoon based games for the CPC.

**6/10**

Z

# Zone Trooper
## Gamebusters – 1988



If the Gamebusters name doesn't a ring a bell, that's understandable as they only ever published four games (including this one) and were actually just a sub-label of Cascade Games, yes that Cascade who produced the infamous *Cassette 50*. The story tells us that you have been woken too late from suspended animation to save your ship from crashing into a strange planet. Now it is up to you to save your fellow crew members by finding replacement fuel and getting of this hostile planet. You fly around on your space pod over the planet's surface and through underground tunnels trying to find the fuel. There are various droids and obstacles trying to destroy you and your ship but you can kill them with your handy blaster. In the main ship you have access to an onboard computer to help you so if you get stuck you can access this for reference. But this does mean going right back to the first screen, which can be more trouble than it's actually worth. The whole time you have to keep

an eye on your oxygen levels, power and energy – although this can be replenished via handy pick-ups. The flick-screen visuals look really nice here and really help set the scene. There is also some nice title music and a host of more than competent in-game effects too. Overall *Zone Trooper* is a good looking if rather challenging shoot 'em up come adventure game that is well worth picking up.

**7/10**

# Zork I: The Great Underground Empire
## Infocom – 1986



To many people out there the very mention of the words "text adventure" will instantly conjure up memories of *Zork*, for a long time they were pretty much one in the same. The game became an absolute sensation spawning a multitude of sequels, a seemingly endless number of clones and multiple releases across just about every computer out there. There were two main things that set *Zork* apart from its many rivals – firstly there was a genuinely gripping and involving story to get lost in Secondly there was the interface – that recognised and understood more than just individual words. The parser in *Zork* could understand whole sentences and led to much less frustration than similar games of its ilk. Ok, it may seem a bit primitive by today's standards because *Zork* truly is just a text adventure, there isn't even a title screen! If you've been spoilt by more recent graphical adventures then may seem a little dull in comparison. But nothing should take away what *Zork* is, a ground

breaking game that's more than stood the test of time thanks to the way that Infocom designed it. They later renamed it to *Zork I: The Great Underground Empire* to help distinguish it from following games. The CPC version is also available as a single game or as a trilogy of the first three games, so collectors should look out for this. If you like text adventures then owning *Zork* is pretty much a given.

**8/10**

# Zaxx
## Chip – 1986



At the time of its release, Sega's *Zaxxon* coin-op (which this game is an obvious clone of) was very unique as it was the first game to employ axonometric projection, in this case better known as an isometric perspective. This effect simulates a 3D effect from a third-person viewpoint, using shadows to indicate the ship's altitude above the ground. This combined with an altitude meter allows the player to control how high or low the ship is. A very important aspect in *Zaxxon* given that one of the keys to this game is moving your ship to avoid high walls and fit through gaps. It also allows you shoot and the enemy and avoid the surroundings by moving on both a vertical and horizontal axis, real three-dimensional movement. It was also the first arcade game to be advertised on television with a $150,000 commercial produced by none other than Paramount Pictures! With the success of the arcade game came many different clones and conversions, the vast

majority of which were a bit pants due to the obvious technology differences. That said, *Zaxx* is actually one of the best 8-bit attempts that I've seen. The graphics are bold and colourful, the scrolling is fairly smooth and while the game moves at quite a slow speed this is actually quite beneficial here. There's also some decent sound effects and responsive gameplay. If you liked *Zaxxon* then you're also going to love *Zaxx*.

**8/10**

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**1**
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