KILOBYTE
MAGAZINE

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8BIT ONLY

CONTENT

PLAYING WITH POWER

Kilobyte HIGHSCORE

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MULTILIFE

color clear

MULTILIFE

There are nice covers in your diskbox as well – we're sure of it! Please send your scans or photos to: kilobytemag@gmail.com

MULTILIFE_____
Can there be a more fitting name for a blank diskette which you are going to load several games onto than Multilife? Also, it sound a bit like one of these diet drinks. But Multilife was a budget-brand, sold exclu-

sively in German Vobis computer stores. The very first ones came in a brown or black sleeve, some even without any hub ring. The „color clear" line was introduced later, as colored disks seemed to be kind of a thing. *(bk)*

MEMORIES

European computer users might not be very familiar with the Memtek brand name. But they most certainly know Memorex – it's basically the same company. This futuristic looking sleeve in silver looks really nice. Funnily, though, Memtek got sued – not because of the sleeve, but because their packaging advertised a 15 US$ repate with proof of purchase within twelve weeks. In many cases, consumers sent in their receipts, but never got any cash back. So the US Federal Trade Commission issued a complaint, constituting "unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce in violation of Section 5(a) of the Federal Trade Commission Act." Not a good sticker to put on your floppy disks? Well, they did it also with audio and video tapes as late as 2000. Well, at least the sleeve looks still slick! *(bk)*

MEMTEK PRODUCTS

MINIDISK

PLAYTIME

THE ACTION TAKES PLACE IN YOUR MIND

Photo taken from the original box art by Mattel.

Mattel is best known for Hot Wheels and Barbie. Those are the toys you instantly connect with the brand name, even today. But Mattel was also into computers – and this is not about the Aquarius nor the Intellivision. When by the end of the 1980s, He-Mans glorious days of being the cash cow for the company deemed to be over, the toy manufacturer was looking for new themes. And as everybody was into computers back then, it seemed only logical to do something about that. But not producing another computer line, heaven forbid. No, instead Mattel decided that it was time to let kids play with computers and use their imagination. And so they came up with Computer Warriors, an extermely short-lived toy series that even should have had its on cartoon show. But after the pilot episode, they pulled the plug. So without any on-screen help, the toy line was sold from 1989 to 1990 and did not at all meet the expectations that were put in it.

THE HOME COMPUTER BASE

At the heart of this toy line was a large playset that looked like a home computer from the outside. It was called „Parallax", sounding like an important scrolling technique for shoot-em-up games at the time.

With a few steps this computer could be turned into a strategic weapons base, its disk drive became a turbo disk launcher. As it unfolded, it also had room for two hoverjets and blaster turrets to fight off evil computer viruses. Yes, it kind of took some reference from Tron, which is also clearly visible in the pilot episode of the cartoon show: the innards of computers are visualized as a grid in neon colors. Sounds familiar, right?

However, the big playset was the highlight of the toy line, after which they really had no clue what to use. A floppy disk? A cassette even? A game module? A joystick maybe? No, not at all. Instead, they used a Pepsi can, a flashlight, a soccer ball, a pencil sharpener, a calculator, a book and a digital clock even. Great, who has not dreamed of action figures inside of their Pepsi can? So with all these items, they missed the point of the whole computer theme a bit. Oh, the book was kind of the base for the bad guys – any hidden message in this decision? Well, today those things are collector pieces and some of them are hard to find and expensive. And there is a good reason so few remember this toy line.

(bk, mhfr)

For all fact freaks out there: Carl Macek, Producer of the Computer Warriors cartoon, previsously produced „Robotech". He was also responsible for the US subtitle script of anime cult film „Akira".
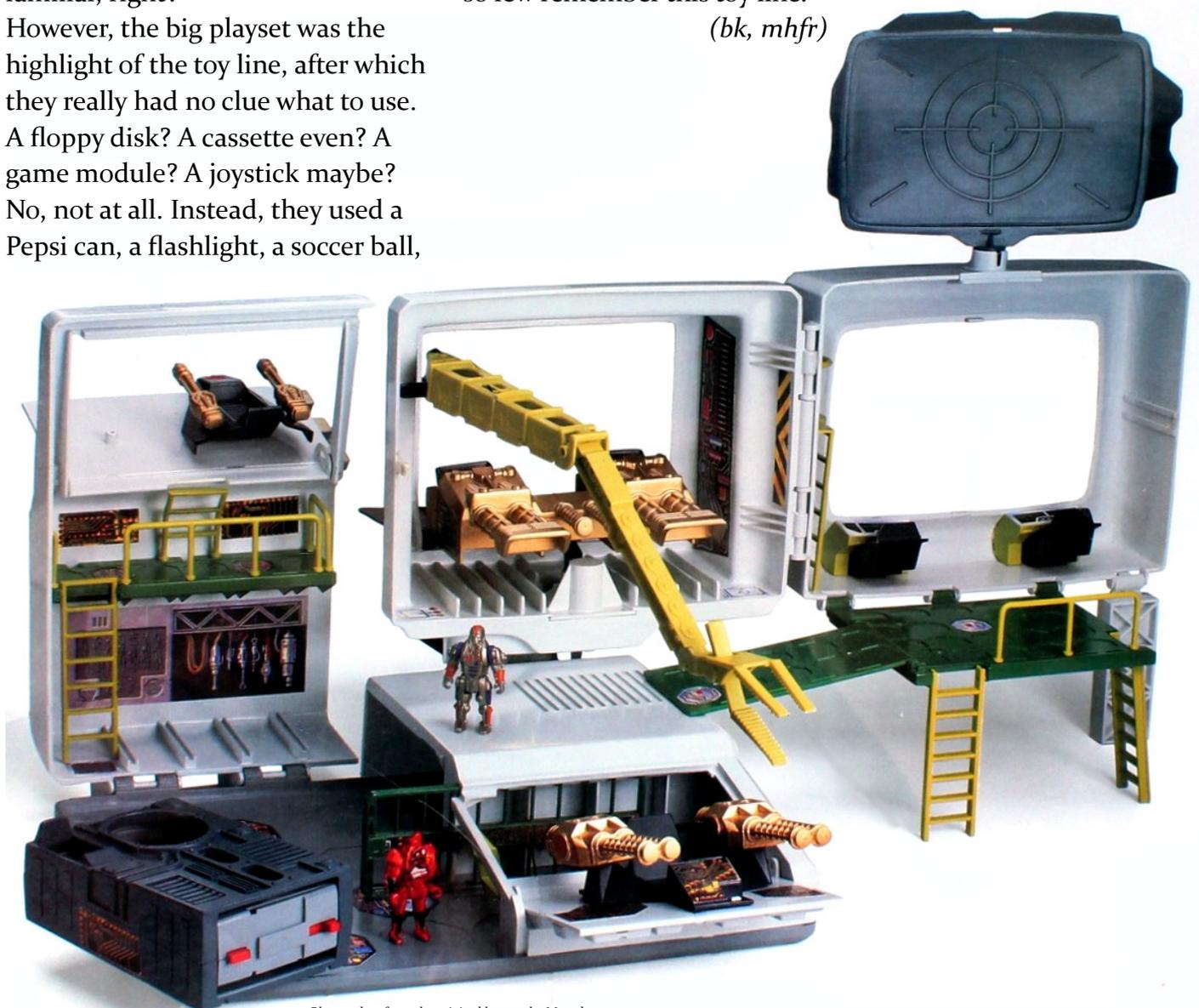
Photo taken from the original box art by Mattel.

A UNIQUE CITY
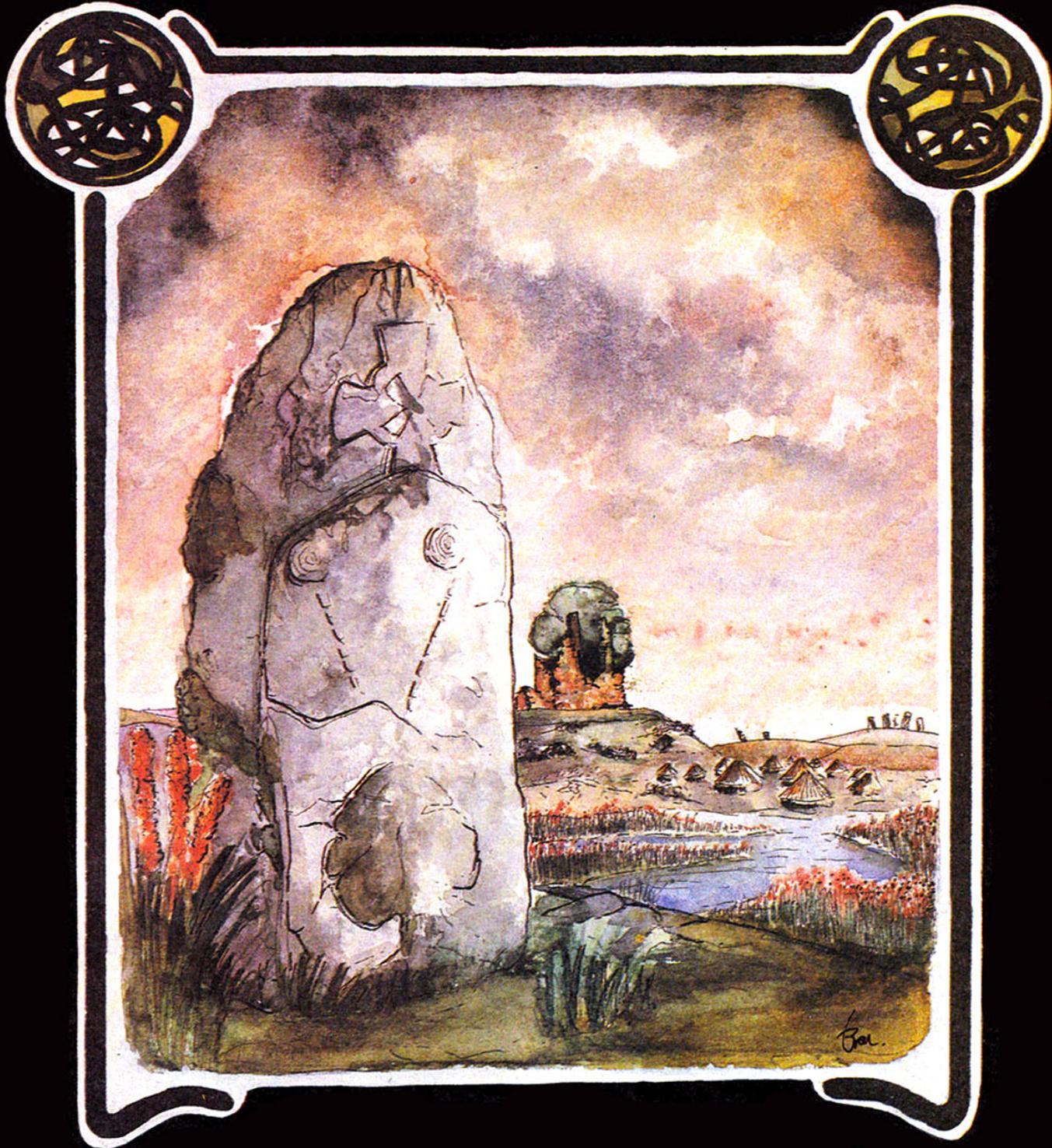
I was but an impressionable kid when I first saw the emblematic, frankly stunning map Oliver Frey created for the city of Dun Darach, and yet, being a very sensible kid also, my first reaction was one of utter disbelief. Fitting a whole city, complete with apparently everything one would expect to find in it in the 48 Kilobytes of the humble Sinclair

ZX Spectrum (or the 64 KB of the CPC) just didn't make sense. Even to someone who wasn't exactly sure what a Kilobyte of RAM was, nor really adamant about the humbleness of the Speccy. This was a technical feat that sounded, and probably was, impossible even for a text adventure, let alone for something that allowed players – I was assured – to look around in full 3D without sacrificing anything from the superb graphics and cartoon-quality animation of *Tir Na Nog*. Besides, I had learned to be skeptical of all those computer game fairytales involving flying Jet Set Willy rockets, and hidden rovers on the moon. Yet, miraculously, everything I had been told was true. Gargoyle Games' *Dun Darach* thoroughly blew both me and my expectations away. This was a real, seemingly vast, three dimensional city that felt complete and alive. It was the very first urban open world I had ever encountered, and it was begging to be explored, understood, solved, and experienced.

A PULSATING CITY WITH MANY DISTRICS_____

Dun Darach is a rather large city with many quarters which come with several districts. They all have names, so you might want to draw a map while you play. And as you do so, you will notice how large and sophisticated the design of this city is. This, you see, was a fantasy setting that was so artful in its construction, so successful in its creative choices,

that it somehow remains engrossing and fun to explore even 30 years after its release. A unique game city that even features inhabitants that walk in it, mind their own business and greet you while they pass by. But most of them have something of interest to you – may it be information or important things you will need on your quest. The whole city feels so real and living that in many ways it remains unsurpassed till today.

CUCHULAINN TO THE RESCUE____

Admittedly not everyone got to visit Dun Darach back in the ,80s, and it's definitely not the most widely remembered retro game today either. I do thus guess I should mention certain basics regarding the game. Gargoyle's creation is essentially an adventure game that is all about navigating the titular fantasy city, collecting objects, interacting with citizens, gaming the economy,
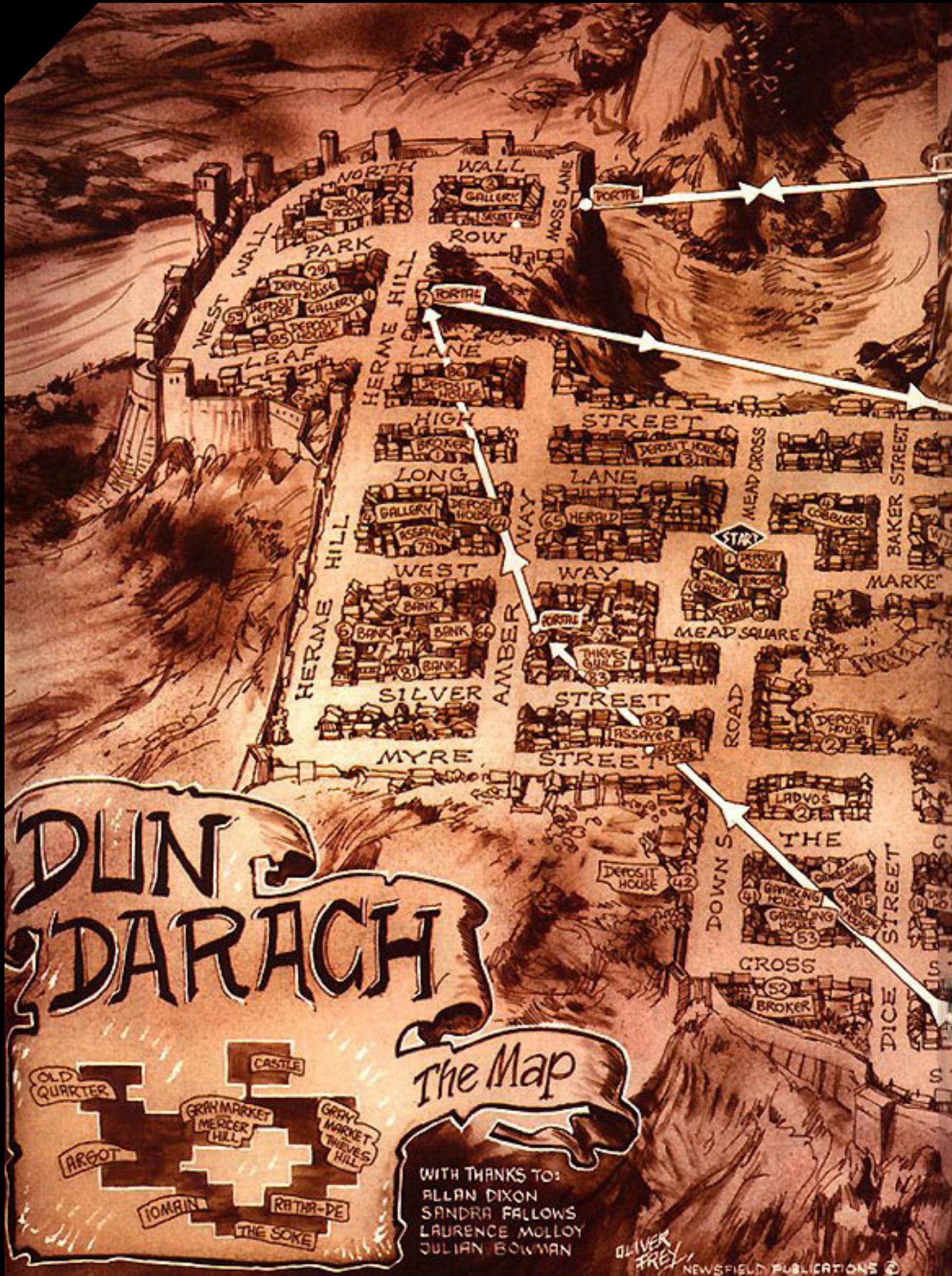
The map of Dun Darach is even more impressive when drawn by Oliver Frey. This is why Retrofusion Books has printed a small amount in poster size.

The logo of developing company Gargoyle. It looks a bit weird, admittedly.

and, ultimately, solving puzzles. It is not dissimilar to *Tir Na Nog* or sci-fi follow-up *Marsport* really, though being the forward-looking adventure that it was, Dun Darach did not allow for the player to die.

As for the plot, this being a prequel to *Tir Na Nog* – another possible first for the game – it also focuses on legendary warrior Cuchulainn of Muirmethne, whose brother in arms „Loeg" has this time around been kidnapped, and is being held in the secret city of Dun Darach (*Dún na n*

Darach means Oak Fort in Celtic). A rescue is obviously in order, and said rescue is Cuchulainn's main quest. Players will have to locate and save Loeg, and to achieve this, they will have to walk the streets of the secret city which are bound to present them with several side quests, lead to cryptic clues, and offer a few incredibly cute pun-based puzzles, most of which will have to be tackled before the game can be completed.

The core of the gameplay lies in exploring, understanding, and mapping the ancient city itself. With the lack of any meaningful real-time 3D options back then, this task was rather taxing, as the game tried to convey its 3D environment via interconnected, scrolling 2D images. Load it up and you'll notice

If you see a door, you can enter the building. This shop is looking for Aurums to buy.

The streets can seem crowded at times. It's really astonishing what Greg Follis and Roy Carter fit into the 48k of the Spectrum.

that a road section is shown at any given time, and as you walk to the left or right, the screen will scroll accordingly. The view can be rotated in 90 degrees increments, so whenever a junction is reached, the view can be rotated in such a way that a direction of movement perpendicular to the initial one can be chosen. Confusing? Yes, quite a bit admittedly, but this is also a sensible way of depicting every facet of a 3D environment when playing in third person and utilizing 2D graphics. Besides, this scheme can be quickly grasped by architects and other spatially aware specialists, and everyone else should be pretty comfortable with it after an hour or two. Comprehending the game's perspective and mastering its movement system are after all essential to appreciating

its city, and this really is a game city worthy of appreciation.

The layout of Dun Darach may not be complex or expansive enough to actually resemble a normal large city as the devs proudly proclaimed, but it remains intricate and well planned enough to make for a ground-breaking 8-bit virtual city. One that can easily stand out when compared to any of its contemporaries. Dun Darach is actually large enough to consist of several distinct quarters and sub-areas, each with their own character, even if sadly the red-light district was brutally censored and all that remains of it is a „Forbidden" sign.
Lacking an in-game map, the game employed several tricks to make

navigating its urban space easier. The regions are wisely color coded. Streets, squares, and neighborhoods also have their own names, and all doors are numbered. What's more, and besides enabling the creation of personal landmarks and paths, to further help players create their own mental maps every district in the game was designed with a distinct character, specialization, and unique set of land uses in mind. Seeing artisans and shops would mean the player is in Graymarket, whereas a cluster of bankers, appraisers, and brokers would have to be linked to Argot.

A LIVING, BREATHING CITY_____
Scattered, yet following believable patterns throughout the city, Cuchulainn can also find shops, deposit

houses, portals, temples, gambling dens, banks, and even a thieves' guild. And more impressively: Every door that players see can be entered, and the interiors of all buildings can be visited. Besides, if people couldn't enter shops and buy all manners of weird, exotic objects, or visit apothecaries to grab some medicine, this almost impossibly-well-crafted-within-its-limitations urban world just wouldn't function. Oh, and paying close attention to it will reveal how the clever, masterful re-use of simple assets such as wall corners, signs, or door frames was employed to create such an expansive environment. A city though is much more than its built environment, and Gargoyle was obviously aware of that. The developers tried to breathe life into Dun Darach by providing it with a

Bring your savings to the bank and let the money work for you. The money district is color-coded in yellow, the color of shining coins. Get it?

sense of dynamism, and an illusion of civic life despite the monstrous technical constraints. The time of day is indicated by the torches on the walls being lit or not, and also by the sort of greeting passersby offer. Rats infest parts of the city, an assortment of aptly dressed and fully animated characters with distinct AI routines seem to purposefully roam the streets, and shops are open or closed according to their own schedule.

What's more, the city acknowledges and reacts to the player's existence and actions. People will trade, greet, or on rare occasions let players in on well-hidden secrets, unless of course they decide to pick their pockets. Not that anybody would steal from a member of the thieves guild, mind you. Certain characters may offer aid in return for something they might need, whereas others will keep to themselves. Money – the wonderfully named Iridi – can be deposited in banks to earn interest, worked for, used to bribe, and its exchange and circulation is crucial for solving the game. It is, quite appropriately, one of the core functions Dun Darach's civic society has been built around. The city features a convincing urban society, and a lovely fantasy city, that is absolutely still worth exploring, and not exclusively for historical reasons. Now, I really wouldn't want to spoil the many wonders the game has to offer, at least not any further. But I do urge you to give this old, unfairly forgotten classic a try. Its

achievements are many and unique, and it is a fine example of how immersive urban environments can be constructed, using only minimal resources, and a tiny amount of assets.

- Konstantinos Dimopoulos
Game Urbanist, Designer,
Webmaster of www.game-cities.com

Crash magazine put Dun Darach on the cover in issue 18 in 1985, featuring some great art by Oliver Frey.

THE LAST STAND
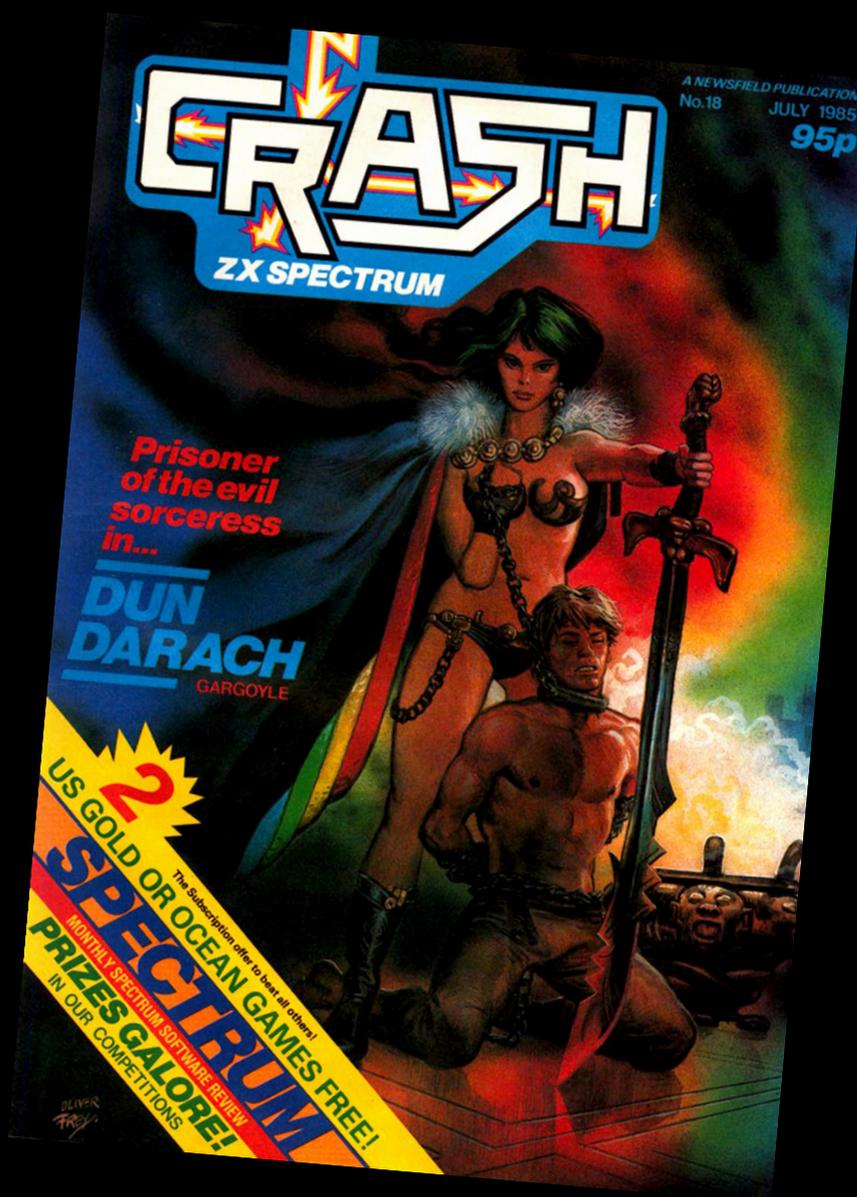
ATARI's LAST TAKE ON THE NES
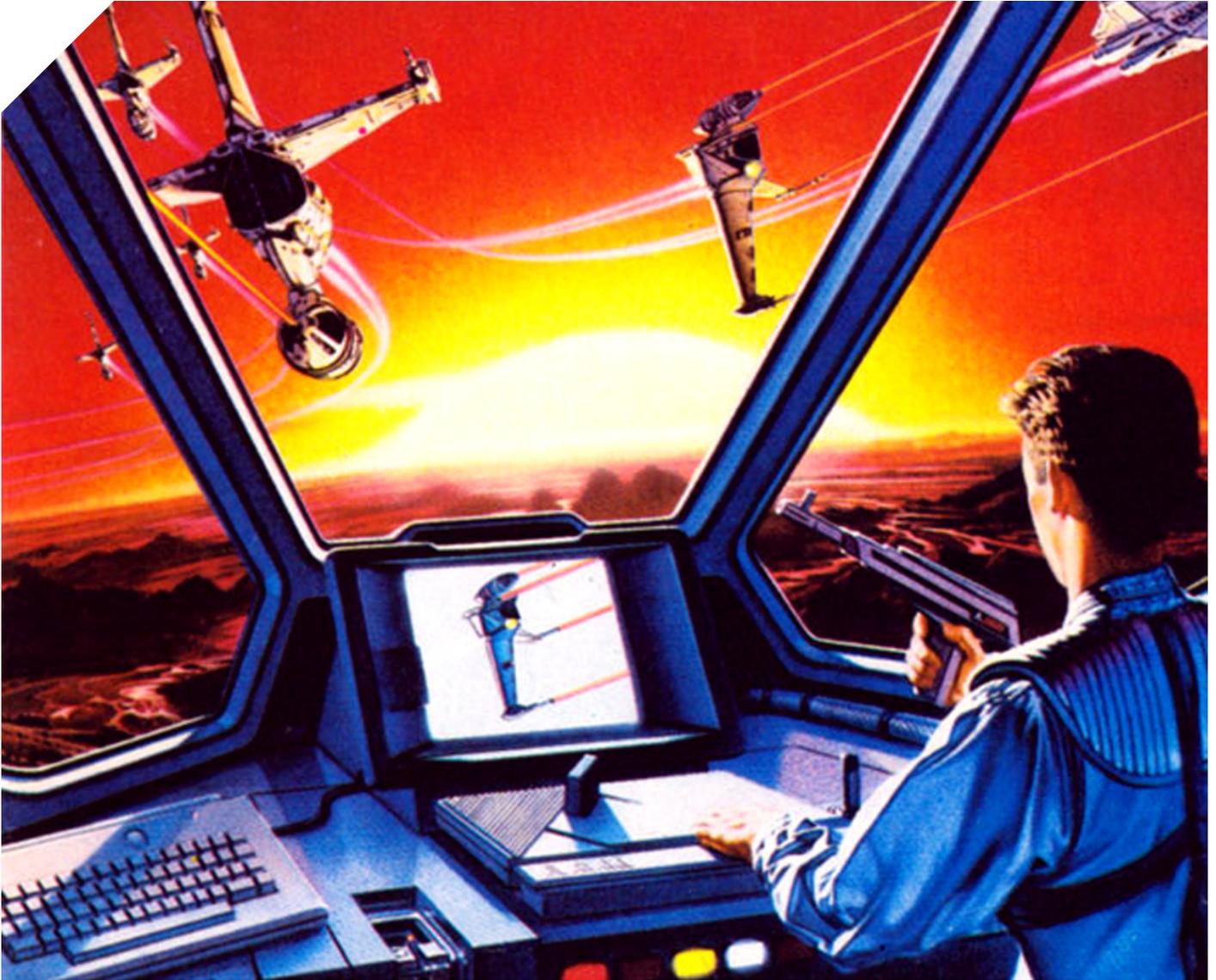
When the Atari XE Game System was released in 1987, Nintendo had already gained a strong foothold in the gaming world with their NES. Just one year before, they launched The Legend of Zelda and Metroid, boosted a strong advertisment campaign for Mike Tyson's Punch-Out and were claming that Nintendo users were "playing with power". The games were innovative, cool and the systems flew off the shelves. Sega with their Master System had serious trouble keeping up with that salesforce. Atari under Jack Tramiel saw a chance to revive its 2600 with the slogan "the fun is back", providing gamers with the most affordable console. One year before that, they had launched the 7800 as the contender to the battle against Nintendo and Sega. With its backward compatibility to the 2600, it seemed like a good way to upgrade for Atari users. And now the XE game system

was advertised as the console that brought computer games to video game consoles. It was, in fact, just a rehashed Atari 65XE. But imagine the situation for gamers: If you bought a Nintendo, there was just one console and you could be sure that every game you bought would run on your system. Now with Atari, you might have had a 2600, but then could only play 2600 games. Or you had a 7800, thus having been able to play either 7800 games or 2600 games. But if you bought a 5200 system some years ago, you could only buy a selection of carts for this and were out of luck finding new games for it. And now, there was even another Atari system out that played no 7800 games, no 5200 games, no 2600 games, but only games for the 400/800/XL/XE computer line. Being a consumer at the time was quite confusing. But it was indeed a typical move for Jack Tramiel: Just put something new out for every CES and see that you have products on the shelf that match every price point. It worked out financially for Atari, which Tramiel steamlined from a money bleeding beast into an actually profitable company. In the years from 1987 to 1992, Atari made a combined net income of around 475 million US-Dollars just with all their 8bit gaming machines. But it came at a price: As Tramiel was used to with Commodore, he focused heavily on hardware. New games, especially creative approaches, were just not his cup of tea. Software, he

believed, was for others to make. He just wanted to deliver the right platform for it at the best possible price. This sounds quite harsh as Atari was of course developing games for their 2600 and 7800 lines. But with the XEGS, it was a whole other story. The grey computer-console hybrid turned out to be very short-lived and did not meet the expectations at all. But let's take a look at the surroundings of its birth.

A TOY FOR THE PRICE OF A COMPUTER_____

When in talks with large stores selling Atari, the management asked them what the would rather like to sell: their line of 8bit computers at a very low price, or a new game console at twice the price. The answer was unanimously: "Give us that console!" They wanted something to address parents who wanted a little more than just a game console.

Nobody knows why they came up this those pastel colors for the buttons on the console, but they do somehow make the XEGS look friendly.

Photo: bk

THE LAST STAND

ATARI's LAST TAKE ON THE NES

With just some old games in a new box and nothing special that you couldn't buy for your 7800 or 2600, the XEGS was not a favorite amongst consumers. And with a game library like that, it had no chance of taking on Nintendo's NES. However, it had arguably the nicer console design.

Photo: bk

Or as Neil Harris, then Director of Marketing and Communications at Atari put it: "Physically it is more appealing to those who don't want a computer but who do want to play games. This system is purely a strategic move on our part [...] in order to keep the 8-bit line going." It was, basically, the old VIC20 story all over again: delivering a great game machine that was in fact a computer. So Atari rushed the XEGS to production. Under the futuristic design with its colorful buttons was a redesigned Atari 65XE mainboard, and that was just about it. To show off that it was more than just another gaming device, the deluxe bundle came with a detachable keyboard and the game Flight Simulator II, which offered a jumpy, but nonetheless unheard-of experience on any 8bit video game system of that time. It really looked nice and it seemed

to have the power to match the NES. Atari magazines praised it, other press mildly ignored it. Atari was ready to battle Nintendo heads-on with a TV commercial that compared the two systems. At that point in time, Nintendo still sold their NES with ROB the Robot, making it easy for Atari to make fun of such a dull add-on when you could actually do something with your console, like programming. Or so they thought. During 1987, they released more than two dozen games to accompany the launch of the system. But all of them were just rehashes of older titles, and worse yet: Many were also available on the much cheaper 7800. So if you liked those, why would you go out and spend nearly double for this new system? Atari missed the opportunity to bring out one new and creative games for the XEGS. It did not help that Nintendo had

contracts with gaming studios that basically said: "It's them or us, chose your side." So that companies that published games on the NES were basically forbidden to publish those games on another console. And because the NES was selling like crazy, it was a sure bet to release a game for it, not for Sega and not for Atari. In turn, the XEGS didn't get much third party support, Atari was on its own, licensing titles from Epyx, Accolade, Sublogic, Broderbund and Lucasfilm Games. They were not bad at all, but they were yesterday's news. The console gained some momentum in 1987, but after a year, there was not much of that left. In 1988 Nintendo had become a phenomenon, boosted by a strong marketing campaign. So Atari came up with some more titles before stopping development – or shall we say converting – games for the system. Many ports of 7800 titles such as Ninja Golf or Ikari Warriors were in the making, but did not see the light of day. Atari reduced the price for the XEGS, but it didn't help that no new games were launched, while you simply could not keep up with the releases for the NES. That year, Atari put some more money into ads, but otherwise did not seem to be too enthusiastic about the XEGS. Their cheaper 2600 and 7800 systems were doing far better.

FADING INTO OBSCURITY_____
Production of the XEGS carried on till at least 1990, judging from the cryptic serial numbers on consoles.

It also is a mystery how many units Atari actually sold. With regard to serial numbers, they might have approached 200.000 consoles by 1989. Let's look at their sales figures: Between 1987 and 1992, Atari sold at least 4 million to 7 million 8bit computers and video game consoles, judging from their net income with those machines alone. It is highly speculative just how many of those were XEGS, but probably the 2600 and 7800 sold the most units out of that bunch. And here is one clue: Atari stated as late as 1992 in their annual report they were "thinking about phasing out" the 2600 and 7800. In that very same report, they had no problem to announce the definitive end of the Atari ST. That's how well those two systems still did. Speaking of annual reports: The XEGS did not get a mention in there after 1990, suggesting the company had abondoned hope for the console. Also, there were no new games coming out for it after 1988. It had not fulfilled the expectations of the Atari management.

END OF LINE_____
It is a pity that the XEGS did not fare better, as it was a quite capable machine back in its day and surely deserved a larger game library. But as it is, you can complete your XEGS games collection with just 32 titles. However, don't expect them to be cheap, with some titles like Airball and Mario Bros. being quite valuable collector's items today.   *(bk)*

Better not lose any of these buttons, as you won't have any luck finding a replacement. Especially the HELP key is just loosely put on. It would be a great thing if someone made spares available via 3D printing...

ALL CLEAN

FLOPPY DISK CLEANER

Photo: Leigh Russ

How to clean a diskette? In our last issue, we had a small step-by-step guide to cleaning your old diskettes without destroying the data on them. Meanwhile, Leigh Russ came up with a clever 3D print that helps you enormously with this task. It consits of a frame to hold the disk itself, a spindle in its center, and that's basically it. The disks fit nice and tight into the frame, which has an opening where the disk surface is exposed so you can use a soft cloth and apply a light and steady pressure there whilst turning the knob to spin the disk inside. It's easy to do and much faster than doing it with q-tips and spinning the disk manually every so often. Leigh sells two versions of this nifty little helper: a basic and a deluxe version. Both work pretty well, the only difference is that the deluxe version comes with a top flap that helps pushing the disk down while cleaning. Either way, it works and it's up to you how much comfort you want to pay for: the deluxe version costs 16.50 GBP, the basic one only 13.50 GBP. The best way to get one is to write Leigh an email: lemaru@hotmail.com. He also offers a cleaning system for 3.5" disk, if you fancy such modern storage media. *(bk)*

FLOPPY FLOP

THE STANDARD YOU PROBABLY NEVER EVEN HEARD OF

The 3.25" disk was not around for long: Introduced in 1983, it was only used by COLECO ADAM's prototype floppy drive and by an obscure system called Seequa Chameleon 325. Besides Dysan, also Tabor and 3M produced these diskettes. In 1984, it was clear that this format was going nowhere and production was stopped at Dysan when the merged with Xidex in spring of 1984.

It sounded like a reasonable idea: if you can shrink a 5.25" floppy disk, then make it 3.25" big and let it be flexible. The new media came out in 1983 and had been developed by Dysan, who were a big name in magnetic storage media and the go-to address for many business software producers. They thought that they could set this new standard – and they were very serious about it. Around that very same time, Sony released the 3.5" disk (which was used by Apple and the Amiga) and Hitachi-Maxell pushed their 3" one (which only Amstrad was willing to bet on big time). Dysan wanted to keep most of its machines that were only able to produce flexible diskettes. And so they began to push hard to rule the market for so-called "shirt pocket disks." They even went so far as to establish a whole software publishing business. But as Sony struck a deal with Apple, IBM and HP to use their format, Dysan abondoned all hope for their format. With an unformatted capacity of 500 KB, it was good, but sadly not good enough. They lost a fortune producing more drives and disks than the market was accepting. *(bk)*

PORTRAIT

## ALF YNGVE, SEUCK MAGICIAN

Photo: Alf Yngve

Alf Yngve enjoys making computer games since he first started it back in the late 80s. But it wasn't BASIC that got him started, nor was it Assembler. "I am not a coder", he says. It was a whole other tool that sparked his passion. Measuring by today's standards, you could say it is a kind of game engine. And he first saw it in the UK based C64 magazine *ZZAP!64*. Its name: Shoot 'Em Up Construction Kit – or

SEUCK for short. "As soon as I read the review of this utility, I decided that I must have it. I began to make plans for the games I was going to create before I actually bought the program", Alf recalls. With games like *Rambo*, *Green Beret* and *Commando* amongst his list of favorite games, this tool seemed like an incredibly accessible way to make his very own games of that sort. "I instantly fell in love with the freedom to create games without programming knowledge – that was unique at the time. There was nothing else like it!", says Alf. Indeed, until SEUCK came out, there have been game makers, but none of them was nearly as sophisticated as this tool was. Many allowed for games that looked like it was still 1983, but for 1987, SEUCK delivered nearly state of the art games. However, it came with several limitations. "The very first game I made with SEUCK was called *Diamond Rings*, and it wasn't very good – the files were lost a long time ago. The scenario was that you fly a small spaceship through the rings of Saturn, zap ice blocks, and try to collect diamond asteroids. I sat literally in my room after school, with my C64 and the cassette tape station (never had a disk drive), and tinkered with game after game. Even then I realized the severe limitations of the software: it wouldn't let me have more than eight enemy objects on the screen at the same time. But later I figured out ways to work around those limitations. And

that's what I have been doing ever since: Working around the limitations." It was an exciting experience for Alf Yngve, and he got better and better with every game he designed. This was just the right tool for him: He didn't have to bother with all that LDA and STA stuff. Instead, he could just focus on his creativity. And at one point, he felt so confident that he sent one of his games on tape to *ZZAP!64* so that they released it. Which they did. "My first published game was COPS, on the covertape of the magazine *ZZAP!64*. I was of course very happy and made a sequel, HOLIDAY COPS, which appeared on another covertape." And his courage paid out in more than one way, as this was how he got his foot into the doorstep of the gaming industry. "One editor at the magazine ZZAP!64/Commodore Force, Norman Osborne, was especially encouraging. He wrote back to me that I should try to get a job in the industry – which I did, much later. I showed my SEUCK games, both C64 and Amiga versions, to a software house, and they were so impressed that they hired me to work with game design and testing. I worked there until around 2001 or 2002", recalls Alf. Who else can say that reading a review of a game construction tool in a C64 magazine eventually changed their life?

COMEBACK
As Alf Yngve went to work in the industry, he left his C64 behind.
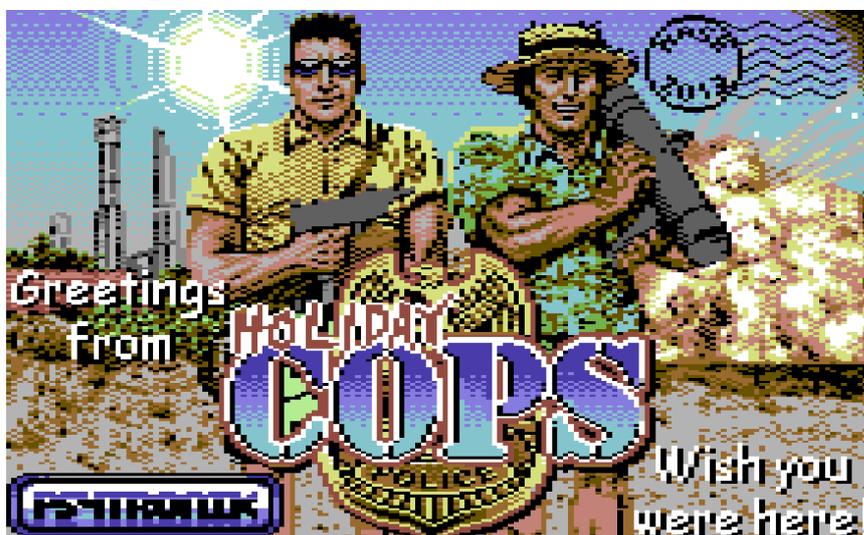
His last game on the platform during the 90s was released in 1995. He sold his C64 equipment, but did never forget about his beginnings. And when the C64 scene started to gain momentum via the internet again, Alf was back. "The real kicker was when coder Jon Wells improved SEUCK with a side-scrolling version. That's when my old enthusiasm returned. I could finally realize some side-scrolling game ideas that the original software wouldn't allow." Driven by enthusiasm and "old habit", as he calls it, Alf has since released a steady stream of games for the C64. And with each one of them, he always tries to bend the limits of what the tool can do and what people would expect of a game made in SEUCK. Like with *Split Second*, for example. It uses a split screen and supports two players at the same time. How is that even possible? The answer is: Alf got help. Jason "Kenz" McKenzie from Psytronik introduced him to two very

His most successful game series, Cops, spawned three sequels: Holiday Cops, Cops III – Cops, Robbers and Dinosaurs, and Cops – The Final Chapter. They are all still available as compilation over at Psytronik.

PORTRAIT

ALF YNGVE

Big sprites and two player simultaniously playing? No problem for Alf Yngve.
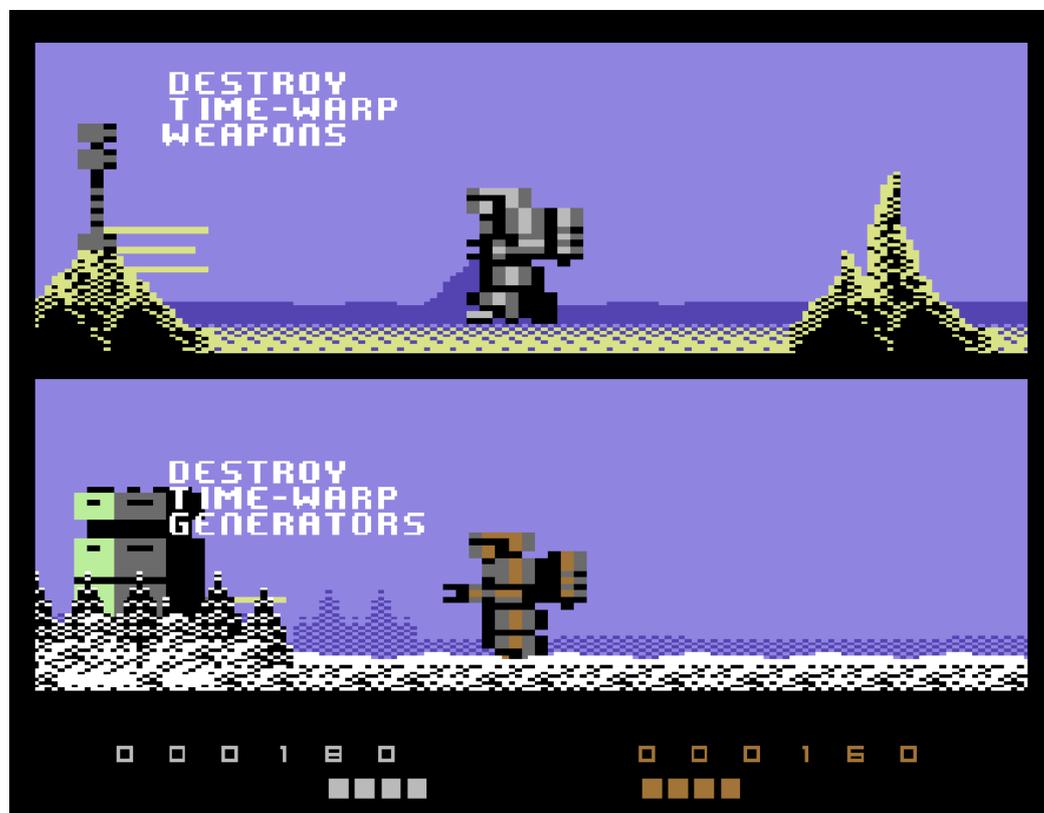
talented coders: Richard Bayliss and Martin Piper. Funny: Martin's game *Tusari* was featured on the very same covertape as Alf's *Holiday Cops* back in the day. "Richard sent me POKE codes that even a non-coder like me could add to my SEUCK files, and thus create entirely new effects", explains Alf. "The games *Double or Nothing*, *Split Second* and *Big Gun #1* were enhanced with Richard's POKE commands. He also unlocked hi-res sprite mode, which I have used in the game *Tau Zero Reloaded*." He adds: "Controlling two players with one joystick is actually very easy to pull off programming-wise. The real challenge is: What can you do with this feature?"

A big technical boost came from Martin Piper, who created a frame-work called *SEUCK Redux*. It incorporates SEUCK game date into far superior assembly code which doesn't have the limitations of the original engine. "This means we can have more sprites on-screen, generate bullet sprites which can be destroyed by the player, enemies can aim their bullets at the player, power-ups and much more. And it is open source software, so anyone can use it."

HOW EVERY GAME STARTS_____

An idea for a new game might strike in any situation. Thankfully, Alf always keeps his notebook near: "My games always begin as drawings and handwritten notes on paper. I write a scenario. Then I try out the basic game mechanics – what is the player

able to do? Are there any technical obstacles? The graphics come next, then a short test version of the game design to check that the concept is working as intended. Next, I draw the sprites, the backgrounds, and map the levels. Finally I make the attack wave patterns and test the game. The final stage is actually a lot of work, since I make many, many small changes to the game design during testing. The number of "versions" in the final testing stage can be anything between three to beyond ten." And he still enjoys making new games, with almost every year two or three new games getting released. And his games always open up news aspects of SEUCK. Like *Bank Run*, which is heavily inspired by *Bank Panic* on the Sega Master System. Originally a lightgun shooter, Alf found a way for the concept to work out with a horizontal version of SEUCK. It's just a great little game. But what does his family have to say to such a time-consuming hobby? "They don't mind, as long as I don't neglect them. But I have scaled down the amount of time I spend on C64 games, for practical reasons." So when he is not producing new games or spending time with his family, he draws children's books and creates book covers. Being a graphic artist, this really is his strong suit. If you are interested in his works, you can find them over at Amazon. One of his titles, "The Argus Project", is even based on one of his older games. *(bk)*

"Shoot'em-ups are at heart power fantasies, so empower the player", says Alf Yngve. And in his latest game collection SEUDS 4, there is no doubt about it: This collection of four games features big player sprites, massive weaponry and a lot going on on-screen.

GAME ON

LEGEND OF SILVERPEAK (ATARI 7800)

Sometimes, a simple woodsman can make a difference – like Azémar Rehn, the protagonist in *Legend of Silverpeak*. He just wanted to see his unlce again, but then stumbles into a great adventure as he finds himself surrounded by mercenaries and theives, bent on taking whatever they can for their own selfish gain. It was certainly not the realm he remembered from his last visit. Much had changed, and he feels an urgent need to restore order to this place, and find his uncle along the journey.

As Azémar finds out pretty quickly, it was a warrior named Nonnag that created this dark place with the magic help of the so-called Crystal of Wrath. Azémar has to find and destroy this beacon of all evil to save this world. Sadly, he can't count on help from the former grand army, as it has disbanded, leaving the helpless civilians to their doom. Equipped with barely more than his courage, he begins his quest ...

FINALLY: A RPG FOR THE 7800_____
The story and gameplay of *Legend of Silverpeak* are somewhat inspired by *Legend of Zelda*, as you might have guessed by the name of the villain: Nonnag is just Gannon spelled backwards. But it's not a bad thing to look for orientation in one of the best games in the NES library when creating your own role playing game for the Atari 7800. Actually, you could say that finally someone takes on the challenge to give Atari users a great gaming experience and show just what the small console is capable of. The game is pretty ex-

pansive with a large overworld map to explore freely, some dungeons and towns and several shops to buy things that will help you on your journey. However, there is no music nor sound effects. Coder Steve Engelhardt explained at AtariAge: "this game is completely devoid of audio. I'm not good at it and have been putting that off." Instead, he focused on the battles and game engine: "The battles at the beginning of the game are very easy, and later on they are probably too difficult. Hundreds of hours of work have already gone into this already, and many design and gameplay choices were made based on compromises related to available hardware resources, especially the attack sequence." And while the game is not yet completely done, it is sophisticated enough for more than a short look. "While the game's basic objectives are in place and the game is playable and winnable, there is still much work to be done. I'm aware of a few minor issues here and there that still need to be worked out. The most notable area that isn't completed are the planned boss battles in each dungeon, some objects in the game don't do anything yet, how you level up and progress in the game will likely be changed or tweaked, and the graphics are my first attempt and may be changed."

That sounds like a hole lot still to do and one might wonder: can you actually play the game, and if so, how does it play? The answer is: Yes, you can play it, and it is quite enjoy-

GAME ON

LEGEND OF SILVERPEAK (ATARI 7800)

able already. It is already too large for any standard EPROMs with 280 KB, and Steve states that the final version will have 512 KB. So you will need an emulator or a flashcard for your 7800 to play the game. (If you emulate, better use the A7800.)

If you ever played a Zelda game on the NES, you will be quickly familiar with *Legend of Silverpeak*. You have an overview of your health and mana points as well as your wallet. When you are in battle, you can press the right fire button to bring get a detailed status screen with your Experience points, the current level of your character, your attributes, inventory and a very handy glimpse of where you are on the map right now. In this menu, you can also save or load your game. When in battle, the right button lets you switch to the menu to use

some of your items while pressing the left button attacks. The fighting feels still a bit unpolished and jumpy, but it works. And the animations of the figures are already rather nice. As Steve is still working to improve and finalize the game, this is very berable. Especially if you consider that the 7800 had nothing that could be compared with either Zelda or Phantasy Star until now. And also bear in mind that Steve is working on this alone in his spare time, and has done everything so far with 7800BASIC (which compiles everything in 6502 assembler so you won't have to fear that it's painstakingly slow). *Legend of Silverpeak* is already a great achievement for the Atari 7800 community and hopefully, Steve will complete the game soon.

(bk)

This is quite a detailed status for an Atari 7800 game. Back in the day, this would have surely been a bestseller on the system.

Alone in the forest: considering this game was written in BASIC, it looks and plays quite elaborate. Hopefully it will be completed this year – and maybe there will even be an cartridge release some day.

Your inventory, the number of crystals you already discovered, your stats and even a mini map!

A C64 DEMAKE OF THE 2014 INDIE HIT LU

How to describe Luftrauserz best? Well, it's kind of like playing *Time Pilot* after having drank six cans of the energy drink of your choice. At night. That's what it's like. You get the idea: it is a very fast-paced, highscore-driven air combat game for the Commodore 64. And it is a demake. You might actually wonder what's missing with all that speed and action going on, and it's really not that much. Certainly, while you progress, the PC version throw more enemy planes at you than you can count, but there is no lack of enemies in this version either. Behind it all is Paul Koller, the guy who already demade Canabalt and Micro Hexagon on the C64 – both fast-paced arcade games that continue to be a favorite play choice at retro parties.

START YOUR ENGINES_____
So what's going on here precisely? Grab a plane, take off, shoot some enemies down, land, upgrade, repeat. As soon as you'll start your plane, you're in the action. There are so many enemies waiting for

JETRAUSER

000810

ABOUT PAUL KOLLER
You might have heard this name before. That's because he has been quite active in recent years, putting out games like C64nabalt (2011), Micro Hexagon (2014) and now Luftrauserz (2017).

you! Your damage is indicated by the border color: If it's black, you've taken no damage. As it gets brighter, you get into more trouble. And if it's white, you're just one more hit away from death. But as you hold your fire, your plany slowly repairs itself. After having shot down a certain number of planes, return to your aircraft carrier to upgrade. Here you can select from more than 125 combinations of weapons, bodies, and propulsion systems to fight off planes, battleships, and rival aces. Oh, and big Zeppelines. Yeah, that's right, those are in here, too. The multi-directional scrolling keeps up with you at 50 fps and there seems to be no frame rate drops here. And the SID tunes by Stein Pedersen composed for this release are also very nice. C64 owners can buy the game from RGCD either on cartridge with an automatic score loading and

saving feature. Or you can download the crt image over at the itch.io page of RGCD. It's definitely a game that will leave you wanting just one more round to improve on your last high-score. *(bk)*

At RGCD, you'll get the game on cart along with a manual, stickers and a poster.

I f you played *Majesty of Sprites* on the Plus/4, you might have been impressed. But you might have also thought: "Of course there is no smooth scrolling, it's just the Plussie after all." And now there is Pets Rescue, and there has never been something quite like it on the machine. Finally, here comes a game that not only utilizes the nice color palette of the Plus/4, but also makes great use of colorful software sprites, multi-directional parallax scrolling and nice music. It is, in every way, an outstanding release for any machine, let alone the Plussie. The coder behind it is Stefan Mader, the same guy who is resposible for *Majesty of Sprites*. He says about his motivation: "Probably the teas-
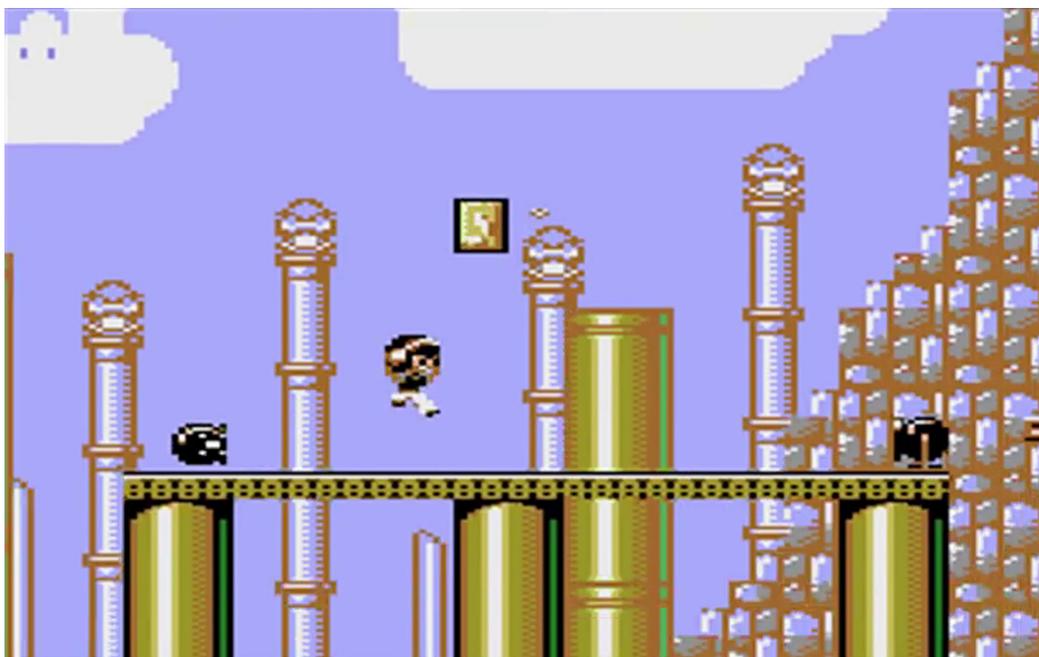
Shapes and color clashes: nothing of that sort can be found in Pets Rescue. The game convinces with very sophisticated sprites and multi-directional scrolling.

ing from the demoscene motivated me to continue with games on the Plus/4. Comments regarding the scrolling in *Majesty of Sprites*, one of our games. It would be unbearable, they said. So that was quite motivating to show that it can be done far better." He continues: "After all, the Plus/4 has soft scroll registers. Except for the missing sprites and the missing SID for the music, it is actually in the same league as other 8bit machines. And 128 colours are a good argument for me. And if you optimize your software sprite routines well and use the 64K memory, you get very good results. That's exactly what I wanted to show with

Going down: Even under water, our main character won't take off her headphones. Must be some great tracks she's listening to.

>> *At first, the game was supposed to be a faithful conversion of Super Mario, until we realized that this might cause problems.*
Stefan Mader

the game." But for Stefan, there is also some nostalgic feeling attached to the Plus/4. He remembers: "Looking back, the first thing that comes to my mind regarding this computer is ditching school to meet and play with friends. I remember the audio samples of the flight simulator *Ace*, *Kickstart* and *Mr. Puniverse*. We played at a friend's house, funnily named Mario, in our free time. Basically, I associate great childhood memories with the Plus/4 and also something like belonging to a circle of friends of several young people with the same hobby."
But Stefan played on many different consoles and computers, and his game certainly shows some of the games that inspired him, some are less obvious: "There is *Super Mario* on the NES first of all. And *Giana Sisters* as well as *Hard'n'Heavy*, *Superfrog* and *Sam's Journey* are also to be mentioned. At first, the game was

supposed to be a faithful conversion of *Super Mario* until we realized that this might cause problems."

INTERESTING TECHNICAL STUFF__
It took the team around nine months to complete this game. They started just with Stefan and Kichy, the graphic artist. Further support came from Luca, Nero and Carrion, who contributed a big deal to the graphics as well. But the first thing you might notice when starting the game from disk are the extremely short loading times, thanks to the Bitfire loader done by BSZ and Bitbreaker. It seems to shovel bytes into the machine as fast as it can handle them – there might very well not be a faster routine on the C64.
The game runs in fullscreen at 25Hz. Stefan explains why: "Some parts of the game could run in 50Hz, but I limited so that the frame rate stays stable." Also, not having any displays

Tubes and coins: sometimes, Pets Rescue shows what has been one of the inspirations for the game.
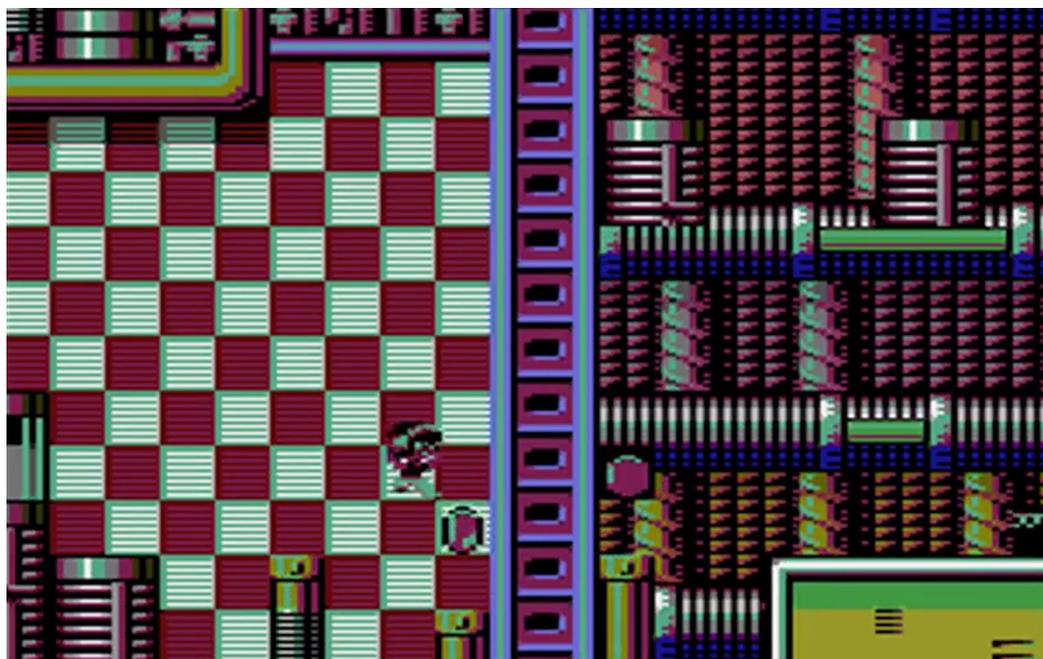
Look at the colors: Pets Rescue amazes with awesome pixel work.

for lifes, scores and the like helps with the smooth experience: "Normally, games that use a lot of colors also have a reduced screen section on the C64 to achieve scrolling in 50Hz. But since a status display would have limited the sprites and would have snatched something from memory, I didn't do that and instead set it to a fullscreen view, which I personally think is quite cool." And indeed, it is. While playing, you can completely focus on the onscreen action and don't get distracted by anything. A display between levels then shows eveything you need to know.

There is enough raster time left for some great scrolling, too. You might notice it first while playing the second level, and it is just amazing seeing this on a Plus/4. Stefan explains: "Many people think that parallax scrolling is very time consuming, but thanks to some optimizations,

like the lack of color information in the back layer, and a good idea by Kichy, it's not really critical at all. Thanks to him, the parallax scrolling only needs 20 characters in the 256 character font. A few years ago I did a game on the C64 which already offered this routine, which is why I already knew the standard algorithms for it. On the Plus/4 we now use a quite similar approach, but with much less memory consumption."

IT'S IN THE GAME_____
But all tech-talk aside, Pets Rescue is a great game. You play a female scientist who has to rescue animals after a lab experiment gone very wrong. She wears headphones throughout the levels (even under water) and that makes for a very cute sprite. But it also lets you think that what you hear is actually the sound from her headphones. The enemies are also drawn very nicely and move

Let it snow: No jacket, but still those head-phones. Anyway, this does not look or feel like any Plus/4 game you played before.

very smooth. One minor downside is that the levels are rather short to play through, but they got you covered there from storming through as the levels get harder as you progress. It's never unfair, sometimes it might reminds you on Mega Man, because you need to know some patterns and enemies to get past them first, and this will cost some lives. But the game is never unfair and it helps immensly that the sprite collisiono detection is a precise as it gets and rather forgiving.

And while playing in 25Hz might not be something you'd find great on a new console, it works like a charm on the Plus/4. It helps that Stefan set the framerate to this instead of allowing krass fps droppings – this would have been a downer for sure. As it is, you will enjoy the game and at some points even forget that you are playing on Commodores long neglected Herdware (get it, because

of Bil Herd? Anyway …). It shows some inspiration from Super Mario, but that seems to be fitting only for the first level and the dungeon or castle levels. *Pets Rescue* has become a game that stands very well on its own, showing some nods to well-established IPs here and there, but haveing enough steam to roll on its own right. It is a revolutionary game for the platform and, if it had been released in 1986 or 87, might have been a serious system seller, muting those wise guys laughing at the specs of the Plus/4. And the best thing about it: it's free. There is no excuse not to play this gem. And for those who want to support the outstanding work of Stefan and the others behind this project, wait for the Psytronik release that will be coming soon. *Pets Rescue* deserves a place in every well-stuffed collector's shelf. And we will stay excited to see what Stefan's next game will be like.   *(bk)*
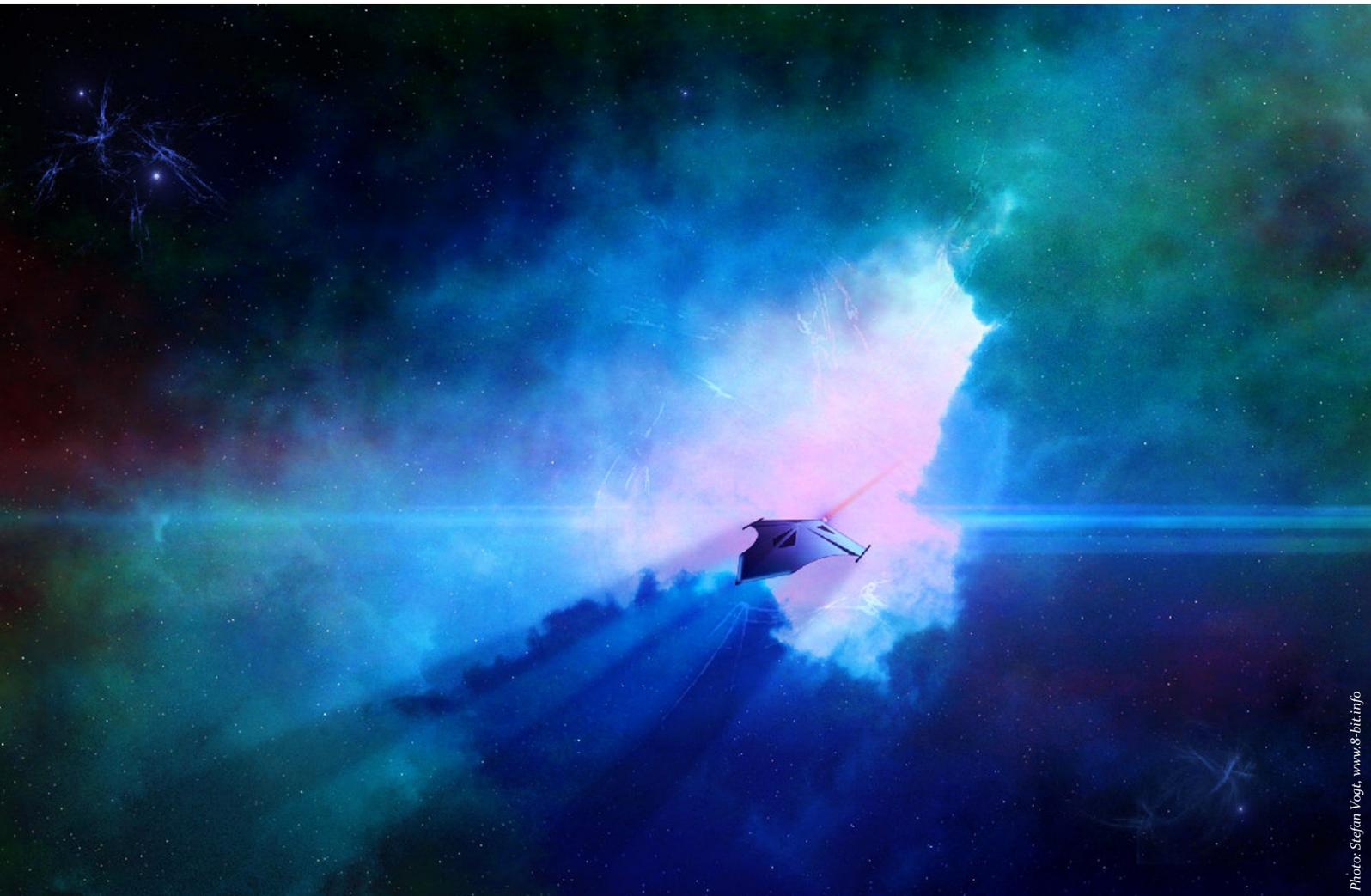
SCENE WORLD

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Photo: Stefan Vogt, www.8-bit.info

"You open up the covers. You lure me in. This place is death – I know you feel the same." This is the opening line of Hibernated. It's based on a song by Deftones (This place is Death). Although not a scifi song, it fits the situation quite nicely.

Imagine waking up half-way on a very long trip – you are traveling to another solar system – and suddenly discover that there is something out there that is not of human origin. Nothing has prepared you for this. Nobody thought that this was even possible, yet here you are, having to cope with the situation. This is the beginning of *Hibernated – This place is death* by Stefan Vogt. His new text adventure lets you play the role of astronaut Olivia abroad her ship Polaris 7. And it's a very elaborate adventure as well. But it is not as hard as you remember adven-

tures from back in the 80s. Stefan explains: "The way you play modern games has influenced me while programming Hibernated in a way, because it is not about finding the exact phrase to get through a door, but it's about telling a great story that you can enjoy. So it's more like a romantic dream of a game from the 80s." And like every great dream, the game is immensly immersive and has a very dense atmosphere. It could take place somewhere in the *Alien* or *2001* universe, as the description of the things you see inspire your imagination. Speaking

of inspiration: What exactly inspired Stefan with his game? Well, it's not easy to break this down to one film, song or book: "It was the pop culture of the 80s as a whole that inspired me. Naturally, during that time many exciting films and soundtracks have been released that are inspiring, like Blade Runner, for example." What's definitely been inspiring him were the works of Isaac Asimov, like the book *The Positronic Mind*, and many Perry Rhodan books. This is why in Hibernated, you have one companion at your side. He helps you to find out how to get along inside of the alien vessel once you are aboard: Io, an AI that is more than just a little helpful. However, it needs some modification to be able to do this. Which, when and what kind of mods – well, you will discover that for yourself. "For me, it was very important to make the story as realistic and plausible as possible, and with this technology, I think, it just works."

TENSE ATMOSPHERE_____
The story of Hibernated unfolds during the adventure, so it's difficult to go into any detail without spoiling too much information. But as being just the first one of three games with that title, it will give you a satisfying ending, yet leaving you wanting more. And this is because of the atmosphere the game creates. "The mind creates the best pictures", says Stefan with regard to why he chose to make a text adventure rather than

anything else. In this way, Stefan manages to create a dark, but not bleak tone. There is some humor in there, but just in the right dosage. And because you cannot die in *Hibernated*, you'll feel more excited than afraid to test things out. Playing this is like a journey in itself, letting your mind wander off to imagine all this taking place in a *Star Trek* universe, or as part of a new *Alien* trilogy. Just free your mind, and the rest will follow.

BY YOUR COMMAND_____
Another thing that Stefan put much work into are the commands: Hibernated understands quite a few synonyms, so that you won't be locked out anywhere, wondering what the correct verb-noun combination might be. It also has a hint system implemented that guides you on the right way.

It's not made up entirely from the ground, but using *The Quill* by Tim Gilberts. It is, in a way, an early form of game engine for creating adventures. And it is also done with a version of *The Quill* that was previously not published and that Stefan got from Tim Gilberts himself as he contacted him. The advanced version will even allow for four word parsers in future games, but for now, Stefan chose to stick with the two word parser.

The game will be released as freeware, but also a tape version will be available via Pond Software. So what are you waiting for – get it!   *(bk)*

> **The mind creates the best pictures. That's why I like text adventures.**
> *Stefan Vogt*

One of the first adventures that impressed Stefan was Planetfall by Infocom.

Tau Zero Reloaded has a unique look that makes it stand out. And it's quite fancy with all those flashy explosions.

Tau Zero Reloaded is a vertically scrolling Shooter that looks slow at first, but you will have plenty to do after the first attack wave of enemy ships. Basically, as soon as you see the grey, mechanical surface and all the defence turrets firing at you, it gets challenging not to get hit. You fly, as the name of the game suggests, the Zau Zero weapon in an attempt to defend earth against an long forgotten enemy force called the Firebird, a mysterious and sinister energy being. It has just one goal: destroy every planet it can find. So you better stop it.

Visually, Tau Zero Reloaded looks superb: The enemies and backgrounds with all the shadings in three shades of grey are drawn quite clever so that you'll actually think the gigantic stepped pyramids you're flying towards will be you certain doom if you don't evade. Destroying turrets on the ground result in a flashing explosion. What's also great are the power-ups you'll receive every so often for destroying certain targets. The music was done by Richard Bayliss and is quite nice as well. Sometimes, the screen can get so crowded that you'll notice a minor slowdown, which is a pity, but bearable. Overall, Tau Zero Reloaded is a solid arcade-style shooter that you can pop in for quick fun, but it won't get you hooked for hours. Give it a try!   *(bk)*

SEUDS 4: BIG GUN NUMBER ONE (C64)

That is indeed one Big Robot with a bit gun! He doesn't bother shooting just a single rocket, he fires a cannonade of projectiles at enemies.

Oh, the Russians. The typical enemy of so many 80s movies. Why not bring them back for one more threat? Welcome to Big Gun No. 1! Apparently, they have found a way to invade whatever country with a mechanical army and it's up to you in your Mech Cruiser NTT-1 to stop the invasion. And what a massive beast this thing is! It's almost half as big as the screen, walking slowly across the deserted landscape. It makes you think of something from Power Rangers or Godzilla – this is some serious metal monster. And you control it. And it actually feels quite nice, the movement of the big robotic sprite fits the slow horizontal scrolling speed very well. Nothing those Russians will throw at you seems to be a match for you. This is really what "empowering the player" is all about, like Alf Yngve said. And then, just when you thought what else might come, you can actually detach your torso and fly over open water. Here you'll see another impressive effect as translucent clouds stay in the foreground while you and your enemies fly behind them. How is that even possible? Again, the SID tunes done by Richard Bayliss create a great atmosphere.
(bk)

Interesting idea, but too difficult to be fun for more than a quick try.

Can you trust your eyes? What is real and what is not? Imagine seeing two different times of a planetary war at the same time. Sounds confusing? Well, it certainly is if you think too much about it. But in Edge of time, you're getting exactly that. So you have to destroy the time-warp generators to prevent enemy troops from going back in time and causing a lot of damage. You control both robots in both times with your movements. So what might look like a silly robo-moonwalk with nothing to be afraid of on one screen is actually making a lot more sense on the other one as you fight off attacking robots. It takes a short time to get used to looking in both timespheres to see what needs to be done, but it is an interesting concept for sure. And a difficult one as well. Because as soon as you lose one of your robots, it won't be possible to accomplish your mission. Maybe that explains the subtitle "Double or nothing 2." It is in fact so hard that many a gamer will lose interest before having played for more than two minutes. Right about then, you will have passed the second time-warp generator in the future – and after that, you take a lot of damage, losing one life after another faster than you can say "flux capacitor." An interesting concept, but far too difficult to be really enjoyable. Maybe Alf Yngve will give this one an overhaul some day? Would be great to see a remastered version. *(bk)*

GAME ON

SEUDS 4: EXPENDABLE ARMY (C64)

Welcome to the jungle: If you liked Commando, you will enjoy this game.

Do you like Commando and Ikari Warriors? Then welcome to the Expendable Army. Enough of Machine Guns and Grenades, this game lets you use rocket launchers, and once you have this weapon, you won't want to lose it anymore. The rockets are so well animated, you'll think this is some console port of a game you never heard of. But it's not. And sadly, you can't keep firing rockets forever. After a couple of shots, it's back to machine gun. The guerilla army you fight against could be anywhere on this planet. But they seem to be quite determined to take you out. However, the game is well-balanced and never unfair. Not even when you are fighting agains a helicopter – a fight that Rambo would be very proud of. But while you're shooting around, be careful what you aim at. There are civilians and even tame dogs that you mustn't hurt.

The lower screen looks also quite nice, just like something you'd see on good Atari 7800 games. A camouflages highscore? Sweet! A green baret next to your lives? Awesome! Alf Yngve has really put a lot of work into this game, and it certainly shows. And while the tune by Richard Bayliss is quite catchy, it is also somewhat unfitting to what is going on there on the screen. But that is really a minor complaint to an otherwise quite enjoyable title. And although it's hard, it's also motivating to try one more time. Nice! *(bk)*
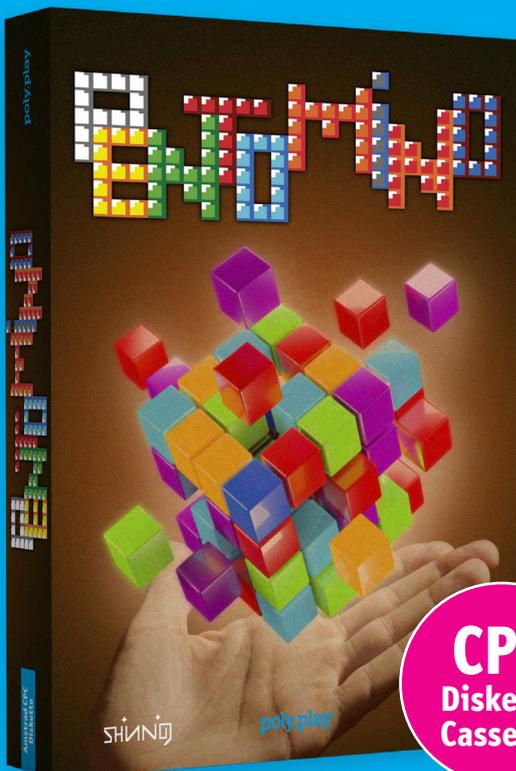
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RETROGAME PUBLISHING
P R E S E N T S

RESCUING ORC
WORLD OF MAGICA
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C64
Cartridge
Diskette
Cassette

Rescuing Orc is a jump & slash game,
a mixture of platforming and action,
with a bit of adventure for good balance.

DOOMSDAY LOST ECHOES
A. RIERA D. CASTAÑO T.PAPASSILEKAS
"[[C]E]"   "EL NOÑO"   "GRYZOR"

IN OUTER SPACE
BEING ALONE IS NOT ALW
poly.play

CPC
Diskette

Doomsday Lost Echoes is a high grade
graphical text adventure with tons
of pixel art and three possible endings.

PENTOMINO
SHINO   poly.play

CPC
Diskette
Cassette

Pentomino is a puzzle-game where
you have to solve 464 different puzzles
and has a great soundtrack.

SPACE CHASE
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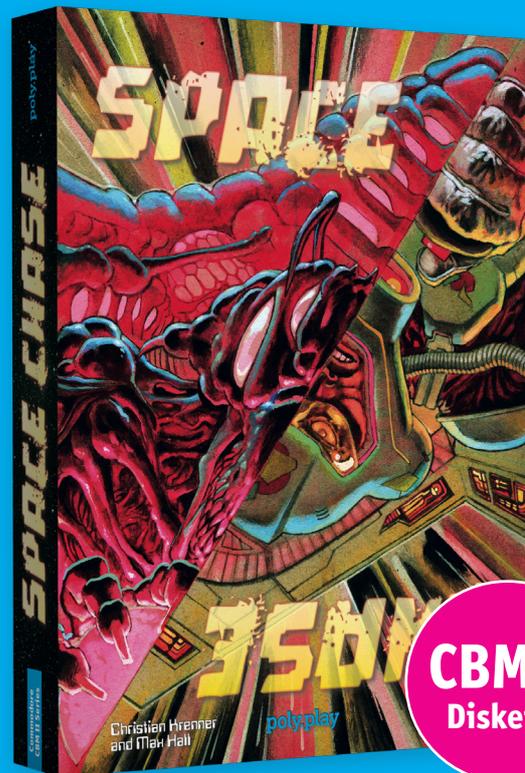
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W W W . P O L Y P L A Y . X Y Z