

OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER



GODS, 1991



REMASTERING GODS

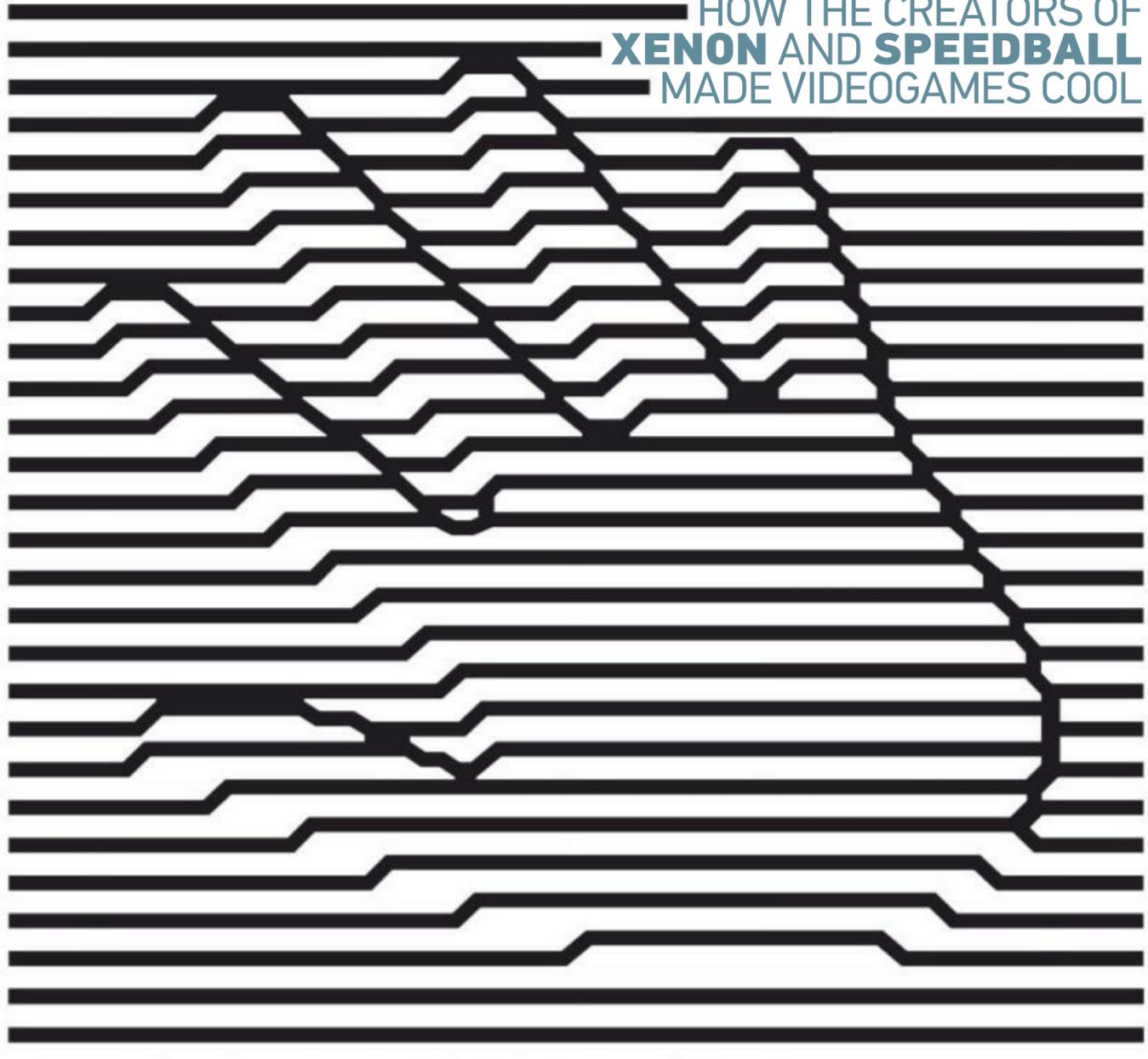
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE 16-BIT CLASSIC AND ITS BRAND-NEW REMASTER

MODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

THE BEST PS2 GAMES AS VOTED BY YOU

The BITMAP BROTHERS

HOW THE CREATORS OF XENON AND SPEEDBALL MADE VIDEOGAMES COOL



THE CHAOS ENGINE, 1993



XENON 2: MEGABLAST, 1989



SPEEDBALL, 1988



SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE, 1990



THE CHAOS ENGINE 2, 1996



MAGIC POCKETS, 1991



XENON, 1988

- PLUS**
- BADLANDS
 - BONANZA BROS
 - CHRIS SHRIGLEY
 - BOUNTY BOB STRIKES BACK
 - CROC: LEGEND OF THE GOBBOS
 - THE LONGEST JOURNEY
 - DEFENDER

35 YEARS OF THE AMSTRAD CPC
CODERS PAY TRIBUTE TO LORD SUGAR'S 8-BIT UNDERDOG

ULTIMATE GUIDE: ISS PRO
WE TAKE AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT KONAMI'S FOOTY CLASSIC



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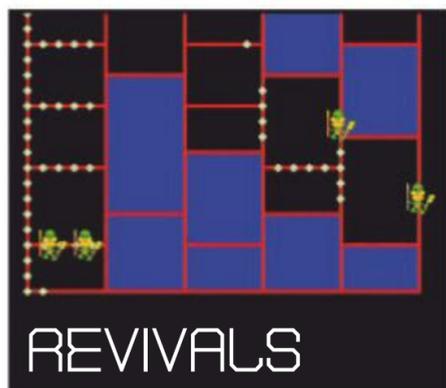
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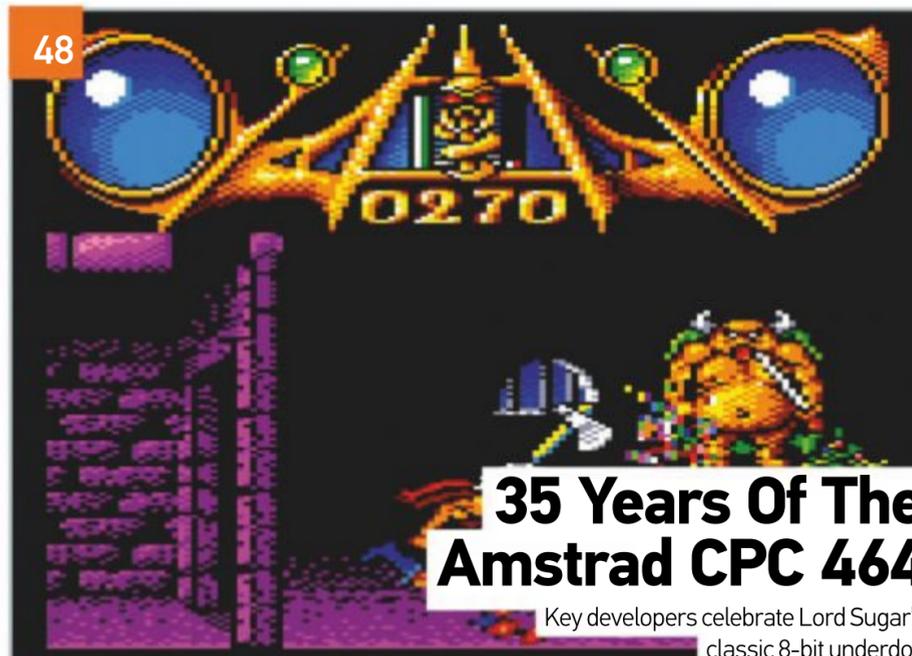
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How the Bitmaps Brothers made gaming cool

Mike Montgomery and the rest of his team were treated like rockstars. Here's how it all happened



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35 Years Of The Amstrad CPC 464

Key developers celebrate Lord Sugar's classic 8-bit underdog



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The best releases to play on Sony's console, as voted by you



35 YEARS OF THE AMSTRAD CPC 464



CPC 464 CLASSICS

CODEMASTERS

The chart-topping CPC 464 budget title specialist



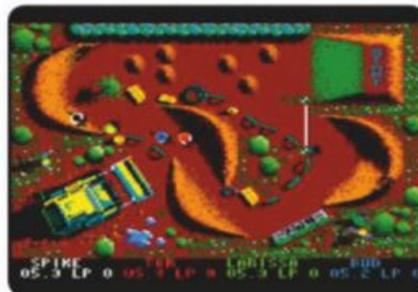
SUPER ROBIN HOOD

■ Although far from original, the Oliver's 16-colour platformer plays to the CPC 464's strengths and is challenging without being impossible. This is mainly thanks to *Super Robin Hood* having a health bar, rather than instant deaths, which places the focus of the game on collecting inconveniently placed items, rather than trying to overcome deadly obstacles. The game's catchy tunes help to urge you on, and its varied speech samples nicely punctuate the action.



DIZZY

■ There's less platforming in the Oliver twins' debut *Dizzy* title than in *Super Robin Hood*, but this is reasonable giving the game's emphasis on puzzle solving. *Dizzy* uses the CPC 464's four-colour mode, but the limited palette is used cleverly, with the result being highly attractive visuals. Looks aside, *Dizzy* is one of the system's most appealing adventures, and this comes down to its clear objective of overcoming obstacles with related objects.



PRO BMX SIMULATOR

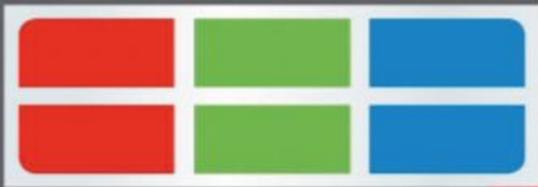
■ Designed by Richard Darling but coded by Philip and Andrew Oliver, this is an improved version of the Codies' bike-racing original, *BMX Simulator*. Rendered in the CPC 464's 16-colour mode, *Pro BMX Simulator* has nicer graphics than either the brightly-hued Spectrum version or the less vibrant C64 iteration. *Pro* has four competitors to the original's two and an 'expert' mode with shorter countdowns and collisions between racers.



CRYPTS OF TROGAN

■ Just barely a budget title, *Crypts Of Trogan* sold for the princely £3.99! But the CPC 464 version looks and plays just like a full-price adventure. Like *Dizzy*, *Crypts* uses the 464's four-colour mode to great effect, but instead of puzzles it revolves around combat with magical creatures, hazard-filled platforming and collecting spells and parchments. When loaded on a plus model CPC, *Crypts* has extra colours and better scrolling.

AD



The CPC 464 launched years after its rivals, but it subsequently received quality ports, acclaimed originals and top budget titles. Retro Gamer discovers why the 464's games library still holds up 35 years later

Words by Rory Milne

By the time of the CPC 464's April 1984 launch, the UK home computer market had all but been carved up between the ZX Spectrum and the Commodore 64, however work on the 464 had begun in early 1983.

Much later that year, following a disastrous start, Amstrad recruited a team led by Roland Perry to get things back on track, as the former hardware consultant explains. "It was absolutely critical to get the 464 to market for Christmas 1984, which is why we were approached in August 1983," he says. "Amstrad knew that unless it did something really drastic that the 464 was never going to happen. So we were given a timescale to get the project rescued, redesigned and relaunched as an internal manufacturing and distribution project by the middle of December 1983. It was a short period of time – it took about a year to produce a computer like that, but we said: 'Well, we're mad enough that we'll give it a go!'"

One aspect of the 464's design that would ultimately define its games library was its implementation of three distinct display modes, but as Roland points out these were largely beyond his control. "The graphics modes were decided very early on, because by using the graphics controller

chip that it was obvious to use there basically wasn't anything else that you could make it do. So you had the three modes: multicolour, high resolution and the four-colour mode, which kind of fell between two stools, really."

Besides configuring the 464's graphics chip, Roland's team had an entire prototype to construct, which it duly completed as 1983 drew to a close. "I got on a plane to Japan at Gatwick on the Friday of the first week of December 1983 with a prototype under my arm and one of the engineers in tow," Roland says. "We went to the factory because it had said, 'If you want us to build a production line to make this product for you to sell next Christmas, then we need to be shown a prototype working by the end of the year.' So we stayed a week-and-a-half in Japan showing it to them, and then they said: 'Jolly good. We'll build a production line for it.'"

Once back in Britain, Roland switched his focus from demonstrating hardware to sourcing software to accompany the 464's arrival in shops the following year. "The 464 was entirely designed to play games on; that was built into its specs," Roland notes. "Where it was built into its business model was that we were only going to be selling it in high-profile, high street retail, and we couldn't just put a naked hardware platform in that kind of environment and hope people would buy it on the assumption that later there might be some games for it. So the idea was to have 50 games from third parties available at the time of the launch."

Quite unintentionally, however, Roland's requests to software houses for 464 games led to Amstrad setting up its own publishing department. "We had people coming to us and saying: 'Look, I've got this game. Would you like to publish it for me?'" Roland explains. "So ▶



» [Amstrad CPC] The Amsoft label supported the CPC 464 from its launch with great games like Strangeloop.



CPC 464 CLASSICS

OCEAN SOFTWARE

The conversion king that excelled on the CPC 464

HEAD OVER HEELS

■ It's difficult to exaggerate just how good Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's masterpiece is, and the CPC 464 adaptation is arguably the best version. Think *Knight Lore*, but with surreal humour and alternating player characters. Alright, *Knight Lore* had Sabreman changing into a werewolf, but the two protagonists were largely interchangeable, whereas the puzzles in *Head Over Heels* can only be beaten by one particular hero, or both, working together.



RENEGADE

■ *Double Dragon* – the spiritual successor to *Renegade* – may have a higher profile thanks to its success in the arcades, but in terms of CPC 464 conversions *Renegade* beats *Double Dragon* bloody. The 464 *Renegade* is also better than the excellent C64 and Spectrum ports of the rock-hard brawler, and what gives it the edge are its stunning 16-colour visuals, which are incredibly faithful given the hardware gap between the 464 and the coin-op.



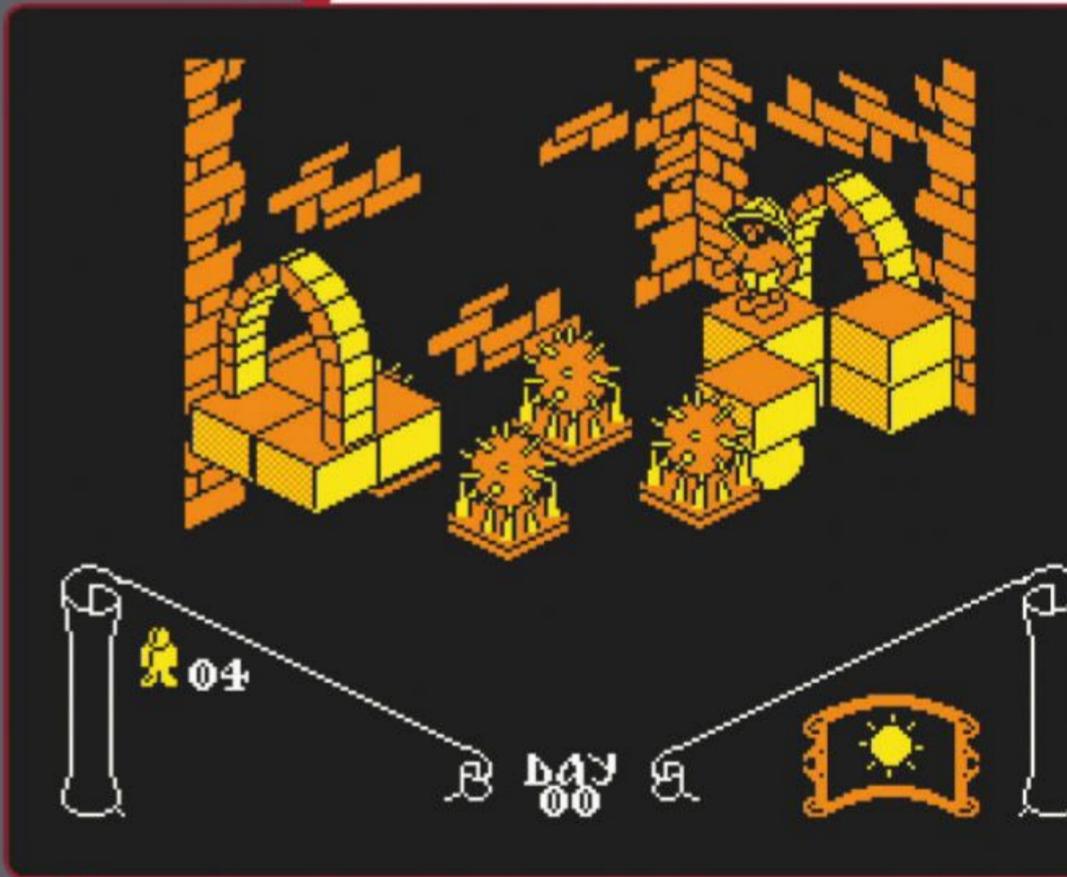
GRYZOR

■ Firstly the negatives: the opening stage of the 464 version of Konami's run-and-gun doesn't scroll like its arcade inspiration does. Actually, that's the only negative: every other aspect of the conversion delivers from its beautifully rendered multicolour graphics to its hard-as-nails gameplay. What's interesting is that *Gryzor's* into-the-screen sections look just as good as its side-on stages, which is a testament to the talents of artist Mark K Jones.



CHASE HQ

■ Into-the-screen racers tend not to look great after they've been crammed into the CPC 464. *Chase HQ*, however, is an exception to the rule. Obviously there are graphical concessions, but the 464 conversion has stunning visuals that actually improve on the coin-op's colour choices. It's not as fast, but the arcade original's intense vehicle-ramming survives the translation with style.



» [Amstrad CPC] Although a Spectrum original, *Knight Lore* looks more colourful and sounds better on the 464.

► we became, almost by accident, a games publisher. That's where Amsoft came from. It was entirely to support the main business, which was selling the hardware. I don't think it ever made any money, but it was important because if it hadn't existed we wouldn't have sold hundreds of thousands of 464s. So Amsoft was a catalyst in a sense."

By 1985, Amsoft had become synonymous with 464 gaming, with its main output being conversions of popular titles – a tactic third-party publishers were also employing, as developer Jon Ritman recalls. "I didn't know the 464, and I didn't really think it had much of a market at the time," Jon concedes, "so Ocean just said: 'Oh, we're going to get *Match Day* converted.' But the developers converting it really didn't give a shit, so as a result the game was awful. That was why my future 464 games were programmed by myself."

Among Jon's 464 titles was a superior *Match Day* sequel, and, just as noteworthy, enhanced conversions of his and artist Bernie Drummond's isometric Spectrum hits *Batman* and *Head Over Heels*. "It was lovely having the ability to do a high-res screen in four colours – it made a world of difference to what you could do," Jon says of adapting his isometric titles to the 464. "Against that it was slightly slower because you had more data to shift around, but for the isometric games I don't think it made much difference. Although *Match Day II* was a bit slower, as it had a lot of heavy graphic work to do."

Due to the 464 and Spectrum's processors having more in common than their colour handling, however, Jon spent far less time on converting his acclaimed isometric adventures than his artistic development partner. "I had hardly any extra code to write for the 464 – I probably did that in a couple of days," Jon reflects. "But Bernie would design the graphics on the Spectrum, and then he would take them to the 464 and colour them in, and because of the 464's colours you could do things that you couldn't on the Spectrum, so some of the graphics changed quite a lot between the versions. Quite often if you were working in a mono palette for the Spectrum you had to make things stand out by having a border around them, but on the 464 that wasn't as necessary because you had the change of colour, so they required a fair amount of work on his part to make them look good."

Around the same time that Jon and Bernie's four-colour mode *Batman* was released, a hit French 464 isometric



» [Amstrad CPC] Some fantastic 464 coin-op ports were released on the Imagine label, such as *Yie Ar Kung Fu*.



» As well as making *Get Dexter*, Remi Herbulot ported *Macadam Bumper* to the 464.



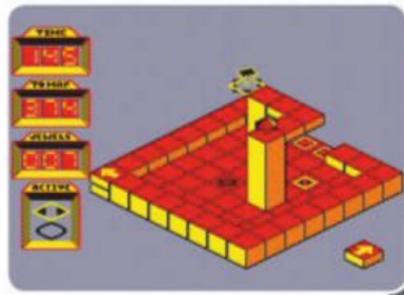
“IN BRITAIN, THE 464 ALWAYS SEEMED TO PLAY THIRD FIDDLE TO THE C64 AND SPECCY”

Mark K Jones

title called *Get Dexter* arrived in Britain, rendered in 16 hues thanks to its developer Remi Herbulot favouring the system's multicolour mode. “When the 464 arrived in France in January 1985 the few game developers were doing things for the Oric mostly,” Remi recalls, “so we all jumped on the 464 as it offered so much more. I loved that computer! It was definitely the graphics. We had more freedom to create colourful sprites on elaborate backgrounds. [...] We were a little late in France, compared to Britain, where there were plenty of games made for the Spectrum, so very soon we were doing new games for the 464, as we didn't have so many to convert. I was always trying to do things that had never been done before, to go further than others. Clearly, Britain was ahead of France, but we wanted to catch up!”

A wave of French 464 titles followed *Get Dexter* into the UK, many of which were very well-received. Noted British 464 artist Mark K Jones remembers the visuals that defined this revolution. “I really admired the French stuff,” Mark says. “In Britain, the 464 always seemed to play third fiddle to the C64 and Speccy, and it got some bad ‘hand-me-downs’ in terms of games. The French seemed to latch on to it, and saw it as the stellar art machine I believe it was.”

Conversely, British artist Nick Bruty wasn't as convinced about the 464's capabilities when he created his



» [Amstrad CPC] Paul Shirley's challenging but compulsive puzzler *Spindizzy* was originally designed for the 464.



» [Amstrad CPC] The 464 received an excellent conversion of Firebird's Gauntlet-inspired multiplatform hit *Druid*.



THE CREATOR

Team leader of the CPC 464 project **Roland Perry** looks back at his creation

Was the 464 designed with conversions in mind?

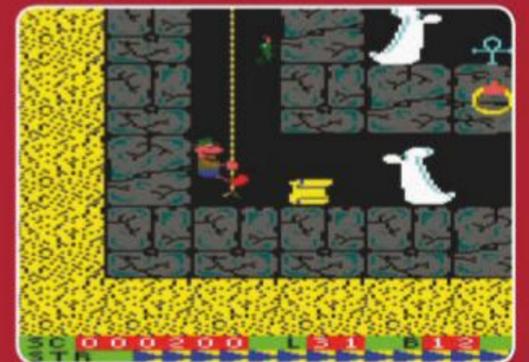
We designed a computer to a spec, which we knew had some decent graphics modes in it, and we knew there were graphics modes in other computers, like the Spectrum and C64 and BBC, which were broadly similar. We were obviously trying to encourage people to convert their games, but we weren't second-guessing what modes they would want.

How did you feel about lazy Spectrum-to-464 ports?

I don't think I would say that they were particularly better or worse, they were just the same thing on a different platform. At the time, I don't remember anybody coming along saying: ‘Let's play this game on the Spectrum because it looks shit on the 464!’ But it did take a while for people to start to use the facilities of the 464, and once they got the hang of it some of the games were a bit better.

Why did Amsoft focus on quantity over top-quality?

I don't think anyone can build a business on only selling absolutely top-notch stuff. You've got to have a range, and then leave it to the consumers to decide what they buy. And when you had magazines being published with reviews in a lot of people would look at those and think: ‘Well, maybe I'll buy this one instead of that one because of what the reviewers have said.’



» [Amstrad CPC] The Amstrad hero Roland was named after Roland Perry. He appeared in several Amsoft games.

Did Amsoft consider demanding 464 exclusives from publishers?

I've no recollection of taking that kind of approach to things, no. What we wanted was an open platform. The whole idea of the 464 was that the more open you made it the more software there would be and the more hardware you were going to sell. The idea of tying people into a proprietary platform didn't appeal to us.

What are your feelings towards the 464 today?

Well I look back at the 464 with great affection. I'm very proud that it got to the critical mass that it did, that people liked it and cherished it, and carried on buying them and using them, and that there's still this huge fandom around the 464. I think that in a sense the whole design was so simple and elegant that it did everything it needed to do on day one.

CPC 464 CLASSICS

ERE INFORMATIQUE

The French firm that played to the 464's strengths



GET DEXTER

■ The CPC 464's 16-colour mode is an interesting choice for an isometric adventure, as its low resolution doesn't lend itself to the depiction of detailed scenarios and characters, but Remi Herbulot and Michael Rho excelled at doing just that when they created *Get Dexter*. As well as having to rearrange furniture to access doors and hidden items, Remi and Michael's game also requires you to pacify opponents and extract codes from scientists.



DOOMSDAY BLUES

■ *Doomsday Blues* has unusual mechanics, but as French 464 games go it's par for the course. Rather than finding keys, *Doomsday's* protagonist kicks open locked doors, which drains his strength until he replenishes it with food. Walking around saps his health but this can be restored with wine, and then there's his bravery when he encounters guards, which can be topped-up with coffee. Ere's title also shifts jailer's locations using a day and night cycle.



CAPTAIN BLOOD

■ An Atari ST original, but the CPC 464 received an excellent conversion. *Captain Blood* is as much an experience as it is a videogame, with its premise being to find and kill your clones by landing on planets and getting intel from their inhabitants on your doppelgangers' locations. Landing on a planet requires skilful piloting, and comms with the planet's denizens are conducted in their language, which heightens the game's sense of immersion.



PURPLE SATURN DAY

■ *Purple Saturn Day's* appeal has as much to do with style as substance, but its absorbing design matches its flashy 16-colour visuals. Essentially a sequence of minigames, *Purple Saturn Day* tests players' reactions in a lightning-fast into-the-screen obstacle course, drops them into a first-person arena version of dodgems with collectible energy balls, challenges them to build a brain with microchips and tasks them with catching stars to fuel a hyperspace jump.



THE EDITOR

Former *Amtix* editor **Jeremy Spencer** on Newsfield's 464 magazine

What were your first impressions of the CPC 464?

When Amstrad launched the 464 it got everybody pretty excited because it seemed to be much more together than the Spectrum. Amstrad published a whole range of back titles, and some original games, but none of it was much good. So the CPC 464 wasn't immediately a games computer: it was a computer that could do games.

Why did *Amtix* launch much later than the official CPC 464 magazine?

We were too focused on the magazines that we were doing. *Amstrad Computer User* magazine was very much in-house and got all the reviews because it got everything early. But about six months later we realised what an appalling job they were doing and realised that we had left a bit of a gap.

So how did *Amtix* come about?

I just suggested that we get on and do an Amstrad magazine. We wrote a script for a Spectrum, and made it run through a whole bunch of random words, and we were rather joyous when among all of them was *Amtix*! So that's pretty much how we did it. Like everything we did in Newsfield it was all done on a bit of a whim, really.

As fellow magazine makers ourselves, we know a mag launch

can be tough. How hard was it to get *Amtix* up and running?

The biggest problem we had was getting screenshots. At the time they were done by camera, and the Amstrad monitor was particularly horrible. So that made getting screenshots a lot harder than it had been for the Spectrum.

Why do you think 464 games improved from mid-1985 onwards?

Some of the kids were beginning to exploit the 464's particular hardware features, and it took a while to do that.

What did you think of Spectrum-to-464 conversions?

As long as the conversions were roughly equivalent I didn't mind. But I think by then I was using the keyboard for word processing and stuff rather than playing games – I was the least enthusiastic gamer at Newsfield!

Why did games publishers support the 464 for so long?

Ten years is a long time. There was more support for the 464 outside Amstrad than there was in it, and I think that's probably what helped its longevity.



» [Amstrad CPC] Taking screenshots of games for *Amtix* was hard. It's a far easier task today.



» Nick Bruty's 464 resume is filled with classics.



» Bill Harbison's *Chase HQ* visuals still impress today.

► first visuals for the system in late 1986. "Impossible Mission was a challenge, because I was going to a lower resolution, and the Amstrad's 16 colours weren't helping me there," Nick admits. "I was confronted with that really high-res C64 sprite running so smoothly. That was the centre of what that game looked like – the animations and the rolls and stuff like that. So that was tough."

An introduction to the gifted and industrious coder David Perry did a lot to change Nick's view of the 464, however, and he became a fan when their stunning debut 464 collaboration *Trantor* outshone the Spectrum original. "I always expected Amstrad conversions to be a little slower, just because of the size of the screen and everything," Nick reasons, "but Dave Perry made the difference. When I saw that the Amstrad *Trantor* was running faster than me and David Quinn's Spectrum version that just blew my mind! I still wasn't a fan of the Amstrad's 'fat pixel' mode, but I could see the benefit in a big character. If we had started *Trantor* on the Amstrad then there probably would have been more stuff in the game, it would have naturally been just a bit bigger and more detailed, because there were just more things to play with on the Amstrad."

CPC 464 CLASSICS

PROBE

The hit factory that pushed the 464 to its limits



TRANTOR

■ Coder Dave Perry and artist Nick Bruty worked miracles on the CPC 464, and it all started with their scrolling run-and-gun *Trantor*. Based on Nick's Spectrum original, the pair's 464 conversion eclipses its inspiration by adding arcade-like in-game sound effects and incandescent 16-colour explosions that light up the game's *Alien*-inspired stages. The extra hues of the 464's multicolour low-res mode also allow the 464 version to match the original for detail.



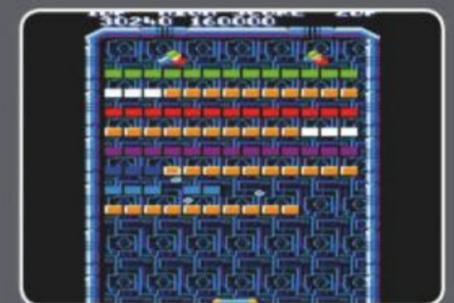
SAVAGE

■ A successor to *Trantor* of sorts, in as much as the first stage of Dave and Nick's *Savage* favours side-scrolling firefights, although guns are swapped for axes and there are many more bosses and even more pyrotechnics. In an eclectic move, stage two channels *Space Harrier*, while the game's third level boasts eight-way scrolling and a giant eagle. As with *Trantor*, the 464 version of *Savage* looks and plays better than Dave and Nick's Spectrum original.



SMASH TV

■ Another of Dave and Nick's CPC 464 projects for Probe, but an arcade conversion rather than an original game, *Smash TV* somehow recreates the frenetic chaos of Eugene Jarvis and Mark Turmell's top-down shooter on the humble 464. The stages that are peppered with opponents and power-ups in the arcade original are replicated in 16-colours without slowdown, as are the coin-op's massive over-the-top bosses.



ARKANOID

■ An equally well-received coin-op port from Probe, although not one of Dave and Nick's, Taito's colourful evolution of Atari's *Breakout* was seemingly designed to be converted to the CPC 464. The system's multicolour mode was the obvious choice when adapting *Arkanoid*'s rainbow-hued blocks, and that's exactly what Probe used. In terms of gameplay, the 464 replicates the arcade original's block bashing, although it runs a little slower.

The talented pair followed-up Trantor with two more titles that seemingly pushed the 464 to its limits: *Savage* and *Dan Dare III*, before creating a series of hit licence-based titles for the system, but Nick feels that they could have got even more out of the 464. "We were really just trying to push as much colour and motion to the screen as possible, and that suited the Amstrad," Nick argues, "but I don't think we ever reached its limits. I think the market was falling away at that point, and we were moving towards 16-bit consoles before we peaked. It's a shame, but I don't think we ever got to the point where we just focused on its strengths. With *Dan Dare III* we were definitely pushing the screen as much as we could with our current engine; we were getting into multidirectional scrolling finally, but I think we could have gone further with the Amstrad than *Dan Dare III*, for sure."

Ocean artist **Bill Harbison had a lot less exposure to the 464 than Nick, but Bill and coder Jon O'Brien's 464 port of the popular coin-op Chase HQ is still considered one of the system's best arcade adaptations.** "I'd never used an Amstrad before I started work at Ocean, so I wasn't even sure if I was going to be able to do it," Bill says of converting his Spectrum *Chase HQ* visuals to the 464. "I quite enjoyed being able to use that amount of colour. The pixels were a bit fat, but the 16-colour mode gave me a better chance to make the graphics as much like the arcade version as I could. We were doing our graphics on an ST in black and white, so I was then able to take the original sprites and plot double-width pixels over the top of

them – it was just re-colouring my own graphics. The Amstrad versions always seemed to be an afterthought. We put so much time into doing the engine for the Spectrum version, which probably took six months, and then you would have like six weeks to do the Amstrad version. I've often wondered why we didn't spend as much time on Amstrad titles as we should have. I think the only person who did was John Brandwood, who did the Amstrad *Gryzor* – he was basically called 'Johnny Amstrad'!"

Artist Mark K Jones partnered with Ocean's 464 coding specialist John Brandwood on two coin-op conversions – *Renegade* and *Gryzor*, which he feels were suited to the 464's low-res 16-colour mode and were better for not scrolling. "I enjoyed the detail in the four-colour mode, and for some art pieces I used it, but for games I felt the 16-colour mode was better," Mark considers. "At the time, most people seemed to use the 464 on a telly, not a monitor, so there was always some 'fuzzy bleed' that somewhat hid the pixels, so they didn't seem as 'blocky.' I enjoyed the challenge of trying to match the arcade quality of the machines we were trying to



» [Amstrad CPC] *La Abadia Del Crimen* is a compelling 464 original that's far better known in its native Spain.



» [Amstrad CPC] *Barbarian* on the CPC 464 retains the C64 original's gore, but it's rendered in eye-popping colour.



» [Amstrad CPC] Ocean released numerous top-notch movie tie-ins, and its CPC 464 *Batman* adaptation is no exception.



THE ARTIST

Graphics wizard **Mark K Jones** on making beautiful visuals for 464 games

How did you find creating visuals for the CPC 464 and its rival home computers compared?

The CPC 464 was 'my' computer; I bought it myself, and it was the machine I used to create all my portfolio work. It was my favourite art tool, so when it came to creating visuals I found it much easier to work with it. On the C64, it always drove me bonkers working around the limitations, and I never really got a chance to use the Speccy.

Did you object to your 464 games all being coin-op conversions?

I'd just started working – Ocean/Imagine was my first job, I jumped at the chance to work there and never pursued a university education, so I just did what I was told to do. I obviously had ideas for other games, I still do, but I was 18 years old and green, and I didn't think anything of it. I didn't really care what I worked on – I was making computer games!

Why do you think that your 464 *Mag Max* reviewed so well?

Mag Max was a game I worked on over a very short period. The original assets were deemed not up to standard, so I was given them to redo. In a way that was nice, as some of the technical aspects had been worked out. So it was just a pure artwork thing for me, and perhaps that helped. But I have no real idea why the reception was



» [Amstrad CPC] Besides *Renegade* and *Gryzor*, artist Mark K Jones worked on the brilliant 464 coin-op port *Mag Max*.

so good for the Amstrad version – it was certainly very colourful.

How did you feel about moving on from CPC 464 development?

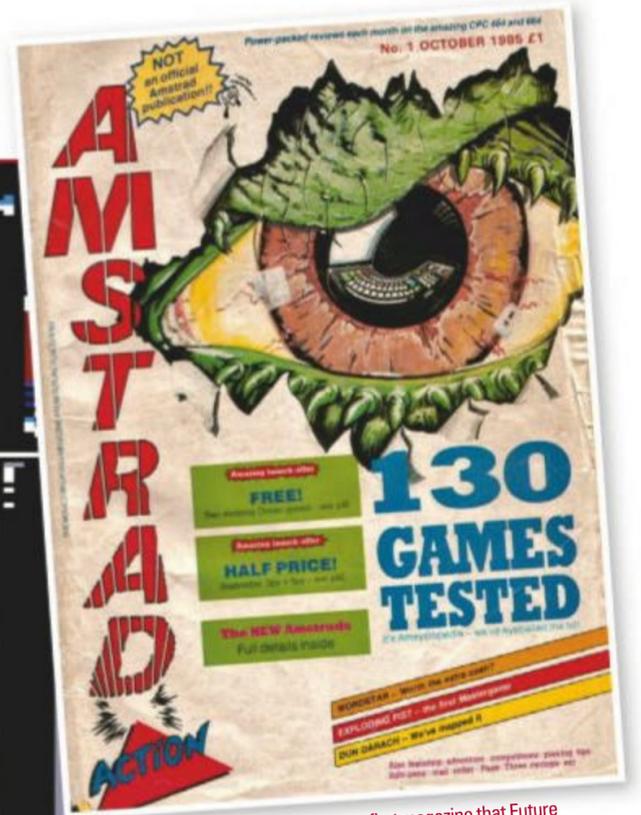
There's only so much you could do with a small sprite in low resolution, and the 16-bits allowed more of an artist's style and skill to shine. I possibly had not enough of either – it took a while to find my groove.

What do you think about your CPC 464 games now?

I'm glad people remember them. It's gratifying to know I worked on something that brought fun into their lives. They took months to create, and then we could see them in shops soon after, but I'm not sure I miss creating my artwork pixel-by-pixel using cursor keys.



» [Amstrad CPC] Nick Bruty and David Perry's 464 Dan Dare III has eight-way scrolling as well as pyrotechnics.



» Amstrad Action was the very first magazine that Future published and later included free cover tapes.



» The Olivers developed numerous 464 originals at pocket-money prices throughout the late Eighties.

► emulate. That's why I thought the 16-colour mode was a better match – it gave that same 'look.' I agonised over every pixel, going back over the sprites again and again until I couldn't improve them. But I liked working on the Gryzor conversion, I was fairly happy with the artwork. Although one thing the 464 did suffer from was that it couldn't scroll very well. All those colours meant lots of memory to move around, and to be honest it did struggle."

But as well as full-price 464 coin-op conversions like Renegade and Gryzor, the 464 games market of the mid-to-late Eighties was also home to some great budget originals, such as those developed by Philip and Andrew Oliver. "The first big hit was Super Robin Hood, and then we followed it with Ghost Hunters," Philip enthuses. "We made the argument to ourselves that if you sold a game at a quarter of the price you would sell four times as many copies. But customers expectations wouldn't be

as high, so it would review better, and you wouldn't have to do so much work because people wouldn't expect such a huge game. So that was our logic, and it played out pretty well, I think."

The Olivers' strategy didn't guarantee smooth sailing, however, as they soon found themselves competing with high-quality back catalogues sold at low price points.

"There was a big move in about 1987 where it got quite difficult to sell full-price games," Philip reflects, "as there were a lot of re-releases. US Gold and other firms started doing the Hit Squad and other labels like that. Basically, they were re-releasing full-price games six or eight months after their original release but down to budget prices. So we were like: 'Crap! We're up against that lot now!'"

The twins' response to the budget re-releases was to up the quantity and quality of their 464 output, which included well-reviewed simulators and three cracking arcade adventures starring a hero called Dizzy, although they stopped developing for the 464 at the end of the decade. "The Amstrad market was dying, and we knew that it was going to be very difficult to sell anything after Christmas 1989," Philip acknowledges. "The Amiga and ST had been on the market for three years by that point, and pretty much anyone who was a gamer had upgraded, and we

were now only able to sell to people who didn't have much money or had a hand-me-down machine."

The very last of Philip's designs to be ported to the 464 arrived in early-1993 – long after the system's commercial prime, but it proved far from profitable, as the designer is quick to admit. "It got harder and harder as every year went past, and 1993 was the end of it," Philip says of the fading 464 games market. "Robin Hood Legend Quest was pretty much our last Amstrad game. It probably broke even on its costs."

As 1993 progressed, the majority of 464 games being released were budget titles – and these were mainly re-releases, but then former demo scene coder Elmar Krieger landed a contract with Titus Software to produce two full-price 464 titles based on forthcoming PC games. These titles were Super Cauldron and Prehistorik 2, and as well as boasting great game design, they used every technical trick in the book to squeeze every last ounce of performance from the system. "After six years of CPC hacking with demos and games – the largest project being a Pang remake called ZapT'Balls – this felt like the right finish for this life chapter," Elmar explains. "With my CPC-only know-how, no company would have hired me to develop its next Amiga blockbuster, so the CPC's decline was probably the main reason why Titus dared to outsource this job to an external dev like myself. But no

matter how hard you worked, and which tricks you came up with, it was just not possible to turn a CPC into an Amiga, so I think I went as far as it was fun to go."

Elmar subsequently left 464 development behind, and between late-1993 and late-1994, the flow of commercial 464 games finally dried up, with the last few notable releases being distributed by mail order.

Looking back at the 464 now, the former developer feels great nostalgia for the system tempered by relief that technology has moved on. "We all know that our brains tends to glorify the past," Elmar muses, "but to me the CPC era feels like the time of never-ending wonders and excitement. On the other hand, if I was offered a ride back into my younger self the need to do software development on a CPC again would make me shiver!" Former budget title specialist Philip Oliver also cites nostalgia when asked to explain the 464's lengthy commercial lifespan. "The Amstrad definitely had a really good fanbase," Philip observes, "and it was an elegant system; it was plug-and-play. Even if technically the Amiga pissed all over it later on, there was still nostalgia for the Amstrad and what it could do. There was a lot of love there, and the minute



» [Amstrad CPC] French developer Remi Herbulot left CPC game design behind after 1987's Get Dexter 2.

“WE ALL KNOW THAT OUR BRAINS TENDS TO GLORIFY THE PAST, BUT TO ME THE CPC ERA FEELS LIKE THE TIME OF NEVER-ENDING WONDERS”

Elmar Krieger

you packed it up in a box that was a sad day, so a lot of people just didn't do it." Reviewing the long-running success of the 464 in France, celebrated developer Remi Herbulot credits this longevity to the sheer number of systems sold in his home country. "Get Dexter 2 was the last game I did on the 464, in 1987. I stopped working on the 464 when the ST and Amiga arrived," Remi notes. "But there were many French 464 games out after that, probably because many unprofessional developers were programming on their own computer – and most owned a 464, as the 464 sold very well in France!"

Given the final say on the CPC 464, Roland Perry considers the six years of production enjoyed by the system and its ongoing popularity. "I was a bit surprised that Amstrad was still selling the 464 two years after its launch," he says, "because in those days platforms did churn very quickly, and you were lucky if your computer had that kind of lifespan. But if you could just hit the spot with them then they did go on a remarkably long time, and once the 464 became a classic it gained its own momentum." ✱



» [Amstrad CPC] Elmar Krieger pushed the 464 when he converted Super Cauldron to the system in 1993.



» Elmar Krieger worked on Super Cauldron and Prehistorik 2.



THE CODER/DESIGNER

8-bit maestro **Jon Ritman** on his and Bernie Drummond's 464 masterpieces

How were the colour schemes for your isometric 464 games devised?

The colour schemes were both of us. They weren't random, we chose them. We'd play with combinations, and they would usually end up with silly names. There's only one of which I remember, which is 'Ice Cream And Green' – it was a light yellow colour and a green, but we had nicknames for all eight colour schemes. The whole system revolved around getting everything as tight as possible in memory, and so we were limited to eight. I thought that was enough, and the schemes we used were nice. You had to have a certain level of artistic ability to look at a colour scheme and think, 'That works,' or, 'That doesn't work.'

Why didn't you use the CPC 464's 16-colour mode?

I wouldn't have used it for the reason that it was lower resolution than the Spectrum. Bernie would have had to redesign everything, and that would've been a nightmare. The resolution wouldn't have been enough, it would've been horrible to look at. You would've lost that detail, you would've lost much of the beauty. So the 16-colour mode was out of the question for *Batman* and *Head Over Heels*.

How about *Match Day II*?

The scrolling was painful on *Match Day II* with just *four* colours, but nothing in *Match Day II* would have looked good in the 16-colour mode – the ball wouldn't



» [Amstrad CPC] Jon Ritman's 464 *Match Day II* plays identically to his Spectrum original despite being slower.

have even looked round! I suppose I *could* have scrolled the screen for *Match Day II* in 16-colours, but it would have looked dodgy because all of the curves would have looked funny.

How do you feel about your CPC 464 games now?

I don't know if *Match Day II* has aged that well. The scrolling is noticeably slower than the Spectrum. I think it was great for its time, but my 464 isometric games have without a doubt stood up better because the speed doesn't matter so much, so they've stood the test of time.

Have you any final thoughts on the CPC 464 *Match Day*?

The 464 *Match Day* is best forgotten. It wasn't my game at all. The developers didn't use any of my code, they just made a football game up, and it was a shit one.

CPC 464 CLASSICS

HEWSON

The original games publisher that made the 464 shine



RANARAMA

■ Graftgold's *Paradroid* was a Commodore 64 exclusive, but the firm's *Paradroid*-inspired *Ranarama* was ported to the CPC 464, and while it plays just like the Spectrum original it has better visuals. Like *Paradroid*, *Ranarama* has a top-down perspective, and until entered its rooms' contents are a mystery. It also takes influence from RPGs in that its spells are cast with various runes won from mages in the game's *Paradroid*-like minigames.



EXOLON

■ The Spectrum original of Raffaele Cecco's *Exolon* doesn't lack colour, but his vibrant CPC 464 port makes it look drab by comparison. It also plays well, with each of its 124 stages requiring platforming, strategy and a steady trigger finger in order to safely make the journey from the left to the right of each screen. It's easy to run out of bullets and missiles, although more can be found every few stages, but there's only one exoskeleton suit per section.



NEBULUS

■ You would imagine that you would miss the fish-blasting minigame from the C64 original of *Nebulus* when playing the CPC 464 conversion, but you really don't. In fact, *Nebulus* is so defined by its rotating tower that it's easy to forget that the original even had a minigame. The only real difference between John Phillips' C64 classic and the 464 version is that the port is a bit slower, but that doesn't affect the challenge of ascending its stages.



STORMLORD

■ As with Raffaele Cecco's Spectrum-to-464 *Exolon* port, the 464 conversion of *Stormlord* is far more colourful than the original. In gameplay terms, both versions are nigh-identical, although the 464 port is a little easier due to its opponents being slightly less aggressive. That aside, the fairy rescuing mission of the original game remains intact, as does its object and obstacle-based puzzles, and its fairy-themed shoot-'em-up minigame.