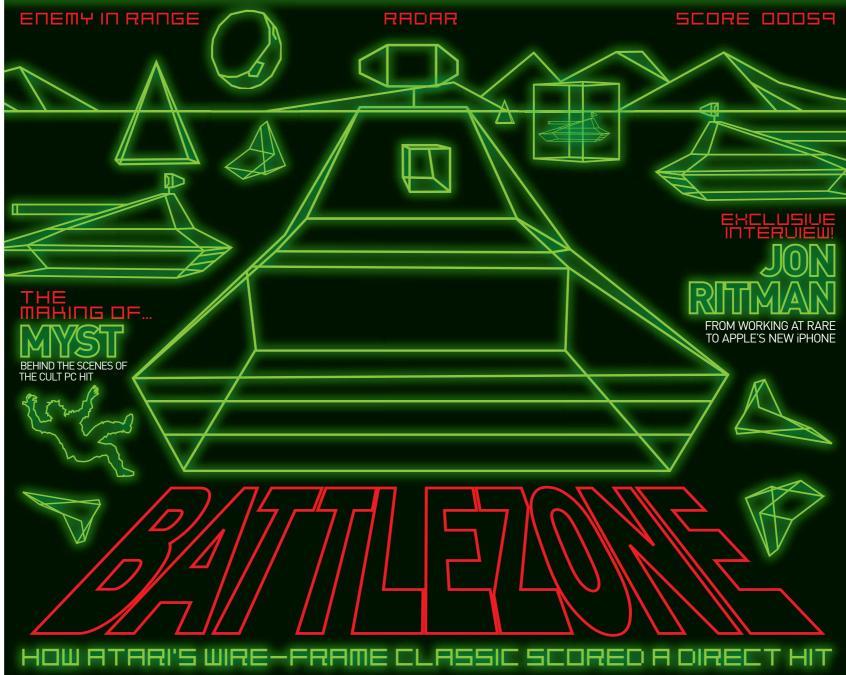




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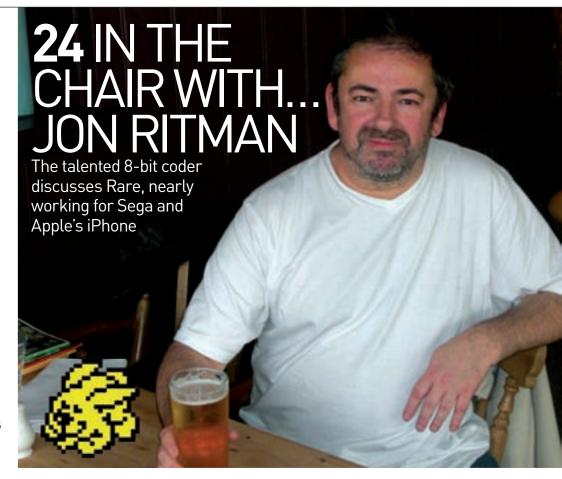
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Along with brother Rand, Robyn Miller went on to create one of the most important PC games of all time. Here he talks about the phenomenon that is *Myst*.



AMSTRAD CPC 6128

WHEN THE AMSTRAD CPC 6128 WAS INTRODUCED IN 1985, SOME GAMERS DISMISSED IT AS A SERIOUS COMPUTER. BUT WHILE IT CERTAINLY LOOKED THE BUSINESS, BEHIND THE STRAIGHT-LACED EXTERIOR WAS A MACHINE WITH LOTS OF ADDED FUN, AS DAVID CROOKES EXPLAINS

Year released: 1985

Original price: £299 (with green-screen monitor), £399 (with colour-screen monitor)

Buy it now for: £25+

Associated magazines: Amtix, Computing With The Amstrad (later known as CPC Computing), Amstrad Computer User (official publication), Amstrad Action, CPC Attack, fanzine WACCI

Why the CPC 6128 was great... It may not have been as cool as the Spectrum or as desirable as a Commodore 64, but the CPC 6128 was arguably the greatest 8-bit machine ever made. Adaptable (plug in a tape drive, fiddle endlessly with the volume control and you had a 464 with knobs on) and dependable, there was a mountain of games, a thriving community, and a real spirit of the underdog.

itting atop a chunky slab of plastic, the CPC 664's white and blue keys and the clumsy-looking addition of a disk drive exuded such ugliness that you couldn't help but feel sorry for the poor sods who bought it. It was a step up from Amstrad's iconic cassette-based 464 in the sense that it added a three-inch disk drive of the like seen in the Oric Atmos, some extra BASIC commands and both the AMSDOS and CP/M 2.2 operating systems. But while it sold around 10,000 units, within five months it was replaced by the 6128 – a machine which not only doubled the memory of its predecessor but looked far sleeker, too.

And so it was that the CPC 6128 came into being. It was launched in America in 1985 and it came to Europe shortly afterwards, making its UK debut at a glitzy press conference in London with BBC newsreader Richard Whitmore overseeing

proceedings. Boasting the same three-inch drive, the only real features to distinguish the 6128

from the 664 were the 128K of RAM and a better, plain white, springier keyboard. The extra memory was an important addition, however, as it was used as a RAM disk or to store data such as gaming levels. In some cases, the 128K versions of CPC games would carry sound not heard in their 64K counterparts and all of this allowed developers to give their titles a little boost from time to time.

Before its unveiling, Mr Whitmore led the assembled journalists and dealers through a potted history of Amstrad. But it was Sir Alan Sugar himself who whipped the covers off the 6128 to show his new machine in all its glory. In doing so, he declared the 664 "well and truly dead" and he said the new arrival was due to "a leap in technology". He later stated that the 6128 was aimed at a more serious buyer, although

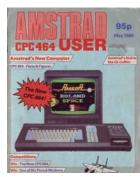
the decision to make the machine compatible with 464 and 664 software created an instant back catalogue of games for the new machine.

"There was a simple reason for launching the CPC 6128," says Cliff Lawson, who worked on the product launch of both the 6128 and 664. "It could be produced for the same money as the 664 so Amstrad decided it would be wise to go for the better product. It offered the punter more and it was, dare I say, much prettier, too."

The 6128 was one of two computers to be unveiled by Amstrad at the same time. The other was the PCW8256, pitched mainly at businesses. That machine came with a monochrome monitor, 256K of memory, a built-in disk drive, a printer and word-processing software, but it wasn't compatible with the CPC and there was no intention of opening its appeal to gamers. The PCW retailed at £460 and, as the trumpets blared for the 6128, the 464 was cut in price, bringing its cost down to £199 for the green-screen version and £299 for colour. In some sense, it meant that the 6128 was a halfway house – part business, part pleasure – bridging the gap between the PCW and the 464.

One of the first games to take advantage of the added capacity that the extra 64K of the 6128 offered was *Sorcery+*. Released in 1985, players of this disk-based joystick-only game saw many enhancements over the original *Sorcery*, including an extra 35 screens. Amstrad loved the lush look so much that it used screens of the game in its promotional literature and yet such enhancements didn't become the norm.

Although it was possible for both 464 and 664 owners to buy a 64K memory pack, which could be inserted into an expansion slot at the back of both computers (Datel Electronics would advertise Dk'tronics' 64K memory on a monthly basis), sales were not sufficiently high enough for all developers to put in the extra effort of creating additional enhancements. The gaming benefits of purchasing extra memory were not heavily pushed either, so whether or not a game carried the extra power depended on the whim of the developer or, in some cases, the near impossibility of making a game as impressive in 64K as it would be using double that memory.



» Amstrad CPC 464 User magazine unveils the brand new – short-lived – 664.

INSTANT EXPERT

The Amstrad CPC 6128 was launched in 1985 as a successor to the short-lived CPC 664, adding 128K.

It cost £399 which made it more expensive than its monitorless rivals, the Spectum and C64. Amstrad wanted its machine to be an all-in-one solution powered with just one plug.

Although the internal drive accepted three-inch disks, it was possible to connect a second drive – either Amstrad's own three-incher, or one which accepted 3.5 or 5.25-inch disks.

The 6128 had 32K of ROM – and this contained the AMSDOS operating system and the Locomotive BASIC interpreter.

Amstrad marketed the

6128 as an all-rounder – good for programming and word processing, but equally at home with games. It was a perfect hook for kids to pester their parents.

Many 6128s therefore

found themselves employed in businesses – and there was one sighting of it being used to operate a ride at Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

Educational software existed for the CPC 6128 but BBC computers dominated schools so it failed to make major inroads.

Many people hooked the 6128 to a tape deck and used the Multiface 2 to copy cassette games to disk.

As time went on, more games took advantage of the extra 64K and it came in handy for reducing leading times, too

loading times, too.
In 1990, the CPC 6128 was replaced by the 6128 Plus. It retained the three-inch drive but added a cartridge slot as part of a major redesign.

COMMUNITY CPC 6128 SITES TO WATCH

CPC Zone

www.cpczone.net

We've flagged up this website before, but if you want the full lowdown on anything CPC, then there is no better choice. Boasting a wonderful forum, scores of well-written reviews and lots of other goodies besides, Malc Jennings is doing a sterling job.



Symb0S

www.symbos.de

For people more used to GUIs, the blue screen with yellow text that greets CPCers can be a little alien. SymbOS is a project that adds a Windows-style environment to the Amstrad and it even supports hard drives with capacity up to 128MB. Check it out.



WinApe

www.winape.net

If you want to get back into CPC gaming or see what all the fuss is about, then you'll need to find a good emulator and there are few better than WinApe. Constantly updated, you can emulate all of the CPC models, including the 6128 and 6128 Plus.



The Amstrad CPC Games Resource

http://tacgr.emuunlim.com

Once you've got your emulator going, you'll need some games. This website is full of retro delights and, as long as you already own copies of the games you download, you'll be on safe ground. It's a popular, well-run and resourced website



» Prehistorik 2 worked on the 464 but there were









TAPE AND

664 and 6128 proved to be a controversial decision at the time of its release. Amstrad seemed to adore the format, using it with its PCW range and with the Spectrum +3, despite the existence of the 5.25-inch and 3.5-inch disk formats. What annoyed people the most though was that 3.5-inch disks



held far more and became rapidly cheaper, so it was all the more surprising that Amstrad didn't scrap three-inch disks when making the move to the 6128 Plus in 1990.

"We looked at a number of storage systems including classic 5.25-inch floppy disks, three-inch floppy disks (like the 5.25-inch ones but smaller),



3.5-inch hard-case floppy disks and the three-inch hard-case disk," says Roland Perry. "At the time, the 3.5-inch disk wasn't 'IBM compatible' and it was a long time before the firm chose the format for the PS/2. So we decided to go for the three-inch disk as it was 'IBM compatible'. The three-inch disk also had the best price and performance, including our ability to commission custom-built units from an existing supplier



RETROINSPECTION: AMSTRAD CPC 6128

Indeed, as the 6128 launched, some developers decided they wouldn't be sticking their neck out in support of the added extras of the new machine. Paula Byrne, of Melbourne House, said she would see how well the machine sold and Taskset's Paul Hodgson felt Amstrad missed an opportunity to enhance the graphics and sound chips and said he had no immediate plans to make games for it. But it wasn't all doom and gloom. Gremlin's lan Stewart said it paved the way for better games and his company certainly made use of the new facilities on offer as the years went on.

"Amstrad didn't encourage 128K disk-based games to be produced," admits Cliff. "It wasn't particularly important since the extra memory was seen to have greater use with serious applications. The 64K games at the time worked well on the full range of Amstrad's CPC machines and it was in everyone's interest to ensure titles operated across the entire range and that the market wouldn't be split."

Around six months after launch, both the 6128 and the PCW were doing well. Amstrad announced £27.5 million half-yearly profits in April 2006 with sales in the six months to December 1985 increasing from £69 million to £128 million. The PCW8256 accounted for 20 per cent of the company's turnover, but the 6128 was becoming a market leader in France, as well as making major inroads into Germany and Spain.

Yet, for the average gamer, such corporate guff mattered little. They were more interested in enjoying some of the gems which were launched over the course of the 6128's life span. As time went on, more games arrived that could only be played with 128K of memory. They included Gremlin's *Nigel Mansell's World Championship*, one of the best Formula 1 games ever launched on the Amstrad and a title which deservedly won it much praise in the CPC gaming press.

Indeed, Gremlin, as we have discussed, liked to use the extra RAM to get the best out of its games. It produced 128K versions of *Space Crusade* and *Super Cars*. And titles such as *HeroQuest* and *Switchblade* contained music on the 6128, whereas, on an unexpanded 464, there were no tunes at all. Some differences were more subtle, however. "In *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*," explains Nicholas Campbell, the CPC Games Review webmaster, "the only difference, as far as I am aware, is that the 'handbook' (the screens displaying the car's specifications) is loaded separately on the 64K version, whereas it is included with the main game in the 128K version."

There was more... Level 9's games, including *Gnome Ranger, Ingrid's Back, Knight Orc, Lancelot* and *Scapeghost*, did not contain graphics on a non-enhanced 464, but the 6128 proudly showed off a host of pictures. This was also the case with *The Famous Five* as well as all four of *Magnetic Scrolls*' adventures for the CPC (*The Pawn, The Guild Of Thieves, Jinxter* and *Corruption*), which were only playable if 128K was available.

Add to that little list less prestigious titles such as *European Superleague* and *Computer Scrabble De Luxe*, throw in the likes of *Final Fight* (this game came on a dual-format disk with the Spectrum version on the other side), tag on *Gauntlet III*, *G-LOC*, *Gunboat*, and most of Microïds' later releases – *Killerball*, *Sliders* and *Swap – No Exit*, *Pirates!*, then make space for all four of Silmarils' releases (*Windsurf Willy, Targhan, Xyphoes Fantasy* and *Bunny Bricks*), *SWIV* and *Times Of Lore* and you had a pretty good reason to go for Amstrad's best machine at the time. If nothing else, the extra vocal samples on *Chase H.Q.* were probably worth the price of an upgrade alone. Well, probably anyway.

And it wasn't just disk-based games that took advantage of the extra memory. It was possible to attach a cassette deck to the 6128 and most people did, enabling a huge library of cassette games to be played. Tape titles such as *Spellbound Dizzy* provided extra graphical effects on a 6128, such as animated Yolkfolk. It

was possible to see changes to the main character when he wore a snorkel and scrolls would appear in the 128K version. With some other games, including *Gryzor*, *Renegade*, *Operation Thunderbolt* and *Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja*, the levels could be loaded in one go. They were stored in the additional bank of 64K.

What's more, using Romantic Robot's Multiface 2, tape-based games could be backed up to disk for easier loading and it became one of the most vital pieces of kit for the 6128, despite accusations of piracy. The device was also brilliant for those who liked to cheat. Amstrad Action was among the magazines to print Multiface 2 cheats that could help frustrated gamers through pretty much every title ever made.

Where the 6128 really came into its own, though, was in the final throes of its life. During the early-Nineties, programmers had truly got to grips with the CPC and there was a thriving homebrew and semi-commercial scene. Since cassettes took an age to duplicate and were more prone to error, most smaller devs released their games on disk and they also decided to make full use of the 128K available to the vast majority of CPC disk-based machines.

Games such as Zap'T'Balls would only work with 128K present – and those who didn't play this Pang-inspired jaunt were missing out on a belter. Creator Elmar Krieger explains: "In Zap'T'Balls the focus was on 100 per cent smooth 50fps software sprites, and this required page flipping, so two lots of 16K were needed as video memory," he says. "While the software sprites moved, the part of the background that became visible again had to be restored. Doing this fast enough required a complete third backup copy of the screen. So with 48K of 'video' memory, the remaining 16K was just not enough for music, games and so on. That's why Zap'T'Balls was 128K only."

Elmar also created *Prehistorik 2* and this also made extra use of the 6128's capacity, not least the addition of in-game music. "With *Prehistorik*, I was able to produce a 64K tape version for the 464 because it only used 16K of video memory, without page flipping, and the background was composed of tiles which ultimately meant there was no need for a backup of the entire screen," he says. "But I used the extra memory on the 6128 for extra effects. I went even further with the CPC+ version, creating additional parallax scrolling foreground and background graphics."

Although actual figures are not available, the 6128 was a solid seller. It fared particularly well in France, where *Iron Lord* and *B.A.T.* were produced to great fanfare. "The 6128 was a natural progression for the CPC range, especially for CP/M applications," says Roland Perry, who was Amstrad's group technical manager in 1985. "Customers demanded more RAM, even if they were not sure what it might enable them to do better."

The 6128 was only discontinued in 1990 because of the introduction of the superior 6128 Plus and yet the CPC 6128 story doesn't end at the turn of the decade. Many programmers cut their teeth on the machine, helped along, no doubt, by the brilliant 6128 manual, which didn't just show you how to turn the computer on and operate it, but also included a comprehensive guide to programming in BASIC with some handy gaming-related type-ins at the back. It's fair to say the legacy of the 6128 has continued to this very day.

"The instruction book for the 6128 was my favourite and that's not just because I wrote most of it," laughs Roland. "I had time to mature the book so that it became a 'learn how to programme' manual. The 6128 was a very stable platform for programmers and I bet we helped nurture many a games programming career. For me, that's a great legacy. I really do think that's something to be proud of."



SPECIFICATIONS

Processor: Z80A 8-bit processor (4MHz)

Memory: 128K RAM

Drive: Three-inch disk drive.
Tape deck could be attached

Monitor: Green screen or colour monitor

Typical resolution: 160 x 200 pixels in 16 colour Mode 0 (out of a palette of 27)

Sound: General Instrument AY-3-8912 sound chip, providing three channels



» Roland Perry oversaw the introduction of the 464, 664 and 6128 range of CPCs.



AMSTRAD CPC 6128









PERFECT TEN GAMES

Some games are poor. Some are great. And there are some which are wonderful and then made even better. Although the real joy came with a CPC 6128 exclusive, many games received a few tweaks here and there, improving them over their CPC 464 cousins. Here are our favourite ten CPC 6128 games...

NIGEL MANSELL'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

- » **RELEASED:** 1992
- » PUBLISHER: GREMLIN
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BYTHE SAME DEVELOPER: SWITCHBLADE

Old Owners of the 464 may have disagreed, but if there was ever a game that made perfect sense on disk, then Nigel Mansell's World Championship was it. It was a racing game Gremlin had clearly spent time on, packing it with as many features as it could possibly fit into 128K of memory. Much of that attention was lavished on the revved-up graphics – the spinning globe, the delicious icons, Nigel's turning hands on the steering wheel – and yet it still left time to spare to ensure this was a blisteringly fast game. It filled not one but both sides of a disk and that led to lots of – seemingly random – side swapping. But it was the best example of a racing game to have ever graced the Amstrad.

SPELLBOUND DIZZY B

- » RELEASED: 1991
- » PUBLISHER: CODEMASTERS
- » CREATED BY: BIG RED SOFTWARE
- **» BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PRINCE OF THE YOLKFOLK

Spellbound Dizzy was the largest *Dizzy* game ever, with its 105 rooms making it bigger than Magicland Dizzy and Fantasy World Dizzy put together. Critics said it was too big, and, given the Dizzy premise of finding objects to solve puzzles, having so many in one game did prove a tad tiresome. However, for a Dizzy game not created by the Oliver Twins, it was full of interesting, fresh ideas. And although it came on cassette, the game made use of the 6128's extra 64K. So anyone with a 6128 and a tape drive could enjoy animated Yolkfolk, a sprite change for Dizzy when he donned a snorkel and the appearance of the scrolls

B.A.T.

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: ZOMBI

Costing a whopping £24.99 when it first arrived exclusively on disk, B.A.T. was a French, Orwellian-inspired, icondriven adventure masterpiece. A game of enormous scope and size and boasting some of the best visuals of any CPC game ever made, what it lacked in sound - there was not a peep - it more than made up for with its challenge. Little surprise then that the manual was so incredibly detailed. It was akin to a small novel and it lent the title great depth. To do this game justice meant Ubisoft simply had to utilise 128K and it had to go for a disk. Fortunately. disks were more popular in France, where this game really excelled.

CHASE H.Q.

- » **RELEASED**: 1990
- PUBLISHER: OCEAN
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BYTHE SAME DEVELOPER: TOTAL RECALL

O2 If you ever heard the words 'Let's go, Mr Driver' coming out of the tinny speaker of your CPC, then chances are you were the proud owner of a 6128. The added 64K of memory was used to deliver some cool snippets of digitised speech – with another notable inclusion being the dreaded 'Your time's up' – and such utterances will surely continue to conjure up some truly magical memories to this day. But that's not the only reason that Chase H.Q. on the CPC 6128 rammed the CPC 464 version off the road. The tape version of the game was a multiload and while the loading time wasn't criminal, having the disk drive in the 6128 inevitably meant that the action came considerably faster.

ZAPT'BALLS

- » RELEASED: 1992
- » PUBLISHER: CPC AMSTRAD INTERNATIONAL
- » CREATED BY: ELMSOFT
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: PREHISTORIK 2

The main article has already discussed why Zap'T'Balls wasn't released as a 64K, tape version. But even though it was made for the machine, not every 6128 owner could play it. Much of it depended on the type of CRTC chip in the computer. Elmar Krieger, who made the game exclusively for the CPC, said some disk drives had problems loading it too and he found the 6128 Plus appeared to run in to the most trouble. For those who got it to work, it was sparkling from the very moment the demo-inspired loading sequence sprung into action to the last pop of a balloon.











EVE OF SHADOWS

- » RELEASED: 1991
- » PUBLISHER: ADVENTURE PD
- » CREATED BY: ROB BUCKLEY
- » BYTHE SAME DEVELOPER: FLUFF

Three things could put you off this game: it was written in BASIC, it only cost a quid or so to buy and it was never playtested. But the odd spelling mistake here and there and the preconception that cheap must equal bad, especially when combined with a rather primitive program language didn't hamper Eve Of Shadows one bit. It made full use of the 128K and drive of the 6128, loading the text and graphics straight from the disk, to free up the memory for the actual code. That made Eve a sizeable text adventure, but it was also one that oozed professionalism. Sending a auid, disk and SAE for this back in 1991 was a wise move

SORCERY+

- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- PUBLISHER: VIRGIN
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BYTHE SAME DEVELOPER: DAN DARE

Sorcery was originally released on tape, but, to take advantage of the 6128, Virgin launched Sorcery+, adding an extra 35 screens to the 40 that were already on the cassette version. This was made possible via the fast loading of the screens from disk. It let the developer pack in lots of other extras, too - including scrolling messages and demo modes - and such was its success (Amstrad Action awarded it 91% handing the original 90%), that it was seen as the start of a bright disk-based 128K future. It didn't quite work out like that since not all games made use of the extra 64K, but it was a noble effort, that's for sure.

IRON LORD

- » RELEASED: 1990
- **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BY THE SAME DEVELOPER: EXIT

Ubisoft was a master of CPC design in the early-Nineties and, along with B.A.T., Iron Lord was one of the undoubted classics from its French stable. Artistic in looks, medieval in atmosphere, Iron Lord became a firm and unique favourite of the swords-and-sorcery genre. It employed a multiple-choice interface and was joystick operated and that worked wonderfully in sucking players in. It was also chock-full with sub-plots Like BAT Iron Lord was disk-only and expensive (£19.99), but for that price you could spend hours submerged in the game's involving quests and feasting your eyes on illustrations that could have come straight out of a children's storybook.



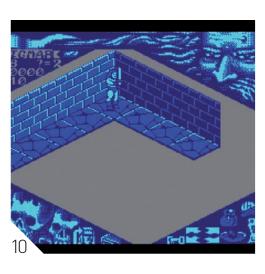
- PIRATES! » RFI FASED: 1987
- » PUBLISHER: MICROPROSE
- » CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE
- » BYTHE SAME DEVELOPER: GUNSHIP

Although a lot of 128K-only games would run on a 464 or 664 with a disk drive and 64K added. Sid. Meier's Pirates! was a little bit different. It only worked with a straightforward 6128 and no amount of jiggery pokery would alter that. It was a shame for other CPC owners because it was such a brilliant game, but then it did come on both sides of the disk and with a lengthy manual inside the box packed full of information. While the graphics were chunky and the sound effects were poor, there was a quality to this MicroProse game that was rarely seen. Sure, at £19.95, it was rather expensive, especially when you think that it was released in 1987, but it was definitely one not to have been missed.

HEROQUEST

- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- PUBLISHER: GREMLIN
- **CREATED BY: IN-HOUSE**
- BYTHE SAME DEVELOPER: LOTUS ESPRIT TURBO CHALLENGE

Sometimes it's the small things which make a 10 Sometimes it is the small unings with HeroQuest, difference. That was certainly the case with HeroQuest, a game that thrilled fans of role-playing games and which came in two distinct flavours: 64K and 128K. What marked the latter was its wonderful sound or music, to be exact. The medieval soundtrack was a joy to hear on the CPC 6128 and it brilliantly complemented the detailed, smooth visuals. It turned out to be one of the best games on the Amstrad in 1991, which is a massive compliment since it was something of a golden year for the machine. That it went down so well with critics and fans alike must have been music to Gremlin's ears.



01 02 HI-SCORE 1 UP 00001300 5 **∯ 4**8 PLAYER 1 P19999 08 09 10 Kungfu Master 画 5CORE -7046 00 10 15 16 RTH-EAST ENERGY DETECTOR 22 23 24 04 989175 ... 29 30 31 KONAHI 38 36 37 100000 THE HIPPER!.. (RASH) 43 44 🐉 🎥 🎥 🎥 45 100 Castle Master 50 51 **52** ī _((((- } <u>(1</u> 00 <u>(1)</u>

MSTRAD CPC 6128

N3 HEAD OVER HEELS 04 RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART I 05 BARBARIAN 06 POWER DRIFT **07** FEUD 08 TARGET: RENEGADE 09 IKARI WARRIORS 10 TOTAL ECLIPSE

11 ALIEN 8 12 GAME OVER 13 JET SET WILLY

14 SPACE HARRIER 15 BACTRON 16 DEATH WISH 3 17 KUNG-FU MASTER 18 SHOCKWAY RIDER 19 RICK DANGEROUS 20 KANE

22 SPINDIZZY 23 GHOSTBUSTERS

24 KNIGHT LORE

25 STORMLORD

26 THUNDERCATS

28 CHASE H.Q. 30 FORGOTTEN WORLDS 31 INSIDE OUTING 32 NEBULUS 33 RAINBOWISLANDS 34 CYBERNOID 35 GRYZOR

38 RAMPAGE 39 WARLOCK 40 SORCERY+ 41 GUNFRIGHT 42 PLATOON 43 STAR WARS 44 JACK THE NIPPER

45 ROBOCOP 47 SOLOMON'S KEY 48 BATMAN 49 OPERATION WOLF

51 KARNOV

52 VINDICATORS

53 PIPE MANIA 54 CAULDRON II 56 GAUNTLET II

50 CASTLE MASTER

21 WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

27 THE SACRED ARMOUR OF ANTIRIAD

36 TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES 37 FREDDY HARVEST

Sadly, the CPC 6128 didn't feature many games that took advantage of its more powerful technology. Good job it was backwards compatible with the CPC 464 back catalogue then. Here are a few of the highlights. 01 PRINCE OF PERSIA

