

OLD!

RETRO GAMER*

I S S U E F O U R

RETRO GAMER* ISSUE FOUR
£5.99 UK • \$13.95 Aus • \$27.70 NZ
9 771742 315004



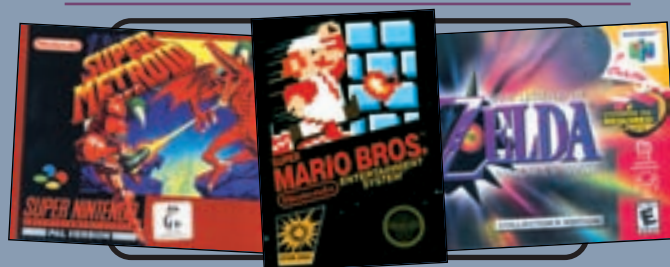
4TH 44 HISCORE 01625850565

CREDITS 4

>SYNTAX ERROR!
>MISSING COVERDISC?
<CONSULT NEWSAGENT>

RETRO GAMER

NINTENDO'S GREATEST GAMES



GAMING GOLD ON THE NES, SNES & N64

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT TRILOGY



MIKE SINGLETON INTERVIEWED

AMSTRAD ACTION



THE CPC RANGE REVISITED

amstrad

Now Amstrad gives you over £100 to play with.

£239
complete with green screen, VDU and software

£349
complete with colour monitor or green screen, VDU and software



CPC464 complete!
with monitor, keyboard and software

Free software worth over £100 is the name of the game. Along with your new CPC 464 (colour monitor or green screen VDU) you'll receive a software starter pack of 12 (yes, twelve) cassette absolutely free. There's something for everyone. Education - the Ropes to East - Revision for exams, cataloguing and budgeting. And it comes complete and ready-to-go.

Amsoft. A ton of software.
Yes. Now there are over 100 titles from Amsoft and independent publishers. And the list is still growing. Arcade games, educational programs and business applications - all designed to make the most of the CPC 464's processing abilities, stereo sound and high resolution graphics. And with Amstrad's spreading sales, even complex programs load quickly. The optional upgrade kit will load a game in under a minute.



Software over £100 value



AMSTRAD

Amstrad Action

The CPC range of home computers were very popular throughout Europe - never reaching the giddy heights of the Commodore 64 or Spectrum, but lapped up by a loyal user base all the same. Self-confessed Amstrad addict David Crookes explores the complete CPC range, including the later Plus models, and lifts the lid on the programmers who extended the natural life of the aging machine

In the days before PCs could be picked up for the price of a mouldy satsuma and a can of Iron Bru, serious computers were expensive and only sharp-suited businessmen working for rich firms could afford them. But at Westminster School on 11 April 1984, bearded entrepreneur Alan Sugar was showing off his new machine, and all that changed. He was unveiling the Amstrad CPC 464 which had been two years in the planning. At the time, Sinclair had pretty much wrapped up the market with its best-selling Spectrum machine. Sugar was eager to enter the fray and wanted to do for computers what he had done for the hi-fi.

Sugar daddy

In the early 80s, Alan Sugar had worked on creating a music revolution. Before he arrived, hi-fis were built out of separate components linked together at the back by wires. Sugar successfully housed the radio, amplifier, record player and tape deck in one combined unit. There were no external wires (save for the speaker cables) and just one plug to the mains.

At the time, computers were sold in a similar fashion to the old hi-fis. Spectrum users, for example, needed a television, a tape deck and the computer itself. And these all needed to be linked together and run with separate power supplies. By contrast, the CPC – which stood for Colour Personal Computer – had one monitor and one computer with an integrated tape deck. The power supply unit was inside the monitor and ran not only the display but also the computer, keyboard and tape device. Just two wires connected the monitor to the computer and everything was powered through a single plug.

Not only did this make the 8-bit CPC a simple system to set up, but it also served to slash the manufacturing costs. Affordability was Amstrad's watchword and the CPC provided that in abundance. The 464 sold for £200 with a green-screen monitor and £300 for the colour monitor bundle. And in time, the system came with a television modulator which enabled people to watch terrestrial TV on the monitor, creating the ultimate all-in-one package.

That it was marketed as a serious machine did not hold it back from becoming popular with gamers. It boasted 27 colours, 16 of which could be displayed in the lowest resolution mode, and it had 64Kb of memory. And of course, the integrated tape deck allowed for easy loading of games. The back of the CPC had ports for printers and other boring stuff like that, but there was also a slot for a joystick (although the one it came with was soon discarded since a couple of wiggles rendered it next to useless).

Sugar was onto a winner, defying his critics in the process. They didn't believe that a man who once made money from selling

The original CPC model. Not the prettiest machine by any means, but as an all-in-one unit it could not be bettered



electronic gadgets out of the back of a van could compete with the dominance of Sinclair and Commodore. It was a good job it was a success, for if Amstrad's first computer had failed, the company itself may have folded – the firm had committed itself to 100,000 units before launch.

Part of the process

The initial CPC prototype (nicknamed Arnold) was built around a 6502 processor, the same one used in Commodore's VIC-20 and the Apple II, and it was to have 32Kb of RAM. Amstrad then searched for a good programming language and opted for BASIC. Rather than license Microsoft's popular version of the language, Amstrad decided it would create its own BASIC language and approached Locomotive Software to come up with a simple, easy-to-use system. The software firm, however, believed that the 6502 was too slow and urged Amstrad to try the Z80 instead. With the new processor decided upon, Amstrad went on to create the disk operating system, Amsdos, which it used alongside CP/M, an alternative to Microsoft's ultimately more successful DOS.

The 464 was a funny looking beast, long and thin with the tape deck to the right of the keyboard and with garish red, green and blue keys (a design feature 'borrowed' from Elan's Enterprise 64 machine). But it was not without its faults. Tapes were slow and unreliable. As with most tape-based computers, users often had to wait an age for a program to load only to see it crash seconds before it was finished. The 464 was also hindered by a lack of hardware sprite capabilities, and the 64Kb memory was merely sufficient. Still, the machine sold well in Britain and was also exported to France, Spain and Germany (where it was sold under the Schneider name). In total, two million 464s were sold throughout Europe.

By 1985, things were picking up. Any game released on the Spectrum and the Commodore soon found its way onto the Amstrad, firmly making it the third established player in the 8-bit market. It helped that the Spectrum and Amstrad shared the Z80 processor so Spectrum games could be easily converted. Often though, the programmers were lazy and produced straight ports without utilising the CPC's extra capabilities.

A whole host of peripherals were also launched, some by Amstrad and some by third-party producers. Most of them reinforced the machine's attraction for serious users and included speech synthesisers, extra memory, and video digitisers. In fact, the serious users propped up the machine's sales. The CPC had a mechanical keyboard, a numerical pad and a cursor pad. This gave

Alan Sugar, pictured at the launch of his new Amstrad CPC 464 computer



Despite a number of lazy Spectrum ports, the CPC was home to a some classic games

The CPC 472?

It's a little-known fact but there was an addition to the CPC range of Amstrads: the 472. And the history behind it is as interesting as the computer itself

The CPC 472 was distributed in Spain by a company called Indescomp. The firm was set up by Spaniard José Luis Dominguez, a man who wanted to make it big in business but was not sure which avenue to take. Dominguez had tried without success to become Spain's importer for Sinclair and Acorn. He had long been fascinated by the computer revolution and when he heard Amstrad had created the CPC, he contacted the firm.

Like Sinclair and Acorn, Amstrad rebuffed Dominguez, who went away to lick his wounds and write a game. This was to prove the turning point. Amstrad liked the game and wanted to snap it up but Dominguez said he would only allow that to happen if he became the Spanish CPC importer. Amstrad at first refused but later relented – on condition he write 10 games and bought the CPCs up front.

It cost Mr Dominguez a fortune to snap up 500 machines, but worse was to follow. At the time, Spain had yet to join the European Union and was sceptical of the foreign machine. The Spaniards believed it would help promote English at the expense of Spanish and were upset that the tilde (~) was not present on the keyboard. The Spanish Government was so unhappy that it put a tax on any computer with 64Kb or less that didn't have the tilde on the keyboard. So, playing the system, Dominguez

decided to add an 8Kb module onto the machine to turn it into a 72Kb computer.

It was a move that was cheaper than changing the keyboard, and thus the CPC 472 was born. Bizarrely, the extra 8Kb was unusable and was there purely to avoid paying the tax. But to add further misery, the Spanish Government soon became wise to the wheeze and put the tax on all computers without the key.

It prompted Amstrad to change the keyboard, while keeping the extra 8Kb, resulting in two 472s – one with and one without the tilde. It was the only way they could shift the remaining stock.



The revised version of the CPC 472, complete with the tilde key

it a boost against the Commodore 64, which did not have a numerical pad – handy for quickly entering numerical data – and the rubber-keyed Spectrum, which had neither a numerical pad or cursor pad.

But it was the games which were exciting – The Way of the Exploding Fist by Melbourne House was an instant classic, as were Boulderdash and Manic Miner. The releases kept coming, most of them retailing for £9.95, and all of them paving the way for a fresh wave of programming talent.

Broadening the range

Such was the CPC's success that at the beginning of 1985, Amstrad tweaked the 464 and came up with the 664. It looked the same (although the cursor keys had been restyled), and Locomotive's BASIC had been updated to version 1.1, but the main addition was a built-in disk drive rather than a tape deck. This suited serious users since disk was a faster, more reliable way of storing data. The only problem was the memory – even in 1985, 64Kb was deemed too small, especially for business usage. Somewhat ironically, the 664 was codenamed IDIOT (Insert Disk Instead Of Tape).

By August 1985, less than a year since its launch, the 664 was killed off and replaced by the 6128. Following Amstrad's naming convention, the first digit referred to the main hard storage system – the '4' denoting a tape deck and the '6' a floppy disk drive. The remaining digits referred to the RAM capacity. So the 6128 had twice the amount of memory as the 664. Other changes were merely cosmetic. The keyboard was more compact – there was no longer a gap between the keyboard and the numeric/cursor pads – and the lack of coloured keys made the machine look more professional. As with the 664, the new machine was backward compatible, ensuring that the vast catalogue of 464 software was almost fully supported.

But retaining the 664's 3in disk drive was perhaps the worst thing Amstrad could have done. The disks held only 178Kb on each side and cost around £3 to buy. Within a couple of years, 3.5in disks had become standard, holding around 800Kb and costing as little as 50p. Third-party firms eventually created 3.5in drives for the CPC but no commercial software was released on the format. Its

only real use was for backing up tape games onto cheaper, faster media.

To support Amstrad owners, the firm set up a CPC owners' club which had its own official magazine called Amstrad Computer User, a free technical support service and discounted software offers. But in 1988 Amstrad decided to hire it off to an outside company – a move which seemed to confirm to many users that Amstrad was displaying a lack of support for the machine. (That was certainly true four years later, when Amstrad Computer User lost its official status in 1992, became CPC Attack for six issues and was never seen again.)

Ugly rumours abounded that Amstrad was going to scrap the CPC, but the firm always strenuously denied these. For the next six years, the 464 continued to sell steadily but as time passed, Amstrad began to neglect it and concentrate more on the PCW range and then its first PC compatibles. Pundits within the industry believed the CPC's time was up and expected Amstrad to pull the plug.

In with the new

In June 1990, Amstrad quashed the rumours by making a shock announcement to journalists assembled in Paris. It was scrapping production of the 464 and 6128. Instead, a whole new version of the CPC was being launched – the Plus range.



The 464's successors swapped the tape drive for a built-in 3 in. floppy disk drive

It took its lead from the Atari ST and Amiga, with a sleek white design that was almost a carbon copy of the 16-bit favourites. The tape deck of the 464 and the disk drive of the 6128 were moved behind the keyboard and the old cardboard edge connectors were dispensed with and proper robust expansion ports were used instead. Amstrad spent £20 million on advertising the new range alone. Out went the CPC 464 and CPC 6128, and in came the 464 Plus and 6128 Plus with no mention of the CPC branding.

Amstrad certainly thought it was on to a winner with the Plus range. It based the new machines around the CPC but there was a fundamental difference – Amstrad had decided to take on the console market as well as that of the home computer. The space-age-looking GX4000 was its answer to the Sega Master System and Nintendo Entertainment System. And to ensure that the console was not left as an isolated product, it added a cartridge port to its Plus range of computers.

The upshot was that all three machines had access to an improved range of cartridge games. These retailed typically for around £30. It was a bit of a culture shock for a generation used to paying between £2 and £10 for games, but it indicated Amstrad's shift away from a serious machine to one tailor-made for the massive gaming market.

There were some gripes: some people wished the Plus range had 3.5in disk drives rather than the 3in format of the old 664 and 6128; backward compatibility won out even though there was an increasing shortage of the more expensive 3in disks. Many expected the new machines to have a faster 6Mhz processor, but this was ruled out because, according to Roland Perry (who was then Amstrad's Group Technical Manager), it would have prevented the console from being used with a normal TV set.

But the biggest problem of all was that publishers writing for tape or disk formats were not granted access to the improved hardware of the Plus range. Amstrad was responsible for the manufacture and distribution of all cartridge releases and looked set to make a killing. And, by making the console features only accessible to cartridges, it ensured that third-party manufacturers could not bypass Amstrad when releasing games. Later, however, persistent programmers discovered ways of tapping into the advanced features and disk-based Plus games became reality.

The super-sleek Plus range, redesigned for a the 1990s



Special Offer when you buy an Amstrad Home Computer while stocks last.

17 games and joystick FREE!

THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO BUY...
...but hurry! This very special offer has to end when current stocks run out.



Yes! Buy any Amstrad Home Computer now and get 17 TOP QUALITY GAMES and JOYSTICK absolutely free. Games include all-time favourites like MONOPOLY, SCALEXTRIC, CLUEDO, SCRABBLE, TRIVIAL PURSUIT – plus 12 more!
Hurry, though. An offer like this means stocks are going to go FAST!

The 17 games and joystick included in this special offer vary depending on where you purchase your Amstrad Home Computer. However, the five games shown here are included regardless of where you make your purchase.



Nothing contained in this brochure or price list is intended to extend any Warranty or representation, express or implied, with regard to the products or services described herein. All software is sold subject to standard license terms. Prices, specifications and products may be altered without notice at any time. Hardware designed in U.K. and made in Korea.

The name and logo Amstrad are the registered trademarks of Amstrad plc. June 1987

Gratis Games

The Amstrad CPC came with a host of free games and, like with all bundles, there were some winners, and more than a few stinkers

Ocean's *Burnin' Rubber* racing game was included as a free extra with the Plus machines, but the most memorable pack came with the CPC in 1989. It had a range of games from the likes of Ocean, Virgin, Leisure Genius, Imagine and Amsoft (Amstrad's own software company.) The package, which included a joystick and TV modulator, was completed by a desk and, bizarrely, a clock radio. Here's a full list of the games in the package, along with minireviews...

Trivial Pursuit Genus Edition (Domark, 1986)

The board game was incredibly popular in the 1980s so porting it over to the computer was an obvious choice, proving to be a winner for kids who got their CPC at Christmas and were able to say to their parents, "I told you the computer was educational."

Nonplussed

Amstrad had done its research. It had visited software houses to ask them for the features they wanted to see in the new range. Mr Perry said he wanted to make the lives of games writers easier: "That way," he enthused, "they produce better games and in the end we all have happier customers." The Plus range featured smooth hardware scrolling, better sound, and up to 16 colours could be used from a palette of 4,096. There were also 16 hardware sprites, each 16x16 pixels.

All three machines came with a decent car game called *Burnin' Rubber* which, graphically, was unlike any title ever seen on the Amstrad. It bore all the hallmarks of a 16-bit offering and impressed magazine reviewers and the buying public. Out went the bundled joystick packaged with the old CPC range – console-style paddles were introduced instead. Crucially, Amstrad tried hard to guarantee the loyalty of its existing CPC fan base while trying to attract thousands of new punters. To that end, the 464 Plus and 6128 Plus were backward compatible with the older machines. The one letdown was that the 6128 Plus didn't have a tape port, depriving its owners of access to hundreds of cheap cassette games. And, just as bad, 464 Plus owners could not connect an external disk drive.

Yet the 464 Plus with a colour monitor retailed at a reasonable £329, with the 6128 Plus at £429, both £30 more expensive than their 'ordinary' predecessors. The GX4000 sold for £99.

But it was not long before the console hit problems. Although there was a good range of games released for the machine including *Batman The Movie* and an updated version of *Chase HQ*, it could not compete with the established consoles. Amstrad may have put up a good fight against Sinclair and Commodore, but Sega and Nintendo were heavyweight opponents. Development houses around the world were pumping millions of pounds into Sega and Nintendo releases and the primarily European-based GX4000 couldn't compete.

It was not long before the console was being sold for as little as £25. Some users tried to bolt the consoles onto their normal CPCs when disk-based console games arrived. But the end had begun for Amstrad's 8-bit machines and within a couple of years, sadly the entire range was scrapped.

In *Burnin' Rubber*, players drove a red, Le Mans-style car around a gruelling, twisting race circuit against 12 other vehicles



release which was put away quickly once the Christmas turkey had been devoured and digested.

Scalextric (Leisure Genius/Virgin, 1987)

This was another computer version of a popular toy. Graphically, it was a treat but the gameplay suffered from some major flaws, not least a boring track and the frustrating manner in which a race would be brought to an abrupt halt when you crashed into an opposing car. There was a good section in which you could create your own tracks and this was the most fun part. But racing on them still proved dull.



Up to six players could answer the questions and the game had a funny character called TP who would ask the questions and then tell you if got it right. It was better than the board game because the CPC was able to handle questions with diagrams and music, but it was a

Cluedo, Monopoly and Scrabble (Leisure Games, 1985)

Unlike Trivial Pursuit, little was gained from reworking these board game favourites as computer games. The Amstrad's processor appeared unable to cope with the demands of the three separate titles and things moved along at a snail's pace. Each had players reaching back into the cupboard for the original, board-based versions.



World Series Baseball (Imagine, 1985)

For many people this was their first proper introduction to playing baseball, and it seemed to be a rather faithful version of the American sport. Hitting a home run certainly cheered you up as a pleasant little ditty blasted out of the CPC's tinny speaker and the tiny players ran to victory to a roaring crowd. It felt very American and sometimes very real, but was initially difficult to get to grips with.



Keeping the CPC alive

When commercial interest in the CPC waned, it was left to the community to prolong the life of the machine with a series of home-grown games

Two of the last commercial games, written by Elmar Kreiger and published by Titus



By 1993, the Amstrad CPC was nearly 10 years-old. Commercial releases had dried up and the main computer magazine, Future Publishing's Amstrad Action, had shrunk in size to around 24 pages. The rot had set in the previous year, with distributors selling off games cheaply to clear stock, and software houses re-examining their full-price titles and knocking them out as budget releases. But thanks to a small bunch of self-taught programmers, who were knocking out a range of decent CPC games, the machine was kept alive for another couple of years.

Despite the disappearance of the larger software labels, enthusiasts across Europe (France and Austria in particular) were working hard to keep things afloat. Among them was Elmar Kreiger, an Austrian who created his own game's company, Elmsoft. The 20 year-old had written two of 1993's top-selling Amstrad games, Super Cauldron and Prehistorik 2, both released commercially by Titus. Platform game Super Cauldron was released in June 1993 and retailed for £15.99. It was a sprawling game with smooth graphics, and is easily one of the best games to be released for the CPC. Prehistorik 2 proved to be equally as good – a neat console-style, cartoon platformer which had the player running and jumping around, beating up bad guys.

But the game for which Kreiger made his name was Zap T Balls, a clone of the well-received commercial title, Pang. Pang itself was only available on the ill-fated CPC

Hunchback (Amsoft/Ocean, 1984)

This was an early platform game and one of the best offerings in the Amstrad pack, if only because it was so easy to pick up and play. The graphics were basic but the controls were simple enough, and players soon got to grips with guiding Quasimodo through a number of screens while avoiding spears, fireballs and sharp arrows in pursuit of Esmeralda. It required some frustrating precision positioning of Hunchback but was fairly absorbing.



Hunchback 2: Quasimodo's Revenge (Ocean, 1985)

This inevitable sequel saw Quasimodo attempting to rescue Esmeralda once again. And just how difficult was it to get her back? Hunchback 2 had Quasimodo swinging around on ropes and jumping around so much his back must have been aching with the vibration. The graphics, even by CPC standards, were also poor.



Doors of Doom (Amsoft/Gem, 1985)

This was a bizarre game with cutesy cartoon graphics which had you exploring a series of landscapes in search of little scraps of a door. When put together, the pieces would have saved mankind from something or other – it was never clearly explained. A very English game, this had lush green pastures and cups of tea for refreshment.



Daley Thompson's Supertest (Ocean, 1986)

This had the player waggling the joystick like there was no tomorrow to increase Daley's strength or speed. The graphics, varied events and sheer endurance required made it a memorable game, even if it did destroy the flimsy joystick which came with the CPC.



Plus machine and was therefore out of reach for the majority of Amstrad owners. Kreiger's version opened up the great gameplay of the original to everyone else, creating a fast, furious and admittedly frustrating game which showed off some amazing graphics. Unlike Super Calderon and Prehistorik 2, Zap T Balls was sold via mail order from a small independent London-based company called Sentinel. Only those who had stuck with the CPC and regularly picked up dedicated magazines or fanzines knew of the game's existence. Yet it still sold in sufficient quantities for Sentinel to become a major player on the CPC scene.

On the ropes

The Amstrad's future had changed. Its dwindling band of users who were once used to popping into their local videogame shop and walking away with a £2.99 CPC cassette were gone. Now software had to be hunted out and a host of small firms flourished, plugging the holes left empty by Ocean, Domark, US Gold and the other firms that had quit the machine months earlier.

Kreiger was typical of the coders still hacking away at the CPC. He had grown up with the computer and had become proficient in machine code. Tellingly, he had approached Ocean and offered to convert Pang from the CPC Plus to the original CPC range. But Ocean refused his offer, and as he had already spent too much time on the project to abandon it, he turned to the independents.

Another big player to emerge on the smaller scene was Rob Buckley. Years earlier, the Londoner had created a stunning public domain adventure game entitled Eve of Shadow. Later in 1993, he teamed up with Richard Wildey, of Sentinel Software, and Richard Fairhurst, a programmer and magazine writer. They looked at creating a Street Fighter 2 clone called Lethal Moves. At the time, US Gold had been tantalising Amstrad owners with plans to release SF2 for the CPC, but as the weeks and months passed, gamers began to realise the title would never see the light of day. It was unsurprising for many who wondered exactly how US Gold planned to replicate the classic fighting game on the CPC with only 64Kb of memory. Lethal Moves was planned for 128Kb and was to be released on the disk-based 6128 and 6128 Plus. Sadly, the game never saw the light of day, although the company's ambitions were both genuine and admirable.

Creating a stir on the CPC nine years after it was created was Fluff, the CPC's answer to Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog. Buckley

produced a game based around a Doc Marten-wearing ball of fluff (!) and had it whizzing around 12 absorbing levels. This platform game was superb fun and had incredible staying power. Once again, it was not released in the shops – Buckley made it available direct from his own company which he called Radical Software. The new software house went on to release other top games including Odiesoft's Megablasters (a clone of the Super Bomberman on the SNES), and Masters of Space (a sci-fi shoot-em-up). Meanwhile, Richard Wildey's Sentinel continued to sell games including Zap T Balls and Ball Bearing, in which players guided a bouncing ball around a series of levels.

But there were many other programmers vying for attention. Scott and Gary Kennedy from Salford tried to drum up commercial interest in their game, Trakers, but eventually decided to release it themselves. Trakers was similar to Dizzy and



This cool Sonic clone really utilised the Plus range's extra capabilities



Roland In Time (Amsoft/Gem, 1985)

This was apparently named after Amstrad's technical guru Roland Perry, and had him in a Doctor Who guise, whizzing backwards and forwards through time to any one of 10 time zones. Yes, he used a phone box to travel and yes, there was whooshing noise whenever he went through time. And yes, it was a complete low-budget sci-fi rip off. It was also difficult and looked rubbish.



NOMAD (Ocean, 1986)

Here's a question: why did Amstrad bundle so many difficult games into one package? NOMAD was arguably the most frustrating of the lot. Just turning the droid around was hard enough, but getting it through missile-strewn mazes was damn-near impossible. You had to turn the droid to face the way in which you wanted it to go and then push forward, but that was easier said than done. After grappling with this for a while, you soon gave up.



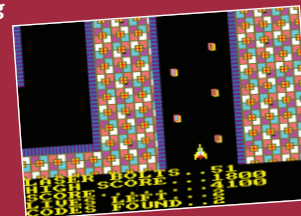
Qabbalah (Amsoft, 1986)

Unusual name and even stranger game. For one, it was so damn hard to play – theme here? – and it was also completely baffling. You started by walking around a fairly regular suburban area – albeit one with skulls roaming around – dressed like Santa Claus, and the idea was to find a number of objects. But did anybody find them, or did most people walk around the back of a few buildings, get completely lost and wonder if they would ever see their character again? One of the world's worst games, ever.



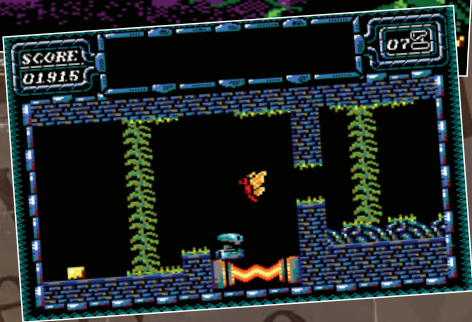
The Prize (Amsoft, 1985)

Remember those type-ins in the old magazines? This game was hardly much better than the stuff you would get with them. It looked terrible and was incredibly repetitive, basically making the player fly around a few mazes collecting stuff and shooting whatever was in your way. Nowadays it wouldn't even get onto a mobile phone. In those days, many wondered how it got onto a home computer in a bundle supposed to be showing off the capabilities of a £300 machine.





Reminiscent of Dizzy, but Trackers was still a great game in its own right



had players controlling a little droid through a flick-screen world collecting and using items to solve puzzles. It was so good, Amstrad Action gave it a two-page review and awarded it 92%.

Down but not out

As the independent releases from the likes of Radical continued to flow, an underground scene of free games also flourished. Many games programmers just wanted to see their titles in the hands of gamers and did not want to profit from them. They released their games into the public domain which made them freely available to

anyone who wanted them. Public domain libraries sprang up in homes across Europe and punters would send them stamped-addressed envelopes requesting a list of software. When they received the lists, the gamers would choose the titles they wanted, bung a disk in the post with some cash (usually about a pound which was passed off as a copy charge), and then received the disk back bulging with free games.

It was a precursor to downloading from the Internet, only more cumbersome. Yet it enabled gamers to play some wonderful offerings for mere pennies. Among the big-name freebies was the brilliant French game Croco Magneto on which Ball Bearing had been based. Another French title, Les Mings (written by Claude Le Moullec), was a clone of Lemmings that had all the richness of the original yet none of the cost. Finding the best proved difficult. Once Amstrad Action bit the dust in June 1995, and the fanzines which had propped up the machine for a little while longer closed, the scene began to fade, killed off by fresh, faster technology.

Which is ironic, since it's these same technological advances that have brought us the Internet and the modern PC – the very tools we can now use to download CPC games and run them through emulation.



Late in the CPC's life, Croco Magneto was distributed freely though PD libraries

Web resources

CPC Zone

Former Amstrad users should make this their first stop. It's an amazing site that's bang-up-to-date (a rarity nowadays, sadly) and packed with the latest news. It has reviews, mobile phone logos, cheats, emulators and, interestingly, CD inlay covers. Basically, a group of people are spending time reproducing old CPC game covers into PC CD-ROM ones, all strictly for fun but well worth looking at. Webmaster Malc Jennings deserves respect. <http://cpczone.emuunlim.com>



CPC Game Reviews

Nicholas Campbell has put together the ultimate Amstrad game review site. It's well worth checking this out before downloading any CPC games to see if the title you want should be taking up hard drive space. All reviews are well written and informative and come with screenshots. An absolutely brilliant resource. www.cpcgamereviews.com

The Amstrad CPC Games Resource

If you are looking for downloads, then this is the place. It's packed with games, even those which were written by independent programmers when the commercial players decided to leave the machine. It's clearly laid out and should definitely be on your list of bookmarks. <http://tacgr.emuunlim.com>

CPC Scene

A website dedicated to listing the movers and shakers of the emulation world, charting the latest improvements by those

with the technical know-how. More of a specialist site. www.cpcscene.com

WACCI

This site doesn't get updated as much as it used to but it's still a good resource. WACCI is a user group which has been going for a couple of decades and used to produce a monthly magazine, mainly for those interested in serious computing. www.wacci.org.uk

